### No One Else

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**Archive Warning:** No Archive Warnings Apply  
**Category:** M/M  
**Fandom:** The Avengers (Marvel Movies), Thor (Movies), Captain America (Movies), Black Panther (2018)  
**Relationship:** Loki/Steve Rogers, Others mentioned  
**Character:** Loki (Marvel), Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanov (Marvel), Tony Stark, Thor (Marvel), Nick Fury, Phil Coulson, Bruce Banner, Clint Barton, Sam Wilson (Marvel), Sharon Carter (Marvel), T’Challa (Marvel), James "Bucky" Barnes, Ulysses Klaue, Other Marvel Characters  
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**Summary**

During the fight in Stuttgart, Steve discovers something about Loki that changes everything and turns his life upside down. While trying to pull together the changed Avengers, Steve must figure out what to do with his connection to an exiled Asgard god. It doesn't help that some people think they know what's best for him, whether they do or not.

**Notes**

Ok, I watched a youtube mashup video and I just had to write the story behind. The link provided below. Credit to "Things we love completely, we're fated to destroy" for creating the video in the first place.

Please note the video contains spoilers for the storyline.

Also, this one is WIP so will be slow posting, but wanted to have something going for Avengers Infinity Wars release.

Also thank you again to shallowgenepool for proofing. :)

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[Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org)
See the end of the work for more notes.

- Inspired by *No one else* by things we love completely we're fated to destroy
Chapter 1

During the flight to Stuttgart, Steve tried to push aside the uneasy feeling he had in his gut, but it wouldn’t go away. The only way he could describe it as was anticipation as if he was waiting for something to happen. He tried to put it down to the fact that this would be his first mission in seventy years, in a strange new world to boot, but if he was completely honest with himself that wasn’t it at all. Something was about to happen, something big.

However, he didn’t have time to worry about that.

The Black Widow shouted from the cockpit. “Cap. ETA two minutes. Reports are coming in that the target has attacked someone and is now holding people hostage in the main square.”

Steve nodded, pulling on his cowl. “Affirmative. Drop me as close as you can. I’ll keep him busy while the civilians get clear, then you can move into position and hopefully, he’ll come quietly.”

“Do you really think that will happen?” Romanoff asked, sounding slightly amused at the suggestion.

Steve shrugged. “No, but there’s always a first time.”

Romanoff dropped Steve off in a neighboring plaza, allowing him to move into the crowd relatively undetected, even with his slightly over-the-top uniform. Steve reached the square where the crowd was being pinned down by multiple assailants, all of whom seemed to look like the target. As he watched, all but the Loki in the centre seemed to flicker, like the pictures in the movies theatres did back in the forties. It struck him that they could be some sort of projections, but from where he couldn’t tell. Unfortunately, Steve didn’t have time to wonder. One of the crowd, an old man, was refusing to comply with Loki’s demands.

“There are always men like you.” Steve heard the old man say and while Steve applauded his conviction, he couldn’t help wishing that the man had stayed quiet.

Steve could see the Loki at the centre point his spear at the old man and said. “Look to your elder, people. Let him be an example.”

In a split-second, Steve knew what Loki was going to do and clambered quickly up onto one of the stone plinths that surrounded the square, before he leapt down over the heads of the crowd, in front of the old man. He was just in time and was able to use his shield to deflect the blast that Loki had fired, back at him. The blast knocked the Asgardian clean off of his feet and Steve stood, his shield ready.

Loki looked up and Steve had to admit he looked more attractive in person, even more than in the picture.

He shook himself and said. “You know, the last time I was in Germany and saw a man standing above everybody else, we ended up disagreeing.”

Loki grinned as he got back on his feet. “The soldier. A man out of time.”
Steve wasn’t surprised that Loki was aware of him. After all, he had a high-ranking SHIELD Agent under his control. “I’m not the one who’s out of time.”

As he finished talking, he heard the Quinjet behind him.

“Loki, drop the weapon and stand down.” Romanoff’s voice sounded over the PA.

Loki’s response came in the form of another blast from the spear aimed at the Quinjet. Romanoff dodged out of the way and Steve took advantage of his distraction to throw his shield at the supposed god. The shield hit its target and rebounded back to Steve, who then followed it with a right hook to Loki’s head. Loki was hardly bothered by either attack and without breaking a sweat, began using the scepter like a quarterstaff, blow after blow making contact with Steve’s Shield.

For the first time, Steve understood the magnitude of who he was up against. His fight with the Red Skull had been tough, but this was something else. The shield might absorb some of the impacts, but he was driven back with each hit. Loki managed a direct blow to his torso and the force of the blow sent him flying into the plinth.

That didn’t stop him. As soon as he was on his knees, Steve threw his shield again, which was this time Loki deflected away. Steve followed close behind it. He was able to avoid most of Loki’s attacks and even landed a punch to his side, but a second hit once more sent him flying. Before he could right himself, Loki had the scepter rested on the back of his head.

“Kneel.” Loki growled, determined to have the soldier yield to him.

Steve took advantage of the moment's hesitation and grabbed the end of the scepter. “Not today.” He managed to get to his feet and catch Loki off balance with a spinning kick, making him stumble backward. It did him little good, however, as when Loki righted himself he grabbed Steve’s arm and ha, tossing him away as if he were nothing but a child.

When he looked up, Steve was surprised to see Loki hesitating rather than moving in for the kill. He seemed conflicted and Steve saw that his eyes which had been a mixed blue-green began to darken until they were a deep emerald green. It was then he noticed that his glove had come off and Loki had grabbed his bare wrist.

“Sjelefrende.” Loki whispered. He said it so quietly, Steve was sure he wouldn’t have heard it if it wasn’t for his enhanced hearing.

Before either could say anything more, the square filled with the sounds of rock music and Ironman flew in from behind one of the taller buildings, hitting Loki with his repulsors. Loki was flung backward once more, landing hard, his back hitting the stone steps.

Steve recovered his glove and shield and was on his feet by the time Tony landed, his whole arsenal aimed at Loki.

“Make a move, Reindeer Games,” Tony warned as Steve reached his side, ready to continue where he and Loki had left off.

It wasn’t to be. Loki, with his eyes continually moving to look to Steve and then away again, raised his hands in surrender. As he did so, his cape and helm melted away leaving him dressed in his tunic and leather coat.

Steve sighed, glad it was over, but still very much confused over Loki’s reaction to him. Though his instincts told him this wasn’t the time or the place. “Mr. Stark.” He said, acknowledging the newcomer.
Tony’s weaponry folded away into his armor as he replied. “Captain.”

Romanoff had landed the Quinjet close by, so the pair escorted the would-be god on-board and into custody.

Chapter End Notes

Sjelefrende is the closest scandinavian word for Soulmate I could find and is Norwegian Bokmal. If I have got it wrong please let me know and I will correct it.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The Quinjet

Chapter Notes

I know this chapter is a little short but it's only really a filler

Steve kept facing the front of the Quinjet but that didn’t mean he couldn’t feel Loki’s eyes boring into his back. Every time he turned to look at their prisoner however, Loki was staring at the bulkhead in front of him. This made Steve even more confused. He resisted the urge to go over and try to talk to him, distracting himself by getting acquainted with Tony.

“I don’t like it.” He said, still keeping his back to the prisoner. Tony was now staring intently at Loki, which Steve didn’t like either.

“What, Rock of ages giving up so easily.” Tony relied.

“I don’t remember it being that easy,” Steve pointed out. He risked another look behind him. “This guy packs a wallop.”

“Still you are pretty spry for an older fellow.” The pair looked at each other and Steve felt the eyes boring into him again. He decided to focus on Tony’s comment. “What your thing, Pilates?”

Steve looked a little confused. “What?”

“It’s like calisthenics.” Tony explained. “You might have missed a couple of things, you know, doing time as a …….. capsical.”

Steve wasn’t amused with the other man’s attempts to rile him up. He saw Howard loud and clear for a moment and decided to get things more serious again. “Fury didn’t tell me he was calling you in.”

“Yeah, well, there’s a lot of things Fury doesn’t tell you.” Tony replied, telling Steve that he had had run-ins with the director before. The conversation was interrupted by a crash of lightning. Natasha looked confused at the controls. “Where has this come from?”

Quinjet shook slightly at another bolt flashed around them. Steve looked automatically around himself before his eyes dropped to Loki. He was surprised to see that the God’s attention had shifted to the ceiling. He looked nervous, almost frightened.

“What’s the matter? Scared of a little lightning?” Steve couldn’t stop himself asking, finally having an excuse to talk to him that Tony couldn’t argue with. Loki’s eyes fell on Steve.

“I’m not overly keen on what follows.” He replied, before focusing on the ceiling once more.
Before Steve could query the remark, there was a thud above them, as if something landed on the roof of the Quinjet. Steve dived for his cowl and shield, while Romanoff struggled to keep the Quinjet level. Tony fitted his faceplate and opened the rear door.

“What are you doing?” Steve yelled, confused.

Tony didn’t have time to reply before a blond man, dressed in a similar style to Loki but in red and silver, dropped from the roof onto the loading ramp. Steve saw that Loki looked frightened at the man’s arrival. Tony raised his hand to fire his replusor, but the newcomer used the hammer he was carrying and hit him square in the chest. Tony was flung backwards, hitting Steve in turn and sending them both sprawling to the floor. The Blond then grabbed Loki by the throat and dragged him to the hatch. To Steve surprised, the pair simply took off, without any assistance other than the blond spinning his hammer.

Tony was pissed as he got to his feet. “And then there’s that guy.”

Steve stood as Romanoff shouted back “Another Asgardian?”

“Think that’s a friendly?” Steve asked, trying to assess the ever-changing situation.

Tony, on the other hand, was in no mood of that right now. “It doesn’t matter. If he frees Loki or kills him, the Tesseract’s lost.”

Steve’s gut churned slightly at Tony words. He tried to convince himself it was the imminent failure of the mission, but he knew it was in truth the fear that Loki might die, and he couldn’t explain why that bothered him the way it did.

Steve pushed all of that aside and did what he did best, focused on the mission. “Stark. We need a plan of attack.”

“I have a plan.” Tony replied as he headed to the hatch. “Attack!”

With that, Tony engaged his thrusters and took off, flying after the Asgardians. Steve cursed. He read in the report that Ironman had been very much a lone wolf up until now, but he hadn’t realized just how reckless he was. This could end very badly if he didn’t intervene. Making a decision he reached for a parachute.

Romanoff could see what he was about to do. “I’d sit this one out Cap.” She suggested not very convincingly.

“I don’t see how I can.” He said as he buckled up the straps.

“These guys come from legend, they are basically gods.” She pointed out, again not trying overly hard to stop him.

If anything would convince Steve to do what he was planning, it was that. Even after everything he had seen, he was still a Catholic. “There is only one god, ma’am, and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t dress like that.”

Finally secure in his chute, Steve grabbed his shield and jump out of the Quinjet, hoping he could catch them before it was too late.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Steve gets few answers but a load more questions

Steve could see the fight between Tony and the other Asgardian from a fair distance away and was able to guide his chute so he landed close to the base of a nearby cliff. However as soon as he had landed and was free, he felt a familiar presence once more. He turned and looked up the cliff. Sitting on a ledge near the top was Loki, looking down at the scene in the forest, a grin on his face as he observed the carnage. The pair locked eyes and the grin faded to a more pleasant smile, as if Loki was happy that Steve was there.

Suddenly, Steve was looking up at the cliff from a slightly different angle than before. He turned to see what had happened to be faced with looking at himself, who was still staring at the cliff ledge.

“I would talk with you, Captain.” A voice from behind him said.

Steve turned once more and found Loki standing there, without a care in the world. Steve raised his eyes to the ledge again and saw that Loki was still there staring down at his other self.

“What the hell is going on?” Steve demanded, advancing to the Loki on the ground before him.

“Fear not Captain. You are perfectly safe. None of this is real, it is within our minds. Now we may talk undisturbed.” Loki replied, a very satisfied look on his face.

“You are joking.” Steve said. “Tony and the other Asgardian are ripping the forest behind us apart and you think this is a good time to talk. Even if I had anything to say to you, I have to stop them before someone gets hurt.”

Steve turned to leave but Loki’s laugh stopped him in his tracks. “Captain, what happens between us now, no time will pass in the real world. When I end my spell, you will be able to deal with Stark and my oaf of a brother as if this never happened.”

Steve turned back to face Loki once more. He didn’t know whether to believe the other man or not, but there certainly he couldn’t hear the sounds of fighting that he could moments before, nor could he ignore his other self behind him. This could be too good an opportunity to miss to get some answers over the way he had behaved since the fight and possibly find the Tesseract as well. He decided it was worth the risk.

“Ok, we’ll talk. Tell me, where is the cube?” Steve asked, squaring his shoulders.

“All in good time, Captain. First I must thank you for freeing me from the control of the sceptre. My mind has not been my own for some time.” Loki said, bowing his head.

Steve looked confused. “What did I do? And what do you mean the control of the sceptre? You’re the one who been using it on our people, turning them into your drones.”

“Just because I wield the weapon, does not mean that I cannot also be wielded by it. I may not have been under its complete control as the archer and the scientist are, but it held its sway over me.” Loki
explained.

Steve shook his head, not really believing what he was hearing. “So none of this is your fault, you’re not responsible for killing eighty people yesterday? What about that town you levelled a year ago?”

Loki’s eyes burned for a moment. “Thor’s lackeys disobeyed my orders. As King, it was my right to punish traitors as I saw fit.”

“Look, I don’t know the ins-and-outs of your internal politics, but the people who lived in that town lost homes. They had nothing to do with your world and didn’t deserve to suffer because of the actions of others.”

Loki closed his eyes and chewed his lip slightly as he mulled over Steve’s words. “Your words have merit and I will not deny I have regrets. But I have been punished for those actions a hundred times over.”


“Pain, Captain, more pain then you can imagine.” With that, Loki opened his tunic and Steve gasped as he saw the criss-cross of scars that covered his torso, some looking fresh, others perhaps months old. All looked horrific.

Steve felt sick to his stomach. He never doubted that what Loki was showing him was real. His voice was a little unsteady when he asked. “That……..who did that to you?”

Loki covered his chest again. “Someone who I pray you never have the misfortune to meet. It was he who sent me here to retrieve the Tesseract. But all that has changed. Your touch freed me from the sceptre.”

“I don’t understand. Why am I so important to you?” Steve asked.

“You are my soulmate.” Loki said simply.

“Soulmate? Is that what that word meant? That sort of thing is from cheap romance novels, not real life.” Steve started. “How can I be your soulmate, we aren’t from the same planet.”

Loki risked taking a few steps closer. “I fear that I can give you few answers at this time. Jotun soulmates are a legend, a myth on Asgard, something that is given little credence in the other realms. All I know for sure is that you are mine. Our connection that I felt when we touched is stronger than any other I have ever known. It is that connection, your strength, that allowed me to free myself from the sceptre.”

“Loki, I’m still not convinced that you weren’t acting on your own. You can’t prove that what you are telling me is true, any of it.” Steve pointed out. This was dragging out now and he seemed no closer to getting the information he wanted.

“Words are all I can offer you, Captain. What more can I give you?” Loki replied getting a little frustrated.

Steve took a moment to think then said “Once I’ve sorted out Tony and your brother and we get back to the Helicarrier, tell us where the Tesseract is. Turn it, and the people under you control back over to SHIELD and I will think about what you’ve said.”

Loki took a few steps back as he replied. “Thor will insist on my return to Asgard which will mean a cell in the dungeons, possibly for the rest of my days. Not a fate I will revel in and now I have found
you, I wish to remain close. I will, however, give you a token of my sincerity. Farewell, Captain.”

With that, Steve blinked and found himself staring once more at the cliff ledge where Loki was sitting. The God smiled once again at Steve before vanishing into thin air. He cursed. He couldn’t help feeling that he had let Loki escape through his fingers, but he didn’t have time to focus on that as the sounds of Tony and Thor fighting were back and getting louder.

Steve ran through the forest until he came across the pair. Tony had just landed and punched Thor. Thor went to retaliate when Steve threw his shield.

“Hey” He shouted as it bounced off of Thor’s hammer and rebounded back. He caught it neatly and continued. “That’s enough.”

He deftly jumped from the tree he had been standing on and said to Thor. “Now, I don’t know what you plan on doing here………”

“I have come to put an end to Loki’s schemes.” Thor interrupted, clearly itching to carry on fighting with Tony or Steve, or both.

“That is a good plan. And was letting him escape part of that plan?” Steve asked. Thor and Tony both looked up to where Loki had been sitting.

Thor turned on Tony. “Your interference allowed him to escape. He will do Norns knows what harm until I am able to track him once more.” Thor raised his hammer to start the fight anew.

“Stop.” Steve shouted again. “This won’t do us any good, it will just make it easier for him to operate. We need to pool our resources and narrow down where he might have gone. Please, help us before he hurts anyone else.”

Thor seemed to think about what Steve said and slowly lowered the hammer again. “Very well. We will assist each other for now. I am Thor, son of Odin Allfather, king of Asgard. Loki is my brother, long thought lost.”

“I know, you’re mentioned in the file I was given on Loki. I’m Captain Steve Rogers.”

“Tony Stark, although you can call me Ironman, Point Break. “ Tony put in, happy that the fight was over but not happy that his prediction over losing Loki had come true. “Romanoff, you still up there? Evac. ASAP. And tell Fury Reindeer Games is on the run again.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Loki makes good on his word

Chapter Notes

From now on we go way off Cannon.

Steve watched as Fury paced around the deck of the Helicarrier, clearly angry with the chain of events. Allowing Loki to slip through their fingers had been a disaster. To make the situation worse, after he had vanished from the cliff, Loki had appeared on the Quinjet and before anyone could react, spirited away with the Sceptre. The only good news had been Thor joining the hunt for his brother, but it was a small consolation at best.

For his part, Steve couldn’t help feeling a little guilty. While there wasn’t much he could have done to stop Loki’s escape, he couldn’t ignore the fact that they had shared a lengthy and confusing conversation before he made his escape. He didn’t even know if the conversation had been real and he decided to keep it to himself, lest Fury and the rest thought he had gone mad.

“Well, gentleman. As it was you who lost our only link to finding the cube, I am open to suggestions on where we go from here?” Fury asked, looking annoyed at Steve, Tony and Thor. Natasha, having been stuck on the Quinjet was spared his wrath, but only just.

“My brother will no doubt continue with his plan of using the Tesseract to bring his army to Earth. He is set on conquest.” Thor pointed out, glaring at Tony, clearly blaming him.

“Well the iridium he stole will help with that. It will give him the ability to open the portal as wide and for as long as he wanted.” Tony said, offering a bag of blueberries around the table.

Bruce took one and said. “What sort of army are we talking here? I mean, are they people you’ve fought before?”

“Nay, they come from somewhere in the void between the nine realms. Their master is a creature shrouded from Heimdall’s sight. He only saw glimpses of Loki since his fall, just enough to know that he now serves this master under the promise of a throne of his own.” Thor explained.

“So we have no idea what could have happened to him while he was missing right. Did he seem to the type who would bow to someone else like that?” Steve asked. He wished that he could have gotten some confirmation on what Loki had told him, just to see if at least some of it was true.

Thor seemed to think for a moment. “He was not as I expected him to be. In all our years together, he has never sought attention directly, preferring to sit in the shadows and plot his tricks. His actions here were bold as if he wished people to see him. Then on the cliff, he tried to claim that his actions were not his own at all. I could not pursue it further before we were interrupted”
Tony ignored the glare aimed at him again. “That’s all well and good, but we need to concentrate on finding the Tesseract before the guy with a loose grip on his sanity decides to be bold again.”

“Have a care how you speak. Loki is beyond reason, but he is of Asgard and he is my brother.” Thor said pointedly.

Steve wasn’t sure if he agreed with either Thor or Tony at this point. Loki seemed to have been very much sane and reasonable in the forest, as long as he wasn’t a figment of Steve’s imagination that was.

“He killed eighty people in two days.” Natasha replied just as pointedly.

“He’s adopted.” Thor said, this time a little sheepishly. Still, it caught Steve attention.

“Adopted how? I mean, that’s a pretty big deal.” Steve asked.

“Loki was not born on Asgard, but Jotunheim another of the nine realms, a realm of ice and giants. Father found him abandoned as are all giant’s runts and took him as his own son. He hid the truth, but Loki found out during my exile. We believe he tried to destroy Jotunheim so that he could in some way erase that part of himself. I stopped him, but he fell into the void during the battle.” Thor explained.

“He tried to wipe out an entire race? His own people?” Steve said, floored by the revelation.

Thor opened his mouth to reply when a message came through on the PA system. “Director Fury, we have a bird coming in and the pilot is refusing to talk to anyone but you.”

“Do we have an ID on the bird?” Fury asked, his curiosity peaked.

“Transport Sixty-Six Bravo. It’s not on the schedule for today. They are repeating their request to speak to you.” The voice replied.

Fury considered from a moment then said. “Ok, let hear it.”

“Director Fury. This is Agent Barton. Requesting clearance for landing, sir.”

Natasha started up, but Fury raised his hand to tell her to hold. “Request denied Barton. Last information we received, you were compromised and stealing rare minerals.”

“I understand, sir. However, the situation has changed, I am no longer under Loki’s influence. I have onboard Dr Selvig and the other SHIELD agents, also back in control of themselves. I also have the Tesseract, the Sceptre and the iridium. No weapons. I repeat my request to come aboard.” Barton’s voice said over the PA.

Fury considered for a moment. He looked over to one of the bridge crew. “We are picking up a faint gamma radiation signature that matches the Tesseract, sir.”

“Take a holding position, Barton. We have weapons locked on you. One wrong step and I will blow you out of the sky.” Fury said. Turning to Coulson, he said. “Well?”

“It certainly sounds like him, but there is no way to know for sure. I recommend some recon.” Coulson replied.

“I take it that's where I come in.” Tony interrupted, standing.

Fury nodded. “Give me a sweep of the bird. I want to know who’s in there. If it’s as he claims, we’ll
Tony headed to the cargo bay and after his fly-by confirmed Barton’s story, the Quinjet landed in the cleared hanger some twenty minutes later. They were met by Fury, Coulson, Steve and a squad of agents armed to the teeth.

“Agent Barton.” Fury said as his agent exited the bird. He noted that his eyes were no longer light-blue and had returned to their natural colour. He scanned the others, including Selvig and saw the same thing.

“Sir. I would like to apologize for shooting you, sir. I never intended to kill you.” Barton replied as he put his hands behind his back to be cuffed by the waiting agent.

Fury nodded. “I know. You never miss. The cube?”

“In a locked box on board, along with the sceptre.”

Fury nodded again. “Right I want you all checked out by the medics, then Barton, expect a very tough debrief.”

Barton nodded and led the group from the hanger. Fury turned to face Coulson, who was carrying out the locked box containing the promised items.

“His eyes are normal. I believe he might just be telling the truth, but we will wait to see if the medical report can actually tell us anything.”

“Well everything he said is in here and there wasn’t a weapon between them, not even Clint’s bow. Whatever Loki’s game is now, he playing to a different set of rules.” Coulson reported.

Steve remembered that Loki’s eyes had changed colour back in Stuttgart and this bit of information supported Loki’s statement that he had been influenced by the sceptre, if not completely under its control. If that bit was true, maybe other parts of what he had said were true as well.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

All the pieces move into place

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clint had been cleared by the medics. As far as they could tell, he and all the others Loki had taken showed no signs what-so-ever of his influence. Finally released from the medics, Clint joined the rest of the team at the promised debrief. Unfortunately, he couldn’t give them much.

“It was strange. Loki wanted to be on the Helicarrier and my team and I were meant to be coming aboard to rescue him. The plan was to try and stir up your distrust of each other, to fracture the team.” Clint said. While his report was aimed at Fury, who was sitting opposite, the agent scanned the room. He noted that Thor had moved away from the table, but still listening to what was said. Tony looked bored and was whispering to Bruce about him coming to work for him. Bruce was clearly undecided on that point. Natasha and Steve, not surprisingly, were listening intently, trying to learn everything they could about their adversary.

He continued “Instead he arrived at the base, completely out of nowhere. He seemed different, less wild, more controlled. He demanded that we contact Selvig’s team who were on the move to prevent detection and get them to return. As soon as the truck arrived, he used the Sceptre to release his control on everyone. He locked everything into that locked box and just vanished again. As we didn’t really know what was going on, I thought it best to come straight here, Sir.”

“And he gave no explanation as to why he changed his plans? Nothing to suggest what he was planning to do next?” Fury asked.

Clint shook his head. “Negative. Whatever his next move, he kept it to himself. Judging from this display of power we saw from him, I would say he is more than capable of causing trouble without the sceptre or the cube. He’s not someone to be taken likely.”

“We’ll take that under advisement.” Fury said, standing up. “Now Barton, you understand that in the present circumstances, you will have to be taken off of active duty until such time as we can ensure that you and the others are no longer under Loki’s influence and therefore no longer a threat.”

Clint nodded. He had been expecting this. “I understand, sir.”

“Ok, people. We have a god to find and I have a meeting with some important suits. Get to work.” Fury ordered.

With that, he left the table and heading to the conference room. Coulson approached Clint as the others, apart from Natasha and Steve, followed Fury’s lead. Clint stood and held out his hands to be cuffed again.

Coulson shook his head. “Don’t worry. I know that it wasn’t your fault. Right now, go see Laura and the kids. You’ve not had a break since the New Mexico incident.”
Clint seemed truly shocked at this development. He fully expected to spend at least a few months in the SHIELD detention centre, not put on leave. Still, he wasn’t going to complain. “Thanks, Coulson. What’s happening with the others? The Doc was pretty out of it after the control was lifted.”

“The agents are also on leave and we’ve already contacted Dr Foster, she’ll be taking care of Dr Selvig as soon as she returns to the States,” Coulson said. He motioned to Natasha to follow him as he left. “I’ll organise your transport and Natasha will see you home.”

Thor had gotten bored during this discussion and followed Fury, Steve assumed, to get him to hand over the Tesseract and the Sceptre. So, Steve was alone with Barton, who was still standing at the table. He didn’t really know what to say to the agent and made to leave himself, but the other man’s voice stopped him.

“He has gone, but he will return,” Clint said, his voice flat.

“Pardon?” Steve replied. He looked confused.

“He has gone in search of answers, but he will return,” Clint said again.

Steve could only think that it was some sort of message from Loki. He supposed he shouldn’t be surprised at who the messenger was. It also proved at least a little that he might not be imagining things. Mind, it meant he was likely crazy for not telling anyone about his experience with Loki but then how would he explain something like that. He needed to talk to Thor again before he left, to try and get answers for himself.

“Are you ok, Cap?”

Steve was startled from his thoughts by Clint, who had moved around the table towards him. He looked concerned and Steve realised he must have been staring into nothing.

“Just thinking about what you said.” He replied.

“I didn’t say anything.” The agent said, looking more worried.

Steve narrowed his eyes. The man looked like he didn’t know what Steve was talking about. He decided that for his sake it was better that way. He had enough to worry about without Steve telling him he had carried a subconscious message to him.

“Sorry. I was lost in thought, I more than likely imagined it.”

Clint didn’t look convinced, but he let it go. With a friendly nod, he followed Barton and Natasha to the hanger. Steve watched him go and tried to decide what Loki would do next.

A few hours later, Fury summoned Steve, Tony and Bruce together.

“The WSC has agreed reluctantly to let Thor take the Cube and the Sceptre back to Asgard with him.” Fury said. He didn’t tell them that they only agreed after Thor had already departed. Fury hadn’t put up much of a fight. He’d seem what both were capable of and if Loki could use the Tesseract to come to Earth, who knew what else could. In his opinion, it wasn’t worth the risk.

Tony, of course, couldn’t let the situation go without saying something. “So, does this mean you won’t be making your Tesseract weapons then?”
With that, he plugged something into the terminal in front of him and a blueprint of a missile appeared. It clearly had a power cell created from the Tesseract. Steve was appalled. “I was wrong. The world hasn’t changed one bit.” He said, angry that the people he was working for were no better than Hydra.

Fury scanned the room. “Yes. We were going to build an arsenal with the Tesseract. I never put all my chips on that number, though, because I was playing something even riskier.”

“And what was that?” Bruce asked, also not happy with what Tony had uncovered.

“There was an idea, Stark knows this, called the Avengers Initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people to see if they could become something more. To see if they could work together when we needed them to, to fight the battles that we never could.”

“And that’s us, I take it,” Steve replied.

Fury nodded. “Yes. Your actions in Stuttgart has swayed the public very much in your favour. That and the fact that without the Tesseract, phase two is useless, the Council has authorised the project. You won’t be expected to work as a team all the time. Stark, you will be free to continue as you have. Cap, you will be welcome to work with SHIELD alongside Romanoff. Dr Banner, I understand Stark has offered you a place in his research lab. If that’s what you want, SHIELD is willing to protect you. But when we need you, you will be ready.”

Steve looked around the table. Bruce was nodding. Tony rolled his eyes but seemed agreeable. As for Steve, he couldn’t come up with a reason to say no. Yet he wasn't going make it that easy for the man that lied to him. “I think you can give us a couple of days to think about this, don’t you think, Director.”

Fury took in the feeling in the room and agreed.

Chapter End Notes

there will be a slight delay as I sort out the next bit but I am hoping to be ready to post more soon
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Steve settles into his new team and finds out more about Loki from Thor.

Chapter Notes

A few more chapters for you.

The two months that followed were busy for Steve. During that time, SHIELD had settled him in an apartment in New York. They had wanted to have him in Washington, but Steve felt a strong need to stay close to his roots. So his apartment was located on the southern end of Manhattan Island, a quick ferry ride from Brooklyn.

SHIELD had sent him on one mission in that time, with Agent Romanoff. It had been a simple search and rescue, but it had been a great opportunity to get to know Natasha on a more personal level. Steve found her to be a very capable agent and potentially a friend, but then he couldn’t help feeling that there would always be something that he couldn’t trust about her. Most of what they talked of en-route was surface stuff, in fact, she was very interested in his love life, but he could tell it was all in good-natured fun. About herself, he learnt very little, but he hoped in time she would learn to trust him.

Steve also visited Tony and Bruce at the Tower. Tony, it seemed, had embraced the idea of the Avengers. He had begun turning the upper levels of Stark Tower in a base of operations for the Avengers away from SHIELD. It was something that Steve found he approved of. No matter what Fury had said it the defence of the organisation, they were far too secretive for Steve to be completely comfortable with. So, while he agreed to the Avengers Initiative in general, he preferred to keep a level of autonomy and their base at the Stark Tower gave them that. As result, only Natasha was an official member of SHIELD working with them. Steve agreed to do missions on an 'as and when' basis and Tony would only be involved in Avengers missions. Bruce made it clear that his role would be as a scientific consultant only and the Hulk was off the cards. Coulson was assigned as the liaison between the Avengers and SHIELD and Steve found time to sign his trading card collection.

Steve found that once he got the hang of dealing with the arrogance and snide comments, Tony was actually a pretty okay guy. He opened up his home to Bruce without hesitation and offered for Steve to stay there too if he wanted. While he was a dick about Howard, Steve could tell that deep down he wanted to know about the man his father had been before he became a self-righteous ass (Tony’s words) and he tried to tell Tony what he could. He wasn’t sure how helpful he was but he tried anyway.

The one other major event was Thor’s return. It seemed that Odin was not content to have both Tesseract and the Sceptre back on Asgard, he was determined that Loki should be returned as well to
stand trial for his actions. To that end, he once more used the Dark Energy to send Thor back to assist in his capture while the Bifrost was being repaired, which would take years according to the Thunderer.

Steve wasn’t sure how he felt about this. He didn’t like the idea that Loki was loose somewhere unchecked, as the man was an unknown factor, but he wasn’t sure if he was comfortable with Thor simply carting him off to Asgard either. While the first was rational, the second was a mystery, one he wanted to be solved. And he was certain that Loki was the one with most, if not all, the answers.

Thor, like Bruce, took up residence in the Tower, as while he was waiting for some sign of Loki on Earth, he also agreed to assist the Avengers when required, much to Fury’s satisfaction. Steve was able to take advantage of the situation to get a better insight into Loki.

Thor was sitting at the kitchen island when Steve arrived at the Tower, devouring a pile of Pop-tarts. He saw Steve approach and held up the plate, offering him one, which Steve declined with a smile. He embraced the change in food, particularly at the variety that was now available in a regular store, but he found that the pastry treat was too sweet for him.

“Thanks, but not for me,” Said Steve as he took a stool next to the god. This was the first chance he got to talk to him alone since his return. “Was everything okay at home?”

Thor looked pleased to talk about himself. “All is well. My Father was pleased to have the not one but two Infinity Stones located. It would seem the Sceptre’s jewel housed the Mind Stone and would explain Loki’s ability to control the minds of the agents and Selvig. I have told Fury of this, as he is without the stone, it is unlikely Loki will be able to influence them again.”

Steve nodded. That was at least something. If he did meet Loki again, he was felt happier knowing that he couldn’t take over his mind and use him as part of whatever his plan was now. “I bet he’ll be reassured about bringing the agents back from their leave. What are Infinity Stones?”

“Sources of almost unlimited power, each in their own right. Legend has it there are six but no one knows for sure. The Tesseract is another, the Space Stone, hence Loki’s ability to open a doorway with it” Thor explained, before reaching for another treat.

Steve was interested in hearing more about the Stones, but he wanted to lead the conversation in a different direction while he had the chance.

“As you’ve mentioned Loki, is there anything about his past that might give us idea of where he might be hiding or what his plans could be? What about allies he might have?”

Thor paused in his eating and considered for a moment. “I fear at this moment there is nothing I can tell you. On Asgard, he and I, we fought side by side. We had our friends, the Warriors Three and the Lady Sif. Now he is beyond us. To whom he would turn or when he may reveal himself. No, I doubt even Mother could say and she knew him better than anyone. It was she who first taught him magic.”

“Why would she teach him magic? I thought that you were more focused on fighting skills.” Steve asked, cocking his head.

“I asked her once when we were children. She told me that I was born to be the mightiest on the battlefield and she wished him to have something of his own that would set him apart. Of course, she knew the truth of his birth which would have influenced her decision.” Thor replied, a grim look on
his face. He clearly wasn’t happy that he had been lied to either. Steve felt a little sorry for him, he imagined that it would have been hard for him. Of course, he was sure that for Loki, it would have been worse a hundred-fold.

“So, what can you tell me about his original people? You said he was Jotun, the stories say that they were giants.” Steve asked. He hoped that once he got him talking, Thor might be able to confirm at least some of what Loki told him during their shared vision.

Steve was right, and Thor was willing to talk. “After my Father finally defeated them in the last war, he decreed that Jotunheim was forbidden. Books were removed from the library and the only knowledge was myth and legends. I cannot help but wonder now if it was to stop Loki learning the truth.”

This was just the lead in Steve was looking for. “Myths?”

“Aye, there were the usual. That the Giants were 20 feet tall, that they could freeze your blood with a glance. I have fought them, and 8 feet was the biggest and I defeated him easily.” Thor boasted proudly. “There was one unusual tale I remember mother telling us. They say that each Jotun has one true soulmate, one in all the nine realms. It is a gift from Ymir, it would seem. It was just a story that mother would tell us to calm us before sleep at night, nothing more”

Steve smiled in agreement, but inside, he mind was speeding ahead. Once more, he had evidence that Loki was telling the truth. It might be just a myth but there had to be some truth into or where would the myth have come from in the first place. He was now certain that he would see Loki again and that it would be sooner rather than later.
Chapter 7

It wasn’t long after Thor’s return and their conversation, that Loki turned up again. Steve was jogging when he first saw him, although felt would be a better word, certainly at first. He was taking his favourite route through Central Park and had just rounded a large group of trees when that same sense of anticipation that he felt before the fight in Stuttgart began again. Steve stopped dead, causing a bike rider that was behind him to swerve sharply. Steve lifted his hand in apology before he scanned the crowd.

Standing on a grass verge, a hundred yards from him was a tall, dark figure, dressed in the same suit he had worn at the Gala. Loki was staring at him and Steve caught his breath. He couldn’t deny that he was relieved to see him again if nothing else because he was alive. Steve’s only problem was he knew he should be calling for back-up to help bring Loki in. that was his job, but something stopped him from reaching for his cell phone and he knew it wasn’t Loki using his magic.

While Steve’s internal debate was going on, a group of teenagers walked along the path between them blocking his view. When they cleared, Loki had vanished, and Steve couldn’t be certain that he had even been there in the first place.

Steve decided not to report the sighting of Loki. Like with the vision and Barton’s message, Steve couldn’t be certain that it wasn’t a product of his imagination or that was the excuse he told himself. He couldn’t admit even to himself that he didn’t want Loki caught, that he deserved the chance to tell his story and based on everything he had said so far, Thor was unlikely to give him that. Not that Loki made it easy for him.

The next time he saw him, Steve was sitting in the briefing room in the SHIELD. Along with Natasha, he had been sent on an information-gathering mission. It had been a training exercise, as while he was most useful as a leader of the Avengers, Fury wanted to make sure that he was able in a range of operations, including infiltration and observation.

The mission had been a success and he was waiting for Coulson to arrive for his debrief. He was still wearing the baseball cap and glasses he had used to hide his identity. Not the most complicated disguise but Steve had to admit, it’s simplicity was certainly effective.

As he was waiting for the debriefing, a group of SHIELD agents walked passed the window. Steve glanced up as the group caught his eye and it was all he could do not to let his mouth fall open in surprise. Walking past the window, mingled in with agents was Loki. Dressed in his Asgardian clothes as well. Steve knew he was staring and was about to look away when Loki turned his head to look into the window as he walked passed. He smiled when he saw Steve and Steve couldn’t help his lips parting slightly at the sight. He couldn’t deny that when he smiled, Loki was attractive. Very attractive.

Steve quickly pushed the thoughts aside when he heard the door open. He looked and saw Coulson coming in, the case file in hand. The group of agents passed the door at that moment and Steve could see that Loki wasn’t with them and had vanished again. Taking a moment to refocus, he turned his attention back to Coulson and his debriefing.

After the second sighting, Steve began having dreams. To start with, they were just random images that made up most people dreams, although Loki featured heavily in the very little of it he
remembered. It did make a nice change from the cold nightmare he had after he was recovered from the ice. But slowly the dream began to take shape.

Loki was standing by a building, an apartment block on Earth. Steve couldn’t make out where it was but still, he followed Loki as he went into the basement. He always woke up at the door and seemed unable to get any further. It was the same every time he had the dream, which was at least twice a week and Steve was certain it had to be some kind of message. He just needed to work out where the apartment block and what the message was trying to tell him.

The crunch came when Loki showed himself during one of the first Avengers missions. Since Tony had come into the open with Ironman, there had been a rise in the number of enhanced humans making themselves known. One of those was Doom and he had decided that it was a good time to challenge the might of newly-formed team. So, he brought a small army of his robot drones and began to attack New York.

It did him little good as the resulting fight was relatively short and didn’t end well for the villain, who retreated with his tail between his legs. Steve was pleased with the overall result, although he did find that trying to control both Tony and Thor wore his patience a little thin. Thor, in particular, wasn’t keen on taking orders from a mortal when he was so used to being the one in charge, although he did respect Steve as a fellow warrior. Steve also felt that with only four members of the team, they were a little light on manpower. He made a note to ask Fury to see if there was anyone who could be a useful addition to the team. He knew that Barton had originally been a planned Avenger, but he had retired from active service after his experience with Loki.

Steve was giving the area one last sweep, making sure they had taken out all the robots while the others were organising the clean up (or in Thor’s case flirting with some fans). He turned the corner to check one of the back alleys and came face to face with Loki, again dressed in his Asgardian leathers. He dropped automatically into a defensive stance, his shield ready in front of him.

Loki raised an eyebrow and looked bemused. “There is no need, Captain, I mean no harm.”

Steve eyed him carefully before he slowly straightened up and put his shield on his back. He then reached up and took off his helmet. He was glad that he got Tony to redesign the suit to something like he worn during the war, although with more up to date materials. It was darker and more inconspicuous then the outfit he had worn in Germany, much to his satisfaction. It also meant his helmet was fitted with his communicator and this was a talk he didn’t want to be overheard.

“This has to stop. Whatever is going on, you can’t keep popping up like this. And I would like some answers.”

Loki smiled. “Soon enough. Captain.”

“Captain?” Thor’s voice said from behind him. Steve broken eye contact and looked around. “Are you well?”

Steve was confused by the fact that while Thor looked concerned, he wasn’t prepared to fight. Turning back, he saw the alley was empty. “I’m fine. Thought I saw one of the robots down here, but I was wrong.”

Thor seemed to accept this explanation and didn’t notice that Steve still had his helmet in his hand. Steve put it back on and with one glance back to where Loki had been, he followed Thor back towards the Quinjet.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Steve meets a possible new friend.

After making his report to Fury, Steve put in his recommendation that they bring in another member to the team. He may want to keep the Avengers independent, but they were mostly government funded and under the oversight of SHIELD. So, he was at least going to tell the director what he was going to do before he did it.

“Even with a God and Stark, we struggle to cover the ground we need with just the four of us.”

Fury looked over the report that Coulson had already filed with him. It agreed with Steve’s assessment and made the same recommendation. “I can draw up a list of agents who can be assigned at any given time.”

Steve shook his head. “I wasn’t asking you to find me someone, I was just letting you know that someone else was going to be joining the team. I think Agent Romanoff is enough SHIELD.”

The pair’s eyes met, and Steve knew that Fury got his meaning. The director leaned back in his chair, thinking. “Ok, but I want final clearance on whoever gets brought in.”

Steve nodded. It wasn’t that much of a problem anyway. “Right, if there isn’t anything else…….”

“Actually Captain, there was another matter I wanted to talk to you about. I need you to come to Washington. There is a meeting of the Oversight Committee and I need you there to discuss the Avengers.” Fury replied.

Steve looked confused. “Surely Stark would be better suited for this. He’s given evidence in these sorts of things before. The last time I was meant to attend something like this, I spent my time debriefing the SSR on Hydra instead.”

“I want the congressmen to support this programme. I put Stark in front of the committee, we are likely to see the whole thing shut down. He’s not known for getting people on-side.” Fury pointed out, leaning forward as if to emphasise his point.

Steve couldn’t argue. Despite his good points, Tony could start an argument in an empty room. “Okay, let me know when the flight is. I’m assuming someone from SHIELD will be coming with me.”

“Agent Hill. She has given evidence before the Committee before, she can guide you through the shit those suits will throw at you.”

Steve wandered into the Washington bar much in much need of a drink. The Oversight Committee review had been as torturous as he had expected. Maria had prepped him as much as she could, but they still tried to turn him into mincemeat. The worst was General Ross. The General didn’t seem to approve of the Avengers on principle, which was rich considering he was the one that who had been
funding Bruce’s research. Maria did tell him however that the WSC had tried to get SHEILD to recruit Ross and the Abomination for the first attempt at the Avengers Initiative. Fury had sent Tony as a liaison, and as per normal he had pissed off Ross. Steve couldn’t help feeling that that had been the plan all along but decided not to comment.

After the first round of questions, which lasted nearly all afternoon, the Committee called a recess until the next day. Steve was a little frustrated at the attempts to trip him up and decided that while he couldn’t get drunk, he needed a drink.

Steve took a seat at the bar and ordered a beer before he scanned the room. It was quiet even though it was late afternoon, in fact there was only one other man in the bar. He looked as though he had been there a while as there were a few empty bottles lined up next to him. Normally, Steve wouldn’t interfere, but the guy looked like he needed to talk. He picked up his beer and headed up to the other man’s table.

“Hey, you okay?” Steve asked as he sat down across from the other man.

The man looked up and took a swig of his beer. “Not much company, man.”

Steve noticed that his voice was slightly slurred, confirming that he had indeed been drinking for a little while. “It’s not good to drink alone. I know, I’ve done it. I was lucky someone was there to help me out.”

“And you think I need help?” The slurred voice replied.

“You tell me. I’m Steve.”

The other man looked up again. There was a flash of recognition in his eyes. Without warning, he burst into tears. “That’s it. First I lose my wingman and now I’m hallucinating Captain America sitting across from me. This is rock bottom, man, rock bottom.”

Steve was surprised that he was recognised. He was also a little confused at the term wingman until he saw the Airforce insignia on the man jacket. The guy was a pilot and it looked like he had lost someone he flew with. It was something Steve could relate too.

The man stood sharply and began to sway around the room. The barman came over quickly and grabbed him, stopping him from falling on his face.

“Come on Wilson, I think you’ve had enough, the taxi’s outside,” he said kindly. Wilson seemed pretty out of it by then and followed where the other man led. Steve grabbed another barman as he went to clear the table.

“That guy a regular here?” Steve asked.

“The last week, every day.” The barman replied. “Never get much out of him, but I think he just lost a friend and taking really hard. I think he’s stationed at the airbase, but not sure. Its where we send the cabs anyway.”

“Thanks,” Steve replied, before thinking for a moment. He could understand what the man was going through, after all, he remembered how hard it had been after Bucky had died. He’d had the mission to feed his pain into and Peggy to lean on, but he was certain that this man had nothing. He pulled the notebook he carried everywhere with him, which had his list of things he needed to catch up on. Tearing a page from the back, he wrote a quick note and handed it to the barman. “When he comes in next time before you serve him, can you give him this.”
The barman took the note and nodded. Grabbing the empties, he headed back to the bar as it was beginning to fill up and left Steve to his thoughts.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Steve gets an unexpected mission and gets help

Steve had finished his deposition and was being driven back to the Triskelion when a call came through, and the car made a sharp turn before skidding to halt.

The driver turned in his seat, opening the separation screen. “Captain, there has been a coordinated attack on the city’s military bases, not sure who’s behind it. The up-highs know you’re here and asked if you could help.”

Steve didn’t need to be asked twice. “I need my Shield.” He jumped out of the car, the agent close behind.

“There is an agent on route. ETA two minutes, along with transport.”

Right on time, a bike screamed to a stop next to them. The rider had Steve shield on their back. They took off their helmet to reveal a blonde-haired woman. “Captain Rogers, Agent Carter. We need you to get to the airbase as soon as possible.”

Steve nodded and put on the flat jacket the driver had pulled from the truck. The agent got off the bike and handed the Shield to Steve. He took her place on the bike, nodded to the agents and speed off.

Steve pulled up to chaos at the airbase. The attackers were storming the main armoury, where the armed base personnel seemed to have dug in. It looked like Steve had got there before any other reinforcements had arrived and he didn’t waste time. He drove the bike straight at the attackers, who scrambled as soon as they spotted him. Their surprise didn’t last long and their weapons were soon turned on Steve, who took cover. A quick glance and he threw his shield at the closest man, knocking him off of his feet.

The problem was that his shield landed out of his reach and every attempt to reach resulted in a rain of bullets in his direction. He was trying to figure out what to do when someone in the air caught his eye. A man wearing a pair of wings flew across the sky. The attackers turned their attention to the other man, firing at him. Using his wings as a shield, he then returned fire with a pair of handguns. Steve took advantage of the distraction and grabbed his own shield again, throwing again to take out another attacker. The winged man dropped to the ground, kicking a third man, taking out two more with an impressive spinning kick, before once more taking to the sky.

With the numbers evening out, the personnel from the armoury poured out, as well as troops from the nearby army base. It didn’t take long to incapacitate the rest of the terrorists. Once clean-up was on the way, Steve approached his winged companion. To his surprise, he found it was Wilson from the bar. He took off his flight goggles and nodded at Steve.

“Captain America. I actually thought I dreamt you up. Sam Wilson.”
Steve reached out his hand, which Sam shook. “Steve, please. Thanks for the assist. I must say, I was surprised at your entrance. Not what I was expecting.”

Sam’s eyes dropped to the floor before looking at Steve again. “Yeah well, I could hardly stay in my quarters while the bullets were flying, discharged or not. I was lucky that I still had access to the warehouse it was stored in.”

Steve noted that there was something more to this but didn’t think this was the time to ask more, as there was a crowd gathering. “Fancy a drink, Sam.”

By drink, Steve meant coffee. The pair met up at the hotel lounge and were able to sit in a quiet corner.

“So, you’re not a regular pilot,” Steve asked as he took a mouthful of his coffee.

Sam shook his head. “I served two tours with the Fifty-Eighth Para-Rescue before I was approached to test some new tech. The wings are fast and manoeuvrable, so we could reach downed pilots in a fraction of the time as well as other missions. Then, my wingman, Riley was hit by an RPG and went down. There was nothing I could but watch him fall.”

“I’m sorry,” Steve replied. “I know what it’s like to lose someone close, partially during a mission. I tried to bury it at the bottom of a bottle, but I can’t get drunk. So I threw myself into finishing the job with Hydra and everyone knows how that ended.”

“Yeah, I’ve been hitting it hard since I’ve been back. Finally started talking to a therapist over the last few days, trying to sort my head out. All I know is I’m out of the army but not sure what I’m going to do with myself.”

Steve nodded. “I know what you mean. Before the incident in Germany, I wasn’t sure what I was going to do after I came out of the ice. This world was so different from the world I left behind. I don’t know where I would be without the internet, once Stark stopped talking long enough to show me how it works. Been reading so much, trying to catch up.”

Sam looked very serious for a moment. “Marvin Gaye, Nineteen Seventy-Two, Trouble Man soundtrack. Everything you missed jammed into one album.”

Steve smiled. “I’ll put it on the list.” After a moment of silence, he continued. “Listen, I know this may not be the best time, but when you’re ready and if you still want to do something, come look me up in New York. I could really use you there, not just on the team, but having my back like you did today.”

Sam looked surprised. After all, it wasn’t everyday Captain America tried to recruit you. “Thanks, I’ll keep it in mind. You do look like you could do with someone a bit more down to earth, a normal guy.”

“You know what, Wilson, I couldn’t say it better myself.” Steve smiled, knowing that he was making the right choice.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Steve finally makes contact with Loki

Back in New York, the first thing Steve did was get Tony to use the contacts he had at the Department of Defence to find out what he could about the Falcon Prototype suit. He had a gut feeling that he would be seeing Sam sooner rather later and wanted to be ready. Tony worked his magic and soon had a copy of the blueprints, which he set about improving on. Steve couldn’t help smiling at the older man’s enthusiasm for the new project. It kept him from his normal teasing which Steve had put up with.

Once he had Sam sorted, Steve knew he couldn’t put off his own problem any more. Since he came back from Washington, his dreams were becoming clearer every night. He was finally able to identify the area of the city known as Hell’s Kitchen. Armed with this information and having a few days of downtime, Steve decided he needed to get some answers.

The apartment block was just how Steve remembered it from his dreams, a plain if slightly dilapidated building. He knew that he should have told the other Avengers that he thought Loki was here, but then he also knew he would have to tell them the truth about where he got his information from and he still wasn’t willing to tell them yet. He tried to convince himself that it was because he still wasn’t certain that he hadn’t imagined the whole thing, but if he was honest with himself, he knew that he hadn’t. He needed to know what Loki had meant when he had called them soulmates and he didn’t want anyone, particularly Thor interfering with that.

Steve approached the front door, unsure if he should try the call buttons. When he got there, however, he found the door lock was broken, people were coming and going freely. A few looked at him, but fortunately few civilians recognised him out of uniform. Seeing there was no excuse to delay, he opened the door.

The entrance hall was as worn as the outside of the building and the elevators were out of order. Luckily, Steve wasn’t interested in going up to the apartments. Instead, he went across the hall to the door that led to the basement, as his dreams had shown him. The door looked padlocked shut but as he approached, it swung open. He hesitated for a moment, but then slowly walked down the stairs to the basement.

The room below the building was dark as it seemed the lights had failed and was clearly in the same state of disrepair as the rest of the building. Standing at the base of the stairs, Steve could make out a brighter area by the furthest wall, which wasn’t as far away as he would have imagined given the building footprint. Seeing as there was nothing else to see he walked towards it, ducking under a low hanging archway.

Loki was sat on a ledge, dressed again in Asgardian leathers. He seemed to be deep in thought, staring in front of him. He didn’t look up but said, “You have arrived. I knew you would see the truth in the dreams when you were truly ready to learn.”
Steve narrowed his eyes. "So, you did send them. Was that part of you stalking me?"

Loki broke his eyes away from what he had been staring at. He turned his head to Steve and smiled. "I was observing you, seeing for myself. You are interesting, the best of the mortal realm. As for the dreams, they are part of our bond, neither of us have any control over them or what they tell us. They come when we have need for each other."

"Trust me, I don’t need you," Steve replied a little defensively. Still, he moved a little closer. Everything he knew about Loki said he should keep his distance, but his gut told him he was safe. "You need to turn yourself over to SHIELD, Loki. If you come with me now, I’ll do what I can to make sure your side of the story is heard. I’ll even try and talk them into letting you stay here rather than be sent home."

Loki stood and turned away from Steve. "I think not, Captain. I do not believe that it would be in my best interests to submit to another’s will."

Steve shook his head. "I can’t let you say here. You are responsible for the deaths of eighty people. I…..you need to come in."

Loki turned to face Steve again, a pained look in his eyes. "I regret the deaths my actions caused, none more so than the man at the Gala. But my mind was clouded, my mind focused on the goal set by... I could do nothing but work towards that goal until I found you."

"I... I believe you. Your eyes. They were same as Barton’s were, from what Coulson told me. But that doesn’t mean you can keep hiding here."

Loki paused for a little while. Then he sat down again. "Tell me. Can you assure me that they will listen? That your Fury will treat me as he has treated his agents who have also killed in the same cause. Or that Thor will let me speak before he drags me to Asgard for my sentence? Tell me these things and I shall come with you, now."

It was Steve's turn to be quiet. He thought about everything that Loki had asked, and he found he couldn’t give him the answers he wanted. He knew Fury and Thor wouldn’t give him the time of day. They would make sure that Loki paid for what he had done, no matter the mitigating circumstances. And Steve knew he couldn’t let that happen, that Loki deserved better.

Loki correctly took Steve’s silence for negatives to his conditions. He decided to let Steve off having to actually answer and said instead. "You knew I would never allow myself to be captured. So, my dear Captain, let us move on to the real reason you sought me out."

Steve sighed in resignation, forced to acknowledge that Loki was right. "Okay. I think I deserve some answers. What is all this soulmate stuff? What does it have to do with me really?"

"Surely by now, you have asked Thor about me? I would imagine that with the right encouragement he would have told you of the myths of my people." Loki deflecting the question for a moment with his statement.

Steve didn’t fall for it. "I did. But he hasn’t gone looking for the truth like you have, according to Barton. So, answer the question. Tell me what being your soulmate means? Are we meant to just jump into bed with each other or what?"

Loki looked amused as if the very idea of any sort of romantic relationship was absurd. He twisted so he could look Steve full in the face. "Had my race only survived by mating with our soulmates, we would have died out many thousand years ago. Few ever find them, especially after Odin took the
Casket from Jotunheim. Most are like you, born on other realms. It is why many believe it was nothing more than a legend. So, no Captain, there will be no expectation that you will be sharing my bed.”

Steve breathed out a sigh of relief. The man in front of him may be attractive and Steve’s type but he would never be comfortable with seeming to have no control over whom he was in a relationship with.

“Good because I like women,” Steve replied, although not one hundred percent accurate. He had looked at both men and women with interest over the years, even if the kiss with Peggy had been the furthest he’d ever got with any of them. But Loki didn’t need to know that. Especially as Steve found him very attractive. “Okay, now tell me, what do you think we are to each other?”

Loki narrowed his eyes. “This is not opinion, Captain, but fact. As I have said, we share a connection, a bond from which we can both draw strength. Each of us is the one being we can trust and depend on no matter what comes between us. There can also be no lies between us. As we become closer, the stronger the bond will become. I will not deny that some soulmates becoming lovers, but there is not a demand that they separate from a lover they already have, nor mate with someone they find they are not compatible with on that level.”

Steve studied Loki for a moment and he knew that the man in front of him was telling him the truth as he knew it. “Alright let’s say for a moment that I believe what you're telling me, why me? What is about me that makes me your soulmate? How do you know for certain? Did you find out that?”

Loki shook his head. “There is no answer for those questions. Soulmates are a gift from Ymir. The rest was lost long ago. And I know because I know, just as you would if you would trust your feelings.” The god turned away for a moment. “Is there anything more you wish to know?”

Steve leant back against a pillar and ran his fingers through his hair. “I don’t know. I have so much going on in my head. I want to believe you, but it’s just too much right now. I have kept you a secret from the rest of my team and I can’t explain to myself why.”

“It is because you feel the bond between us, you know that we are stronger together and they will not understand, will try to interfere,” Loki answered, rising to walk to Steve and placed a hand on his shoulder.

Steve jumped at the contact. He backed away to give himself some space. “Look, I’ve got to go. If you won’t come in, I need to figure out what I’m going to do.”

“You know where to find me, Captain, should you have need of me.” Loki turned away again.

Steve looked at Loki's back and he almost said that he wouldn’t need him again, but he knew that it wasn’t true. “I know.”

Steve headed to the stairs to leave but looked back one more. He wasn’t surprised to see that Loki had vanished. Not sure what else to do, he left, hoping time would give him an answer.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Steve gets an insight into his past which in turn may help explain his future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve was very lucky as almost as soon as he got back to the tower, Coulson had a mission ready and waiting for him and Natasha. Nearly a week of thinking of nothing but analysing intel and tracking down a Terrorist cell that was planning attacks in major commerce centres across Europe, before hitting a G20 meeting later in the month. Their mission was to observe known members of the cell, hoping that they would lead them to the group’s leaders before they carried out their plans. The mission was a success, with minimum casualties for Steve’s team, while capturing or eliminating all the major members of the cell.

The mission was a welcome distraction, but that was all it was. A distraction. Back at the Tower, he found that Loki was always at the forefront of his mind. He kept repeating everything that he had been told over and over. It seemed so fantastic, that none of it could possibly be true and yet, it was also too fantastic not to be real. Plus, the feeling that had been there before Stuttgart had only gotten stronger. Each time he saw Loki, he felt as though he belonged for the first time in his life. There wasn’t this yearning to be close to him or anything that the romance stories described, but he certainly felt more at ease around Loki, more even than Bucky who had practically been his brother since they were kids.

Still, there was still something he felt he was missing, something that might explain why he was chosen. The answer came from a source he never expected.

Steve was sketching in his apartment, when Tony knocked on his door, carrying a box under his arm. After letting him into the apartment, Steve quickly closed the pad, hiding the drawing from view. After all, he didn’t think it would be a good idea for the rest of the team to know that most of his recent inspiration was of Loki.

Tony noticed but didn’t say anything, putting it down to his artistic temperament. He put the box on the table. “I turned this up when I was looking for some old legal stuff of my Dad’s for Pepper. Looks like my dad grabbed your personal things before the government got their hands on them. He must have wanted to keep them safe just in case he found you.”

Steve was surprised, while friends, it wasn’t an action he would have expected from Howard. He pulled the box towards him and opened it. Inside were the things that were left in storage at the base in London. He picked up a notebook and flicked to the page of the monkey on a unicycle. He smiled because it was meeting Peggy that day that put him back where he was meant to be, fighting Hydra. Putting it aside, he reached in once more and found a foxed edged photograph. It was the only picture of his parents together, taken not long after they had gotten married during his father’s final leave from the army before he died. It was a photo he had always kept with him, apart from that last mission, when something told him to leave all these things behind.
Steve put aside the remaining contents and looked up at Tony. “Thank you. You don’t know what it means to me to have these things back.”

“Yeah well, they were cluttering up the place, needed to have a clear out.” Came Tony’s flippant reply.

Steve knew better but decided not to comment. He knew that his friendship with Howard had, for some reason, caused tension between father and son. He guessed that it had to do with the fact the man had spent years looking for him and then focusing on his work with the Government, rather than his home life, but he had no idea how to make it right.

“Well thanks again. Do you want a drink or something? You’ve never visited me before.”

“Sorry, this is a flying visit, literally. I left my suit on your roof. Pepper wants me to join her in a meeting between her and an old school friend.” Tony said, looking as though it was the last thing he wanted to do. He seemed more than happy to hand the day to day running of STARK industries to his partner, particularly as they moved away from their arms contracts. It gave him more time to work on his Ironman suits and designs for the Avengers. “That reminds me though, Cap, I need you to come over with the SHIELD, I’ve tweaked the magnetic cuff and need to do some adjustments.”

“I’ll drop into the Tower in the next few days. I want to go over some tactical scenarios with everyone anyway.”

“Always on the clock, Rogers. You need to chill every now and again. Let loose. You’re almost as uptight as Bruce. I can introduce you to some lovely ladies who can help with that.” The former Playboy suggested as he headed to the door.

Steve shook his head. “I’ll pass, but thanks for the offer.”

“Your loss,” Tony called as the door closed behind him.

Steve snorted then turned back to the box. He once more picked up the photo and stared for a little while at his mother whom he missed greatly, even after all this time. He wished he could say the same about his father but no matter how much love his mother had for him, it was hard to miss someone you’d never met. Absently he turned to photo over to the verse that he knew was written on the back.

“To you, I can open my heart and share my innermost self. My Joseph, my Anam Cara.”

Steve frowned at the phase Anam Cara. It was something his mother had said more than once. When he had been a kid, he had asked why she had never remarried, as many young war widows had. She always replied that his father was her Anam Cara and could never be replaced in her heart.

Steve thought for a moment and then switched on his computer. Using his ever-trusty internet, he soon found the meaning of the phase. It was a Gaelic term which literally translated into Soul Friend. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. There in his own history was something which almost exactly described what Loki claimed they shared. It was something he was sure that he would have to talk to Loki about it when they saw each other again.

Chapter End Notes

The phrase quoted on the back of the Photograph is from an engraved wall plaque,
which I have cut down slightly to fit better.
https://i.pinimg.com/736x/56/9e/01/569e018aef435208b56ab6be0e551221.jpg
Chapter 12

As it was, Steve saw Loki much sooner than he expected and for a far more pressing reason than their being soulmates.

It seemed that Thor’s visit to Earth had caused a lot of people to take a lot more interest than before. One such person was another Asgardian called Amora, who had become obsessed with Thor and with using him as her ticket to the throne. Like Loki, she was a powerful magic user and had the ability to bring men under her thrall, believing themselves in love with her. It was something she had used on Thor before and he grudgingly admitted later that it was only because of Loki that he had been able to get free of her, which also gave him a certain degree of resistance to her gifts.

That did not stop her however and she seemed to work on the principle if she couldn’t have him no-one could. She had popped up in the middle of Central Park and began sending blasts of energy at anyone and everyone that moved.

The Avengers were called in to deal with her. Thor, however, decided to take matters into his own hands, hoping to settle a score. Not waiting for the rest of the team, he took off and arrived at the park first. Amora was ready and after trading blows, she managed to get close enough to scratch his face with her nails, leaving deep gouges down his cheek.

The rest of the team arrived to see the final exchange. Amora satisfied that her job was done, vanished, presumably back out into the Nine Realms. Thor turned to wave at his teammates, but as he did so, he began to feel very light headed. Steve got to him just in time to catch him before he hit the ground.

Thor lay in the medical facility Tony had outfitted in the Tower, a tube helping him to breathe. Bruce ran his eye over the results of the tests he had run and it didn’t look good. Admittedly all he had to compare them to with was the tests he had run on Thor when he had first arrived, but the stats were still worse than they were before. Bruce had at least found the cause, poison was attacking his cells.

“I would say that Thor’s lady friend had the poison on her nails, it’s the only way I think anything could have got into his system. It’s certainly not of Earth origin, his body should be able to repel anything here if Thor is to be believed.” Bruce said. He put down the tablet and rubbed his eyes.

Steve kept his attention on Thor, his mouth set in a grim line. Another man down on his watch. Steve and Thor had become friends, bonding over not really understanding half of what Tony and Bruce were talking about and exploring the modern world. He was also happy to continue talking about Loki and Steve could see that he missed his brother, even if he would never really admit it. If Thor died, Steve wasn’t sure if he could forgive himself for losing another friend during a mission.

He glanced at Bruce and said. “What’s the plan, Doctor?”

Bruce knew Steve meant business, as he had stopped using his title months ago. “I have managed to isolate the poison but trying to break it down? I don’t recognise two-thirds of what’s in it. I’m going to keep working and Tony is trying to get help from experts in the field but right now, all I can do is hope his body fights it off on his own or we get some help from Asgard.”

Steve shook his head. “Even if they could help, Thor seems pretty certain that even with the Tesseract it would years before they were able to send anyone else here. I think we’re on our own.”
Steve had been awake for nearly thirty hours when Bruce, fed up with tripping over the super soldier, informed him that if he didn’t leave, he would break his winning streak and get the other guy to throw him out. Steve didn’t need telling twice, having seen enough videos on the Hulk to not want to meet him in person. As Thor was stable and Bruce had promised to let him know the moment there was a change for good or bad, Steve headed back to his apartment for some rest. It was just after noon, but now that he was away from the situation, he realised he was dead on his feet. Closing the blinds tight, he stripped out of his pants and headed to bed.

It was early evening when something dragged Steve from his sleep. His senses told him that he wasn’t alone, but he was certain that the intruder wasn’t hostile. Reaching for the lamp, he switched on the light and scanning the room in seconds. He was surprised that he wasn’t shocked to find Loki standing at the end of the bed looking at him.

“Something troubles you, Captain?” He asked smoothly. His eyes were darting around, clearly looking for whatever was distressing Steve.

Steve said nothing for a moment, given that Loki had just popped in his home uninvited. If he was honest, he wasn’t bothered and was actually glad to see him. It also saved him looking for him tomorrow as had been his plan.

“You get a dream from me this time?” Loki nodded, so Steve continued. “I was going to try and find you in the morning. We had a visit from an old friend of yours.”

“Yes, I felt the witch’s presence here and her departure. Thor should be able to deal with her alone by now, I have given him all the protection from her control that I can.” Loki interrupted, sounding slightly bored.

“Did that include poison?” Steve asked. He saw Loki’s eyes go wide. “She poisoned him, and Bruce says he’s critical. I thought you should know, as the only family he has here.”

“She has never taken such steps before, her plan has always been to rule Asgard, with Thor as her puppet. What does she think she can gain from assassination?”

“Well, the poison’s not from Earth so, it was either her or you.” Steve pointed out. He pushed the sheet back and pulled his pants on again before standing to face his visitor. “And I don’t think it was you.”

“You place such trust in me, Captain?” Loki remarked, an eyebrow raised.

Steve shrugged. “Isn’t that what the whole soulmate thing is about, me being able to trust you?”

Loki smirked at the answer “But you do not believe that it is true, Captain.” He then turned away and stared out of Steve’s window for a moment. Then he continued. “What steps are your healers making to cure Thor?”

“They are doing all that they can, but I’ll be straight with you, Loki. We don’t know what the poison is and it could be simply out of our reach. I’m sorry, it happened on my watch and I let him down.” Steve looked away from Loki, attempting to hiding his guilt. He jumped when the hand touched his arm. Unlike the last time, Steve let it stay there.

“Your guilt will not aid us, even if it were warranted. Thor made his own choices which led to this, I have little doubt.” Loki said, sharply but not unkindly. He backed away again. “I must leave you now but expect my return before the morning. I shall have what the oaf requires.”
It was Steve’s turn to grab Loki’s arm, stopping him from vanishing again. “What do you mean? You know how to save him?”

Loki looked at the hand then back to Steve’s face, his own unreadable. “Of course. There is a plant in Asgard, that when distilled, will cleanse the body. This will rid Thor of the poison and he should return to his arrogant ways after a few days of recovery.”

“Why? Why would you help Thor? Given what he has told me of your recent past, you’re not exactly on good terms.” Steve asked, releasing his arm.

“You care about his safety. I do this for your sake, I assure you.” Loki looked completely detached, but Steve was already starting to get a sense of Loki and didn’t quite believe him. Still, right now, Loki was willing to help Thor and that was all Steve was interested in.

“Alright, but I can’t just sit around waiting. I’m coming with you.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Steve and Loki search for a cure for Thor.

Steve still couldn’t believe that one moment, he had been standing in the middle of the Utah mountains, the next he was on a cliff face on Asgard. His jaw dropped as he saw the golden city in front of him. Thor had told him stories, but to see it in person, impressed wasn’t the word.

Loki vanished within a minute of them arriving, claiming he had to find something they needed. That was nearly twenty minutes ago, and he still hadn’t returned, so Steve was starting to get a little worried. While he knew it made little sense to bring him along to simply leave him there, he couldn’t help feeling that Loki had only brought him so far then left him where he wouldn’t interfere in his search. After everything he had been through, trusting others was hard for Steve and Loki did little to make it easier.

Just as he was starting to think of looking for a route up or down the cliff, Steve heard the sound of something moving below him. He looked over the edge and had to step back quickly as the flying ship rose level with him, Loki at the helm.

“Were you worried for me Captain?” The god said as Steve jumped aboard.

“Nope, just starting to think you were going off after your plant on your own after all,” Steve replied honestly.

“You still do not trust me, then, despite your words earlier. You are wiser than I gave you credit for.” Loki commented with a slight smile. “I thought it best to see what news Asgard had of Thor’s condition. It would seem that Heimdall’s attention has been diverted by the ongoing conflicts that now run over the other Realms. Asgard’s presence is missed and he is unaware of Thor’s condition.”

“Well, wouldn’t it be better to let them know? We could get a cure for them or couldn’t you take one of the healers with you and return them with you just did with me.”

“I do not believe my help would be accepted. As I have said, even if it was their only chance to save Thor, they would throw me in the cells before allowing me to give him aid. As for their cure, the healers depend on their soul forges, the old ways are lost to them. This I have learnt by talking to others outside the palace walls.” Loki explained.

Without another word, Loki turned the ship and headed towards the mainland, sticking close to the water to prevent detection. Steve came up and sat next to him, looking out across the realm.

“It’s beautiful. I can understand why Thor loves it here.”

“He loves it less than he once did. It is Midgard that holds his heart now, partly because of the Foster woman. I believe that I am simply the excuse for him to remain as long as possible.”

Steve looked at Loki for a moment. “And now you’re helping him. Going to tell me why you’re really doing this?”
Loki kept his eyes on their destination. “It is as I have said, I am helping you.”

Steve shook his head. “I don’t buy it. I thought you said we couldn’t lie to each other.”

“It is no lie.” Loki snapped before twisted slightly in his seat so his back was more to Steve.

Silence hung in the air and Steve felt a little uncomfortable. The man was meant to be the God of Lies, the Silver-tongue, but Loki seemed to be offended at the idea of lying to Steve. It hit Steve that it had never occurred to him to lie to Loki either. He was certainly no angel in that department but every word he had ever said to Loki had been the truth.

“Look, I’m sorry. I’m still getting used to all this stuff.”

Loki head turned slightly towards him, but he made no move to turn around.

Steve tried again on a different tack. “You said earlier that I don’t believe in the whole soulmate thing. Well, I’ve been looking into a few things. My family came from Ireland originally and my mom used to call my dad her Anam Cara. It means Soul Friend and traditionally you are meant to have a similar connection to the one you described to me. I’m not saying I’m completely sold on the idea, but it seems to be a massive coincidence that we both have soulmates as part of our cultures.”

Loki finally turned around, looking Steve in the eye. “I would agree. It would go some way to explaining why we are soulmates, but as I have said, it is not likely we will ever discover the truth. Better we accept it and find a way to move forward as part of each other’s lives.”

“It’s that simple for you isn’t it. You don’t question it at all.” Steve stated. Loki said nothing, nor did Steve expect any different.

“Why did we need the ship anyway? I would have thought you could use your magic here as you did on Earth.”

Loki seemed happy to change the topic once more. “I can cast a cloak over us, preventing Heimdall from locating us with minimum effort, but to teleport both of us across the realm would require a greater expenditure of magic. Frigga would feel my presence through my magic. She would know that I am here and attempt to see me, attempt to reconcile me with Odin. She would never understand that too much has passed between us.”

Steve frowned, trying to remember where he had heard the name before. “Frigga is your mother. Mine always wanted me to know that I could achieve anything, even when my body was holding me back. Guess she was why I never gave up when I wanted to do my bit in the army.”

“Frigga…….mother alone loved me for who I was. Everyone wanted me to fit into their ways, become the same as them. But I am not the same. I am the monster parents tell their children stories of at night. And when I became to monster in truth, they left me to drift through the void. They could have tried to find me but decided to think me dead and gone forever.” Loki voice was laced with pain, remembering his ordeal.

Steve reached out and took Loki’s hand. The first time their skin touched, he had been too distracted by the fight to notice the slight tingling that vanished after a moment, but he felt it now. It gave him a warm, contented feeling. “You’re not a monster, Loki. A monster is what gave you those scars, that made you their puppet. You let Barton and the others go, you didn’t have to, but you did. That wasn’t the actions of a monster.”

Loki turned his hand over and held Steve’s tight for a moment, which Steve found comforting. It was all Steve could do not squeeze it a little tighter. He knew he was treading on dangerous territory but couldn’t help himself.
Then Loki let go and turned his attention to finding a place to land by a small lake. The plant itself wasn’t hard to find and in no time, Loki had three large flowers which looked like snowdrops boiling in water over a campfire. As soon as it was done, they were back aboard the ship and flying to the cliff face.

Steve entered the Medbay just after two in the morning to find Bruce dozing at the terminal. The desk was covered in empty coffee mugs and it was clear the man hadn’t moved from Thor’s bedside since he was brought in.

Steve checked Thor’s vitals and saw that he was getting worse, slowly but noticeable. He didn’t have long. Tentatively, he reached out, shaking Bruce’s shoulder gently. “Bruce.”

The doctor jumped, and Steve wasn’t sure if he caught the slight touch of green in his eyes. Luckily, it only took a moment for Bruce to regain control and Steve’s heart started beating again.

“Sorry, but you can’t help if your falling asleep. He looks stable, take a couple of hours.”

Bruce checking his screen before rubbing his eyes. “Yeah, you’re right, Steve. The next set of test results won’t be ready ‘til the morning. Can you sit with him, make sure he doesn’t get worse any quicker?”

Steve couldn’t have asked for a better opening. “Sure, I’ll call if there is anything.”

Steve watched as the Doctor left, before checking to see if the cameras were off in the room. Tony rarely had them on, as he didn’t want his check-ups with his personal doctor available to hackers. Satisfied that he wouldn’t be seen, he pulled out the syringe that he had in his pocket containing the distilled plant extract. He was surprised when Loki had conjured one from thin air. It certainly simplified things, as he had learned basic field medicine during the war and had had a crash course from SHIELD. Some things had changed but a needle was still a needle.

Steve reached for Thor’s IV, then hesitated. This was going to be the biggest leap of faith in his whole life. Up until now, he had to risk his own life on his hunches. This time he was risking Thor’s, in faith that Loki had created a cure rather than something that would kill his brother quicker. In the ideal scenario, he would have given it to Bruce or Tony to test, but then he would have had to explain where he had gotten the cure from, and no one was ready for that, least of all him.

So it was down to him and the faith he had in Loki, in them being soulmates really meaning as much to Loki as he claimed. Steeling himself for the result, either way, Steve injected the syringe into the valve. Knowing that all he could do now was wait, he took a seat next to the bed and prayed.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

We see if Steve's faith was well placed.

Steve’s faith was proven justified and Thor made a full if steady recovery. The effects of the cure were so gradual that, given the extract was undetectable by Bruce’s tests, the doctor could only conclude that Thor’s immune system had finally kicked in, clearing his system of the poison. Steve was glad that he was making a recovery but wished that everyone knew that Loki had helped Thor, off his own back. But he didn’t want his involvement known and Steve was certain that it was partly to protect Steve from the suspicion of the other Avengers.

Steve decided that he should try to find Loki to at least let him know how his brother was doing. So nearly a fortnight after Thor was first poisoned, he was standing once more outside the dilapidated apartment block. It was after all the only clue he had to find Loki, short of the dreams. He knew Loki had had one when Thor was hurt, but he doubted that just wanting to find Loki would be enough for a second one.

Not really sure what else to do, Steve headed down to the basement. It was just the same was it was before, dimly lit. Steve could just make out the wall of the other end of the basement. He still wondered at the wall. Having looked at the building plans, it was clear that the room should be bigger than it looked. There was no sign of an obvious door, suggesting a storeroom of some kind.

Steve frowned for a moment. He knew that he was meant to be looking for Loki, but he couldn’t get the wall out of his mind like he couldn’t leave a mystery alone. Reaching out he began running his hand over the wall, not sure what he was looking for. He knew Tony would be laughing if he saw him pawing at the brickwork, looking for the trapdoors.

Steve was about to give up when his hand seemed to vanish through the wall. Feeling around the edge, he found a space which seemed big enough to be a door. Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes, he stepped through.

He opened his eyes and was shocked to see that instead on the expected storeroom, he was looking at a fully finished apartment. Even more surprising, Loki was standing in the middle of the room, apparently waiting for him.

“I commend you, Captain. I believed it would take you far longer to discover the entrance to my home.” Loki commented with a smirk.

Steve looked around him. He didn’t know what he had expected, but it wasn’t an immaculate sitting room, with a small kitchen beyond. He thought about Thor’s room in the tower and how he had covered it in furs and wooden furniture, making it look as much like home as possible. This apartment looked at the pinnacle of modern minimalism Steve had seen in magazines.

“This is where you’ve been hiding? Aren’t you worried that someone might fall through the wall?” Steve asked as he walked gingerly into the apartment. While Loki had proven himself so far, Steve felt it was foolish to take anything with him for granted.
“Given the state of the building above, there are few who would venture below through a locked door. In addition, the barrier itself is solid to others.” Loki explained as he took a seat in an armchair, his hands clasped in front of his face as he watched the super-soldier. He waved his hand after a moment, conjuring another chair.

Steve remained on his feet, not wishing to get comfortable just yet especially given his mixed feelings. “So you knew I was there. Was it a test? See if I can find my own way in here? You’re putting a lot of trust in me, to let me find you here. I still think the best thing for you is to come in to SHIELD. What if I told everyone where you were?” He pointed out, still trying to get a feel for Loki.

Loki shrugged. “If you do, there is nothing in my power to stop you. But I believe you would have done so already. You are an honourable man, Captain and would not betray me this way.”

Steve considered Loki’s words and knew he was right. He didn’t realise just how much Loki had been able to read him from their few short meetings. He wasn’t sure how he felt about that and changed the subject. “Thor is recovering well and should be on his feet in the next day or two, just like you said.”

“You doubted it? I have said there can only be truth between us.”

“Yes, but just because you tell the truth, doesn’t mean you have to tell everything. I know you hold things back, particularly about Asgard. You seem to know me, but I’m getting to know you as well.”

Steve waited for Loki’s reaction and was pleased to see that while his face was grim, there was amusement in his eyes. Still, he remained silent for a long time. Steve wasn’t sure what to do, especially as he felt a little stupid, standing there just inside the sitting room. When Loki did speak, Steve nearly jumped out of his skin.

“You were right.” Loki’s voice was low. “I told you the truth, I did give my assistance because of your friendship with him. But that was not the only reason. Thor and I, we were raised together, we played together, fought together, as he reminded me on the cliff. He was just as betrayed as I, by the lies Odin and Frigga told. For all his faults, he loved me once, as I do him.”

“He still does.” Steve finally took the seat Loki offered. “I mean when we talk about you most of the time, it’s about possible sightings, you’ll be surprised how many of them there are. Any of them to do you, by the way?” Steve had a twinkle in his eye as he asked.

At the question, Loki grinned. “Well, maybe one or two. I could not let you think that had forgotten you. You will find that the times I was observed on other continents are real, keeping the attention of your companions away from my real location.”

Steve had already guessed as much as they were the ones that had remained unsolved. The rest had been nutjobs who had seen Loki’s picture on the internet from Germany. Most had been picked up and being dealt with by the proper authorities.

“Anyway, we’ve talked about you, Thor and I, and I know he wants you back. It’s just he doesn’t see how, given that he doesn’t know what I know. You could be a family again. All you need to do is come with me and let us tell everyone the truth.” Steve leaned in, trying to emphasise his point.

“And I have told you, that I shall not give myself into his power. Even if he believes the truth, which is unlikely at best, he will still insist on our return to Asgard, either waiting for the Bifrost to be repaired or if he knows of my skill to travel between the realms, by forcing me to take us. There would be no return for me. Odin would wish to keep me close, under his control if not in a cell.”
Loki looked straight at Steve, his body tense. “I would never see you again.”

Steve knew that Loki believed absolutely in them being soulmates, but until this moment he had had no idea that is meant that much to him. He also couldn’t deny that, even though he was still unsure himself about them being soulmates, he still wasn’t happy for Loki to vanish from his life. He had become very important to him very fast.

“Okay, I get it. I….. I don’t want you to go either. I’m still not sure what this is between us, but I know there is something. So where do we go from here? We can’t keep going on the way we are like this.” Steve asked, leaning back in the chair. He realised suddenly that he had done what he said he wasn’t going to. He was comfortable with Loki and he was okay with that.

Loki also seemed to relax, seemingly happy that Steve would not push him on handing himself into SHIELD. “I would like to know my soulmate better. It would strengthen our bond and maybe convince you of the truth.”

Steve nodded. “I like that idea.”

Steve spent the remainder of the day with Loki, talking about their respective histories. They both knew what was public knowledge about each other, but they shared things that were personal. Steve found out about the sides of Asgard that Thor didn’t talk about, including the Jotun wars and Loki’s parentage, but he still said very little about the time between his fall from Asgard and his arrival on Earth. Steve was less reserved and talked about his own parents, mostly his mother and Bucky.

Steve noted that Loki looked at little sour as he talked very fondly of his oldest friend but decided to ignore it. After all, Bucky was the closest thing he’d had to a family after his mother died and Soulmate or not, Loki wasn’t going to make him feel that the others in his life should mean less to him then Loki did, especially now he was gone too. He supposed it didn’t help that he had let slip that he was in fact attracted to men as well as women. Although he supposed it didn’t matter that much as Loki didn’t seem that interested in him in that way.

Still, the pair parted on good terms, with Steve feeling more at ease with the knowledge of Loki remaining free on Earth. Steve was certain that he wouldn’t do anything that would risk getting himself captured. On the other hand, he was also certain he wouldn’t just sit in the background, being forgotten either. Steve could put money on his future with Loki being very eventful.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

A new member joins the team and Steve and Tony have a heart to heart before a mission.

A few weeks later, Tony called Steve. “Hey, Capsicle. There is something important over at the Tower that needs your attention.”

Steve was intrigued, as Tony refused to say what was going on. So, he wasted no time heading over to the Tower. He found Sam Wilson waiting for him, his rucksack over his shoulder. Steve smiled and reached out to shake his hand. “Good to see you, Sam. You should have called, I would have met you at the airport.”

“And spoil the surprise? Anyway, I was sitting around my apartment, not doing a lot, and I figured that you must be getting yourself into all sorts of trouble down here.” Sam replied. He looked around the lounge, clearly impressed by the décor. “You got a nice pad, better than my digs back home.”

Steve shrugged. “Tony likes to splash his money about and he certainly prefers the finer things, though he fills is wardrobe with metal band t-shirts. But I’m not living here, I’ve got an apartment just across the water from Brooklyn. What about you? This a flying visit?”

Sam laughed at the pun. “Yeah, keep the funny coming, Cap. Might send me chuckling back to DC.” He sobered again. “No, I’m here to take you up on your offer, if you’ll still have me. The last few months, the therapy reminded me I want to help people.

Steve was happy that Sam was willing to join the team, but he didn’t want to rush the man into something he wasn’t ready for. “I glad you want in, but don’t rush into this. Stay here the next few days, get a feel for the place and the others. If you’re still interested, Tony has a set of wings that he’s upgraded from the original blueprints. He’s very keen to show off his toys.”

“I appreciate that, Cap. I’ve been following the reports of what you’re up against. Your world is crazy, and I think you need all the help you can get.” Sam replied with a smile. “So, unless your teammates and I really don’t like each other, I’m in.”

Over the next few days, Steve introduced Sam to the team and included him in the training sessions. The former airman gelled quickly with the others, particularly Natasha. As Steve predicted, Tony was quick to show him the upgraded wings that, in addition to their improved flight capabilities and armour, now sported a range of weapons and sensors, as well as a detachable scanner, which Sam affectionately nicknamed Redwing. The new design meant that Sam had much greater speed and manoeuvrability, making him almost as versatile as Tony during the battle simulations.

Thor was a little wary of the stranger at first but after fighting alongside him in training declared him to be a true warrior and worthy to fight with them. Sam had grimaced at Steve as the god’s arm was
wrapped around his shoulders in a bone-crushing hug, but he accepted the compliment with good grace.

While he wasn’t told everything just yet, Sam was informed of the Avengers standing orders to bring in Loki. He, of course, had seen the report in the attack in Germany, but like many others knew very little, other than what was in the briefing all members of the military received after the incident, which was a description and orders to not approach and to contact SHIELD directly should he be spotted. So he was keen to learn more.

“Okay, this guy comes from the same planet as Thor……..” He said to Steve as they were changing after a session in the gym.

Steve fastened his pants and reached for his clean shirt. “He’s actually from another planet but grew up on Asgard with Thor, both believing they were brothers. He went off the rails when he found out the truth, according to Thor.”

“And he turns up here, armed to the teeth, ready to bring an army to conquer us and the next thing we know, he gave up his greatest weapons and hostages and is hiding in earth somewhere with his tail between his legs.” Sam continued, lacing up his boots.

Steve forced himself to keep a straight face and not jump to Loki’s defence as much as he wanted to. After all, he couldn’t tell Sam that he saw the god at least twice a week and was becoming close friends, certainly not that they may or may not be soulmates.

“He’s certainly gone to ground and gave up the tesseract and sceptre of his own accord. What else he has planned now is anyone's guess, but I would not underestimate him in the slightest. He’s powerful in his own right if Thor is to be believed.” He replied once more keeping it as general as possible. He hated lying to his friends, but what else could he do, if he wanted to stay close to Loki.

Further talk on the subject was interrupted by JARVIS. “Captain Rogers, Mr Stark has just asked me to inform you and Mr Wilson that he feels the need to assemble.” JARVIS’s crisp English accent said, reminding Steve of Loki.

Steve looked at Sam. For Tony to be the one to get everyone together was unusual. They finished getting dressed and hurried to the conference room, which doubled as a command centre. Tony, Thor and Natasha were already waiting for them.

“Tell me what we’ve got,” Steve asked as he took a seat, Sam sitting next to Natasha.

“Looks like Dr Third Person is back. Seems he’s planning to add the Abomination to his arsenal.” Tony replied, switching on the holo-screen. A large warehouse type building appeared in front of them. “Despite how it looks, this is actually a high level, classified detention centre in the middle of Death Valley. Apparently, that’s where Blonsky is being holed-up, but I bet it was originally meant for the green guy.”

Steve ran his eye over the very basic specs of the building that was on the tablet in front of him. “Isn’t General Ross still responsible for Blonsky? How did he find out what Doom is up to and for that matter how did we find out? I can’t imagine him calling us in for help, even if the Doctor is involved.”

“He didn’t. the Intel arrived by courier a couple of hours ago. I’ve had JARVIS checking out the details and its kosher.” Tony saw Thor’s confused look. “It’s real information, Point Break.”

Steve frowned and glared at Tony. “Why am I only hearing about this now? I should have been told
as soon as this information came in, especially if it came from an unknown source.”

“I wasn’t sure if I was going to do this one on my own, but I thought you might like a run out for fly-boy here.”

Steve narrowed his eyes but decided that calling Tony out any further in front of the others was a bad idea. So instead he asked. “So, have you been able to find out who sent the intel and how reliable it is? Will we be walking into a trap if we intervene?”

Tony looked smug with himself, feeling he had won this round. “JARVIS has checked every courier service in New York State. No one made a delivery here so as of right now that’s a dead-end. As for the intel, everything checks out. My sources tell me that Blonsky is being held there under observation and there is movement in Latveria as far as the satellites can tell. Whatever’s going to happen it will be in three days.”

Steve ran his eye over the information again. “Okay, team. We can land the Quinjet two miles from the facility and remain undetected by the base security. Natasha, get Coulson to organize us a feed to their internal communications, so we know if they go to alert. SHIELD might as well make themselves useful. Everyone else, I want us running close quarters drills. It likely that Doom and his goons will already be inside. And I think we are going to have bring Bruce with us, in case Blonsky gets free. Okay, get to it people.”

The team nodded their acknowledgement before filing out to carry out Steve’s directions. Steve, however, stopped Tony.

“You just can’t help yourself, can you Tony?” Steve said, crossing his arms. “The Intel was sent to me, I don’t know what your deal is Spangles.”

Tony replied off-hand. “I don’t like that you kept the intel from me until you have a chance to work your own angle on it. Especially as you knew it was Doom, who isn’t someone you can take on alone, Tony. I’m not complaining over what you’ve done, but it’s the way you do it. I can’t lead a team when everyone has their own agenda. It hard enough keeping my eye on Romanoff and Thor, don’t make me have to not trust you either. I need you to watch my back.”

With that Steve reached out his hand. He realised that he had never really offered Tony his friendship before, although as far as he was concerned it had been implied for a while now. Tony looked at it a moment before taking the offered hand.

“This doesn’t mean I’m going to start agreeing with everything that comes out of your perfect teeth, Rogers,” Tony said, before looking back to his screen, a little uncomfortable at the show of trust.

Steve shook his head. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The team deal with Doom but runs into someone unexpected

Chapter Notes

I know it been a little while since the last update, but I have had some major writer's block. However, I have got another chunk done and hoping to be on the home stretch.

Fortunately for the Avengers, Doom was punctual and hit the base when they were waiting just two miles away as opposed to two thousand. When the call for assistance sounding over the radio, the jet was in the air and at the base in less than five minutes. The base itself looked deserted as they approached, with a few abandoned vehicles scattered around. The building’s exterior certainly supported that, given that it looked like a strong wind would bring everything crashing down. The Avengers might have thought they were in wrong place if it wasn’t for Doom’s transport, which was large enough to take the Abomination back to Latveria and a large number of Doombots waiting outside the main doors. The team quickly dealt with those bots and Steve turned his attention to assessing the situation.

“Falcon, watch the perimeter. I don’t want to be caught unaware if Doom brings in reinforcements. Bruce, stay with the jet. I’ll call you if Blonsky gets free and we need the Other Guy.”

Bruce nodded, before he headed back into the Quinjet, hoping that he didn’t have to end his winning streak. Sam knew that his skill set wasn’t suited to a fight in a confined space, took to the skies and the rest of the team followed Steve into the facility.

Once inside, the team found the first signs of life, as there were several military personnel unconscious on the floor in front of the formerly concealed elevator. Steve would have preferred to get them to safety, but he knew they didn’t have time. They stopped to make sure that they were all alive before heading down to the detention centre.

They were met with a similar sight as they exited the elevator. Military and support staff seemed to have just dropped where they stood, some still holding tablets and weapons, there were, however, no signs of gunfire anywhere. The facility looked completely intact.

“This doesn’t make sense,” Natasha said, as she felt a young soldier’s pulse. “If they defended themselves, this place should be a wreck.”

“The SOS only lasted for a few seconds and could have come from the patrols on the surface.” Steve surmised. He glanced into the next corridor. “We can figure out what happened to the staff when Blonsky is secure. The cell should be this way.”

The team reached a large set of very tough looking doors, which were open far enough for a single person to pass through.
“Ok, if Abomination is free, his containment is the primary objective. If not, we take Doom out before he lets him loose. Ironman, get one of your bugs on to the main computer if you can. I want to know what Ross has planned for Blonsky………….”

Steve stopped mid-sentence when he heard an all too familiar voice. “Victor, if you truly wish this beast under your control, you will be patient. Magic such as this cannot be rushed.”

“Doom’s patience runs thin, Loki. I wish to leave with my prize before those meddling Avengers arrive.” Doom replied from inside the cell.

“Loki,” Thor growled and without waiting charged through the door into the room.

“Thor,” Steve shouted, as he also rushed to the door, the rest of the team following behind.

The room was large, mostly taken up by the Abomination’s cell. The man (if he could still be called that) was pacing back and forth, looking like he was staring at something in the distance. In front of the cell, as well as a considerable number of bots, was Doom as they expected and Loki, who they weren’t. The latter’s hands were enveloped in green light and he was clearly responsible for the Abomination’s current distracted state. Steve stood stunned, not knowing what to think at the sight of his so-called soulmate helping another supervillain.

Doom had spun around at the sound of the god of Thunder charging into the room. “Grr. You have interfered in Doom’s plans for the last time. Loki, have the beast attack.”

Steve recovered from his shock and steered himself to the task in hand. “I wouldn’t do that. Blonsky had less control over himself then the Hulk, he will rip you both apart, then everyone else here.”

Loki looked at him and for a moment Steve could have sworn he winked at him. It suddenly dawned on him who had sent the intel to Stark, that Loki had fed them what they needed to get them there.

“I fear the beast is unwilling to cooperate.” Loki directed at Doom casually.

“Fool,” Doom growled again. “Doom shall deal with them myself.”

With that, the bots charged at the Avengers. The team, who hadn’t moved for fear of setting the Abomination off, jumped to action. Loki also abandoned his attempts to control Blonsky, who surprisingly wandered to the back of the cell and fell asleep. He made a token effect to fight with Thor, who was very angry with Loki’s involvement.

Steve noted in-between dispatching his own bots, that Loki was mostly deflecting Thor’s attacks, while his own were very inaccurate, either hitting the floor or more often taking out bots by ‘accident’. It didn’t take long for the Avengers to gain the upper hand and Loki took advantage of a lull in the fighting to land a minor hit on Thor, dazing him.

He looked about him, then shouted. “I fear, Victor, our association is over. Maybe when you have a better plan.”

And much to everyone’s frustration, Loki simply vanished, leaving Doom to his fate.

“TRAITOR!” Doom shouted. “DOOM WILL NOT FORGET THIS, COWARD”

Doom pressed a button his belt and the remaining bots exploded in a cloud of thick smoke which blinded the Avengers and emitted a pulse that scrambled Tony’s scanners. When the smoke cleared, Doom had also made his escape.
An hour later, reinforcements from the nearest army base had arrived and the Avengers were more than happy to hand over control of the clean-up operation. The unconscious personnel had begun to wake up a few minutes after Loki and Doom had made their escape and nearly all told the same story of a dark-haired man popping up out of nowhere and then nothing until they woke up with the Avengers. It seemed that Loki had cast a sleep spell to ensure they could not interfere.

“Your brother isn’t that much of a fighter,” Tony said as they boarded the Quinjet to return to the tower. “Did he actually hit you more than that once?”

“Nay, it would seem his time here has made him weak. Before his fall, his aim was deadly, but that was when he trained with the mightiest Asgard could offer. That is of course myself.” Thor replied, his chest swelling with pride in himself.

Steve had to bite his lip to stop him defending Loki once more. He wasn’t stupid, he knew that Loki’s aim had hit everything he had intended to.

“Well, I’m not complaining. He seemed deadly enough when hitting the bots.” Natasha replied stretching out her arms. “I think one may have caused me some damage if he hadn’t taken it out when he did.”

“Not losing your touch are you, Romanoff?” Tony laughed. He stopped laughing when he suddenly found himself on his back, as Natasha had taken his feet out from under him and finished with her foot on his chest.

“Nope, I think my touch is pretty good, Stark.”

Steve smiled. The banter may be a little physical, but it was also good-natured, as Natasha helped Tony to his feet once more. He was glad they were finally starting to really come together as a team and that the banter had deflected the conversation away from Loki. His involvement was something Steve wanted to deal with in his own.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

When Steve talks to Loki, he makes a discovery and finds a new mission

Steve opened the apartment building door and headed straight to the basement. He was still amazed that no seemed to question him walking through a door that was locked to everyone else but guessed that Loki’s magic would have a hand in it somewhere.

It had been four days since Doom’s attempt to hijack the Abomination, most of which had been spent trying to explain to Fury where they had got their intel from and why they had acted on it when it was from an unknown source. Of course, General Ross had also been in contact, demanding to know why they didn’t inform him of the impending attack, but Steve let Tony handle him, something he thoroughly enjoyed. Loki’s involvement did little to help the situation. Positive proof that he was still on Earth sparked a new search for the god coupled with a dozen new sighting all over the world. The bloodhounds were once more baying for blood and Steve knew that he had to be careful.

Now he knew what to look for, there was a slight shimmer where the entrance to Loki’s home was, which was useful as Steve didn’t want to have to be searching for it every time he came. Loki wasn’t actually home at present, but the god never seemed bothered at Steve being there on his own. His only comment had been to tell him that his secrets protected themselves and to inform him to help himself in the kitchen.

Steve made himself a coffee then began looking at the books which Loki had piled on a large bookcase that seemed to be much too big for the apartment but fit with ease anyway. Many of the books were in written in something that resembled Norse runes but there were one or two that were written in English. Steve found one of the lower shelves and looked at the title. Surprisingly, it was a book on Asgardian Courting Customs.

“Is there someone that has caught your eye, Captain, that you would need such advice?” Loki said from behind him. Steve nearly dropped the book in surprise.

“God.” Steve yelped, putting the book back from where it came from, before turning around to look at the smirking god of mischief. “Don’t sneak up on me like that. You’ll give me a heart attack.”

Loki laughed. “Forgive me, but it was too good of an opportunity. I would have given you aid should your health have failed you. My skill with healing magic is impressive.”

“As is your modesty,” Steve replied, with only the slightest hint of humour in his tone.

Loki of course noticed, and his grin became even wider. After a moment he became more serious. “I expected you before this. What kept you, Captain?”

Steve shook his head. He walked past Loki and back into the room, giving them each a little bit of space. “Well, two super-villains teaming up made for extra paperwork. You know everyone is on high alert looking for you again, right?”
“I fear there was little I could do to prevent it. Had Doom gained any degree of control over the beast, he could have wreaked havoc anywhere. When he approached me to give him aid, I took the opportunity to enlist the only people I could trust to prevent it.”

“You didn’t have to be in the facility for everyone to see. I mean, I’m grateful that you knocked the personnel out, Doom would have killed them, but people were starting to think that you had gone off the planet. And why send the intel to Tony, he almost didn’t share it with the rest of us.”

Loki shrugged. “Your Ironman is a very public figure, both as one of Earth’s defenders and a high-ranking member of your society, while you, Captain, work with the others of SHIELD in the shadows. It is logical that people would send information of this nature to him. It was also to keep suspicion away from you. And had I not gone to the facility, Doom would have simply attempted to remove Abomination, which certainly would have failed, resulting in him being loose on the world one more, likely in a rage. It was an unpleasant possibility that I could not risk, not if it meant you being in danger while you attempted to recapture him. My plan had a much greater chance of success as was proven.”

Steve couldn’t argue, as he already knew Loki was right. Nor was he surprised that his welfare had been foremost in Loki mind’s, a sentiment that Steve shared. His worry was, of course, the danger Loki had put himself in with both Doom and the other Avengers.

“Loki, I know you were looking out for me, but I can’t say I’m happy with you associating with villains, particularly if we are going to end up on opposite sides.”

Loki simply raised his eyebrows. “Well, I find your associating with my buffoon of a brother a burden and also puts us at odds. However, it is a burden I bear without complaint.”

The pair stare at each other for a moment before they both grinned and chuckled, finding the humour in their situation.

Steve shook his head, still smiling. “Just be careful. I don’t want you getting hurt because of our connection.”

Loki came closer and raised his hand to Steve’s cheek. “I would ask the same of you. You face greater danger than I, far more frequently.”

Steve felt the familiar tingle he got when their skin made contact. It was a sensation he found to be a comfort, warmth spreading through his skin. He met Loki’s eyes and felt as though he had been kicked in the gut. Whether it was the intimate touch or the look of concern on his face he wasn’t sure, but Steve was faced with the realisation that the feelings of friendship he had for Loki had grown into something more. He had always found him attractive, but this was something deeper, something that he really didn’t want to put a name on right now.

Steve, trying not to panic pulled back gently, saying. “You don’t need to worry about me, I have a good team around me.” Steve decided he needed to change the topic. “Did you learn any more from Doom, any plans he might have in the future?”

Loki seemed unconcerned by Steve’s withdrawal and shrugged. “The plans he told me of were dependent on him obtaining his prize. I imagine he will be limping back to the ruin of a castle he lives in. There was one thing of interest. A moment, Captain.”

Loki left the room, leaving Steve to his thoughts. He ran his hand through his hair. This wasn’t good. It was one thing him sharing a bond with Loki but having romantic feelings for him was a massive leap, one he certainly wasn’t ready for.
It wasn’t really that Steve was bothered over the development, Loki was attractive and the more he got to know him, the more he saw the man that hid behind his sarcasm and arrogance, which he used as a shield. Under all that, he was a loyal man, very intelligent, funny and warm but he had hurt by his experiences, both before and after his fall into the void.

No, Steve’s problem was that there was no chance that Loki would be interested in him in return. When Steve had mentioned them having a relationship when this whole thing had first started, the man seemed to find the very idea amusing. Loki didn’t even call him by his first name, after months of Steve asking him to.

He had also been very negative about Thor’s relationship with Jane Foster, claiming he was foolish to cleave to someone who would die so many thousand years before him. It wasn’t very likely that Loki would ignore his own opinions to become involved with a mortal himself. Especially as there was nothing special about him that wasn’t related to Captain America.

All of this meant that Steve was going to have to deal with his feelings quickly before they made his friendship with Loki awkward. He sighed, taking a moment to feel sorry for himself. He wished that he and Loki were different people in different circumstances, as he couldn’t help feeling that if they were ordinary people, they could have had a future together.

Steve heard Loki coming back into the room and plastered an indifferent look on his face. Loki himself seemed a little reserved, but that was just for a second before he handed Steve the file in his hand. “I think this will have particular interest for you.”

Steve frowned and took the file. Inside was information on an Arms Dealer called Ulysses Klaue. It wasn’t that man that interested Steve but what he had been willing to sell and where he had got it from. It seemed he had an unknown buyer who would want more than he had stored, although he imagined Doom would be more interested in stealing it. The words Vibranium and Wakanda jumped off the page at him.

Steve also noted that he was had crossed paths with Tony in the past. This put him on edge with the Avengers. He knew he should trust his team, but he couldn’t help feeling worried about the billionaire’s impartiality in this case and if he was out, so were the rest. As for Sam, Steve was reluctant to include him as he had only just joined the team. His eye snapped up to Loki.

“You’re right, we need to check this out.”

“We, Captain?” Loki asked looking very surprised.

Steve nodded in full business mode. “Of course, right now, you’re the only one I can trust with this.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Steve and Loki try to find Wakanda

Steve and Loki were picking their way through a Jungle in Uganda, navigating towards the northern border, which it shared with the isolationist country of Wakanda. Given that there was little known about where they were going, Steve didn’t think it was a good idea for Loki to teleport them in, hence the jungle hike.

Steve had spent the last week doing research into Klaue and Wakanda. As he expected information about the African kingdom was limited, only that they were a poor, underdeveloped county that hadn’t been influenced by white colonisers as had the rest of Africa. The few times the royal family had ventured outside their bordered, they showed the world at large that they were a people heavily entrenched in their traditions and love for the people they ruled over.

Steve found that there was a lot more information available on Klaue. The man was on SHIELD watch list and had a long-running vendetta with Wakanda. It seems that he was first hired to Assassinate the current King T’Chaka nearly thirty years before. There was also a hint that there had been some sort of attack years later, although it was rumour only. Steve guessed that that was when he stole the Vibranium Doom’s information suggested he had.

He had been looking over the files in the Lounge at the Tower when Tony had walked in. Without caring that it was rude, he looked over Steve’s shoulder and saw Klaue’s mug shot.

“Wait, I know that guy. From back in the day. He operates off the African coast, black market arms.” Steve already knew this but pretended to be surprised. He looked at Tony suitably disapproving. Tony didn’t seem bothered and said. “There are conventions, alright? You meet people, I didn’t sell him anything. He was talking about finding something new, a game changer, it was all very "Ahab."

Steve decided to dig a little, to see what the other man knew. “Any ideas what he meant?”

“Nope,” Tony replied. “likely it wasn’t nothing but bluff and hot air. He always made out he had a large operation, but he’s not much more than a thug. What your beef with him anyway?”

Steve shrugged, hoping to give nothing away. “I was going through people on SHIELD’s hit list. Well, the one they’ve given me access too. You never know when he might turn up.” Tony seemed to accept this as it was a reasonable answer, given his opinion that Steve was never off the clock. “Well, let me know if you need anything more.”

Armed with the information, Steve decided that it was a good idea to make contact with the reclusive people to warn them of the possible danger. Of course, given that he didn’t think he could use official channels as this would alert SHIELD and all the problems that would bring, he decided that a personal visit would be better.
Steve informed Fury that he would be unavailable for missions for a month, hopefully giving himself plenty of time to carry out his self-appointed mission without being missed. The Director had been curious at his proposed absence, but he wasn’t in any position to actually stop him from leaving when he wished. He seemed to simply accept that Steve wanted to visit the parts of Europe that he had seen during the War. Steve wasn’t convinced and deliberately left his SHEILD issued phone in his apartment. Instead, he carried a simple pre-paid cell which only Sam had the number to, in case of emergencies.

As soon as Steve hit the Paris airport, he quickly lost the agents he was certain were following him and met up with Loki at their prearranged meeting place before the god teleported them as close as he dared to the Wakandan border. It had still been a two-day hike, and even with the combined strength and stamina of a super soldier and a Norse god, the going had been tough.

The heat was like nothing Steve had experienced before, even when he was escaping from the burning Hydra compound with Bucky. Super-serum or not, he still had a constant river of sweat running down his back and from his forehead. Frustrating as that was, every time he looked at Loki, the god looked as cool a cucumber as if he had just stepped into Central Park on a spring day, which only served to put him out more.

The pair made it to a small clearing around mid-afternoon and decided to take a moment to get their bearings. Steve pulled out the map he had bought at the last village they had passed through.

“We’ll be at the border by nightfall, assuming this map is accurate,” Steve said, before putting it away in his pack and taking a mouthful of water from his canteen. He looked about himself, into the trees. “Given what the locals said about how defensive the Wakandans are, I’m surprised we haven’t seen any sign of guards, even this far from the border.”

As if he had summoned it, a spear flew out of the trees, burying itself into the ground at Steve’s feet. Instincts on high alert, the soldier was on his feet, his arm outstretched. Loki, also on alert, conjured Steve’s shield from his temporal storage. He threw it to Steve, who caught it cleanly, before producing two long daggers with a flick of his wrists.

Steve scanned the jungle, looking for their attackers, but he couldn’t see anything through the thick undergrowth. They remained that way for a moment before Steve looked at Loki and nodded towards the spear. He assumed a defensive stance as Loki approached the spear and concealing his daggers again, he pulled the spear from the ground.

Loki slowly turned it over in his hand, a confused look on his face. “This weapon is not all that it appears.”

Steve took his eyes from the jungle to the spear. At first glance, it looked like a normal, if plain African tribal weapon. It was only as he looked closer that he could see that it was made from a single material which looked just like his shield before Howard had added the paint. Scanning the tree line once more, he reached out and took the spear. The weight was the final confirmation that it had to be made mostly from Vibranium.

“Well looks like we’re in the right neck of the wood,” Steve commented, hoping to lighten the slightly tense mood.

“Agreed, this weapon is made from the same metal as your shield, but this is not a primitive’s tool. There is a hidden function that I cannot activate.” Loki said, running his hand over the smooth handle.

“Nothing about this adds up. I think we should go ask some questions, but I’m keeping my shield.
We need to be ready.”

Loki nodded. He also decided that it was wise to keep the spear ready to hand, for now, giving him chance to study it on the move.

The pair headed out of the clearing in the direction the spear came from, Loki leading the way. The rough terrain meant that there was little time to talk as the hacked through the undergrowth, keeping an eye out for patrols and predators alike.

The silence gave Steve the chance to think about what just happened in the clearing. Not the attack, but how he and Loki responded to it. Their actions had been smooth and coordinated, something he would have expected between himself and Natasha after hours of training. They hadn’t really had time to work out more than the simplest plan for how to proceed, certainly not to work out any sort of battle strategies. He had expected that they would fight independently and have to work around each other as required, but when threatened, they had moved instinctively, together. Steve knew where Loki was and what he had intended. This was yet more proof that their connection was real and strong.

It made Steve’s growing feelings for Loki more unsettling. He tried not to let it affect his interactions with him, but he couldn’t stop himself avoiding making eye contact and certainly not letting them touch. Loki didn’t show any signs that he noticed the change in his attitude, but Steve wasn’t convinced. He just needed to get this mission over with, so he could get some space and hopefully get over his attraction. Then things between him and Loki could get back to normal, or as normal as their situation could be.

They had been walking for another hour when Loki stopped suddenly. The trees were thinning finally and Steve guessed that they were coming to the edge of the jungle, although they were still thick enough to hide people from view. He scanned the trees but couldn’t see anything. However, he knew that Loki senses were even sharper than his enhanced ones.

“Anything?”

Loki nodded slightly. “At least five in close proximity in front, more further into the trees, circling to come at us from behind.”

Steve debated their next move. Retreat was likely already not an option, so it was either an aggressive stance or try to appear non-threatening. He decided for the latter as it would have the best chance of getting what they wanted.

“Okay, we’ll wait for them to break cover. Have your daggers ready but keep them sheathed unless they attack first. We still don’t know what we are dealing with.”

Loki didn’t reply but held the spear upright in a rested position. They weren’t waiting long as within a few moments, the first group of five warriors moved out of the trees, weapons at the ready. Steve noted that they were all dressed in traditional wear for the region, each with a blue patterned cloak of one shoulder and carrying a spear. They formed a screen, clearly to prevent Steve and Loki from advancing further. As Loki predicted, Steve heard movement from behind, suggesting that there were indeed more warriors guarding their retreat.

“Here we go.” Steve thought.
As Steve eyed the warriors in front of him, another man, with the air of someone in charge, exited the trees. He passed the lined of warriors and stopped in the gap between. He also carried a spear, but like Loki, kept it in an upright position. His eyes flicked from Steve to Loki and back, seemingly trying to decide which of them was the leader.

Steve took advantage of the hesitation to say. “We mean no harm. We just need to speak to King T’Chaka, about a very real danger that is coming to Wakanda.”

“The only danger I see, Colonizer, is you.” The man replied, focusing on Steve. “And Wakanda protects itself, especially from thieves. You are bolder than most, trespassers normally run from any sign of danger.”

The man eyes dropped to look at Steve’s shield. Steve gripped the handle a little tighter. He was surprised that a country noted for being isolated would even know who he was, much less what his shield was made from, particularly as it was something that wasn’t known to the general public.

“We aren’t thieves.” Steve retorted, offended by the accusation. Still, in the back of his mind, he was very much aware that he had no real idea where Howard had got the Vibranium from in the first place. He had faith that his friend wasn’t a thief, but he knew he wasn’t a saint either.

Loki had no such reason to remain silent. “Nor are you the simple people that you would have the world believe. You have much more of your metal then you claim, enough that you use it as a standard weapon for your warriors.”

The man was taken back by Loki’s statement. He seemed unsure of what to say and opted for ignoring him. “You will leave now. Return and it will cost you your lives.” He turned to one of the guards. “Take what is ours”

The Warrior advanced and first went to Loki, who gave up the spear without a word. He then moved to Steve, clearly intending to take his shield. Steve took a step back.

“I’m sorry, this is the property of the US Government or Stark Industries, depending on who you talk to. Either way, it’s staying with me.”

The leader pushed the warrior away gently, before staring intently at Steve. “It is Wakandan, stolen from us and now it will be returned.”
Steve refused to back down. “Not going to happen.”

The leader seemed to debate what to do before asking. “You would challenge me for it, Colonizer?”

Steve was suddenly on the back foot as this was the last thing he had expected to happen, nor what he wanted at all. “Look, we’re here to help. There is an attack coming and we don’t need to fight like this.”

“Captain.” Loki interrupted. The look he sent Steve was clear. The other man allowed them to back a few feet away, while he stripped out of his outer clothes, leaving him in just leggings.

“Do not refuse this challenge. This is a matter of honour and respect. Best him and we will find achieving our goal that much simpler.”

Steve looked to the other man and wondered how the hell this mission had gone south for quickly already. But he knew Loki was right, this was a culture still very steeped in tradition if everything that he had read was to be believed and this was just the sort of thing he should have expected.

“I just don’t want to hurt him, this isn’t what we are here for,” Steve replied even as he handed Loki his shield and shrugged off his pack.

“Do not assume that this will be an easy fight. I feel that there is more at work here then even we suspect.” Loki said, and Steve could hear the slightest note of concern in his voice. It warmed his heart a little before he remembered that Loki was only ever going to be his friend.

“This goes bad, get away and let the Avengers know what happened to me, but they aren’t to come after me. Just don’t get yourself caught in the process.”

There was fire in Loki’s eyes as he replied, “Should they harm you permanently, Captain, they shall learn the reason why I am feared across the Nine Realms.”

Steve could tell his wasn’t joking and was about to say something when his opponent shouted. “It is time, Captain America, to show that you are more than a name.”

Steve could see that the warriors had formed a circle, clearly marking out a battle arena. There was space in the circle which he guessed was meant for Loki. Steve took a deep breath and entered the circle, with Loki closing it behind him. In the centre was his opponent and another warrior, whom Steve assumed was something like a referee. He stopped just short of the pair, eyeing his opponent warily.

The third man raised his spear. “Who challenges W’Kabi of the Border tribe?”

Steve straightened his shoulders a little. “Steve Rogers, of the Avengers, Defenders of Earth.” He looked pointedly at the man he now knew was W’Kabi. “All of Earth.”

W’Kabi snorted dismissively. “I accept your challenge.”

“The fight will continue until one man yields or is unable to fight. Stay your hand from the killing blow. BEGIN!” The third man shouts.

Both Steve and W’Kabi began circling each, getting the measure of the other and seeing who would make the first move. Steve, as he didn’t really want to fight, tried to keep his distance, hoping W’Kabi would back down. It was a vain hope, because as soon as W’Kabi could see that Steve
wasn’t going to strike first, he charged forward, quickly sending a flurry of blows aimed at his head and body.

Steve blocked them quickly, not making any counter attacks and moving back around the circle. He had it admit Loki was right. While the force of his blows suggested to Steve that he did indeed have the advantage in strength, his opponent was quick and experienced at hand to hand combat, always looking for a way to turn the fight in his direction. It didn’t help that Steve was actively pulling what punches he did make as not to hurt him.

Steve could tell after only a few minutes that this man wasn’t going to back down and he needed to find a way to end this quickly. He felt a warmth once more and he was somehow sure that Loki agreed with him.

When W’Kabi moved in again to attack, Steve blocked and then countered quickly, the blow sending him staggering back. Steve was impressed as most people would be flat on the floor, but he needed to press his advantage.

W’Kabi spat blood upon to the ground before he grinned, clearly happy to finally be getting a challenge. He still approached more cautiously, staying just out of arms reach. His new strategy was to strike and withdraw quickly, hoping to keep Steve at a distance when he tried to counter.

Steve, reading the situation, pressed forward attacking rather than countering. He waited until W’Kabi was retreating before following with a roundhouse kick, catching his opponent by surprise and sending him sprawling face-first into the dirt.

Steve tackled him while he was dazed, getting him into a tight armlock. “Yield.” He growled

“Wakanda Forever,” W’Kabi replied defiantly through gritted teeth. He struggled against Steve, but it was useless.

“W’Kabi.”

Steve’s head shot up to look where the new voice had come from. From the trees, a tall figure dress in a skin-tight body suit, completely black, with silver detail and a mask which strongly resembled a cat. Not loosening his hold, Steve scanned the gathered warriors and saw them cross their arms in front of their chests as a form of salute to the newcomer. He was clearly a person of authority. He quickly assessed the situation and released his hold on W’Kabi.

Standing, he waited until W’Kabi was in his feet again, then raised his hands. “I yield.”

W’Kabi looked to the newcomer, unsure of what to do. The newcomer advanced and said. “You were clearly the stronger warrior. Why do you give up your victory?”

Steve lowered his arms, satisfied that the fight was over. “I didn’t want to fight, that is not why we’re here. He was never going to give in, his pride wouldn’t let him, and I see no point in carrying on ‘til I hurt him.”

The newcomer reached to his helmet and with a slight twist, detached it from the rest of the suit. It revealed a younger man around the same age as W’Kabi but with the air of someone very much in charge. “I am T’Challa, Prince of Wakanda and I welcome you, Captain Rogers.

Steve started, not expecting to be meeting the Crown Prince like this, nor that he knew him on sight. He bowed his head slightly. “Your Highness, it is an honour.”

Further discussion was prevented by Loki, who approached Steve and rested a hand on his arm
before handing him his shield.

Steve nodded to him, then held out his shield to W’Kabi. “This is yours.”

W’Kabi looked again to the Prince, who shook his head before he raised his hand in a negative. “You have proved yourself a warrior. It is in safe hands.” He said, grudgingly.

“I see that our intelligence on you, Captain, is accurate.” The Prince said. He looked between the two men before him. “Still, I am surprised to see you in the company of a man it was my understanding you were charged to capture.”

Steve gave Loki a concerned look before he replied. “It complicated, but Loki isn’t here with any evil intentions, you have my word.”

“We will reserve judgment on him, he has a lot of blood on his hands.”

“There are few of us that don’t. Thor’s hands drip with it and yet he is a hero.” Loki interrupted, his seemingly off hand comment making his point. “I am here with the sole purpose of aiding Captain Rogers in preventing Klaue from gaining more of your Vibranium.”

W’Kabi surged forward. “You have news of that thieving, murdering dog?”

“W’Kabi!” T’Challa repeated, this time in a warning tone. The other man flared his nostrils in rage but was in control enough to back down at the command of his Prince. Turning to Steve and Loki again, the Prince continued. “That name is a curse here. He has long escaped justice for his crimes against us and there are many who desire revenge.”

“Well if the information we have on him is correct, he has bought himself a powerful ally with the promise of Vibranium that he will try to steal from you. We think it will be within the next few days.” Steve said, happy to finally be getting to the point of why they are here.

T’Challa nodded. “Thank you for informing us. Now it is time for you to leave, I ask that you do not return.” The Prince turned away, the rest of the patrol falling into step behind him.

Steve rushed forward and grabbed his arm. “You don’t understand. He has an army backing him and it will take more than spears to stop them.”

“I can assure you, Captain, Wakanda can protect itself. He succeeded once, but we have learnt from the past and he will not succeed again.”

“Is your shield a new addition to your defensives?” Loki put in. He walked past the Prince and before he could be stopped, he stepped into the trees and out of sight.

Steve, not wanting to let Loki out of his sight, followed quickly and was astonished to find that instead of more thick undergrowth, he was looking out over a large technologically advanced metropolis, so far removed from the underdeveloped society he had expected it was unreal, but Steve could see even from this distance that they still held with a more traditional way of life. The city was made up of small hut-like buildings, all the way to towering skyscrapers. Pack animals walked the streets by their owners, carrying goods and small aircraft filled the sky.

Loki was looking back to where the tree line had been, watching as T’Challa and W’Kabi followed behind them. Steve blinked several times before he asked. “How did you know?”

Loki grinned smugly. “I get a sense of the power the Shield is emitting through my magic, far more than anything else you mortals produce save for one of Stark’s reactors. We have a similar device
protecting Asgard, although we only use it to defend and not to conceal. I believe we are looking at
science that could rival the Realm Eternal.” He looked directly at T’Challa. “This is based on
Vibranium. You, in fact, have it in vast quantities and have used it to advance your technology
beyond that of your peers. It is the reason you have cut yourselves off from the rest of the world.”

The Prince made no attempt to lie about what was before their eyes. “When the Vibranium was first
discovered, the tribes fought for years to gain control of it. It was only the coming of the Black
Panther that stopped us from killing each other. We saw the truth what would happen should the rest
of the world learn if the Vibranium's power. So, we protect it. Not just ourselves from the world, but
the world from itself.”

T’Challa sighed regretfully and then nodded to W’Kabi. He in turned clapped his hands and Loki
and Steve found themselves surrounded by the patrol Warriors, each with a spear at the ready.

“I fear that now you have seen this, you will remain our guests. Forgive me, but you have left us no
choice.”

Steve readied his shield, looking to buy them time for Loki to teleport them away, but he felt Loki’s
hand on his arm. He looked at him and knew that he didn’t think this wasn’t the time to try to fight.
Steve knew he had to trust Loki’s instincts as so far, they had not led him astray. Slowly he relaxed,
and they allowed themselves to be led to the city.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

We meet the king

Steve paced back and forth across the room, fighting the urge to take out his frustrations, in absence of punching bags, on the windows. Of course, Loki, knowing what his favourite outlet was, had already informed him that the windows were in fact not glass, but transparent Vibranium and therefore unlikely to give way, no matter how hard Steve punched.

“Captain, there is little to be gained by continuing your pacing, so I would save your strength,” Loki commented from where he sat, his eyes closed, deep in thought.

Steve stopped and sighed, knowing his companion was right. Still, he didn’t seem able to keep still, which wasn’t like him. He normally was more than able to wait for the right moment to strike during a mission. Usually, it was Tony or Thor who was the hot head, not him. But in this situation, he seemed to be unable to just sit and wait as Loki was. It was getting to him a little, but he knew better not to take it out on other people.

“It’s hard when you know something is coming, but you don’t know when or how bad it’s going to be. It’s not like they are going to need our help anyway, these people clearly know what they are doing.”

Loki couldn’t argue with Steve’s assessment and he stood to face him. “Their technology is certainly more advanced than anything we have seen in this realm. Should you wish, we can leave.”

Steve knew Loki was only making a token offer, that Steve could never leave a mission incomplete.

“We can’t, not until we know that Klaue hasn’t got what he’s after.”

Loki nodded. He slowly walked to the window and looked out on to the city. They had been housed in the royal palace, in a very luxurious set of rooms, simple but elegant, with subtle hints every where of African design. They might be effectively prisoners, but the cell was the pinnacle of comfort.

“This is all so familiar. At least I know this gilded cage for what it is.”

Steve joined him by the window. “Asgard? Was it really a prison?”

“It may not have seemed that way as I grew, but I was a foreign prince held in secret, Asgard’s prisoner under the guise of family. Just because Mother and maybe Odin forgot the truth didn’t change that. Only Thor was as truly innocent as I was in this.” Loki stared off into the distance, lost in his memories. Snapping back to their present situation and clearly not wishing to continue talking about his past, he turned away from the window again. “It is strange we have been provided with such a comfortable cell.”

“Just because we are unable to allow you to leave, does not mean we must treat you both as common criminals. You have provided us with valuable information on a foe that has long evaded capture.” A voice from the doorway. Steve and Loki turned to see King T’Chaka standing there, a pair of bald, dangerous looking women flanking him.
“Your Highness,” Steve said, bowing his head slightly in respect.

Loki, however, drew himself up to his full height. “I am Loki, Prince of Asgard.”

Steve shook his head and rolled his eyes as Loki attempted to impress their captor. The King, however, seemed to take it in his stride.

“We knew of your royal position, but it was my understanding that you had renounced your home, in favour of making yourself ruler of ours. It makes me wonder why you stand beside the defender of freedom.” T’Chaka questioned, repeating the sentiments of T’Challa.

“It’s a personal thing.” Steve replied, not wishing to give away any more than was necessary about them being soul mates. “All I can say that Loki, like the others, was under the control of the sceptre he carried and was not wholly responsible for his actions when he first arrived but freed himself before he went into hiding. I trust him with my life.” Steve looked at Loki and their pairs eyes met. While his face was grim, Steve could see that he was surprised once again by the faith that was being placed in him. “and vouch that he will do you no harm.”

“Unless you threaten the Captain.” Loki put in, not breaking their gaze.

T’Chaka looked from one to the other, seeming to try and gauge what their relationship was. After a moment, he nodded. “Very well, he will also be granted the freedom of the city along with yourself, Captain.”

Steve was surprised at this development as he certainly hadn’t expected to be given the free run of the city seeing as they were meant to be prisoners. “You trust us not to attempt to leave.”

The King smiled and one of the Women approached holding out a box. She opened it and inside were two bracelets made up of decorative beads.

“I trust in your word, Captain. In addition, the Kimoyo beads monitor the health and wellbeing of every citizen of Wakanda. These will also inform W’Kabi, should you leave the city or remove the beads. It is this or you will remain within these rooms.”

Steve looked to Loki once more before reaching out and slipping one of the bracelets, watching as Loki did the same. Everyone was surprised as Loki’s flashed red. The King looked concerned.

“It would seem you are in very poor health, Prince Loki.” He said worry crossing his face.

Loki, in contrast, seemed unconcerned. “I assure you it is your technology that is a fault, my health is perfect, Sire.”

T’Chaka nodded, agreeing. “We must calibrate the system to your physiology. If not, you will be bombarded with medical teams coming to your aid.” He gestured to the woman next to him. “If you follow General Okoye, she will show you to our medical centre where my daughter Shuri can carry out the adjustments.”

Loki seemed slightly reluctant to allow himself to be examined, but Steve knew that if he was given a choice between this small intrusion and remaining confined, the choice would be simple. After a reassuring look from Steve, Loki proved him right and followed Okoye from the room.

“Now, Captain, allow me to give a tour of the palace,” T’Chaka said, turning towards the door.

Steve raised his hand to stop him. “Please, don’t trouble yourself, your Highness. You must be far too busy to show me around.”
“Nonsense, Captain, I must say I have long been an admirer of yours, my Father telling me of your feats during the War. It was your courage against Hydra that made him consider breaking our isolation to aid in the war, although I believe we would see a far more aggressive world than we do now, armed with Vibranium weapons. I have followed your missions with the Avengers and find his stories were well founded. And please there is no need for formalities, we have little need for them. T’Chaka is enough when we are within the walls of the palace and you will find my son very much the same.”

Steve wasn’t comfortable with the familiarity the King was offering him but said. “I’ll try but it’s hard to break habits.”

He fell into step with the king as they left the room, leaving his shield behind.
T’Chaka was only able to take Steve as far as the training grounds before he received a call via his beads (It seemed that they had many uses that hadn’t be explained to Steve yet, although he did find out that they were needed to activate Wakandan weapons.). He quickly apologised and left Steve in the hands of the other female guard. Steve decided that his time was best spent working on his hand-to-hand combat, something he hadn’t done since before he left America.

His guard, it seemed, was a member of Wakanda’s elite armed forces, the Dora Milaje. The story of how Steve had all but beaten the head of Wakandan security had already spread through the ranks and she was keen to see if she could best the super soldier. So, she volunteered to act as Steve’s sparring partner. It wasn’t long before he was standing in a training ring, dressing in a pair of leggings in a similar style to W’Kabi’s, facing his opponent.

After training with Nat for months, Steve had learnt that a woman could be just as an effective fighter as a man. It only took a few swings for him to see that he should treat his guard with the same respect. If she was an example of the elite training Wakanda had to offer, he wasn’t surprised that they were confident of victory, especially coupled with their advanced weapons technology. Still, his superior strength and agility meant that it wasn’t long before she, like W’Kabi, was pinned in a hold she couldn’t break. As pride was not a factor, she yielded.

“Very impressive, Captain.”

Steve turned to see T’Challa approach the training ring, dressed for exercise. The guard snapped to attention once more making the crossed arm salute. The Prince nodded to her and indicated with his head that she could leave, which she did.

“Sire.” Steve nodded in welcome, reaching for a towel that was just outside the ring to wipe himself down.

T’Challa smiled. “I see you found our training facilities quickly. The Dora Milaje are the finest of our warriors, they are not easily beaten. May I offer you a stronger challenge?”

Steve paused. Part of him felt that he was concerned that he could hurt the heir to the throne, but there was something about the look in the prince’s eye which suggested that he truly believed that he could take Steve on in a fight. He also knew that T’Challa knew what he was capable of and therefore knew what he as letting himself in for.

“I’m willing, if you’re sure.” He replied.

The Prince smiled and stepped into the ring. As with W’Kabi, the pair circled each other, T’Challa having the advantage of having at least seen Steve fight before. Steve was flying blind and was therefore very cautious.

T’Challa decided to take advantage of his foreknowledge and pressed the attack with a complex
series of punches, all of which Steve was able to block. Just. Steve was shocked by how strong and quick the prince was, almost his equal which shouldn’t have been possible. He knew that he couldn’t hold back as he had with everybody else apart from Loki and Thor. The pair were soon trading blow for blow, neither giving ground to the other in a match that lasted for nearly half an hour. Both had managed to land hits that would bruise, but nothing that would last leave any lasting damage.

In the end, the sweat was running down Steve’s back and as it was clear that neither was going to get the upper hand without causing more harm, he raised his hands, bringing the fight to a halt. T’Challa seemed grateful for the break and reached for some water that was just outside the ring.

“You know how to fight.” Steve said as he stretched out his overworked muscles.

“Indeed.” Loki agreed, and Steve turned to seem him sat on a chair watching the sparing match, a look on his face that Steve couldn’t quite pin down. He stood and walked to the ring, seeming to look Steve up and down, making sure he wasn’t injured to badly. Then he looked at T’Challa “I must say, I am surprised to see any mortal with the strength and stamina to fight as an equal to the good captain. Tell me, how this is achieved?”

T’Challa flicked his eyes again from one to the other, clearly still trying to decide what precisely their relationship was.

“The Black Panther has been the protector of Wakanda for generations, a mantle that has been passed from Warrior to Warrior. It is a duty that has fallen to me.” The Prince replied. He subconsciously straightened his back, appearing truly regal for the first time.

“That doesn’t explain how you are that strong.” Steve pointed out, still breathing a little hard from the fight.

This time T’Challa hesitated, trying to decide how much to tell the outsiders. “There is a heart-shaped herb, that grows in the mountain. Legend tells us that the god Bast led a Warrior there. When he consumed it, he united the tribes and became the first Black Panther, one chosen to lead and defend Wakanda from those who may wish us harm. Of course, while it is forbidden to study the herb, it has been surmised by our geneticists that the radiation from the Vibranium had mutated the herb, resulting in plant that can enhance anyone who consumes it. It has the same effect as the serum that courses though your veins, Steve.”

Steve was once more surprised how much these people seemed to know about him.

T’Challa, reading the look on his face, continued with his explanation. “We have agents in every county, all the way back to the War and beyond so there are few secrets that we do not know. I was pleased to see your strength and skills are not the stuff of legend to be dismissed as such as some alive today would have imagined.”

Steve shrugged. He wasn’t stupid, even with the exhibit in the Smithsonian, he knew that there were some that didn’t believe that anyone was capable of what he had done and that his feats were hyped up or made up all together. And there were those who didn’t believe that he was the Captain America from WW2, but a new enhanced using his identity. The Internet was full of theories about him, many of which he avoided at all costs.

“I can’t change what people believe. I did what I did so that I could stop Hydra and I wasn’t the only one in that fight. I was the face that gave people hope that we would actually win. I’m still trying to make the world better, even if the enemies have changed. People don’t have to accept what I am, just that I’m here to fight for them.”
T’Challa nodded in agreement. “The Black Panther may also be the Kings of Wakanda but it is we who serve our people not them who serve us.”

“As it should be on Asgard, although I fear that there are times when the need for glory in battle outweighs the need for peace for the people.” Loki joined in the conversation, providing an insight into his own realm.

While T’Challa looked interested, Steve knew that Loki was talking about Thor and the things that happened before his fall. Knowing it was something that Loki wouldn’t want to talk about, he decided to change the subject quickly.

“So, if you had a lot of this technology before, how did Klaue manage to steal it?”

“We do not know. There was talk of a traitor, but nothing was ever presented to the council to my knowledge. It was a dark day for us, as we lost many, including W’Kabi’s parents during the raid and he has always carried a bitterness in his heart over our inability to bring their killer to justice. Still, maybe in the days to come, Klaue could finally receive his just rewards.”

Before they could continue their conversation, T’Challa’s Kimoyo beads flashed blue with a message. He read it quickly, then smiled apologetically to Steve and Loki.

“I fear, my friends, I have duties I must attend too. It will require my father and I away for a few days, but when we return, there will be a formal dinner for my family and the tribal leaders. You are most welcome to join us.”

Steve wasn’t sure if it was a good idea, but Loki jumped into answer. “Of course, it would be our pleasure.”
Tensions mount as Steve and Loki go to dinner.

Steve and Loki had been in the city for several days. They had explored the areas they were permitted to go, Steve in particular was in wonder over the mixture of the old and new that filled the streets. Loki was less in awe as it seemed that Asgard also had a similar mix between technology and tradition, for example swords and leather amour mixed with skiffs that could fly. In turn, they had been a curiosity for the locals, many of who had never been outside Wakanda and had never seen a colonizer apart from in their school history lessons. Tonight, was the first time they would be meeting the tribal leaders, which made up Wakanda’s ruling council which had the king as its head.

Steve was relieved to discover that the Wakandan idea of dining with dignitaries was a lot less formal then the kind he was used to. During his trip to Washington, he had been roped into attended a formal dinner with a noted Congressman who supported the Avengers Programme. Of course, Steve didn’t find out till later that the Congressman was using him as part of his fund raising for his re-election campaign, something that didn’t please him one bit. It didn’t help that he found the whole affair false and stiff, certainly not the highlight of his trip. This dinner was a far more relaxed affair. Everyone was laid on low divans, the food plied high on sharing platers and the room was filled with easy conversation. Well easy for everyone else. Steve had exchanged a few pleasantries with the King, Queen and Shuri, T’Challa’s intelligent and outgoing sister, but that was about it. He had had more luck talking combat strategies with T’Challa himself, as well as W’Kabi and Okaya, who he discovered were married, but they had moved on to internal politics. This, he suspected, was led by W’Kabi. While he was cordial around T’Challa, Steve didn’t miss the glares that were sent his way. The Warrior was clearly smarting over his ‘defeat’ at Steve’s hand, because no one, not even the man himself tried to claim he won the fight even with Steve yielding. Too late, Steve released that while his intentions were good, the false victory had done the man’s pride more harm than his honourable defeat would have done. Steve hoped he would have a chance to make amends before it got too bad.

All the others in the room regarded the outsiders with mistrust, clearly not happy about T’Chaka’s decision to let them live and certainly not about the degree of freedom they had been allowed. If what Steve had overheard was correct, it seemed that T’Chaka had been considering ending Wakanda’s isolation and their arrival had brought the debate to a head. It was a course of action that was not widely supported yet and there were those in the room that felt that their presence in Wakanda was the worst thing that could have happened.

It meant that Steve was a little apart from the rest of the group. He was never brilliant at social gatherings, to begin with because very few people before the serum were interested in the skinny, sickly boy, and then afterwards, he was never sure if they wanted to be close to him because of him or his persona of Captain America, the women especially. Bucky never changed the way he treated him, but apart from him, the only people he was certain of was Peggy, Howard, Phillips and the Howling Commandos. Since he woke up, his need to play catch-up in the modern world had over shadowed his need to improve his social skills, and again he was only comfortable among the
Avengers and Loki.

Loki of course had spent years living at the Asgardian Court and had begun charming his way around the room, belaying the fears of tribal leaders with practiced ease. He was currently in a deep conversation with Shuri over the difference between Asgardian and Wakandan technology, a subject that again Steve couldn’t hope to keep up with. As he watched his friend, he couldn’t help but smile as he was clearly enjoying taking to someone who could understand him. That did little however to curb the slight hint of jealousy he felt deep in his belly. Loki, as if he knew something wasn’t right with his soulmate, glanced his way with a concerned look on his face, but Steve simply smiled again hoping to reassure him. After all, Steve was hardly able to complain if Loki took an interest in the princess. She was his equal in many ways, if the age gap and the fact she was human was ignored.

Loki still raised an eyebrow, but after smiling slightly himself, he returned to his discussion. The smile sent a shiver down Steve’s spine and the memory from earlier that evening flashed before his eyes for the hundredth time since he had sat down to dinner.

After yet another sparring session with T’Challa, Steve took a much-needed shower. Afterwards came the difficult problem of clothes. The sets of hiking gear from his pack was hardly suitable and the only other outfit he had was his uniform that Loki had in his temporal storage. Wrapping himself in a lose fitting robe, Steve went to ask Loki’s advice.

When he reached the other bedroom, Steve knocked and was instructed to enter. He was shocked to see Loki standing in the centre of the room, completely naked, his hair still damp from his own shower. He had turned to face to door as it opened, making no attempt to cover his more private areas, which Steve had to admit were impressive. His eyes were also drawn to his chest, which while faded, still bore the scars that Steve had seen before in the forest.

Steve knew somewhere in the back of his mind that Asgard had a very different view on modesty, in fact he had seem Thor in the nude more than once, the god having to be reminded constantly that underwear at least was the minimum in the common rooms in the tower. So, Steve shouldn’t have been surprised that Loki shared his views, but he still couldn’t process that the object of his desires was standing before him bare without a care in the world. His eyes roamed over the planes of muscle that covered Loki’s long frame and he was starting to feel uncomfortably warm. He was glad the lose robe seemed able to hide the interest his cock was showing.

Loki seemed to take Steve’s shocked silence for embarrassment at seeing him naked and without a word, his casual Asgardian clothes faded in around his body. Trying to get his mind and body back under control, Steve focused on what he was there for.

“Ummmm. I was wondering what you were going to wear, I didn’t really bring anything for a formal dinner.”

Loki smiled seemingly at some pleasant thought, before his face dropped to a look that was bittersweet. He waved his arm and Steve only just had time to reach out his arm to catch the pants and check shirt that seemed to materialize from nowhere. While still not formal, it was an outfit that was for more appropriate than anything Steve had, with the added advantage of being comfortable.

“I believe this will suffice, Captain. Now please do not tarry, the King would not appreciate being kept waiting for his meal.” Loki replied, still smiling in a way that somehow made Steve feel even more hot under the collar.

Fearing that opening his mouth might make him look foolish, Steve nodded in thanks before
hurrying back to his own room, to dress and calm a certain part of his anatomy down before it got him into more trouble.

Steve’s attention was dragged back to the discussion when T’Challa asked him if the food was not to his likely as he hadn’t touch anything for a while. Steve assured him that it was and realised that his stomach was also objecting to his lack of eating. He quickly grabbed from a dish he enjoyed earlier and began eating in earnest. If he was honest, he welcomed the distraction as the memory was having a very unwelcomed effect on his cock. He shifted slightly hoping that the semi would go away if he ignored it.

Steve listened to the conversations around the room for a little while, before W’Kabi’s Kimoyo beads lighting up silenced everyone in the room. As the leader of the Border Tribe, his was the first port of call should there be any intruders. He nodded quickly then turned to T’Chaka.

“Sire, forgive me, but there is a matter I must attend to. I shall return shortly.” The King nodded his assent, and he rose to leave the room.

T’Challa rose also. “Do you wish me to accompany you, my friend?” He fully expected his help to be welcome and he began heading for the door.

W’Kabi pulled him up short, saying. “There is no need. I can handle guarding the border, not every Colonizer will be an empowered super soldier.”

This reply had created an awkward feeling in the room. Steve looked at the gathered dinner guests and he could see that this was not what was expected. Okoye looked particularly unhappy with her husband’s words but remained tight lipped.

T’Challa seemed to measure his words carefully before he replied. “Very well, my friend. No one here doubts your ability.”

W’Kabi glanced around the room, clearly seeing the disapproving looks before he nodded to T’Challa and gave a salute to T’Chaka before he left. T’Challa said nothing but took his seat next to Okoye. There was a rapid exchange in Xhosa, which Steve didn’t need to speak to understand that there was something wrong with W’Kabi. He looked to Loki who was also watching the pair intently. Steve didn’t need to read his mind to know that he was thinking the same thing. Something going to happen, and it was going to be soon.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Klaue attacks and a new player enters the game

It didn’t take long for Steve to be proven right. Dinner broke up a short while after the exchange and Steve and Loki were about to retire to their rooms when there was the sound of an explosion outside the city. T’Challa took off at a run, with Okoye, Steve and Loki close behind. The group made its way up to the landing area at the top of the palace which also gave a clear view of the surrounding area.

The plains that surrounded to city were filling with troops fighting the Border Tribe security. The Warriors were highly trained and well-armed against gun fire, but the invaders had the advantage in numbers and were gaining ground. The troops were being directed from an armoured car, the hood carrying a symbol Steve had hoped he would never see again outside of a history book.

Okoye saw the look of recognition on his face. She narrowed her eyes and said. “Friends of yours?”

Steve tore his eyes from the battle and shock his head. “Not likely. Let’s say that they are people I never wanted to see again. I don’t know how or where they have come from, but they are Hydra. They must be the ally that Klaue bought.”

By this point, T’Chaka had arrived. He assessed the situation, which wasn’t good. “We have a traitor among us, your sister has informed me that the shield has been disabled. She is trying to get the system back online as quickly as possible, but you must buy her time with the Dora Milaje. When the shield is up, they will be unable to bring in more reinforcements.”

T’Challa was already on his way to suit up, but Okoye stayed and pointed her spear at Steve and Loki. “What of them? How do we know they are not working with our enemy after all?”

“Believe me, we don’t have anything to do with Hydra. They wanted to rule the world with their own brand of Order, but they should be gone, taken apart when the Red Skull vanished.” Steve quickly defended themselves. “I want to know how they are still here, after we stop them stealing the Vibranium.”

T’Chaka nodded. “As he was willing to sacrifice his life to put an end to Hydra, I do not believe Captain America would fight for them now. General, take the Palace guards to defend to city, the Captain and the Prince will be able to repel anyone that reaches the palace.”

Okoye looked unconvinced, but her sense of loyalty meant that she wouldn’t argue against her King. She quickly followed T’Challa to get her Warriors into battle. The King turned back to Steve and Loki. “Follow me.”

T’Chaka led the pair to the main throne room, which when needed doubled up as a command centre. From there they had a clear view of the battlefield. They watched T’Challa in his black armour as he charged into the fight, with the Dora Milaje chasing close behind. Seeing him fight unrestrained for the first time, Steve and Loki could really see how deadly the Black Panther was and was a born leader. The additional Wakandan forces were quickly helping to turn the tide and the Hydra troops
were being forced to regroup.

Loki watched the fight but was on edge. He kept looking intently at the battlefield, as if he was trying to figure something out. He turned to face Steve, who raised an eyebrow in a question.

“This is not what I would expect from an organisation that has remained hidden from the world for seventy years. A direct assault would hardly maintain their anonymity unless they aim to do more than steal the Vibranium and leave. There is something more at play, something that is not happening on the battlefield.”

T’Chaka had been listening to Loki’s theory, nodding slowly as his mind came to the same conclusion.

“To have disabled to shield, the traitor must have accessed the control systems, only a few have the required access.”

“What about W’Kabi? He is in charge of the border defence, would he be able to disable the defences?” Steve asked, a sinking feeling developing in his gut.

“Of course.” The King answered. “But he is Wakandan, his loyalty unquestionable.”

“Someone let those troops in. I could see that there was something amiss with his behaviour when he left earlier, and I bet he was the only one who had access that didn’t stay at dinner.” Steve hated pointing out the obvious, but despite everything he was saying, he could see that there was doubt in the king’s mind.

“He has become increasingly frustrated with our failed attempts to capture Klaue and allow him his revenge, but it would make little sense for him to side with a man he wishes to see dead at his feet.” The King was clearly torn between his faith in his son’s closest friend and his suspicion fuelled by recent events.

Loki could see his indecision and decided to offer a solution. “The attack has emptied the Palace, so whatever the traitor’s scheme is, it is here that must be the intended target. Allow us to search the palace and confirm the truth one way or the other if it is W’Kabi that is to blame here.”

T’Chaka hesitated, knowing that he had little reason to trust the two strangers, but his only other option was Shuri who was frantically trying to get the Shield operational. “Very well, inform me should you find anything.”

Steve moved quickly through the corridors of the Palace making his way down to the ground level entrances. T’Chaka had provided them with directions to two emergency escape tunnels that led out of the palace. As any attempt to land an aircraft on the landing area above would be detected, Steve surmised that the only way someone could get into the palace had to be on the ground. They also know that a frontal assault would also be easily spotted. Which left only the tunnels. One tunnel led through the mines into the mountains, while the second led under the river to just outsides the Border Tribe’s territory. Knowing they were limited on time, they decided to split up, Loki taking the mine route while Steve took the river.

Steve turned the final corner which led to the tunnel and his hearts sank as his suspicions were confirmed. W’Kabi was not with his warriors in battle where he was meant to be. He was standing by a control panel, having just unlocked the entrance to the tunnel. Steve stepped back out of sight but glanced around the corner to see what was going on, before he made his move.
The door slid up and three men stepped through. The oldest and shortest was an unkept man, dressed in dark green combats, which Steve recognised as Klaue. The second was much neater in his appearance and was dressed in black combats, similar to what the members of Strike worn when they were on a mission. This man seemed to be pointing a gun at the first, who looked like he was a prisoner. The third man was also dressed in black, apart from his left arm which seemed to be covered in a metal frame. His face was completely covered with a mask, making it impossible for him to be identified.

As he hadn’t been seen, Steve held back for a moment, hoping to gain some insight as to what was going on.

“The Vibranium is yours for the taking, Garrett. Now let me kill this dog.” W’Kabi growled his eyes fixed on the unkept man.

“There has been a change of plan, my friend.” Garrett replied, holstering his gun. “You see, now we are here, I can’t help wondering what you bring to the table. After all, Ulysses here has a large network that could be of use to us once we have more Vibranium. You, unfortunately, are liability.”

Klaue had a broad grin in his face and Steve realised that this had been the plan all along and that W’Kabi, blinded by his hatred, had been deceived. Before he could make any move to stop it, Garrett nodded to the third man, who stabbed W’Kabi straight in the chest. W’Kabi’s eyes were wide with as he dropped to his knees, then to the floor, clutching at the wound to stem the bleeding.

Steve charged, throwing his shield had the assassin, who caught it without hesitation with his left arm. Up close, Steve could see that it wasn’t a frame covering the arm, the arm was some sort of prosthetic but one more advanced then he had ever seen before. The assassin looked at the shield for a moment before throwing it back at Steve, who also caught it. Steve was surprised at the strength of the throw and stumbled back as the shield winded him.

The three men took off down the corridor and Steve quickly went W’Kabi. The man was alive, the knife having missed his heart just.

“Go, protect the king.” W’Kabi crocked, blood staining his lips. “Do not let my foolishness end us all.”

Steve didn’t want to leave him, but he was sure that help would be coming as the fallen man’s beads were flashing red. He quickly set off after Klaue and the others. He caught up to them after only a few turns and was about to take out Klaue, when the assassin went for him with his knife, blocking his path. The man was quick and for the second time in a week, Steve found he had met his match in hand to hand combat.

Garrett smirked at Steve before looking at the assassin. “He doesn’t get though. Kill him if you must, but he might be useful to us alive.”

With that Klaue and Garrett took off once more, heading to the command centre. Steve, certain that he wasn’t getting past his opponent anytime soon, yelled into his beads.

“LOKI, get to the King.”

He didn’t have time for anything else as the assassin charged him again, swinging at him with both his fist and knife. Steve found himself on the defensive as his opponent didn’t seem to have any sense of self-preservation, his attacks were cold, calculated and deadly. Luckily few of their attacks and counter attacks landed more than glancing blows, but Steve had more close calls then even his fight with the Red Skull. It was as if the assassin knew his style and could read whatever tells he was giving off. The first thing the assassin did when he could, was wrench Steve’s shield from his hand.
again and throw it out of reach, burying it half in a wall.

Steve, seeing an opening, used a roundhouse kick, which hit the assassin in the face. The assassin staggered backwards and dropped to his knee, his hair covering his face. After righting himself, the Assassin rose back to his feet. The kick had knocked the mask from his face and Steve felt as if someone had walked over his grave.

“Bucky.” Steve gasped. He had grown up looking at that face, there was no way it couldn’t be Bucky. The only thing different was blank look in his eyes.

“Bucky?” Bucky relied in a flat voice. “Who the hell is Bucky?”

Bucky advanced on Steve once more, attacking with the same vigour as before but Steve was now only blocking attacks, his mind still not processing that his friend was alive and trying to kill him. All he knew what that there was no way he was going to hurt him unless there was no option.

This proved to be Steve’s downfall. He missed a block and Steve found himself with the knife buried just under his ribs, almost certainly ripping though his diaphragm into a lung. He stepped back until he hit the wall and slid down. All he could do was watch Bucky walked over to him and looked hard at his face, frowning as he did so.

“Bucky.” Steve coughed, groaning in pain at the effort.

“You know me.” Bucky replied, as a statement rather than a question. He stared hard at Steve and seemed to hesitate as if he was trying to remember something.

Then there was a call over his ear piece and without another word, he ripped the beads from Steve’s wrist, rose and set off after Garrett and Klaue.
Loki heard Steve’s communication and doubled back to the command centre as quickly as he could. The tunnel he had been trying to reach had been much further away than Steve’s and as he had almost reached it, he had to run.

As much as time was of the essence, unfortunately the proximity to the Vibranium meant his magic was unpredictable. His only attempt to use it resulted in him only moving forward five feet and dangerously close to the wall. Given that he could easily end up inside a wall, he knew that it was too dangerous to make any further attempts this close to the raw material. He guessed that it was the concentration of Vibranium that was the problem or Steve’s shield would have affected his magic before this.

It didn’t take Loki long to reach the command centre but unfortunately, he heard the shot at he reached the door.

He entered the room to see Klaue standing over T’Chaka, a gun pointing at his face. The King was sat against the wall, bleeding out, barely conscious. The second man in the room seemed impatient.

“Get on with it Klaue, we don’t have time for your petty revenge. They will have the shield repaired before we can get the Vibranium out if we wait any longer, kill him and be done.” Klaue chuckled slightly. “Shame, I wanted this to last longer.”

Klaue raised the weapon again and Loki only had moments to react. Before he could fire, Loki threw an ice dagger hitting his forearm. The blade sliced through the flesh and bone as if it was butter and Klaue screamed, clutching at his bleeding stump, the rest of his arm lying useless on the floor.

The second man turned to see Loki, who conjured another dagger. For a moment Loki thought the man was nodding at him, before he realised that it was at someone behind him. He didn’t have time to look when he was slammed into from the rear with a force that rivalled Steve’s. The suddenness of it meant that Loki was unprepared, and he toppled forward into the room, clearing the door way.

Once he was steady, Loki saw that the second man and his unknown attacker had escaped. Klaue had been abandoned and had collapsed, partly due to blood loss. Loki didn’t have time to worry about either of them now. Hoping that wherever he was, Steve would be able to deal with the escaping invaders, Loki hurried to T’Chaka, to see if he could help the dying man. He was too late, his eyes staring blankly into the distance. The King of Wakanda was dead.

Loki, seeing as there was nothing he could do, took off in search of Steve.

Steve had managed to get back on to his feet, the knife in his side jarring with every move. Still he knew better then too remove it as that could well do more harm than good. At least it wasn’t as painful as it could be if he didn’t have the serum. He was sure he wouldn’t be awake let alone
After retrieving his shield, he slowly made his way back towards the command centre in search of help and had almost reached there when he was bombarded by people dressed in white. They were medics from the way they were talking, and he quickly pointed down from where he came from.

“W’Kabi. He needs help now.” Steve insisted, knowing that while his injury was serious, W’Kabi’s was life-threatening.

As if he called him, Loki appeared by his side, his arm wrapping around Steve in support. “Go, I will deal with this.” He snapped at the medics, his attention solely on Steve.

The medics seemed very reluctant to leave him, but the battle had left the medical staff stretched thin treating Wakandan and Hydra alike. Loki gave of the air of a man not to be trifled with and they headed back down the corridor in search of W’Kabi. Alone, Loki quickly assessed Steve’s wound, before slowly pulling the knife free. Steve grimaced feeling the stream of blood flowing down his side, but he bit his lip as he trusted Loki to work his magic, literally. After only a few moments, the pain eased, and Steve felt his strength returning. He stood up straight and turned to thank Loki.

The words died on his lips as he was the worry that was in his friends’ eyes. Loki’s hand reached out again to touch the damaged part of his uniform and it was all Steve could do not to gasp as his fingers brushed his skin. He reached down and took Loki’s hand. Their eyes met, and not for the first time in the last few days, Steve had to fight the urge to kiss Loki. He could see a mixed bag of emotion in the god’s eye. Concern of course, that was a given, but there was something more, something raw that Steve didn’t dare put a name too. He was sure that it was wishful thinking, seeing something that wasn’t really there, but it was taking all his will power not to act on it anyway.

Steve’s attention was caught by the medics rushing past, racing to get W’Kabi to the medical facility. His eyes followed the injured man and he almost didn’t feel Loki pull his hand away. When he looked back to Loki, the moment had been lost and his friend once more had his emotions in check. Loki lifted the knife he had pulled out of Steve to examine it. “Whoever you were fighting must be highly skilled to have managed to injure you, Captain.” He remarked. “there can be few in Midgard like T’Challa.”

Loki’s question made Steve focus on the situation at hand rather than his unrequited feelings. “It was Bucky. I don’t know, but it was him. Zola was doing experiments on him so maybe he gave him something like Dr Erskine’s serum. Either way, he’s as strong and fast as me and he doesn’t know who I am. He’s just a cold killer.”

Loki looked bemused. “Captain, your former companion is dead, you saw him fall to his death. Was your head injured during your fight, that you would see him in another?”

Steve narrowed his eyes angrily at Loki’s dismissal but took a deep breath to keep his cool. “I have known him all my life. Even when I had nothing, I had Bucky. It was him. It’s just he didn’t remember me.”

Steve watched as Loki visibly closed himself off from him. He hadn’t moved, but his eyes became cold and his face hardened. Steve couldn’t understand what had caused this change, but their conversation was interrupted by a guard approaching them from the same direction as the medical centre.

“The King requires you, Colonizers.” She said scornfully. Steve knew that it was a reaction to the
Hydra attack and wasn’t aimed at the pair specifically, but it still grated that she had lumped them all together in her distain. Still, it also provided a distraction from Loki’s attitude change, which he decided would be better talked about in private.

“Tell T’Chaka we’ll be right there.”

“T’Chaka is dead, Captain.” Loki said before the guard could open her mouth to say the same thing. “The concentration of raw Vibranium prevented me from using my magic safely. Klaue had already fatally injured him by the time I reached them. It cost him his arm and I’m sure there will be worse for him. T’Challa is king now.”

Steve swallowed the lump that had developed in his throat. He hadn’t known the King very long, but he was a good man, welcoming to his prisoners and Steve could tell that Loki was just as sorry at his death.

“We did what we could. We’d better see the new King.”

The medical centre was filled to capacity with medics moving from patient to patient treating everything from cuts to bullet wounds. The majority were Warriors and Steve guessed the Hydra wounded were being treated elsewhere away from the Palace. T’Challa was in an isolated area, talking to W’Kabi. The man looked in pain but also determined to say what he had to before he passed out.

Steve looked to Loki. “Is there anything you can do to help?”

Loki nodded. “My magic reserves are not limitless, but I can treat the most severe to prevent their lives being in danger.”

He started to move towards a woman who bleeding profusely when Okoye stormed over to them.

“You have done enough. I will not allow you to bring more harm to Wakanda or it’s people.” She hissed, her hand itching to use a sear that she didn’t have.

“All we have done is protect your people and your precious Vibranium, which cannot be said for your mate.” Loki snapped back.

Okoye’s eyes were burning with anger and looked as if she was about to lash out at Loki, when T’Challa’s hand fell gently on her shoulder.

“Peace, my friend. You know as well as I do that these men risked their lives to protect my father and spilt their blood for us. Go, be with W’Kabi, he wishes your forgiveness.” The woman looked crestfallen at the dismissal but retreated to her husband without a word. “I am sorry, she is angry that my father fell on her watch and heartbroken because of W’Kabi’s betrayal. I hope that time will heal them both, their love has been strong.”

Steve raised an eyebrow. “You talk like he isn’t going to be punished for his actions.”

T’Challa shook his head. “He had lost everything today, his honour, his position, my friendship and trust, nearly his life. There is little more that I can do to him that will way heavier than that. He will spend his days living with his regrets.”

It was Loki’s turn to look surprised. “Does your own honour not require revenge? He is at least partly responsible for the King’s death.”
"Vengeance has consumed Klaue. It consumed W’Kabi. I will not allow it to consume me."

T’Challa looked around the room at his wounded people. “We must mourn our dead. Then we shall see what can be done with those that escaped us. The soldiers are nothing, but it is those with Klaue that concerns me. I believe that man in black is the assassin known only as Winter Soldier. Your intelligence networks don’t believe he exists, but our sources tell us that there are at least two dozen kills over fifty years to his name. We believe it is the codename for a number of agents over the years.”

“It’s not.” Steve interrupted him. “He is the same man. His real name is James Buchanan Barnes, Bucky and we grew up and fought together. And I watched him fall to his death in 1945. I don’t know how, but it is him. I think they gave him enhancements like mine when he was Hydra’s prisoner, but how he is still alive, I have no idea.”

T’Challa seemed to believe Steve without question. “We have the technology to freeze a person. We use it for transporting an injured Warrior home for medical attention. But we have never tried it for more than a few months. But the minds behind Hydra’s science were always beyond their time. Either way I must stop them. My Warriors destroyed their transport, but we need to intercept them before they reach the edge of the jungle.”

Steve agreed and said. “We’re coming with you. I need to find Bucky, I can’t leave him in their hands. What even they have done to him, the man I knew must be in there somewhere.”

Loki didn’t look keen as giving his assistance as Steve expected him to be but he held his tongue and simply nodded. T’Challa wasn’t in a position to argue. While he wasn’t seeking revenge, he wanted to make sure that the threat was dealt with once and for all. He couldn’t forget that the situation with W’Kabi came about because his father refused to go beyond their bounders to bring Klaue to justice, letting the hate fester for thirty years. He also couldn’t deny that the Captain had the right to try to help his friend. And although he was sure he could handle the remaining Hydra forces, he was going to take all the help he could get, given the Winter Soldier was an unpredictable variable.

“Very well, my friends. Shuri has been tracking what is left of Hydra using one of our drones and will report to us as we go. We leave immediately.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Steve, Loki and T’Challa catches up with Hydra

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve was once more surprised with how quickly T'Challa could move even through the rough terrain of the jungle. He was also quiet, as well as fast. Given that Loki was also capable of moving silently, if he couldn’t see them as they ran, he would be sure he was alone. Between the three of them and Shuri’s updates, it hadn’t been hard to pick up the trail of the Hydra troops and as they were burdened with injured men and equipment, Steve was certain they would overtake them quickly.

He was right and after only a few hours hiking, they began to hear several voices, most of them quiet but one barking orders above the rest.

“Get on your feet. We need to keep moving, we can’t call for Evac until we are clear of the jungle. Sitwell is going to love rubbing this failure in my face to Secretary Pierce, particularly after taking the Asset without him knowing.”

Steve’s attention was caught by the name of a mid-ranking SHIELD agent that he had seen on the Heli-Carrier, as well as a high-profile politician which Steve was sure had a connection with the WSC. Steve was suddenly concerned that Garrett had seen Loki. This simply made capturing him more important before he used them both being here together in some way to save face with his superiors.

They moved forward, following the voice until they reached the edge of a clearing. Steve and Loki stopped while T’Challa moved around to approach from a different direction. The pair had been surprised that there was no one watching the perimeter, but when they saw the disarray of the Hydra troops, they understood.

Only Garrett was standing, pacing around running his own monologue of woes, the rest slumped on the floor, exhausted, nearly all of them sporting an injury of some sort. Steve strained his eyes looking for Bucky and saw him sat on a stump, staring blankly into space in front of him. To anyone else, he looked like a blank slate, but Steve could see a slight twitch around his eyes, a tell that he was thinking hard about something.

Garrett stomped towards Bucky and growled. “Get moving.”

Bucky didn’t move, he just kept looking ahead. "The man in the corridor, who was he?"

“A righteous bastard who doesn’t know to keep his nose out. When I find out what he was doing here, he will regret crossing me, him and his alien pet.”

Bucky hadn’t seemed to have noticed the rant Garrett had gone off on. In the same flat voice, he said, “I knew him.”
“Fuck.” Garrett cursed. He reached for a pack that was laying on the ground next to Bucky. He beckoned over one of the soldiers. “He’s useless like this and we can’t reset him here. You speak Russian, read this. It should make him follow orders till we get him stateside.”

The soldier looked slight terrified but took the notebook Garrett had pulled from the pack. Slowly he opened to book and began reading out the words. “Желание. Ржавый. Семнадцать. Рассвет. Печь. Девять. Добросердечный. Возвращение на родину. Один. Грузовой вагон.”

Steve watched as Bucky straightened and stood, poised to fight. “Я готов отвечать.”

“He is conditioned,” Loki said, his eyes fixed on Bucky too. “They have programmed him like one of Stark’s computers. You will find this hard to break even if he were to remember you.”

Steve was saved from replying by a whistle, T’Challa telling them that he was about to attack. Moments later the Black Panther leapt from the trees. The Hydra soldiers scattered as they reached for their weapons, although a few simply made a break for the trees in an attempt to escape. Steve and Loki also broke cover, each taking on large groups of soldiers, T’Challa made for Garrett, who stepped behind Bucky, the assassin moving quickly to defend his commanding officer.

The pair exchanged a few punches before T’Challa caught him with a lucky high-kick sending him stumbling backwards. T’Challa took advantage to race past him chasing after Garrett, who had made a run it, hoping to lose his pursuers in the jungle.

Steve could see his friend right himself and turning to run down T’Challa. He quickly put down the three men he had been fighting and dived forward, catching Bucky around the middle, bring him to the ground. Before he could pin Bucky down, a fist flew up, cracking his nose, blood flowing freely for a few moments. He didn’t have time to shake off the pain the more blows were heading at his face and Steve was forced to pull back to give him room to defend himself.

Still, he felt that he needed to give Bucky a chance to come out of whatever they had done to him.

“You know me.” Steve shouted, even as he used his shield to block a kick from the ground. “Bucky. you’ve known me your entire life. Your name is James Buchanan Barnes.”

Bucky just looked at Steve blankly and rolled on his feet once more. He closed the gap between them and faked a fist right. When Steve raised his shield to block, Bucky used his other had to grip it and twisted. It took all Steve strength to keep his hold on it. He rolled backwards, taking Bucky with him, throwing him over his shoulder.

Getting to his feet and facing him again, Steve said. “I’m not going to fight you. You’re my friend.”

“You’re my mission,” Bucky said, like a mantra.

The pair had been so focused on each other, they hadn’t seen that Loki had finished off any Hydra who had been foolish enough to try to take him on and was able to come to Steve’s aid. Steve was shocked when Loki’s hand appeared from nowhere to rest on Bucky’s forehead. After what felt like an eternity but was actually moments, Bucky staggered back, dropped to his knees and buried his head in his hands.

Steve dropped his shield and rushed forward, but Loki took his arm.

“Give him a moment. What I did was not very pleasant.” Loki explained as he healed Steve's broken nose.

Steve narrowed his eyes. “What did you do?” He snapped. He knew he trusted Loki not to hurt
Bucky, but Loki’s methods were not always ideal.

As it was, the god scowled and said, “I have brought him out of his conditioned state. I cannot undo what has been done, that is beyond my ability, but i was able to bring forward the memories that were beginning to surface. You are welcome, Captain.”

Steve could hear the hurt in Loki’s voice at the veiled accusation that Steve had made, and the apology was on the tip of his tongue, but it was forgotten when Bucky lifted his head and looked about him.

“Steve?”

Steve moved forward gently, treating Bucky like a nervous deer that could bolt at any moment. “I’m here, Buck. Is it really you in there?”

Bucky closed his eyes and then opened them, looking straight at Steve. “Your mom’s name was Sarah. You used to wear newspapers in your shoes.”

Steve snorted at the snippet of information that only Bucky and his mother knew. Relief completely overcame him and unable to control himself, he knelt next to Bucky, wrapping his arms around his friend.

“I’m with you ‘til the end of the line, Bucky, always.”

For those few moments, the rest of the world didn’t exist for Steve. He didn’t see that T’Challa had returned to the clearing, Garrett secured and awaiting transport back to the Palace. The King had seen nearly all the exchange between Loki and Steve, then Steve and Bucky. He was pleased that Steve had found his friend once more, seeing the strength of the bond of friendship he once thought he shared with W’Kabi.

T’Challa had also observed Loki’s reaction to the scene before him. He had watched Steve and Loki closely over the few days he had known them, and he knew that they were close, closer than simply comrades. He had seen Loki, in particular, be very aware of the change in the Captain’s mood and when they had fought together, they had moved as if they were one, each instinctively ready to support the other, something he had only ever seen in warriors who had trained together since the cradle.

However, he was sure that there was more than they had even admitted to each other. Steve always had a look in his eye when he was talking to or watching Loki. Longing and sadness, as if the man who he stood beside him was so far from his reach he might as well be on his home planet. T’Challa was certain almost from the first that the Captain held strong feelings for the god, but until this moment he had been uncertain if they were reciprocated.

Now there was no doubt. All the control Loki held over his emotions had come crashing down. As Steve held his friend close, Loki looked as if he wanted to rip him from his arms and possibly kill Barnes where he knelt. The was no mistaking the jealousy that was painted over the poor man’s face and T’Challa was poised to attempt to restrain him should the need arise.

His fears were unfounded because as he watched, the jealousy melted away and all that was left was pain and the same sadness that had been in Steve’s eyes. T’Challa opened his mouth to reassure him that he was mistaken in his assumption of Steve’s feelings when the god slipped the Kimoyo beads from his wrist, dropped them to the floor and vanished.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger. I am hoping that the next 5 chapters will be up soon but I am at the mercy of the Muse.

For those that don't know, the Russian:
Желание. Ржавый. Семнадцать. Рассвет. Печь. Девять. Добросердечный.
Возвращение на родину. Один. Грузовой вагон.
Freight Car.

Я готов отвечать
Ready to comply
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

T’Challa gives Steve some advice.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it has been a little while since i’ve updated, I fear that the muse has flown right now. i’m hoping it's a blip and more words will arrive soon.

When he had finally let go of Bucky, Steve had been confused and a little hurt, turning to find that Loki hadn’t stayed in the clearing after the fight. At first, he assumed that he had gone to deal with the prisoners or even speed up transport until he spotted the Kimoyo beads in T’Challa’s hand. It was then he knew that Loki wasn’t coming back. He was certain that Loki hadn’t left Earth. When Loki had vanished after the returning the tesseract, there had been an emptiness in the pit of his stomach which had only eased the day he had seen him in Central Park, even if he hadn’t really understood it until much later. He could only guess that Loki had returned to New York as planned, but he thought he would at least have stuck around long enough to say goodbye to T’Challa and the rest.

Steve had to take some of the blame for Loki’s sudden departure. He couldn’t help feeling guilty that he had let his need to help Bucky mean he hadn’t apologised as he should have, and he knew that Loki could well be smarting over that. However, he was sure it was no worse than the other disagreements the pair had had over the months they had been getting to know each other and Loki had never reacted like this before.

Still, he decided that it was a situation he could sort out as soon as he got home. His priority had to be Bucky. While Loki’s assistance had helped him with his memories of Steve, Bucky was beginning to remember more than his life before his fall from the train. It seemed that the Winter Soldier had been every bit as deadly as stories had suggested and Bucky had broken down when he told Steve the truth about his involvement in Howard and Maria Stark’s deaths. His spirit was broken and it would take him a long time to make peace with what Hydra had made him do over the last seventy years.

His past wasn’t their only concern. Bucky still had the Hydra conditioning buried deep in his subconscious. Anyone with his command words could switch on the Winter Soldier and they wouldn’t always have Loki on hand to snap him out of it. Bucky was nervous that if Garrett had access to them, then other members of Hydra would too. Steve and T’Challa were also worried but hoped that it was unfounded. It wasn’t to be.

Bucky was at the training ground, watching Steve and T’Challa sparing when Okoye approached him from behind and touched his arm. Before anyone could move, Bucky had her pinned under him, his hand around her throat and a blank look in his eyes. It had taken Steve and T’Challa to drag him off her before he choked her.
It hadn’t taken long for him to snap out of combat-mode and he was horrified at the sight on the warrior woman on her knees, coughing and gasping for air. Seeing what he could do right now against a fully trained warrior, he couldn’t imagine what he would do to a Wakandan civilian. After talking with T’Challa, he made his decision.

Steve walked towards Bucky, who was sitting in Shuri’s lab, nearly a week after he was liberated from Hydra. His metal arm had been removed and he looked resolved in his decision. Steve wasn’t so confident.

“You sure about this?” He said one last time, already knowing the answer.

Bucky’s eyes met his, then looked at the suspension chamber the lab techs were getting ready. It seemed that Hydra wasn’t the only one with the technology to freeze people when required, although Wakanda used it for purely medical reasons.

He sighed. “I can’t trust my own mind.” Bucky looked at Steve again and smiled sadly, before focusing again on the chamber. “So, until they figure out how to get this stuff out of my head, going back under is the best thing. For everybody.”

Steve knew what he meant even if he hadn’t said it. He had told Bucky almost as soon as he was sure his friend could cope, everything about Loki and them being soulmates, even his unrequited feelings. It was the biggest thing that had happened to him since the Serum and if there was anyone he could confide in about it all, it was Bucky.

Bucky had taken the news surprisingly well and had wanted him to go sort things out with the god sooner rather than later, but he also knew that Steve wouldn’t leave him, not awake anyway. This way, Steve wouldn’t be hanging around Wakanda waiting for his recovery, something that could take years to happen.

Steve watched as the lab techs sealed the chamber and the tube filled with ice. Once everything was completed, they left him to say goodbye in his own time.

Steve stood by the window waiting for T’Challa to finish with the Council, looking to say goodbye before he left to head home. His formal initiation as King had taken place two days ago, the first part of which Steve and Bucky had been invited to witness. It was not a decision that had gone down well with some of the tribe leaders, nor was giving Steve, Loki and Bucky freedom to come and go in Wakanda as allies, but T’Challa was now convinced that the only way to truly protect Wakanda was to bring it out of isolation and show that they could offer more as an ally than as a target. To support this resolve, after being sworn to secrecy, Steve and Bucky stood with the Queen and Shuri for the Ceremony, which included the challenge from the renegade mountain tribe leader. Seeing him fighting depowered, Steve was even more impressed with T’Challa’s skill and was pleased to see that he not only won but proved his wisdom by persuading M’Baku to yield rather than making him kill him.

The final part of the Ceremony was a very private affair, that only the guardians and the Black Panther were allowed to be included in. Steve guessed that he shouldn’t know what T’Challa had already told him about the history of the Black Panther and the herb, and simply waited until his friend appeared hours later, once more the defender of Wakanda.

“Thank you,” Steve said as he heard T’Challa approach to also look out of the window.
T’Challa looked solemn. “Your friend and my father, they were both victims. If I can help one of them find peace……”

“Hydra will try to find him, he seems to be a major asset for them.

“We have beaten them once and next time they will not have the help from within.” T’Challa turned to face Steve. “Now, I believe that there are others for whom I can bring peace.”

Steve looked confused on why T’Challa was talking to him about this.

“My friend, now that Barnes is settled, I believe that you need to repair your relationship with Loki before he goes beyond your reach.” The king continued.

Steve shook his head. “This thing between Loki and me, it won’t change no matter what we do. He’s hurt because of what I said about him doing something to Bucky. He probably thinks I don’t trust him, and I’ll apologize for that. I can’t explain everything, but I know he won’t leave me.”

“Do not be so certain. You didn’t see what I saw, Steve. He wasn’t hurt by your words but your actions. You chose Barnes over him and I believe that he thinks your affections are directed at him.” T’Challa explained.

Steve laughed to himself regretfully. “Trust me, Loki has made it very clear that he wouldn’t be interested in any sort of romantic relationship. Whatever I may feel for him, it isn’t returned.”

Steve realised too late that he had told T’Challa about his feelings. Of course, T’Challa didn’t look surprised. “You did not see the look he gave you both. I was ready to stop him as he looked as if he wanted to kill Barnes for touching what was his. I assure you his feelings are not passive towards you. I would go to your Ubambo lwami before he gives you up.”

Steve couldn’t quite believe what he was hearing. If it were true, then it would mean that Loki was truly hurting from Steve’s actions, intentional or not, for good reason. He was so preoccupied he hadn’t really heard what T’Challa was saying. All he was interested in was getting home as soon as he could to find out the truth for himself.

“Your Highness, I could really use a lift.”

Chapter End Notes

Ubambo lwami = Soul mate in Xhosa
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

The boys finally get on the same page.

The aircraft dropped Steve off on the roof of the apartment block, Okoye wishing him good luck before he left, which made him wonder if he was the only one who had missed that Loki might actually have feelings for him. If it was true, of course, which he wasn’t convinced about. It was late, the sun had not long set and the apartment block was quiet as the grave. He had never been there at night before, nor had he been anywhere but the entrance hall and the basement. He only met one other person, who eyed him with suspicion as they passed on the stairs.

As Steve approached the basement door, he half expected it to stay shut but thankfully it swung open, inviting him inside. When he got to the apartment, he found Loki standing in the middle of the room, waiting for him, clearly have been made aware of his arrival by his magic.

Loki nodded a welcome to him. “Captain, I am surprised you are here. I would have thought that you would wish to remain with your….friend for a while longer.”

Steve had already decided that a direct assault would be the worst idea possible and that he would need to try and catch Loki off guard if he wanted to get inside the walls. He casually took a seat on the sofa, hoping Loki would do the same, which he did sitting next to him.

“Bucky had to be frozen again,” Steve said, unable to keep the regret out of his voice. “He dropped back into his conditioned state and nearly killed Okoye. It took me and T’Challa to get him off her and he decided that he wasn’t safe until Shuri can undo what Hydra did.”

Steve watched Loki from the corner of his eye and for a moment he saw the conflicting emotions. Part of him was clearly pleased with this development while another was unhappy.

“Anyway.” Steve continued. “I’m more worried about why you took off like that. I know I implied you might have hurt Bucky and I should have apologised but it was the shock of everything happening at once. I looked for you, but you were already gone.”

Loki turned away from Steve, avoiding his eye. “I did not wish to interrupt your reunion.”

Steve reached over and took his hand, the ever-comforting tingle present as always. Loki looked back at him, clearly confused over the gesture, even though Steve had done more than that a few times before.

“T’Challa talked to me before I came back. He told me what you did while I was looking after Bucky in the clearing, about what was written all over your face. Loki, is there any chance that you might…….have feelings for me beyond our connection and us being friends?” Steve had worded his question very carefully, trying to give Loki as little room as possible to wriggle out of his answer without lying. The only problem with this plan would be him simply not answering at all.

Loki’s face was once more conflicted as Steve watch the internal debate play out in front of him. Finally, he said. “My feelings for you are irrelevant. You have no such interest in me. I recall your
relief that our bond did not require a physical or emotional relationship between us.”

“I don’t think they are irrelevant. They’re very important to me.” Steve replied and as he seemed to get the confirmation he had been looking for, leaned in as if to kiss Loki. He wasn’t prepared for the hand that shot up and shoved him back. He let go of Loki’s other hand before it was yanked free as he stood and stormed away from the couch.

“Do not believe, Captain, that because I care for you, that I will allow you to use me.” Loki snarled his eyes like emerald daggers. “I am not a warm body that you may take comfort in now that your lover is once more out of your reach.”

“Wait, what are you talking about? Why would you think I have a lover? I don’t see anyone regularly apart from you and those connected with the Avengers, where would I get a lover from?” Steve shot back, completely taken aback by the accusation. Even though T’Challa had hinted at it, he still didn’t really believe that Loki thought like this until now.

Loki scoffed. “Do not take me for a fool. I have heard your tones as you spoke of Barnes, your lost love. I understand that fate has been cruel, to return him to you only to snatch him away, but I will not allow you to take advantage of our bond nor my feelings to bury your sorrows in.”

Steve couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He had no idea where Loki had gotten the idea that he and Bucky were romantically involved, it was so ludicrous that had the situation not been so serious he would have laughed.

He stood but kept his distance. “Loki, there is nothing going on between me and Bucky.”

“No, not now, he had been taken from you. But I saw the light in your eyes when you spoke of him and how tenderly you held him when he finally remembered you. Your love for him is clear and I will not be second in your heart, to be supplanted upon his recovery.” Loki sounded like he was trying to maintain his anger, but his voice broke at the end and he only sounded hurt. He hung his head and turned at to once more avoid Steve’s eyes.

Now Steve walked over and rested a hand on his shoulder. He felt Loki stiffen but didn’t let it deter him.

“Loki, I’m not in love with Bucky. I love him the way you love Thor. He is my best friend; my brother and I would give my life for him. But I could never look at him in that way and trust me, he is only interested in dames.” Steve felt Loki relax a little. Still, he didn’t move. “I can’t lie to you, remember? So here is the truth. Bucky isn’t my lover. And I love you. I don’t know when it started but it’s all I can think about. It doesn’t matter if we had this connection or not, I would still love you. If it’s not like that for you, I mean caring is one thin………..”

Steve was surprised when Loki turned on his heel and clamped a hand over his mouth for a moment. “If I were indifferent, then I should not care whom you took to your bed. You alone have accepted me for what I am and placed your faith in me. I love you, my soul.”

Loki’s hand slipped down to his side as he finished talking. The pair stared at each other for a long moment before Steve grabbed Loki’s arms, pulling him close and kissed him.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Things get steamy

Chapter Notes

Smut time, if you don't like, the next chapter will be up tomorrow.

Steve wasn’t sure what happened after he kissed Loki. It started soft and slightly chaste, but quickly became heated as the tingle he normally felt intensified a hundred-fold, igniting his skin and blood. This had been nothing like the kiss with Peggy before the ice. She had been safe, easy, controlled. Loki was none of those things. What Steve felt in his kiss was passion, unbridled and wild.

Hands quickly reached for clasps and buttons as each of them tried to remove the other’s clothing. Steve had the advantage, as his shirt was a button-down, which Loki relived him of in short order, leaving him in just his wife beater.

On the other hand, Loki’s casual Asgardian tunic was a complicated leather arrangement, with clasps and clips holding it tightly in place. He was surprised given that he was so focused on maintaining the contact with Loki that he could do anything productive with his hand, but he finally managed to get the tunic open and off. Only then did he pull back and realised that Loki had led them to the bedroom, the only place in the apartment he had never been yet.

Loki saw him hesitate and reached up to run his fingers down his face. Steve leaned into the touch.

“This does not have to happen tonight. This is a big step.” Loki said, trying to reassure him.

Steve smiled again. “I want this. I’ve just never done this before, with anyone. I never found the right partner. Until now.”

Loki’s gasped at Steve’s latest confession. He looked away shyly. “I have also never bedded another. I always felt like I was waiting for someone. Thor would make jest if he knew.”

Steve drew Loki close to him, comforted by how perfectly he fit into his arms. “If you want this, we’ll find our way together.”

When Loki met his eye and smiled, Steve guided them towards the bed. He stripped off his vest and pants before lying down on the soft sheets dressed only in his boxers. The look on Loki’s face could only be described as hungry as he ran his eyes over Steve’s serum enhanced body, making him feel self-conscious, not helped by the blood that was rushing to his already swelling erection.

Loki saw the blush that was growing on his cheeks and grinned. He unlaced his leggings and pushed them down and stepped out of them, before crawling up the bed to where Steve lay. He was every bit as impressive as Steve remembered. He reached out and ran his hands along the lines that crisscrossed his chest. He felt tears started to fill his eyes as he tried to imagine what Loki would
have had to live through that would leave marks on the god’s skin for this long.

Loki saw and took his hand, bringing his fingers to his lips. “There is time later for all our pains. Now is only for our pleasure. I want to find out what will make my soulmate scream my name.”

Steve shuddered and pulled Loki down to kiss him. He felt Loki’s hand let go of his own and it wandered down to cup his erection, rubbing it with his palm and making Steve moan loudly into Loki’s mouth. He quickly reached down himself and pushing Loki’s hand aside, trying to strip off his boxers without breaking the kiss.

Loki snorted as he got himself into a mess and with a wave of his hand, the offending underwear vanished. Finally having unrestricted access, Loki ran his hand across Steve’s cock, rubbing lightly over the head, causing Steve to start to thrust forward slightly, looking for friction. Steve wanted more and began to sit up, encouraging Loki to lie down on his back. He looked down at his lover, taking him all in. He may have never done anything before, but he knew what to do.

Once Steve knew it was allowed to like men as well as women, he had been interested to see what was out there. He had done one of his internet searches and nearly fell off his chair at some of the things he had seen. The different positions that the participants got themselves into were unbelievable and when he found the more intense BDSM, he couldn’t shut the page down quick enough. Still, he had learnt enough so that he knew what he would have to do to go all the way with Loki, assuming that was what Loki wanted.

“Please do not keep me waiting, my love. I wish to feel you within me.” Loki said, pulling Steve out of his thoughts, answering his question without it being asked.

Steve leant down to kiss Loki again. “Tell me if you want me to stop, if I’m going too fast.”

“I trust my body in your hands, my love.”

The sincerity in Loki’s statement of trust was all Steve needed. He kissed his lips one more time before he moved down to his lover’s neck. His ran his tongue along his collarbone before slowly biting and sucking on the skin above, pleased to that he had left a mark, at least until the god healed himself.

He continued down Loki’s body, kissing every inch of skin, worshipping him like a god. Not that he would tell him that, his ego was big enough. He knew that he must be doing okay, as Loki groaned when Steve passed over sensitive areas.

After what seemed like forever for Loki, Steve reached his goal. His lover’s cock stood erect, ready for him. Knowing that it would be better to help Loki relax, Steve ran his tongue over the head, before licking down the shaft and back up to the head once more. Loki twisted his fingers into Steve’s hair and then lifted his head away.

“Do not keep me waiting, I need you.”

Steve got up to his knees, so he could look into Loki’s eyes. “Are you sure? I understand that this can hurt the first time and I don’t want to rush into anything you’re not ready for.”

Loki nodded, his hand stroking Steve’s cheek. “You shall not break me with your touch.”
Steve smiled at Loki’s statement. “I could use something to make this easier, I didn’t think to bring any sort of lubricant.”

Loki took Steve’s hand and the super soldier found his fingers covered in oil. Steve kissed Loki and then tentatively, he ran his finger around the outside of his love’s entrance, before very gently pushing inside.

Loki took a deep breath expecting the pain. It wasn’t bad, more discomfort than pain. Steve stopped, waiting for Loki to relax. He slowly began to ease his finger in and out. With a nod from Loki, Steve slid a second in next to the first.

There was pain this time and Loki couldn’t stop himself from wincing. Steve froze. “Loki.” He said, sounding worried.

“I am well, there is but a slight burn. Please, my love.” Loki pleaded.

Steve couldn’t deny him and slowly began to pump his fingers, scissoring to increase the stretch further. The pain slowly eased, and Loki began to enjoy the feeling of Steve filling him, but he wanted more.

“Enough please, it is enough,” Loki demanded this time, his voice laced with need.

“Loki, I don’t want to hurt you,” Steve replied, pushing his fingers in once more.

“I am ready, please.”

Steve met his eyes, nodded, then pulled out his fingers. After using the oil that was left on his hand to coat his cock, Steve wrapped Loki’s legs around his hips, lined himself to Loki’s entrance and slowly pushed inside.

Loki knew he’d made a mistake as he felt Steve’s cock breach him. Steve was substantial and the stretch of the ring of muscle was more painful than he had imagined it would be. Not the worst he had ever felt, but enough to make him gasp and squeeze his eyes tight shut. Luckily Steve was moving slowly, but he was still overwhelmed by the tightness and heat from inside Loki that he didn’t notice his discomfort until he was completely sheathed inside of his lover. However, when Steve looked at Loki’s face, he was horrified.

“Loki, no…. this is too much. I’m stopping…….” Steve tried to pull out, but Loki locked his ankles around his thighs, holding him in place.

“No, I…..I just need a moment.” Loki said, only slightly breathless.

Steve waited, unsure what to do until he saw Loki’s face relax. Loki raised his hand to Steve’s cheek, before pulling him in close for a kiss. Steve took this as a sign and as they kissed, he slowly pulled out and then pushed back in.

Steve set a steady rhythm and with each thrust, Loki became more accustomed to Steve filling him and beginning to enjoy it once more. Steve shifted slightly and touched something which made Loki moan in pleasure.

Steve looked confused and hesitated. “Was that okay?”

“Yes, again.” Loki demanded, pulling his legs even tighter around Steve’s waist.

Steve thrust again, but it took several attempts to touch Loki’s prostate again. Once he had, Steve did
everything he could to hit again and again, after seeing the pleasure it brought Loki. Loki for his part, tightened his legs further, lifting his hips to meet Steve, his nails leaving marks in the flesh of his shoulder.

It wasn’t long before Steve felt his climax building. Pulling back slightly, he wrapped his hand around Loki, stroking in time with his thrusts. The extra friction was more than he could take and soon Loki climaxed loudly, covering both of them with his spill. He slumped back on to the bed exhausted.

Steve continued thrusting harder until in a sudden rush, the world around him whiting out as he climaxed inside the man he loved. Neither knew how he ended up laying on the bed, but when they came to their senses, Steve was wrapped around Loki, his face buried in his hair.

The lovers lay together in the afterglow, for one night at least, refusing to let the world come between them.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Steve and Loki talk.

Steve woke, feeling confused over the unfamiliar room. As he rubbed the sleep from his eyes, the memories began to flood back and he turned to see the bed next to him was empty. Looking around he saw his pants and undershirt on the floor. He grabbed them and slipped them on before heading off in search of Loki.

He found him sitting at a chess table, dressed in, of all things, an old tatty dressing gown and with his hair now curling slightly around his shoulders. It was the most unkept Steve had even seen Loki and he found it adorable. Loki was moving the pieces around as he played against himself. He flicked his eyes to Steve as he sat down on the chair meant for the other player. He still couldn’t believe how much Loki could fit in the tiny apartment. As he had seen that Loki’s last move was with a white bishop on his side of the board, Steve studied the game and moved a black pawn forward, putting Loki’s knight in danger.

Loki frowned at the unexpected move. If he moved his knight, his king would be checked. He took the pawn with his queen instead which Steve then took with his Rook. Loki’s king was safe once more, but the exchange had been costly to himself.

Loki sat back. “Unusual strategy. I will still achieve checkmate within 10 moves, I fear.”

Steve nodded, already having worked that he had lost. “I know, but it was six. If I can’t win, I’m going to make it as hard for you as possible.”

“You play the long game, Captain,” Loki replied amused.

“Steve. After what’s happened………” Steve stopped as he noted the love bite that Loki hadn’t healed away yet. He hoped that meant Loki was okay with last night.

Loki leaned over the board, appearing to plan the next move, even though they both knew he would move his rook to place Steve’s queen at risk.

“Do you regret your actions last night? There are many who would even after your confession.” Loki asked, his eyes firmly on the board.

Steve shook his head. “You still don’t know me very well yet, do you?” He gave Loki, who had looked up at his answer, a small smile. “Loki, I’m here for as long as you’ll have me. I love you and I don’t think that’s something that’s going to change anytime soon. But do you regret what happened? You were hardly complimentary of Thor’s relationship with Dr Foster.”

“I may have let my frustrations colour my opinions when I voiced them. After all, at the time I was smarting that he could have his love and I could not have mine.” Loki replied with his own smile, which Steve could see reached his eyes for the first time he had known him. “I have no regrets. I may not have known it at the time, but the belonging that I feel with you is what I have searched for all my life. Short as it will be, this will be a time that I shall cherish.”
Steve swallowed hard at the idea of how short their relationship would be in relation to Loki’s lifespan, nor did he miss that there was a slight bitterness mixed in with Loki’s contented tones. It seemed that whoever was dealing the soulmates cards had been cruel on that score but then his life had never been easy from the first and Loki’s hadn’t been a picnic either. Still, all he could do was to focus on what they had now and not let the future hang over them.

Steve could also see there was something that Loki wasn’t telling him. While the man seemed happy with the development of their relationship, there seemed to still be a shadow over him, as if this hadn’t been all he had expected it to be. Knowing Loki would only tell him when he was ready, he pushed it from his mind, hoping to show him through his actions that everything was going to be okay.

Steve grabbed his phone from off of the table. He checked the date and saw he still had two days left before he had to get into contact with Tony and the rest of the team.

“Would you like to finish the game, or we could always…….” Steve’s voice trailed off, raising his eyebrow in a very suggestive way.

Loki got the hint. He grinned possessively, then waved his hand over the board and the pieces moved to the places that would give him checkmate. Then he rose, took Steve’s hand and led him back to the bedroom.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Steve sees the rest of the fall out from his trip to Wakanda

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve had to deal with more than a few questions as to where he had been on his trip when he reported back to the tower. Tony had been less than happy that he had left his phone behind, but Steve pointed out that he just wanted some quiet time. Sam raised an eyebrow over the fact he hadn’t been in contact but just like Bruce, was content to let him be. Thor had also not been around much having attempted to fly around the planet looking for Loki, a plan that of course had yielded nothing more than a warning from the Russian government about an American-aligned alien flying through their airspace.

Steve had expected some pointed questions from Natasha, Coulson or Fury, but he found that they had more than enough to keep them occupied. Before he had left Wakanda, Steve and T’Challa had interrogated both Garrett and Klaue and were shocked at what they discovered. It seemed that while its founders had had the best of intentions for SHIELD, thanks to the policy of recruiting people such as Zola after the war, the organisation was little more than Hydra under a different name. Fury, Coulson, Natasha and Barton were clean, but Alexander Pierce, the WSC secretary, was the main voice of the tyrannical group. Under him was a network of Senators, government officials and double agents, all moving towards the creation of a single world order under Hydra’s rule. In addition, there were at least a dozen splinter groups working independently, each with their own agenda. Garrett had been the leader of one of those groups.

Steve couldn’t believe that after everything that he, Peggy and Howard had worked for, Hydra was as strong if not stronger than it was before. All the lives that had been lost were for nothing and the war he thought had been won seventy years ago was on the verge of being lost. Steve hated to see the legacy that his friends had created was corrupted, breaking his heart a little.

They decided for T’Challa to use his war-dogs to feed information to Fury. They still faced the problem of proof, but they hoped that it would put enough doubt into the Director’s mind that he would begin conducting his own investigation.

A week after Steve came home, reports started coming in that Fury and members of the WSC had been assassinated, followed days later by similar assassinations of Senator Pierce and Senator Stern. Within the hour, there was a massive data dump onto the web of all SHIELD’s files, implicating hundreds of officials and agents as members of Hydra. It also incriminated the deceased Senators, with evidence that Pierce himself masterminded Fury’s murder. The only mystery was who killed the Senators, but Steve had his own ideas on that one, given just how accurate the kill shots were. He never mentioned those ideas, but he hoped a certain retired archer’s alibi was airtight.

In the space of a month, SHIELD was no more, the Hydra members the authorities could catch, including Sitwell, were in high-security facilities and the remaining loyal SHIELD agents were farmed out to other agencies. Maria Hill ended up working for Stark Industries.
As Steve had insisted on their relative independence, the Avengers came out of the political storm that followed mostly unscathed, also helped by Tony taking over complete financial responsibility for the team.

After some sort of order had been restored, Steve thought the fuss was over, with the Avengers taking it upon themselves to clean up the remaining Hydra splinter cells. He was understandably surprised to find someone sitting in his living room when he came home from Fury’s funeral. Fury was sitting at his table, looking worn but very much alive. He seemed to have changed his suit and leather jacket for a hoodie and jeans.

Steve stopped in his tracks for a moment, but given what he knew about the former spy, he wasn’t all that surprised. “You’re not looking bad for someone we buried a few hours ago.”

Nick laughed then coughed a little holding his side, where he had been shot. “Well, my doctor has been telling me to take a vacation. The abandoned hospital they stashed me in wouldn’t have been my first choice.”

Steve couldn’t help but smile. He then sighed and sat down. “So, you going tell me what really happened, Nick? Or will this be one more of your secrets?”

Nick raised an eyebrow as he sat back in his chair. “It seems to me that I’m not the only one who has been keeping secrets here, Cap. But I think it’s fair that I start. I knew the risks when I started digging. When they tried to take me out, I knew it was time to step out of the picture for a while.”

“You died. Nat saw you die.” Steve pointed out, in a matter of fact.

“Tetrodotoxin B. Slows the pulse to one beat a minute. Banner developed it for stress. Didn't work so great for him, but we found a use for it.” Nick replied. “And don’t worry about Romanoff, she knows I’m alive. She was the one that dumped the data on the web, which needed my retinal scan. Thank you for trying to protect her from the political vultures. They won’t come for her as long as she’s working publicly with the Avengers. So, you wanna tell me what you had to with all of this?”

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“I’m not sure what you mean?” Steve replied, looking Nick straight in the eye.

Nick narrowed his eye. “Someone else might just believe you, you are getting better in my world. But my job was putting the pieces together. You go off alone and it wasn’t to visit France. You turn up again a month later, having not even looked at any of your checking accounts nor flying in on any commercial airline. Within days, I’m getting intel about Hydra from random sources. I also can’t ignore that one of my senior agents, who is also a major Hydra player has gone AWOL. You really going to tell me that you’ve had nothing at all to do with this.”

Steve actually did consider confiding in him. But there was Loki and T’Challa to think about. He would never betray the trust that had been placed in him by the Wakandan king, not until he was ready to reveal the truth to the world, which he wanted to do in stages. He also couldn’t be certain how Nick would react to Loki, after all, Steve couldn’t forget that the only time they’d met, Loki was bent on conquest and ordered Barton to kill him.

“If you’re asking if I’m the source, I’m not. I have no idea what happened to your agent, and I came back into the country on a private jet, owned by a friend I met while I was on leave.” Steve replied, telling only as much truth as would answer Nick’s points.

Nick clearly decided not to push the issue and let it go. For now. “Alright, I’ll let you keep what you
know. I better get moving.” He stood up gingerly, some of his injuries still bothering him.

Steve also stood, “Where are you heading?”

“We've been data mining Hydra's files. Looks like a lot of rats didn’t go down with the ship. I'm headed to Europe tonight. Wanted to ask if you'd come. I thought you might like the chance to even the score.”

Steve shook his head. “I have my team. With everything that’s gone on, we need to stick together to weather the storm.”

It was the answer Nick had expected. He reached out his hand to Steve who took it without a word. An understanding passed between them, a mutual respect, with each feeling sure the other had their back if they needed it. Nick released his hand and headed out through the door, pausing only to exchange his eye patch for a pair of shades.

Steve watched him go before sitting back down and staring into the dark remembering everything that had been lost.

Chapter End Notes

I'm keeping my fingers crossed that i can't get back to this on ASAP
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Steve finally finds out who or what hurt Loki.

The winter morning was grey as the rain was falling on the sidewalks above their heads as they lay in bed. Steve had just woken after spending the night, their nightly activities leaving him blissfully sore. It wasn’t something he had been able to do as much as he would have liked. Since the fall of SHIELD, Steve had seen an increased number of enemies taking the chance to attack an unprepared U.S. A scientific institute called AIM decided to use its own version of enhanced troops to try take over the government, threatening the President directly. Tony originally took the organisation on by himself, as the guy in charge had been a school friend of Pepper’s, but after his home in Malibu was destroyed, he’d called the Avengers for help, who were able to take out AIM before the situation got out of hand.

All that, coupled with trying to round up the remaining Hydra cells, Steve didn’t have many opportunities to spend any real time with his love. Loki of course understood, which made Steve feel a little worse. It meant that when he did get a free evening with his lover, he cherished it.

Steve rolled over and looked at Loki who was laid on his back, his eyes closed and breathing deeply. The bed sheet had slipped down, revealing Loki’s upper body. Steve’s eyes were drawn to the scars that still covered his chest, although they had nearly faded to nothing. They still haven’t discussed the cause of those scars, Loki being very reluctant to talk about the time between his fall and coming through the gateway opened by the Tesseract. Tentatively, Steve reached out and traced the pale lines with his fingers.

“Speak your mind, my love. Your questions have hung between us for some time now.” Loki said, opening his eyes.

Steve’s hand stilled, then flattened it to lie over Loki’s heart. “It’s ok, I don’t want you to talk about anything you’re not ready to.”

Loki rolled to face Steve, allowing his hand to fall. “Being uncomfortable discussing something does not make it something to avoid. What do you wish to know?”

Steve’s eyes fell again to the scars. “I’ve seen you heal. Those scars should be long gone, so what happened to you must have been horrific. What did that to you?”

“The one directly responsible was a creature called Corvus Glaive, a particularly nasty being. He is a member of the Black Order and is fanatical follower of the Mad Titan.” Loki explained, seemingly calmly, but Steve could tell that the memories the conversation were bringing up were making him anything but calm. “Of course, his actions were guided by his master.”

“The Mad Titan? Is that like anything like the Titans from Greek mythology.” Steve asked, resting his head on his hand as he listened. After all, if Norse gods had some truth to them, why not the other older religions.

“If you believe Thor’s tales, he once battled Ares, whom I am told also visited Midgard, but Thanos
has no relation to those stories.” Loki replied a little amused. He then sat up, bringing his knees to his chest. “He wants to collect the Infinity Stones but for what purpose I was never told, as I was to be just another tool, not one of his children as he describes his most loyal followers. There have been rumours that he comes to a world and slaughters half the population, leaving the rest to live in peace. Not something that has any logic to it. All I know for certain that at his orders, both my mind and body were sliced open until I was broken enough for the Mind Stone to take hold. Then I sent by the Other as his tool to claim the Tesseract. He filled me with a desire to rule, something I never wanted, not really, but it made me believe that this was my choice and therefore much easier to control.”

Steve had also sat up and when Loki finished talking, he moved behind him and wrapped his arms around him from behind. This was more than Loki had ever talked about what happened to him. Mostly up until now, they talked of his life in Asgard before the fall and Steve could hear in every word, the pain that reliving it was causing.

“It’s ok, you’re free of him, you’re on earth, and he can’t reach you.” Steve said, trying to reassure him.

“I am not a child that requires your comfort, Steve.” Loki snapped, all the while pressing closer into his soulmates’ arms. “In any event, you are wrong. He will come, I am sure of it. He knows that another Stone is here, hidden and guarded. By whom I do not know, but it is here.”

Steve pulled away a little, moving around again so he could look at Loki’s face. He wasn’t happy that Loki had kept this to himself. “You didn’t think that it might have been a good idea to tell me that a being with control over a vastly superior army could well be on it way here? Loki, we need to warn people, let them know of the threat. He could be here at any time.”

“It was not my intent to withhold this from you, but it is unlikely that he will be a threat during your lifetime. From where he is in the far reaches of the cosmos, it will take years from him to reach Midgard. That was why he needs the Space Stone. With that he could travel as I did, in a matter of moments. And while he knows that the second Stone is here, he doesn’t know how it is hidden, nor can he discover it now that he has lost the Mind Stone.” Loki explained. “Steve, he will come in my lifetime, I have no doubt but if we are fortunate, it will be after this realm has matured and gained the knowledge to fight back. But any one we inform will not be believe us, after all, aliens for them are two men, one who is a hero and another who was beaten by the avengers.”

Steve tried to find an argument to Loki’s logic but was struggling badly. Even if he went to the government, the UN or even the other Avengers, he would need to tell them where his intel came from and that meant telling them about Loki, which would mean the intel being dismissed as one of his lies. To use the term from their favourite pastime, it was checkmate. He could also understand why Loki hadn’t said anything, given the pain it was associated with. He pulled Loki back into arms, telling him without saying a word that everything was okay.

“Okay, but it might be worth telling T’Challa. He will believe us and with their technological advantage, they could create weapons that could deal with the threat.” Steve said, his strategical mind thinking out loud. “It might also be worth us trying to track down the Stone that’s here, if it’s possible.”

Loki nodded, accepting that Steve’s proposal was sound. “I was never permitted to see much, but I can tell the Princess all that I know of his army and their capabilities. As for the Stone, unless its keeper uses it, it will be impossible for it to be located. It was first the Red Skull’s meddling and then SHIELD’s experiments that lead Thanos to the Tesseract.”

The rain fell from above, and the lovers held each other close, the need for comfort driving all other concerns away.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Revelations are made

The winter months changed to spring. Loki had been on Earth for nearly a year and in a relationship with Steve for three months. In that time, the public interest in Loki had once more dropped off as there had been no sightings since the fall of SHIELD, even Thor declared that it was likely that his brother had left the planet. This suited Steve just fine as he was getting a little frustrated with only being able to see Loki at his hidden apartment.

Since Christmas, where they had only managed to share a few hours as Doom decided to take advantage of the holiday season to cause destruction, the couple had been a little more adventurous. They had taken a few walks in the evening around the city, never visiting the same place twice and Loki always blending in as much as possible. Most of the people simply ignored him, although he had received the odd strange look, nothing had come of it. They tried to keep to the areas most frequented by couples, where their occasional kisses and holding hands were reflected by the people around them. It made Steve, who had been wary that this sort of behaviour would draw attention to them, feel more at ease as it had the exact opposite effect. The result was that the kisses become more commonplace and a good deal more relaxed.

Given their success, they decided to risk a day time walk through central park, Loki smartly dressed in a crisp black suit and Steve, in the slacks and shirt he wore in Wakanda. They stopped at a coffee stand, completely oblivious that they were being watched.

Until recently, Brock Rumlow was the lead Agent in charge of STRIKE, SHIELD’s primary counter-terrorism unit which was often assigned to assist Steve and Natasha. Of course, in addition, he had also been a Hydra sleeper agent, whose mission had been to remain within the organisation until such time as Hydra was at risk of exposure. Current intel suggested that he had been responsible for Fury’s assassination and had sabotaged more than one mission over the years to promote Hydra’s interests.

When Hydra had been exposed, Rumlow knew it would only be a matter of time before they came for the minor members of the organisation, once the big fish had been removed. While he believed completely in the HYDRA rhetoric, he was a practical man and had an escape plan in place should the need arise. Within hours of Pierce’s assassination, he had gone into hiding, holing up in an apartment that he had rented and paid for under an assumed name which he had acquired independently from SHIELD and Hydra, selling whatever intel he could get his hands on to whoever would pay the most for it. He had a fair sum tucked away, but after months of hiding his funds had begun to dwindle.

Rumlow had already made contact with a small Hydra cell that had so far kept under the radar, with the base located in Sokovia. From there, he hoped to set himself up with his own merc team, selling his gun to the highest bidder. The Avengers were the only stumbling block to this plan, as the interference had scared many into downscaling their operations or shutting up shop for good.
So Rumlow had decided to tail each, in turn, hoping to find something he could use against them, his first target being the unmovable Captain America. He couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw the goody two shoes, Rogers, stepping out of a rundown apartment block with Loki, the man that topped nearly every most wanted list in the world, only a few places above Rumlow himself. Admittedly if Rumlow hadn’t examined those listed once a week, ensuring that other Hydra agents were not on them, he possibly wouldn’t have recognised him, dressed in a suit and with his hair pulled back into a tight ponytail, making him look more like a city highflyer than a homicidal maniac with a literal god-complex.

It wasn’t like they were just hanging out together either. As he watched, he saw Rogers leaned over and kiss the criminal alien on the mouth. It was an action that was clearly welcome if Loki’s arm sneaking around Rogers’ back to pull him closer was anything to go on. Rogers pulled away again after a moment, smiling and blushing at the same time. Rumlow quickly took out his phone and snapped several photos of them together, one with Rogers laughing loudly at something the alien had said and another of them holding hands before they headed back across the park, and another sickening kiss. He scowled as he looked at the photos. Rogers had always been a little bit of an idol for him. He may not have shared his views, but his determination to do what it takes to do what you believe was right had always been a trait that he had tried to emulate. Now that man he had slightly hero-worshipped was not only a faggot but hypocrite as he was clearly protecting a man he was meant to be bringing to justice. His disgust was enough to give him the incentive to do what he needed too. This would tear the Avengers apart and his only regret was that he wouldn’t be able to see it in person.

Tony walked into the kitchen after pulling yet another all-nighter. He was working on improvements to his suit, trying to make the suit respond to hand commands. He had limited success and was becoming more convinced that he would have to look into subcutaneous implants to give the different sections a tag to home in on, but that would have to wait till he got back.

This weekend he had promised to take Pepper to the Alps for the weekend, just the two of them, no work, STARK Industries or Avengers. Tony had been neglecting her recently, after having to clean up the mess SHIELD/Hydra had left behind. He had also promised her that once that job was done, he was going to take a step back, leaving the Avengers solely to Steve to lead, something he was sure the Super soldier could manage.

“Sir, an email has been received by the hotline that SHIELD created to report sightings of Loki,” JARVIS reported, just as Tony was reaching for the coffee pot.

“Forward whatever they’ve sent us to Spangles, J. It couldn’t have been urgent if they sent it by email,” Tony replied, cursing whoever had clogged the sink with the coffee grinds again. He strongly suspected Thor.

“I believe that it would be in the interests of everyone for you to look at the email before making that decision, sir.”

Tony’s interest was piqued by this response. It wasn’t the first time he had told JARVIS to pass intel on to Steve about Loki and he had never questioned it before. This was more than the run-of-the-mill quack. He walked quickly to his private office and locked to the door. He opened the email that JARVIS had ready for him on his display. The message itself was one word. ENJOY!

“J, trace this account,” Tony said, confused at the single word.

“Already done, sir. It was created 1 hour ago and deleted immediately after the email was sent. The
That wasn’t what he wanted to hear. That Mall was huge, and tracing one person would be almost impossible. His attention was drawn to the attachments on the email. As they were images, he opened the files and sent them to his holo-screen.

Loki dressed in a black suit filled the screen, which Tony fully expected. What he didn’t expect was Steve standing right next to Thor’s brother, without a care in the world, a smile on his face and an arm reaching to Loki. The next image opened, and Tony got an eyeful of Steve laughing his head off, his head thrown back in reaction to something that had been said or done. The final image almost proved too much for Tony as he saw Steve in Loki’s arms, kissing him in such a relaxed manner that it couldn’t have been the first or the second or even the tenth time.

“JARVIS, scan every inch of these images, I want to know if they are real, or someone messing with Photoshop for sick kicks.”

The computer was quiet for a few moments, then said. “As I do not have access to the originals, I cannot be conclusive in my conclusions. However, with a degree of ninety-three-point four percentage of accuracy, these imagines are genuine. And judging from the date on the newspaper in the second image, it happened today, sir.”

Tony was struggling to keep his anger in check. Steve had lied to them, possibly from the very beginning about his involvement with the most wanted man on the planet. He felt betrayed, yet another knife in the back from someone who was meant to be his friend. He knew that this wasn’t as personal as Stane’s betrayal, but that didn’t make it hurt any less.

“JARVIS, get the team together but leave Rogers out of it for now. We have business to discuss.”
Tony was the last to enter the briefing room, noting that Sam was missing as well as Steve. Then he remembered that the flyboy was in Washington, visiting some girl he met there before he joined the team. He decided quickly that it wasn’t a bad thing as the guy was Steve’s man anyway.

Natasha eyed Tony up suspiciously, clearly wondering where Steve was, as Tony hadn’t called a meeting himself since the Abomination incident. Banner also raised an eyebrow his way, while Thor was amusing himself, leaning against a wall, throwing his hammer up and catching it cleanly.

When Tony moved to the head of the table, taking Steve’s seat, Nat spoke up. After all, she knew how Steve felt the last time Tony went behind his back. “Stark, where is Cap?”

“You’ll see soon enough, Romanoff,” Tony said, and he sat down. “We’ve had a sighting of Loki yesterday, not far from Central Park.”

Natasha shook her head and leaned back in her chair. “Is this going to be another crazy guy obsessed with the horns? Why have you dragged the rest of us in here, if you didn’t think it was worth bothering Steve?”

Tony could see that Thor also looked bored, already having decided that it wasn’t his brother. He snorted before he hit a key on his tablet. The photos popped up from the holo-projector in the centre of the table. He watched his teammates reactions as they took in the sight of Steve clearly involved with Loki. They were shocked into silence.
Bruce recovered first. “This isn’t real, is it? Someone is trying to stir up trouble with lies.”

“Stir up trouble, yep, I would say so.” Tony conceded. “Lies? JARVIS has checked every inch of the images. They are real. Captain America is in bed with Loki. Literally”

“That’s quite an assumption to make, Tony,” Natasha interjected weakly, mostly because arguing with Tony had become more of a habit, rather than with any real conviction.

“Really?” Tony snorted, bringing the picture of Steve and Loki kissing to the forefront, zooming in on their faces. “Unless this is an Asgard equivalent of a high-five, I would say this is proof that there are relations happening in the bedroom.”

“The good Captain would not willingly engage in such unmanly activities. This is clearly Loki controlling him in some way, for his own ends. It is possible he may have been under his influence for some time.” Thor finally put in, his eyes fixed on the image of Loki. Tony could tell he was itching to get out there to try and find him.

Bruce coughed slightly. “Thor, we talked about this, it’s perfectly acceptable for men or woman to be involved like this.”

“Yes, but you would not have such men defending your homes. Captain Rogers is a Warrior and warriors do not submit to each other in such a way, it is womanly.” Thor retorted, looking very offended at the idea.

Tony could see that both Bruce and Natasha were getting ready to argue with him and rapped his hand on the table. “We can reintroduce Thor to LGBT rights later, can we get back on topic here? Rogers has clearly known where Loki has been the whole time and possibly has even been helping him. Why we can sort out later, but right now we need to decide what we are going to do about it now.”

“Going to do about what, Tony?” Steve asked from the doorway.
Steve arrived at the tower and was surprised when the receptionist at the main entrance told him that Tony was upstairs. He was meant to have been leaving on a trip with his partner, and while Pepper had the patience of a Saint, Steve knew that she would kill Tony if he had forgotten her in favour of burying his head in yet another suit upgrade. Steve quickly checked his personal lab and was again surprised to find everything packed away.

He also noted that Bruce’s lab was also empty, and Thor was nowhere to be seen. As the lounge and kitchen was void of life, he decided to check the one other place they tended to gather and headed for the conference room. He arrived just to hear the last bit of what Tony had said.

“………Later, but right now we need to decide what we are going to do about it now.”

Steve stepped through the door and was met with the sight of the Avengers apart for him and Sam clearly in the middle of some sort of briefing.

“Going to do about what, Tony?” Steve asked as his eyes drifted around the room stopping on the imagines that were still displayed on the holoprojector. His mouth dropped open as he saw himself and Loki kissing and he was under no doubt that whoever had taken them, had done so yesterday.

Seeing that their leader was lost for words, Tony decided to open the batting with. “You make a lovely couple, although I wouldn’t have guessed your type ran to homicidal lunatic.”

Tony’s jab grounded Steve. He drew back his shoulders and met Tony’s eyes. “Where did you get those?”

Tony shrugged as if he hadn’t been asking himself the same thing ever since he saw the pictures. “They were emailed to the Loki sightings hotline. A well-wisher I imagine who wanted you to have a memento of the moment.”

Steve played the only chance of denial he had. “And you think they are real? Even I know what can be done with photo editing software?”

Tony looked insulted. “And you think JARVIS isn’t sophisticated enough to tell when he is analysing a mash-up, please Rogers, this is the big league now, not the NYPD.”

Now Steve knew that he was in trouble if Tony was back to calling him, Rogers.

Natasha decided it was time to step into the debate between them before it got out of hand. “Steve, I think we need to hear what is going on. I mean, you look way too happy for it to be coercion or blackmail…….”

“It’s nothing like that,” Steve said quickly. “I’m not under his spell before you suggest that either.” He sighed. He had always known that he would have this discussion someday, he just never expected it to be this soon or not on his terms. Deep down though, he was glad that there would be no more secrets. “What do you want to know?”

“How about the truth, Steve,” Bruce said sitting back into his chair and taking off his glasses to rub his eyes.

“Aye, you will explain why you are cavorting with my brother.” Thor put in, staring at Steve menacingly.

“Why? Isn’t it obvious? Because I love him and he loves me.” Steve replied, crossing his arms. “He was under the control of the sceptre, just like Barton and the rest, but broke free of it during our fight
in Stuttgart. That’s why he released them and returned the Tesseract and Sceptre.”

“What, you got a magic punch or something that cured him,” Tony said, his voice laced with sarcasm.

Steve couldn’t help but laugh anyway when he thought back on his first meeting with his love. “It was something.”

Thor shook his head. “My brother is the master of deception, lies are his weapons, misdirection his art. Once he has gained his ends, his affections with vanish as if they never were.” Thor said as he approached, talking as if to a child. “You have been deceived.”

“He can’t lie to me. Everything he has said is the truth. His eyes changed back to green after the fight, just like Barton’s” Steve insisted.

“And what makes you so special that he won’t lie to you, but he can do it to everyone else.” Tony snapped.

“Because he thinks we’re soulmates.” Steve snapped back, frustration getting the better of him. Suddenly he released what he had revealed and turned away from the table, taking some deep breaths. When he was calm, he turned to face his team, knowing he had to tell them everything or they were never going to understand.

“We have a connection. When he touched my skin during the fight, something happened which meant he got free of the sceptre. We can’t lie to each other and we move together perfectly when we fight side by side. We also seem to get a sense of what the other is feeling, nothing detailed but I somehow knew when he agreed with a decision that I made. It’s taken time for me to trust him and even more to realise that I love him, but he has been there for me more like no other.”

“You’re kidding me.” Tony stood up sharply. He sounded annoyed at Steve’s explanation. “You fell for the oldest trick in the book. He conned you into bed with him, spinning you a tale of fate telling you to let him fuck you.”

Thor glared at Tony but said, “As much as it pains me, Captain, I must agree. I told you before, Jotun soulmates are a myth, a story for children, nothing more.”

“Fate hasn’t told me to do anything. This thing doesn’t mean a romantic relationship, we got there on our own. We chose it, the feelings are our own.”

“He has bewildered you with his magic, Captain.” Thor bellowed, slamming his fist into the table. “Else why would you belittle yourself by going to his bed.”

“Steve, you have to see it from our side,” Natasha said quickly as Steve shot up from his seat. She could see that Steve was getting angry and while the guy was an expert at keeping his cool, Thor seemed to be pushing him to his limits. “All we have seen has been him trying to bring an army to earth to conquer and side with another supervillain to release Abomination.”

Steve smiled and shook his head. “And where did you think we got the intel on that in the first place? Tony’s random courier that we have never been able to trace? That was Loki, he fed us the information, he kept Abomination distracted and for your information Thor, your brother hit everything he was aiming for. He took out the bots deliberately, saving you if you remember, Romanoff. And on the subject of saving lives, Thor, you would be dead if it wasn’t for him. He went back to Asgard for the cure when Amora poisoned you, you owe him your life.”

Steve’s speech made everyone pause. It certainly hadn’t been what they had expected to hear. Bruce
leaned forward in his seat.

“I thought Thor’s immune system purged the poison. There was no evidence in his blood work of an antidote.”

“You said it yourself, you barely recognised the poison for what it was. He knew that Thor would never have accepted Loki’s help himself and you wouldn’t have on his behalf, even if I had. He risked capture to save your life, Thor because he still loves you.” Steve shot back.

Natasha had worked with Steve for a while and was sure she knew him well enough to make a good judge of his character and behaviour. He was absolutely certain that Loki could be trusted, and she was certain that he wouldn’t do that without seeing everything he had talked about and more for his own eyes. It was enough for her to trust him in turn.

“What does he want here then, if his aim isn’t to take over the planet?”

Steve looked at her, visibly pleased that he had seemed to talk someone around. “He just wants to stay on Earth, where I am. He has been studying old magic that was on Earth before Asgard withdraw after the Jotun War.”

“Captain, your foolishness in believing Loki’s lies is astonishing. Well, I shall search this city for him and prove his falsehoods.” Thor declared, his hammer pointed at Steve before he strode from the room.

“Yeah, not good,” Tony said, jumping from his chair to race after the god. “J, lock down the tower before he gets to the roof.”

As he ran to catch Thor, Tony was glad that standard shutdown included a communications blackout. After all, he didn’t want Steve communicating with Loki until they had this mess straightened out and the billionaire was already thinking up a plan which would achieve their goals, with him front and centre.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Tony tries to talk to Steve again

It had taken over an hour for Tony to talk Thor out of crashing through the roof of the penthouse and trying a different approach to solve the situation with Steve and Loki. Tony was still surprised that he actually managed it, as Thor was completely convinced that Steve was under Loki’s control. Tony agreed but knew that tackling the problem with force would never work. A more subtle approach was the most sensible way forward.

After stopping off quickly at the lab, Tony went in search of his team leader. Unsurprisingly he found Steve taking out his frustrations at being discovered by sparring with Natasha in the Gym, or at least that had been the intention. As Tony entered, he saw them sat on the mat, talking in low voices. The pair jumped to their feet when they saw Tony come into the room and he could tell just by the look on her face that Steve had somehow managed to talk her around. He guessed he really shouldn’t be surprised as she took Steve’s side more often than not and Tony never really trusted her after the Natalie thing.

“I could do with talking to Cap alone, Romanoff,” Tony said pointedly, fully intending to set her straight first chance he got. She looked at Steve who nodded slightly. She glanced back at Tony then said, “Be careful,” making sure he heard her. She grabbed her sweatshirt and headed for the showers. Tony waited until JARVIS confirmed that she had moved out of listening range before he approached Steve.

“I take it the lockdown wasn’t just for Thor’s benefit. Worried I was going to run off, Tony?” Steve started, making no attempt to hide his hurt.

Tony crossed his arms and leaned against the boxing ring that was set up. “Well, you haven’t given me much reason to trust you right now, Spangles. Couldn’t have you ringing lover boy to let him know the game was up.”

Steve shrugged as he began to wrap his knuckles up ready to use the punching bag. “No chance of that, he doesn’t use a phone. So, no point going through mine either to track him.”

With that, Steve picked the phone from his bag and held it out to Tony. Neither were surprised that he took it, slipping into his pocket for JARVIS to analyse later, although he knew it would come up blank. He cursed himself that he had shown Steve how to deactivate the GPS tracker.

Steve moved over to the bag and began his routine. It didn’t last, the leather around the middle giving way and the sand spilling all over the floor. He watched as Tony’s robots cleaned up the mess but didn’t have the heart to hang another bag.

He turned back to Tony, hanging his head slightly. “Look, me keeping my relationship with Loki a secret…………I know I hurt you. I guess I thought by not telling you about Loki, I thought I was protecting you all. I see that I was just protecting myself and him.” Steve looked Tony in the eye. “But what would you have done, Tony, if it were you? If it was Pepper?”
“I would have trusted you with it. Remember, as you asked me to.” Tony pointed out, trying not to sound bitter.

Steve shook his head. “This was never about trust, not with you. It’s just I knew there was no chance you were going to believe that Loki wasn’t staying to somehow carry out his plans to take over in a different way. It was a long time before I truly believed it myself. But time and again he has proved to me that he means no harm, that all he wants is to stay close to his soulmate.”

“Now that’s the bit I find the hardest to swallow,” Tony said as he pushed off the ring. “I’ve talked to Point Break and he is absolutely certain that there is no such thing as soulmates. He thinks Loki is playing you or worse deluded enough to believe what he’s telling you which means he’s completely lost the plot.”

“He’s not crazy. With everything that has happened to him, you wouldn’t be surprised that it broke him, but he is one of the sanest people I know.” Steve said, defensively. “Look, the whole soulmate thing doesn’t matter to me, I’m not sure that I even believe it myself. But it matters to him, so I go with it. I love him and that’s what matters to me.”

Tony had to stop himself from snorting and pointing out just how crazy Steve sounded defending the god of crazy. He decided it was time to put his plan into action. “Alright, let’s say that I actually do believe you. I mean the part about you fucking him because you have a snuggly feeling, not the soulmate mumbo jumbo. What is it going to take to bring him in?”

“Loki doesn’t want to end up in a cell again, all he wants is to be left alone. He will only get involved in a situation to protect me. It’s bad enough that I’m going to die thousands of years before him, without me getting killed on a mission. Just leave him be and everything will be fine.” Steve explained. Thinking that the discussion was over, he grabbed his kit.

Tony reached out and took hold of his bare upper arm. “You know we can’t do that, Cap. Steve. He’s too much of a risk to be left unchecked. And I don’t mean something that he will do before you think that. He is still the most wanted man on the planet. He’s already been recognised once when he was trying to hide, how long will it be before it’s by someone who doesn’t stop at sending us snapshots. What if it’s someone who tries to take him out themselves.”

This made Steve stop, as he thought about what Tony suggestions implied. “We got careless. I won’t let it happen again.”

“And if it does? He is in more danger out there then he would be under the Avengers’ protection. These Asgardians are pretty tough, but I don’t want to see you get hurt when someone figures out what it will take to kill Rock of Ages.”

Tony let Steve’s arm go, giving him some space for his words to sink in.

Steve ran his hands through his hair. He had to admit, Tony may have had a point. He wouldn’t know what he would do if Loki got hurt, not if there was something he could have done to prevent it.

“So, what do you suggest?” Steve asked, already knowing the answer.

“Get him to come in.”

“He won’t. He hardly trusts anyone, given all the lies he has been told by his parents. He’s convinced Thor won’t let him speak but will just haul him back to Asgard.” Steve pointed out quickly.
“I think myself, Wilson and Romanoff can keep blondie in check,” Tony said with a shrug. “You could both move in here and set up your own little love nest, knowing that no one will be coming after him.”

Steve smiled at the suggestion, the first real one since he saw the photos. “Ok, I’ll talk to him. I can’t promise it will work. He’s stubborn. It will be his decision, and I won’t force him. That’s the best I can offer, Tony.”

Happy that it was over, Steve once more picked up his gear and headed for the showers.

“Oh and Tony, I’m going alone.”

As soon as Steve left him alone, Tony said. “J, keep a check on the bug I just planted on Cap and tell Point Break we are on.”
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Steve goes to meet Loki

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve didn’t head out straight away, as he knew Loki was on another realm. He had left not long after the time Steve guessed the pictures had been taken and was trying to learn if there was any way to track the Infinity Stone that was still on Earth while it was still dormant. He would be returning the following afternoon and unless a mission turned up, the pair were meeting in Central Park. Of course, Steve felt far less comfortable about them being in public together right now, but he knew Loki would worry if he didn’t show.

Instead, Steve went back to the apartment, intending to relax, but he found that he couldn’t sleep. The next day could very well be a major turning point for him and Loki, hopefully for the better. He kept replaying the events of today over and over, trying to make sense of everything that had happened.

He was disappointed but not really surprised that Loki’s prediction of Thor’s reaction had been accurate. The Thunderer was never going to be interested in what Loki had to say, he was only interested in getting him back to Asgard. Bruce also reacted as expected, trying not to take sides, but also trying to avoid conflict which could bring out the Other Guy. The ones that surprised him was Natasha and Tony. Natasha had certainly been one of the more level-headed of the team, particularly when it came to Loki. Still, he wasn’t stupid, he knew that while he seemed to have Natasha on his side, it had taken a lot of convincing. It helped that once she was told, it was obvious to her that Loki had helped them during the Abomination incident.

On the other hand, Steve was very surprised that how easily Tony had come around, as like Thor he had tended towards the capture and ship off-world without question camp. He was far too reasonable about Steve keeping secrets from him, which made him uncomfortable. He couldn’t deny that the genius’ arguments were not without merit. In fact, it had been things that he thought about himself but had been able to push those worries aside before they had been caught. Now he couldn’t ignore them anymore and Steve felt he had to do whatever he could to get Loki to at least consider the possibility of him coming under the Avengers’ protection. If he couldn’t, then they would have to come up with a new plan to keep Loki safe, even if that meant his lover leaving Earth permanently. That was Steve’s last resort solution, but if need be, it was what he would do.

After lunch, Steve grabbed his jacket to head out to meet Loki. The original plan had been to take a quick trip to Wakanda to see T’Challa and to check if there was any change in Bucky’s condition. It was a trip they had made a few times, helped that it was the one place on the whole planet that they could just be together with the certainty that they didn’t always have to be looking over their shoulder.

He walked towards the park, a spring in his step that he was going to see Loki. It may have been
only two days, but every time the god was away from Earth, Steve missed him a lot and it had gotten worse since they had become a couple. Now, the empty feeling had gone so Steve knew that his lover would already be waiting for him.

Steve entered the park and quickly headed to the spot where he had seen Loki nearly a year before. As he expected, Loki was standing on the verge under the trees. The area was quiet after the lunchtime rush, with only a few lone runners and a young family having a late picnic on the grass. Loki seemed to know that Steve had arrived and turned to face him, smiling and raising his hand to wave in welcome.

The clouds suddenly began to darken overhead and Steve heard a crack of thunder. Before he could move, Thor landed on the path between him and Loki. The Thunderer advanced, holding his hammer before him menacingly. Loki tried to defend himself, but Thor was too quick, grabbing him by the collar. Before he could stop him, Thor had Loki pushed up against a tree and had a pair of cuffs on his wrists that seemed to close by themselves.

His surprise made Steve hesitate for a moment before he made to run to Loki’s side. However, he only took a few steps when a group of Tony’s Iron Legion surrounded him, blocking him from view. The man himself, in full armour, but with his faceplate up, landed inside the circle, just Steve went to start taking out the robotic wall.

“Stand down, Cap,” Tony said, his repulsors aimed at Steve, which made him stop. While it wouldn’t cause any serious damage, without his suit or shield, the impact from Tony’s weapons could well knock him down.

Steve could hear the Quinjet landing and heard Thor though Tony’s Suit communicator. “Stark, I have Loki contained. Please thank the Captain for his assistance.”

“No!” Steve yelled, the words making him feel like he was being kicked in the stomach. He was horrified, knowing that Thor had only said that to hurt Loki. He was sure he could feel that hurt himself, like his heart was being ripped in two.

Steve shoved passed Tony and smashed his fist into one of the legion’s chest-plate. Unfortunately, he managed to free himself just in time to watch as the jet lift off the ground. He turned to see that Tony and the remaining legion also took off, leaving Steve alone in the park, feeling that his soul itself was bleeding.

Chapter End Notes

Ok so the muse has stopped helping me out on this one so there will be a break. It does mean my rewrite of ragnarok is now being written so im hoping that when that is done the muse will come back to this one again so i can finish this. I just hope you can stick with me and I can get the next chapters to you ASAP.
Steve ran all the way back to the tower from the park, ignoring the blast from horns as he tore across the busy streets. He came close to getting hit once, but he didn’t care. All his focus was on getting to Tony and finding out where Loki was.

Bruce was waiting for him just inside the private entrance, clearly there to defuse the situation.

“Steve, calm down, Tony did what he had to do to protect you.” The scientist said, not really sounding as convincing as he wanted to.

“Don’t fool yourself, Banner.” Steve shot back as he pressed the call button. “Whatever his reasons for doing this, none of it was for my benefit. Is he upstairs?”

Bruce nodded. “He just landed. Thor and the jet haven’t come back though, I don’t know where they’ve gone.”

Steve didn’t trust himself to say anything else. He didn’t know how much Bruce may have been involved in Tony’s deception, but he had clearly known about it and that was enough for Steve to be furious at him. So, he simply nodded and hit the button for the Avengers Operations floor.

As the elevator doors slid open, it didn’t take long for him to find Tony, as he was standing only a few feet in front of him, facing Natasha, who didn’t look happy.

“You really think Steve is going to forgive you for this?” She glared at him. “You have just betrayed him in the worst way possible.”

Tony shrugged. “Once things settle down, I’m sure he will see things my way.”

“I wouldn’t count on it, Stark,” Steve said, advancing from the elevator. He was grateful that he seemed to have at least someone who wasn’t defending Tony, although it didn’t prove that she was on his side instead. Steve knew better than to make assumptions when it came to the Black Widow. “Where is he?”

Natasha took a step back, watching the leaders of her team glaring at each other.

“In a very secure location. Where he belongs.” Tony replied, crossing his arms defensively, putting a barrier between him and Steve.
“You had no right to do what you did. You used me to get to Loki, you’ve made him think that I helped you.” Steve said. “Why, Tony, why didn’t you just trust me?”

Tony laughed. “Trust you? Steve, you are so far under whatever hold Loki has over you, you can’t see the truth biting you in the ass. He’s controlling you, using you and until you see that, you’re benched.”

Steve moaned in frustration. “He isn’t controlling me, Tony. I love him. That’s it and he’s doing nothing on this planet other than loving me in return.”

“And we take your word for it? Not happening, Cap.” Tony looked up slightly. “J, let Thor know that the whammy Loki has on Spangles will take longer to pass than we thought.”

“Tony, I need you to tell me where he is. That little stunt in the park hurt him more than you can imagine. And how did you know where to find him?” Steve asked.

“Like Thor said, you were a real help,” Tony replied ignoring the first part of Steve’s question. He reached out and into Steve’s jacket, peeling something from the inside of his upper arm. It was small and made up of a clear material, which looked practically invisible against Tony’s fingernail. “Something that R’n’D was working on before I shut down the weapons division. Amazing what you find when you go digging for things.”

Steve looked at the bug, his mouth hanging open slightly. He tried to think how Tony had gotten it on him until he remembered him reaching out in the gym to grab his arm. Steve had hoped that Tony had simply spotted them together and took advantage. This, however, proved that everything had been planned ahead. Given his own actions, he couldn’t blame Tony for the lie, but it hurt to find out that he had deliberately used him.

“That speech about wanting to help me, it was all a bluff. You weren’t interested in helping me at all.”

“You would never agree to give him up, you’re blind to reason.” Tony shrugged. “So, Steve we are helping you. Helping you see that he has been using you, in more ways than one. He’s sick, making you think you could ever willingly get involved with a megalomaniac.”

Steve saw red at the veiled suggestion that Loki had taken advantage of him and lunged at Tony. He grabbed him by the shirt, lifting him slightly off the floor.

“Don’t you dare. He hasn’t got me under his spell and he hasn’t done anything I don’t want.” Steve growled through gritted teeth.

Tony gripped Steve’s wrist, more for support rather than to try and break the grip. He glared at the super soldier, ‘I bet it felt like that. Did you really think he cared? He took what he wanted and oh man, did he do a number on you? You were a toy, a plaything, an easy lay. How else do you explain falling for the villain?’

Natasha couldn’t believe Tony would bait Steve like this when he was livid, it was practically suicide. Fearing that Steve could hurt Tony, she took hold of Steve’s free arm. “Come on, Cap. This won’t solve anything.”

It might not have been the most convincing argument, but Natasha broke through Steve’s red angry haze. Everything that had happened and Steve still knew that he could never forgive himself if he hurt Tony. He was wrong but that didn’t matter. Steve made sure that Tony was firmly on his feet before he pushed him away gently.
“I’m done, Tony, I’m done defending myself when you don’t want to hear the truth. Unless you’re ready to let him go, just stay away from me. You got want you really wanted; the Avengers are yours.” Steve turned away and headed back to the elevator.

“You’ll be back,” Tony shouted. “You’ll see, when this is over, you’ll know I was right.”

The doors slid shut and the arrow above lit up down. Tony looked to Natasha.

“I wouldn’t count on it,” Natasha said, mimicking Steve before she headed to her room leaving Tony alone.

Loki stood in the middle of the circular cell, glass panes making up nearly all the walls. He had been provided with a cot bed, a small table and chair where he could eat and nothing else. The only area of privacy was the small screened off area for him to relieve himself. The cuffs had been removed but for some reason, he still couldn’t use his magic. It was as if he had been cut off from the world outside the cell. Loki could only surmise that between Thor and Stark, they had been able to come up with a method of interference similar to the cells in the dungeons on Asgard.

“Prove that you can cooperate, brother, and I shall provide you with more comforts. Although I hope we shall not remain long enough for them to become necessary.” A voice from behind him said. Loki turned and saw Thor watching him from the outside of the cell.

“And what form shall my cooperation take, Thor? Carry you back to Asgard.” Loki sneered before turning away again. “I have no desire to leave this realm, so I fear until the Bifrost is repaired, here you will remain. You should have left me alone.”

Thor moved around the outside on the cell to face him again. Knowing that he would continue to do so, Loki sat on the cot instead, his eyes closed. Thor huffed in frustration, which made Loki smile.

“There is nothing for you here, Loki. As I have told you before, you can come home. Mother misses you greatly.”

This made Loki open his eyes. “As I have missed her.” He said under his breath. He looked at Thor again. “And what of the Allfather? Has he told you of how my absence has pained him, that he wished for my return, to welcome me once more as his son?”

He was disappointed, if not surprised when Thor paused before he answered. “Father desires your return. He knows that you belong on Asgard and he has assured me that you will once more have a place at my side.”

Loki raised an eyebrow. “At your side, or in your shadow. And will I have the same freedoms as I had before, will I travel the realms at will? May I come here to him?”

Thor once more hesitated “Of course there will be restrictions. You conspired with our enemies and brought them to our door. You must once more earn our trust.”

“You are saying nothing to persuade me. If I can’t come to Midgard as I please then I have no interest in returning to Asgard. This is my home now, and I will fight to stay here.” With that Loki once more shut his eyes, hoping that Thor would go away if he was ignored.

It seemed that his brother had learnt patience in the last two years. “I tell you Loki, there is nothing for you here. You will find nothing for you with the Captain once your hold on him begins to fade. Return to Asgard and I will not inform Father how you tricked a mortal into your bed through words
or magic. It shall remain between us.”

Loki once more focused on Thor and laughed. “You would resort to a lie to win my assistance. You may not believe it or understand it, but I care for Steve deeply, he is mine as I am his and only death shall part us.”

Thor narrowed his eyes. Then he snorted his disbelief. “You do truly believe that old wives tale of Jotun Soulmates? Loki, it is a myth, it is bad enough that you were taken in by it, but to drag the Captain into dishonour is madness. Have you truly fallen so far?”

Loki stood and advanced to the wall until he could look Thor full in the face. “I know it is true. We have a bond nothing can change. And he loves me, loves me for who I am not for being your brother.”

“And does he share your conviction of your being soulmates? Because I know he does not.”

“You lie.” Loki spat, turning away again.

Thor pulled out his phone and opened an audio file Tony had sent him. Steve’s voice filled the room.

“Look, the whole soulmate thing doesn’t matter to me, I’m not sure that I even believe it myself.”

Loki’s first thought was that the recording was a fake, but he knew his lover’s voice better than he knew his own. Then there was Thor’s comment when he was captured. Had Steve really told them where to find him? Loki knew that he still had hopes that they could come out into the open, so was this his way of forcing the issue?

Thor could see that he had Loki second-guessing his relationship and decided to drive his advantage home. “As I have said there is nothing for you here. If this is how he is feeling about your so-called bond, how long before he thinks the same of his love for you.”

With that Thor left Loki alone, the cameras covering him from every angle.

Loki’s mind was spinning and his anger was building. While he didn’t want to believe Thor, the evidence weighed heavily in his favour. After all, it wasn’t as if his bond with Steve was complete and as there was no doubt in his mind, the problem had to be with his soulmate. His soulmate who could well have betrayed him worse than Laufey, than Odin, than Thor.

Loki’s anger grew until it boiled over in a wave of power, that shattered everything in the room. When everything was little more than splinters, he dropped to his knees and wept.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

Steve tries to find Loki

Steve sat alone in the hotel room, not sure what he was going to do. He didn’t think it was a good idea to stay in his apartment, as he imagined that there would be little chance that Tony would do as he asked and leave him alone. So, after checking that there were no more of Tony’s bugs on him, he grabbed whatever cash he could get his hands on quickly and booked into a cheap hotel that didn’t ask questions. His only means of communication was the back-up phone SHIELD had provided him with. Only a few had the number, including Sam.

It had been nearly a week since Loki had been captured and he was no closer to finding out where he had been taken. Of course, that fact that he had no idea if there was anyone he could turn to or who he could really trust made his job impossibly hard. Pretty much all his bridges had been burnt in the US and so far, T’Challa hadn’t been able to find any trace of Loki though his war dogs.

His lack of sleep didn’t help either. As he expected, his nights were filled with dreams. He had hoped that they would be able to tell where Loki was being held. But something was wrong. The dreams were fuzzy and unclear as if Loki didn’t want him to see where he was, which didn’t make sense to Steve. One thing was certain. Loki’s emotions were coming through loud and clear and he was hurting. It led to Steve only managing a few hours a night before the dreams forced him awake.

His phone rang, forcing Steve out of his thoughts. He checked the screen and saw Sam’s ID. Now he had to decide if he should trust his friend. The call ended and a minute later a voice mail appeared. Steve played the message.

“Steve, what the hell is going on? Stark is telling me you’re screwing around with Loki, that he’s got some sort of spell on you? Talk to me, man. I’ll keep an open mind. Meet me in the coffee shop in Brooklyn you took me too. Three o’clock.”

Steve stared at the screen long after the message was finished. Out of all the Avengers, Sam was the one he trusted the most and as he joined later, had no direct contact with Loki, so less likely to be prejudiced against him. Steve also knew he couldn’t do this alone. He made up his mind and headed for the door.

Steve arrived at the coffee shop just before three and watched as Sam arrived with a familiar looking blonde, although wasn’t sure where he had seen her before. He knew Sam had mentioned that he had got involved with someone before he left to join the Avengers but until now, he didn’t know who it was. Steve hoped that this was the girl in question and not some sort of cop.

Wearing a baseball and glasses (he really needed to come up with a better disguise) Steve followed them into the shop. Sam spotted him immediately, not helped that his own disguise differed only that his glasses were shades. Steve walked over and sat down on the opposite side on the table, which
was far enough away from the other customers that it was unlikely they would be overheard.

There was a moment of silence as they tried to decide who was going to talk first.

“You going to introduce me?” Steve said breaking the ice.

The women spoke before Sam could open his mouth. “We’ve met before, Captain Rogers. My name is Sharon Carter, formally Agent Thirteen of SHIELD, now field agent in the CIA. Sam and I met during the debrief after the Washington incident and have kept in touch since.”

Steve nodded as he finally linked the woman in front of him to the Agent on the bike, nearly a year ago. The fact she was a government agent didn’t help Steve trust her.

“I remember, but I’m sorry if I’m being rude but why are you here? This hasn’t got anything to do you, in fact, you must be pleased to see Loki locked up like the rest of them.”

Sharon smiled. “She always you could be a hard nut to crack. My aunt Peggy sends her love, by the way, and understands if you can’t visit her again anytime soon.”

Sam looked just as surprised as Steve. Clearly, she hadn’t told him about her connection to Steve’s wartime love. “And you were going to tell me this when?”

“When it made a difference,” Sharon replied, reaching her hand out to hold his.

Steve could tell she wasn’t lying as it wasn’t common knowledge that he visited Peggy in her hospital room as often as he could. It had become easier since Loki knew and had teleported him there more than once. This Sharon could only have found out from Peggy.

“I didn’t know she had family that was still alive. I’m glad she has someone. Is she doing alright?” When Sharon nodded, Steve looked back to Sam. “Ok, so the question is now, Sam, why are you here? I imagine Tony has told you in great detail what has gone on.”

Sam nodded. “He did, although he didn’t tell me where he’s got Loki holed up. Not sure what he was hoping I was going to say, but I don’t think he liked it that I didn’t agree with him. I guess I need to hear what has been going on from you. No judging.”

Steve let out the breath he was holding, relieved that his friend was open-minded. “Well, Tony has got some things right. I was hiding my relationship from everyone and I’m not proud of that. But Loki has not cast any spells on me, he hasn’t tricked me, what we feel about each other is real.”

“And what about you being soulmates? Stark was keen to point out that anything that you told him about that was part of Loki’s control.” Sam asked.

“There is a connection between us. You know, right now, I wish there wasn’t, I could get some sleep.” Steve rubbed his eyes. “Look I didn’t tell the others this, but with Loki and I. When one of us needs the other, we get these dreams, it tells what we need to know to help. It’s how I knew where to find him the first time.”

Sam looked sceptical, making Steve laugh. “I know how it sounds but it’s real.” He became serious again. “It’s real. And he’s hurting. And for some reason, I can’t see where he is.”

Sam and Sharon exchanged a look. With a nod from Sam, Sharon pulled a USB from her bag. “This has been circulating around the agencies, apparently someone on the inside got this footage out, showing off that he’s been caught. It’s just the footage, nothing to indicate where he is being held. Stark seems to be keeping that close to his chest.”
Steve took the USB and looked at it. The Coffee shop had a few computers lining the wall. Seeing one free, he went over and plugged it in. There was one video file and after checking it the best he could for viruses, he played it. What he saw broke his heart just that little bit more.

Loki was sitting with his back against the wall of his cell, his clothes in disarray and his hair a mess. Steve could see that his feet, which were bare, were cut and the reason was obvious. The cell was a scene of carnage, with bits of what may have been his furniture scattered around. As Steve watched, Loki suddenly leaned forward and yelled, before slumping back, with a mix of frustration and hurt written all over his face.

Steve swallowed hard and reached out to touch the screen as if Loki could feel it. There were tears in his eyes to see Loki in such a state, but he didn’t have time to breakdown now. After watching the video, Steve knew he couldn’t wait any longer. He had to take whatever help was offered to find his soulmate and quickly. He unplugged the USB and handed back to Sharon, unable to bear seeing anymore. Sam had watched Steve’s reaction and knew that this was real.

“You’re going after him?” He asked already knowing what his friend was going to say.

Steve glanced at the USB one more time. “You don’t have to come with me.”

Sam didn’t even check with Sharon. “We know. When do we start?”
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Steve and Sam find a new ally.

Sam decided that Steve had been cooped up too long in his hotel room and the following morning, dragged him out for a run in Prospect Park. Sharon had reported back to her Task Force Commander and was trying to covertly dig up more information on Loki’s location. While Steve didn’t really have any other options at the moment, he hoped that he could leave Sharon out of the rescue mission. He didn’t want her to end her career if there was another way and Sam agreed, not that he told her that.

The pair had just completed a five-mile circuit with Steve mercifully keeping pace with Sam. He was still out of breath when they stopped for a drink.

“So, Cap,” Sam asked, spraying some water over his head. “You said about the dreams but what else does this soulmate thing actually give the pair of you?”

Steve thought for a moment. He knew this question would likely come up at some point, after all, it wasn’t every day your friend and teammate found out that you have a bond with an alien from another world.

“Well I can’t speak for Loki, but I have had a sense of when he agrees with a decision I’ve made, and I know when he isn’t on Earth. I think there’s more, he told me he was able to use my strength to break the control over his mind after he came through, that was how he knew the truth. Loki knows more than I do and so much has been lost as myths, I don’t think we will ever know how far this could go. We don’t know what will happen when I die, I hope he will be able to move on after I’m gone, I would hate for him to be alone because of how we feel for each other right now.”

Sam looked confused. “I thought Soulmates were like one and only deals isn’t that what the romances are all about.”

Steve shook his head. “That what I tried to tell Tony and the rest. Me and Loki being connected didn’t mean being together in a relationship. We fell in love. Did it help things along, hell yes, but in the end, we made the choice to be together, nothing else.”

Their conversation was interrupted by Steve’s phone beeping, indicating a message. Steve frowned as the only person who knew he was using this number was standing next to him. He pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the message. It had a SHIELD mission authentication code and read:

“Message Alert. Search and Rescue. Meet at the Black Jacket, 5 pm.”

Steve showed the message to Sam. “Only SHIELD Level Eight Agents and higher have access to this number, nearly all of whom went down with Hydra.”

“So, who would have access now and what is black jacket?” Sam asked, grabbing their gear.

Steve smiled. “We are about to visit an old friend.”
Steve stood looking down at the fake grave of Fury, who was known as Black Jacket among the Junior Agents. It wasn’t very original, given the guy wore little else particularly in the field, but there was little harm in the nickname. Sam stood further back by a tree, keeping a watch to see who the mystery sender was.

They saw a black car pull up and Steve found he wasn’t surprised when the window rolled down, showing Natasha sitting in the driver’s seat. After all, if anyone would have got his number, it would be the Black Widow. He nodded to her as she got out of the car and walked over to him, a folder in her hand.

“Good to know that you listened to the gossip around the locker rooms too, Steve.” She said with a smile.

Steve shrugged. “Nick heard it from his office, I bet. So, what are we doing here Romanoff? I know you don’t agree with Tony and what he’s done but that doesn’t mean you agree with me.”

Natasha smiled a little. “Tony is a Jackass, Steve. But you can’t deny that he might have had good reason not to trust Loki. I trust you. I don’t think you that weak-minded that you would fall for what Loki has told you unless you knew it was true. If you think he should be given a chance, I’m here to help.”

Steve looked at her hard. She was a spy, a born liar second only to Loki himself, he was sure, but he didn’t think she was lying now.

“Allright. What have you got?”

Natasha held the folder out to him. “I pulled in nearly all my favours, but I have finally found out where Tony has got your lover-boy stashed.”

Steve took the folder and opened it to find a photo of Loki staring back at him.

The group headed back to Steve’s hotel. The documents from the file were spread out on the bed.

“He’s in a prison codenamed the Raft. General Ross’s brainchild apparently, for when someone classed as enhanced goes rogue. It’s still under construction, but when it’s complete it will be a high-security detention facility, floating most of the time just under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean. The Hulk cell from the Helicarrier was moved there after it was mothballed, and Tony is using it for Loki.” Natasha continued.

“Should’ve known he wasn’t beyond doing a deal with the devil,” Steve said as he flicked through the facility blueprints and other documents, not sure which of them he was referring to. “Where is the drydock located?”

“On the east coast, the nearest town of any size is over a hundred miles away. Whatever we are planning on doing, it needs to be soon, it will impossible once its complete and at sea.” Natasha replied. “Thor is also trying to contact his people every day to see if the repairs have been finished on Asgard.”

“He will want to get Loki away from Earth and me as soon as he can. Loki told me that the chances of them ever letting him leave Asgard again would be negligible. We need to get to him before that happens.” Steve cleared off the Raft blueprints so he could look at them again. Then he looked up to Natasha. “Are you sure you want to do this? If you walk away now, there shouldn’t be any come back but you do this, and it could mean burning all your bridges.”
Natasha shrugged. “I didn’t have many left after SHIELD went down. I’m thinking when this is over, I gotta go figure out where I fit into the scheme of things.”

Steve raised his eyebrow. “That might take a while.”

“I’m counting on it,” Natasha replied with a glint in her eye.

Steve smiled. She was a resourceful woman, and he knew she would land on her feet. “Well, if you need a bolt hole, call me. I’m sure we can squeeze you into ours.”
Steve looked through the field glasses, his eyes fixed on the dry dock where the Raft was close to completion. The site was filled with construction teams as they rushed to get the hull watertight and ready to get the prison and it’s captive out to sea, where it will be much harder for unauthorised personnel to reach. The site was as isolated as Natasha said, with the nearest town over 100 miles away and the only real form of the cover was the ridge Steve was lying on. Natasha was behind the ridge, in a small extraction jet that Steve guessed came from SHIELD, especially as it was equipped with the same stealth technology as the Helicarrier was. The construction teams were driven in from an old army barracks just over five miles away, where Sam was currently living.

They had been there for a little over four days now while Sam had integrated himself into one of the teams. To pay his way through college, he had worked construction so was able to infiltrate easily, especially as he was the least well-known of the Avengers and Natasha had provided him with a fake ID that would fool Fury himself, even including a kind of mask that made him unrecognisable. He hadn’t been able to find anything about Loki as the section of the craft where the cell was located was strictly off-limits to all but security personnel. It hadn’t been that much of a surprise to Steve as his job wasn’t information gathering, but to provide a distraction for Steve to make his entrance to the facility.

While Steve knew that both Sam and Natasha would be willing to be more involved with the extraction, Steve felt that this was something he needed to do alone. After what Thor had said during his capture and the dreams, Steve wasn’t sure how Loki would react to seeing him and would likely react badly to seeing other members of the Avengers. Steve also wanted to keep his friend’s involvement to a minimum not wishing to make their lives more difficult in the future than they were already going to be.

Steve looked through his field glasses again and saw the current shift gathering to get aboard the buses that would take them back to their digs. He scanned the crowd and spotted the face Sam was wearing, looking casually towards to ridge, waiting for a signal. Steve picked up a transmitter and sent a single beep to Sam’s communicator, telling him to do whatever he was planning. He saw Sam smile before leaning in to talk to the man next to him. The man faced darkened. More words were exchanged and suddenly fists were flying. The fight seemed to be a catalyst for something bigger and soon it turned into a full-on riot between fifty men, with the guards rushing to break it up. Steve only had time to hope Sam got away with only minor injuries before he made his move.

As soon as he saw the base personnel moving towards the main gate, he sprinted towards the boundary fence. He knew he would be visible to the cameras at the fence but hoped that those manning the feeds would be focused elsewhere. Increasing his speed, he jumped on to a large stone, using it as a springboard over the eight-foot fence, rolling as he hit the ground and then back up on to his feet. He checked to make sure no one had spotted him, before running his hand over the sheets of metal that made up the external wall. It only took him a few moments to find a panel where the bolts were still loose and had enough give in it to get his hands underneath. Glad that the noise from the gate was deafening, Steve gripped the edge of the panel and pulled it free, before slipping inside.

Inside, the Raft was still far from complete. While most of the internal bulkheads were in place, the rooms themselves were bare, many not having doors or lights. Given that the schedule had them moving the craft to its main location as soon as it was watertight and the engines were fitted, they clearly planned to continue working on the internals at sea.
Steve took a moment to try and guess where he was from the blueprint. He guessed he was in one of the large storerooms. According to the file, Loki’s cell was in the centre of the raft, three decks up. The main elevators were yet to be fitted so Steve made his way to one of the maintenance shafts where ladder ran up the length of the ship. He was lucky to meet no-one coming through the shaft he was in and quickly found himself on the main detention deck.

This deck was more complete, including where the security office was located. Steve was happy to see that it was unmanned. He was thankful for the espionage training SHIELD had given him and it didn’t take long to corrupt the saved files and cut the feeds to the cameras. He knew it wouldn’t take long for them to fix them, so he had to move fast. He slipped out of the room and towards the detention area.

As Steve turned into the final corridor to the cells, he saw a single guard standing at the other end. The rest had gone to deal with the confusion outside, but this guy had stayed to keep at least a minimum eye on the prisoner it seemed. The guard was facing away from him, looking towards a door that headed to the main entrance, thankfully Steve was coming from the other direction where no one was expecting anyone. Steve knew he didn’t have much time, but he also couldn’t rush. He waited until the guard responded to a call over the radio.

“All quiet here. Apart from the screaming every now and again, this guy is like the grave, just sits there.” Steve heard him reply to the unheard call.

Hoping that the seemingly routine report as enough, Steve quietly crept over and quickly injected the poor man in the neck with a sedative that Natasha had provided him with. Steve wondered if there was anything that woman couldn’t get her hands on. He slowly lay the unconscious man on the ground and turned his attention to the door that separated him from his goal. The security lock on the door required a code as well as a handprint recognition. Seeing as he had neither to hand, he decided to use a method preferred by his former teammate. He ran his hand over the door until he found a ridge thick enough for him to grip with his fingers. The mechanism was very secure and it took all of Steve’s strength to break the lock, pulling the door wide enough for him to get through. With one last look to make sure he wasn’t seen, he slipped inside.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Steve finally finds Loki

Steve stopped as he took in the sight that was before him. He had never seen the cell when he had been aboard the Helicarrier, but Bruce had told him about his ‘room’ during their many discussions about the Hulk. He was surprised that SHIELD had been able to develop something that could contain something as strong as Bruce’s alter-ego but wasn’t surprised that they were now using it for Loki. After all, if it could hold the Hulk, it could hold anyone.

Loki himself was still sitting in the same spot he had been in during Sharon’s footage. The cell had been cleared of debris and the cuts on his feet had healed, but Loki himself looked as dishevelled as before. He hadn’t even bothered to clean the dried blood away.

“Loki.” Steve shouted. Loki didn’t even blink, leaving Steve unsure if he was being ignored or couldn’t be heard.

He hurried to the control panel and was relieved to see that they didn’t expect intruders to get this far. The panel had no additional security and it didn’t take Steve long to find the door control.

Loki still didn’t move a muscle as the door slid open and Steve entered. He did however say. “Why are you here?”

The question made Steve stop. He hoped that Loki would be pleased to see him or at least expected him. That Loki questioned him being there was something he never expected.

“Loki, you had to know I would come if you wanted me to or not,” Steve said, his voice shaking a little.

Loki looked towards Steve for the first time. “I knew no such thing. After what you did to put me here. How else would they know where to find me, if not for your betrayal?”

Steve came closer and knelt down next to Loki, but not close enough to touch him. Yet. “I know how it looked and I know what Thor said, but I promise I didn’t betray you. Betray us.”

“Then how did they know that we knew each other? That we shared something more than hatred?” Loki asked, his tone suggesting that he knew Steve told them.

“Because we were seen.” Steve sighed, frustrated. He closed his eyes to calm himself for a moment, then continued. “The day before you left to try and get some more information on the stones, someone recognised you. They took pictures and sent them to Tony. I could hardly deny us being together when they had the evidence in full Technicolor.”

This did seem to make Loki pause, but he simply turned away again. “And then you told them how to find me.”

Steve shook his head. “I defended you. They accused you of manipulating me, of putting a spell on me. I told them it wasn’t true, that this is real, that you weren’t what Thor painted you to be. Tony
came to me, he seemed to want to believe the truth. He wanted to bring you under that Avengers protection before someone tried to kill you.”

Steve edged a little closer. “I wanted to believe him, that we could finally come out into the open, that they could see the truth about you. But it was just so Tony could get a bug on me. I did lead them to you, but I didn’t intend to, I swear to you.”

Loki once more looked at him and Steve could tell that he hadn’t convinced him, even though he must have known he wasn’t lying. “Whether you brought them to me by choice or by their design, it is nothing. Your betrayal goes far deeper than you can imagine. A betrayal I heard from your own lips.”

“I don’t understand,” Steve sounded a little desperate, knowing they didn’t have time for explanations but also couldn’t escape without one.

“Thor provided me with a recording of your denial of our bond you made to your precious Avengers. Not that it was in truth a surprise to me.” Loki sneered, his eyes burning in anger that he seemed only just able to control.

“What are yo……….Tony.” Steve growled. He should have known that the bastard would take every advantage to come out on top. He was so angry that for this first time in years he acted without thinking. Standing up, he threw his shield into the glass was of the cells. The glass was indeed strong as it didn’t shatter, although several large cracks appeared. The shield itself fell to the floor, clattering loudly.

Steve turned back to Loki. “I bet he didn’t play it all. What did it say?”

Loki closed his eyes as if the act of repeating it was painful. “That us being soulmates did not matter to you, that you didn’t believe it was true.”

Steve knelt down again. “I also said that what was most important to me was that I loved you. I wanted to focus on what they could understand.”

“It is not enough,” Loki said sadly. “While it was not your intention, your words came from your heart. You do not truly believe that we are soulmates. If you did, I would not have to face the years ahead without you, I would know your inner thoughts just as you would know mine. I thought I could live with a shadow of what we should have but I find I cannot. Better that I return to Asgard with Thor, than look into your face knowing that we can never be truly whole.”

Steve couldn’t deny what Loki was saying. Up until now, while he had understood that they shared a connection, he tried not to think about it more than he had to. Even after all this time, he still didn’t like that some part of his life was out of his control. But in the last few weeks, being unable to reach Loki had hurt him more than he thought possible. He knew that he couldn’t hide from what he had right in front of him anymore.

Slowly Steve reached out his hand to cup Loki’s face. He half expected Loki to pull away, but after visibly tensed, his lover relaxed into the touch.

“Loki, you are right. I won’t lie, even if I could, and say that I haven’t had doubts about this. This whole thing is so far out of my control, that it was easier to live with the effects it had and to not think about the rest. But since they took you, when I haven’t been able to get to you, it has been the hardest weeks of my life. I can’t hide from it anymore. I know I don’t understand how, but there will be no one else. You do make me whole. You are the man that I love, and you are my Anam Cara, my soulmate.”
Loki didn’t need their bond to know that Steve wasn’t lying. The truth was in his eyes and his words pieced together the broken shards of his heart and soul. He placed his hand over Steve’s which was still on his cheek. Then he ran it over the length of his soulmate’s arm until he reached the back of his neck, before pulling him in to kiss him.

Steve wasn’t sure what to expect from the kiss, but it certainly wasn’t for his vision to white out for a moment, making him feel as if when he opened his eyes, he would see stars. His vision began to clear, and he opened his eyes to Loki’s smiling.

“We are truly one now, my love,” Loki said.

It took Steve a moment to realize that Loki hadn’t opened his mouth. “Loki?”

Still, Loki didn’t speak but Steve heard him. “You can hear my thoughts just as I can hear yours.”

Steve blushed, for some reason feeling very exposed and a little uncertain about Loki knowing every little thing that came into his head.

Loki heard and smiling, said out loud. “Do not fear, I shall teach you to shield your thoughts, even from me when you wish. But there now will never be a time that should we need each other, that the other will not know.”

Thinking back over the last few days, Steve signed in relief on how useful that could be. “Is there anything else?”

Loki didn’t answer straight away but pulled Steve in close, hugging him as if he would never let him go. “Only that I shall not lose you. Now our souls are whole once more, you shall live all the years that I will.”

Steve didn’t know how he felt about that fact he seemed to have gained thousands of years more life but it didn’t matter as they were running out of time before the guards found them. Pulling away, he stood and reached down to help Loki to his feet.

“We need to get out of here. Can you teleport us to the evac ship?”

Loki nodded. “I can when I am out of the cell. There is something within that is preventing me.”

Steve turned and headed from the cell but stopped when Loki grabbed his arm. “Your shield.”

Steve looked at the shield that had in some ways dictated much of his life since he first started as Captain America seventy years before. “I can’t be Captain America and have you. I chose you. Could you send it to the Tower? It belongs with them.”

Loki knew what his soulmate was giving up for them, so was more than willing to agree. He picked up the shield and exited the cell, his clothes and hair morphing to perfect as Steve had always seen him. He held it at arm’s length, and it vanished, on its way to the Tower. He then reached out to take Steve’s hand and a moment later they also vanished.
Tony sat in his lab, unable to focus on any of the projects he had at the moment. Loki was at large once again and the only clue as to who was responsible for the break out was sat on the bench behind him. He stood up and looked at Steve’s shield, which had magically appeared at the Tower thirty minutes before the report came in that Loki had escaped. He knew when Steve went dark, there would be trouble, but he never expected that he would actually be able to find out where Loki was held and that he would come around as soon as the god was off-world.

It wasn’t the last message from Steve he had received, as this morning a package had arrived which including a burner phone and a letter. He had been in two minds about reading it, but his curiosity got the better of him and he opened the envelope.

“Tony, I hope you got the shield. Howard made it and I wouldn’t want it to end up in the hands of Ross. You’ll keep it safe. We all need family and The Avengers are yours. Loki is mine. I’ve been on my own since I was 18. I never really fit in anywhere, even in the army. Maybe it’s because of me being the soulmate for a Jotun and maybe it’s not. My faith’s in people, I guess. Individuals. I have my faith in him and in the time that I’ve known him, he hasn’t let me down. Which is why I can’t let him down either. Hopefully one day you can understand. I wish we agreed on Loki, I really do, but it’s going to take a long time for me to forgive you using me to get to him. I know you did what you believed in, that you were trying to protect me and that’s all any of us can do. That's all any of us should. But I don’t need you to do that, not from him. I do know that there could well be a time soon when you might need help. So, no matter what, I promise you, if you need us...if you need me...I’ll be there......”

Tony put the letter down and picked up the simple flip phone. The memory had one number saved as Steve, which he guessed would be another burner phone. He knew that if he really wanted to, he could try and trace it, but something told him that, for now, to leave it be.

There was only one thing that caught his eye and that was what Steve meant when he said he knew that they would need help. He wondered what he meant by that. He decided that he needed to plan ahead.

“JARVIS, open the suit base design. I think we could do with making some upgrades.”

Steve opened his eyes and smiled as he always did at the sight of his soulmate, curled up next to him on the bed. He leaned over and kissed Loki’s shoulder, an action that earned him a playful slap on the arm as it disturbed his lover’s sleep. Loki then rolled over to look at Steve before pulling him in close and kissing him.

Steve would have loved to stay in bed and see where the kiss led but he had a more pressing need. He pulled back and said. “Sorry I got to pee.”

Loki huffed at not being able to continue but Steve knew not to take it seriously. He pushed the blanket off and headed to the bathroom.

The soulmates had been in Wakanda now for a little over two months. T’Challa had welcomed his friends with open arms, granting them a sanctuary and a home. They were now in living in an apartment a stone’s throw from the palace itself and were regular visitors to the King and his family.
Natasha and Sam had decided not to join them, both still having lives back in America, although
Sam no longer worked with the Avengers. He had begun training as a councillor for War Vets back
home in Washington meaning he could be closer to Carol. They had both told Steve that should he
need them they would be ready to help, for which he was grateful.
Once he had relieved himself, he looked into the mirror. His once clean-shaven look had been
replaced by the beginnings of a beard. He had tried to grow one before the war, but it didn’t look
right on his thin face. Of course, since then he had kept up the habit from the army of shaving every
morning. As he was no longer answered to anyone, he decided to try again, and he had to admit he
was pleased with the results so far.

As he looked at himself, Steve took a moment to reflect on how he had reached this point and what
he had had to sacrifice. In the last two months, he and Loki had tried to explore the bond they shared.
There was still a lot that they didn’t know but Loki had followed through on his promise and was
teaching him to shield his thoughts. Loki was respectful and tried not to pry unless it was wanted.
Right now, the only time their minds were completely open was when they were intimate. Steve
couldn’t put into words the feeling of sharing your lover’s mind while it was totally submerged in the
pleasure he was giving him. It certainly made their sex life interesting.

He still felt a little guilty over what happened with the Avengers. He knew that if Tony and Thor had
not forced the issue with Loki, the situation would have been resolved very differently but that didn’t
mean that Steve refused to accept any responsibility for the end result. General Ross, now retired
from the Army and serving as the Secretary of State, had taken advantage of the split in the Avengers
to petition the UN to make it illegal for the Avengers or any other technologically or genetically
enhanced individuals to operate without their authority. Steve had been declared a wanted criminal
alongside Loki, and a heavy reward was being offered for information. It was a hard pill for Steve to
swallow, but he still knew he had done the right thing.

The Avengers themselves were not the force they were. Not only had Sam resigned but Bruce had
also gone back into hiding, worried that now Ross was in charge, he would once more try to
weaponize the Hulk for his own ends. So the Hulk was running. This meant that even though Nat
had gone back and Tony’s friend Rhodey AKA War Machine had joined the team, they were still
very short-handed with their actions heavily restricted to the point they could hardly breathe without
permission. This made Steve feel as if he had left the job unfinished, that the world was unprotected.
He took a deep breath before coming to his final decision.

Loki was making breakfast when Steve finally left the bathroom. Steve couldn’t help smiling again
and crept up behind his lover to wrap his arms around his waist. Loki, already knowing that he was
there, turned and pulled Steve into a kiss, before running his fingers through his beard. He had been
very happy when his lover had set aside his razor.

“You were a long time, my love,” Loki asked. “I know that you were thinking a while, but I could
not hear what. Your skill improves.”

“I have a good teacher,” Steve replied, kissing Loki once more. He then grabbed the plates of food
and carried them to the table while Loki brought the coffee.

They ate in comfortable silence before Steve pushed aside his plate and said. “Loki I can’t sit idle.
There are still people out there trying to take over the world and the Avengers are fighting with both
hands tied behind their backs, because of us.”

Loki put down his cup and nodded slowly. “I was surprised how long it took them to enter the field
when Doom attacked. I cannot imagine what fool decided that a team of simple mortals were a match
for him, when the Avengers, trained as they are in such things, were kept away.”

“Ross wants to prove they don’t really need them if what Nat tells me is true. Soon others are going to realise it too and they are going to hit harder because of it.” Steve paused and sighed. “I know this isn’t what we wanted but it’s where we are. I want to stay in the fight. T’Challa’s information network rivals SHIELD.”

Loki looked down for a moment before he met his soulmates gaze again. “Steve, this is your calling. We also can’t be sure how many years we have before the Titan arrives and we must be ready. And I shall stand by your side when that day comes.”

Steve was glad Loki agreed with him. “I know. Because I want no one else.”

End Notes

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