Walk With Me
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Summary

In every story Loki had ever heard, humans were the monsters who stole your fur and robbed you of your freedom— and in every one of those stories, the Selkie was doomed to a terrible fate. So when Thor tempts Loki into shedding his coat and he learns that his soulmate walks on land, Loki is sure that he is hurtling toward an unhappy end.

Notes

Our entry into the Frostiron Minibang 2019. We hope you all enjoy!

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See the end of the work for more notes.
Shore

The first story that any selkie is told is the nightmare tale of the humans that walk on land. It is accepted as inevitable that a selkie-child will go to the shore, because the pull to feel the sensation of sand between one’s toes is far too strong to resist. It is ingrained in them, because selkies were never supposed to stay in only one form– they were meant to be creatures of duality, but the cruelty of humans had forced them to keep to only their watery home.

Oh, there were many different tales, and no two were exactly the same. In some, the selkie would go ashore and shed their coat with the intention of returning home before the rising of the sun, but a human would steal their coat and force the selkie to be their spouse. In others, the selkie would be cruelly tricked, promised a hearth and a home only to be refused their coat when they asked. And in others… the selkie chose to stay with their strange human love, only to live a cruel and pain-filled life, separate from the sea and so broken from the loss that they died without fail before the end of their seventh year ashore.

Throughout all these stories, there was that one common thread– to be with a human was to suffer, and by going to land, a selkie was only walking to an early grave.

*Take care on shore, for where men tread, death is sure to follow.*

When Loki heard the stories as a child, he decided that he would never visit the shore. He was curious by nature, and always wanted to *know*– but it was not worth the risk of losing his home, of losing his brother and his freedom forever. He knew that he could content himself with the world below the waves, that he would be more than happy so long as he had his home.

The world of men was dangerous, and it would never be worth the risk– at least, not in Loki’s eyes. There were plenty of selkies who thought otherwise, who stepped upon land for the chance of a rush.
It was accepted to take a human lover for a night, to enjoy a few hours of deadly risk and the surge of adrenaline that came with rolling in the sand. After all, every selkie had their soulmate to find, to settle with and care for. So long as the peculiar dalliances remained only that, then a complaint was never raised.

Loki, however, was never interested in such things. He was more than content exactly where… well, not exactly where he was, because he had always wondered whether there was something more than the life he had as the second prince of the selkies. But he was happy enough, and besides… whenever Loki thought about his future, there would always be a touch of warmth in his heart which reminded him that his soulmate was out there somewhere, just waiting to be found.

Whenever he had spoken of soulmates with his mother in the past, it had been with a certain longing. She had always weaved tales of great love that overcame all else, of people that beat out the odds to be with their match, who were able to hold on despite all that worked against them.

“Of course, life does not always turn the way it does in the stories,” she warned him. “Sometimes, people meet their soulmate at the wrong moment, or in the wrong time. Sometimes, life gets in the way, or perhaps they just want different things and are unable to align. There is no such thing as meant to be, and it does not always work out. But when it does… there is nothing more powerful in any of the seven seas.”

Loki had always listened intently, taking her words to heart. He was practical about it, he understood her warnings for what they were, but… he knew that if he were given the opportunity, he would not let the chance at such happiness to pass.

And, well…

What need did he have for empty, dangerous couplings when he had something so bright to look forward to?

Unfortunately, not everyone in his life thought the same.

Loki had been quietly lounging on his favoured flat rock near their home, taking a break from his princely duties when a shadow fell over the light. He didn’t glance up, already knowing who it was without needing to look. He had heard Thor and his friends discussing a trip ashore that very morning, and he knew that his brother was there only to ask again whether Loki would go.

And, sure enough—

“Brother, do you have any plans for this evening?” Thor asked, settling down beside Loki on his rock, his strong sealtail brushing over Loki’s in a gesture that was both comforting and pushy.

“You know very well that I do,” Loki told him. “I am currently studying how the currents in this part of the sea could be used to—”

“Studying does not count,” Thor interrupted. “Do you have plans to do anything fun?”

Loki didn’t deem that deserving of an answer, and instead returned to his contemplation. Or, well, he tried to, but Thor merely nudged closer, until he was almost pushing Loki off the edge of the rock.

“What?” Loki snapped, turning with a glare.

“You have seemed rather down lately,” Thor said, his expression innocent though clearly attempting to hide a triumphant grin. “And I have an idea of how we might be able to perk you up a
“Thor, no,” Loki cut in. “I know what you’re going to say, and I have given you my answer in the past—”

“You do not have to take a lover, Loki, you know that is not all we do,” Thor replied, rolling his eyes and finally leaning away, but only enough so that they were no longer touching. Loki still felt trapped. “The humans know how to enjoy themselves, and the drinks they concoct leaves one feeling warm and happy. I think that it might do you some good.”

“I will not go ashore,” Loki growled. “And you cannot make me.” He pushed up from the rock and moved his tail in a sharp thrust, feeling the familiar rush of cool water over his fur. He didn’t know where he was going, only that he wanted to get away—

Then Thor reached out, and grasped his arm in a grip that was firm, but nothing Loki could not break if he wished it—though it was certainly enough to at least make him pause.

“Loki,” Thor said, one brow arching jauntily. “You’re not scared of a little dry sand, are you?”

“No,” Loki replied immediately. “I am merely not going to do something so stupid for such a ridiculous reason.”

“Loki, you’ve never seen the shore,” Thor said, his tone gentle now— and Loki realised that he wasn’t just messing around. Loki knew that Thor genuinely worried about him, but in the past he had always been quick to dismiss his concerns.

After all, Loki knew that he was fine— and he told Thor so.

But Thor merely shook his head. “You do not know what you are missing if you have not tried it,” he said. “Come on, brother. Come ashore once. If you decide it is not for you, then I shall never ask again, but only if you come with us this one time.”

“Never?” Loki asked, narrowing his eyes in sudden interest.

“No ever,” Thor confirmed.

Loki put on a show of thinking about it, though truly, he already knew his answer. To never have to put up with Thor’s prodding ever again? It was simply too good a chance to pass up.

“Very well,” he said, making sure that his voice remained reluctant— which, of course, was not difficult to achieve. “Just this once.”

Thor’s triumphant grin was not particularly tactful, but it was infectious, and Loki found his own lips curving up in response.

He still dreaded that coming evening, and he certainly was not looking forward to his first experience on land. But, sometimes, seeing his brother so happy was worth a little bit of discomfort.

Not that he would ever admit that aloud, of course.
Swimming toward the shore was perhaps more difficult than it should have been. Thor and his four friends seemed to have no problems— they were joking amongst themselves, spinning around each other in the water playfully and wearing grins so bright they shone through the water. But Loki felt like his muscles were tensing, like every stroke of his tail was bringing him closer to darkness. The old stories his mother used to tell him echoed through his mind, growing louder as if they were echoing through the shallow water.

*Take care on shore.*

*Where men tread, death is sure to follow.*

By the time they pulled themselves onto the wet sand of the beach, Loki’s heart was beating rapidly in his chest and there was a horrible, disquieting sensation sitting heavy in his gut.

The air felt strange in his lungs, and he coughed at the sudden dryness in his throat. Thor chuckled, and reached over to thump him on the back— but at least he looked mildly sympathetic. The others simply shook their heads and began the task of removing their fur coats, and Sif actually had the gall to roll her eyes.

“You shall grow used to it, brother,” Thor promised. “It won’t take long.”

It was both a relief and slightly irritating that Thor was right, his lungs quieting and accepting the oxygen from the light air rather than the salt water he had breathed his whole life.

That left him with the task of shedding his fur, something else that he had never done before in his life— and a prospect that was somehow far more terrifying.

He stared down at his tail, considering how best to proceed. He had always been rather proud of his fur— it was a silver-grey, though in a darker shade than most, providing him more protection from the dangers that lurked in the depths. Initially, the thought of removing his coat seemed inherently wrong, but the more he thought on it…

Feeling the air in his lungs and the sand against his skin awakened a bone-deep instinct, and he found his hands sliding along his fur almost of their own accord. His sealcoat slipped from his body, falling away easily as if it had been waiting to do so for so very long. He gasped as his single, powerful tail pushed back to reveal two limbs. They were bent in the middle with a knee, and ended in feet adorned with five toes each. He stared in amazement as he spread his toes into the sand, relishing the feel of the grains sliding over his smooth skin. It wasn’t just his tail that had changed— the removal of his coat smoothed all his skin, making it more adapted to dry land than swimming through salt water. His skin was a little darker than the silver-grey he normally wore, but it remained paler than the light gold that Thor’s skin had transformed into. He ran his hands— with his now un-webbed fingers— through his hair, which did not appear to have changed, and then ran them down his sides, feeling the odd sensation of skin that remained the same along the length of his whole body rather than changing to sleek fur.

“Come on, Loki!” Thor exclaimed. “Hurry up! We don’t have many hours, and we must be gone before dawn!”

Loki gathered up his coat, cradling it as precious cargo in his arms as he struggled up to stand on his feet. His first few steps were shaky, but it was as if his legs knew what they were supposed to do. He quickly grew used to the rhythm of one step in front of the other, and followed after Thor as quickly as he could manage.

The five other selkies were all crowded around a pile of rocks— rocks of all the same, creamy
colour, which appeared too purposefully placed to have formed a natural pile.

“It’s called a breakwater,” Thor told him. “Don’t worry, humans don’t come this way.”

Together, Thor and Volstagg moved one of the rocks, revealing a pile of material. The pair exchanged the material for their coats, and then took Hogun’s, Sif’s, and Fandral’s as well, tucking the coats into the dark opening. Thor held out his hand for Loki’s, but Loki held it closer to his chest.

Every nightmare, every horror story he had ever been told always started with a selkie leaving their sealcoat for a cruel human being to find.

“It’s all right,” Thor soothed, reaching a little closer so his hand gently lay over Loki’s fur. It was… it was a strange feeling, an odd, phantom sensation—because that coat was still a living part of him, and to let it go truly felt like he was cutting a piece of himself away to be left abandoned.

But he told himself that he was being foolish, that Thor had tried and tested this hiding place many a time. There wasn’t really anything to worry about.

Still, he didn’t hand his coat to Thor. Instead he moved to the breakwater to hide it amongst the rocks himself, making sure that it was tucked in safely, and could not be easily seen. By the time he turned back, the others had pulled the material over them as if it were a different, human coat.

Thor passed him some of his own, and it only took Loki a moment to work out which parts of his body were supposed to go where. The—clothes, Thor called them—were a little large and hung from his frame, but they at least were not too short, and they did not drag on the ground as they walked.

The final piece of their transformation came in the form of hard coverings for their feet, and Loki found himself saddened by the loss of feeling the sand between his toes. But he understood the necessity, and followed what the others did so that they would all fit in.

Walking away from the beach was hard, and Loki had to force himself not to look back over his shoulder at the rolling waves lest he be tempted to return immediately. He steeled his nerve and focused on placing one foot in front of the other, on following Thor and the others with his increasingly steady steps, watching his feet to ensure that they did not catch on anything and cause him to trip. Without the water to cushion him, he imagined that such a fall might hurt.

Such was his focus that he hardly would have noticed the change in his surroundings if not for the change in the surface his feet were walking over, shifting from sand and grass to a hard grey surface that was much too flat. He recognised it from pieces that had fallen into the ocean, and from the human pipes that ran below the waves. He knew that they must be reaching a town.

When Loki saw his first human, his breath stuttered a little. But Thor clapped a hand to Loki’s shoulder, and firmly reminded him that the human could not hurt him—at least no more so than another selkie, so long as their coats remained hidden. That was why they hid them, for to bring the coats with them would only broadcast what they were, and would incite someone to attempt to attack them for possession of their coats.

With that realisation, Loki considered the humans once again. They walked on two legs, but they could not breathe below water. They had only one form, and they possessed no innate power… compared to a selkie, they were actually rather weak. Their strength lay only in their cruelty, and Thor was right. So long as their coats remained undisturbed, then there truly was nothing to fear.
It wasn’t entirely reassuring, but it was enough to allow Loki to take a more observing glance around at his surroundings. The human buildings all looked small and cramped, with barely any flow from the outside to in. The inside was even worse– the tavern was packed full of humans, jammed in so tightly that it was difficult to move without touching one of them. The humans were, for the most part, rather grimy with the evidence of a long day, and Loki found himself wrinkling his nose at the smell. There was nothing to do about that, however, because Thor was pressing through the crowd and heading straight for the bar, his grin stretching wide over his face. And when Loki paused at the entrance, wondering whether he should find a space for them to sit, Fandral glanced back and gestured for Loki to follow them forward.

“We start at the bar,” he explained, taking Loki’s arm when it was clear that he was not inclined to move without further prompting. “We have no human currency, so we must entice the humans to buy the drinks for us.”

That… sounded relatively interesting, at least from the standpoint of enjoying manipulation. Coercion, after all, can be enjoyable in many forms.

Thor was already speaking to a young girl with light brown hair, and Sif was leaning against the bar as she whispered something to a human man who was even broader than Volstagg.

Honestly. Loki knew that none of them had yet committed themselves to a single person – three of the group had located their soulmate, but Hogun’s had been killed some years ago, Volstagg seemed to have come only for the drinking and Sif had decided to never speak to her soulmate ever again after he had tried to convince her to change the colour of her hair to something lighter. None of them were truly doing anything wrong, but… the humans still set Loki’s teeth on edge. He had spent his whole life planning to avoid them at all costs, and it was difficult to change his mindset with the simple flick of a switch.

When Fandral looked to Loki curiously, Loki merely shook his head, and he was glad when it seemed that they was willing to stay true to Thor’s word, and would not push him toward something he was not comfortable with.

Instead, he accepted the cup of amber liquid that Fandral acquired from… somewhere, and then retreated to the edge of the room, planning to wait the evening out. After all, he only had to weather this for a few hours. Just a few hours, and then they would return before dawn– and then, Loki would never have to suffer another one of Thor’s suggestions that they go ashore again.

Besides, in a way, the humans were… interesting. Loki had never seen one before, and the way that they interacted was different and yet oddly similar at the same time.

It was as he was watching that a certain human caught his eye. He could not say what it was about this one man that that held his attention, but he could not tear his gaze from the tilt of his head, the curve of his neck, the ruffled brown of his hair. He was dressed in black and white clothes that hugged the curves of his body in a manner far more attractive than what Loki was wearing, and his hands seemed impossibly quick as they flew over the surface of a device that he held in his hands.

Loki felt his feet drawing him forward of their own accord, as if he had lost control of his newly formed limbs. He had to step around tables and avoid the drunken humans, but he never looked away, he never grew distracted. He was floating, pulled forward by something deep inside…
Then the man looked up from his hands, his lips twisting in a grimace as he glared at the ceiling, and as Loki caught sight of his face his feet froze to the ground and he came to a sudden, jerking halt.

Oh.

Oh.

If later asked to describe the sensation that flooded his body in that moment, that surged through his veins and itched at every inch of skin, he would not be able to find the words. It was a bone deep knowledge, an instinctive sense of belonging, an overwhelming *understanding* as the whole world began to realign, as pieces of his insides fell apart and then jigsawed back together—

—and then just as quickly as it had begun the sensation was gone, fading to a faint throb somewhere around his heart.

His knees went weak, and he found himself swaying on the spot. He knew that everything remained exactly the same, that fundamentally nothing had changed. There was no compulsion, and the desire to step forward had all but vanished with the completion of his realisation.

Loki had found the match to his soul, and rather than the joy he had always imagined that moment would bring, the only sensations he felt in that moment was a sickness to his stomach and terrible, awful sense of dread.

Loki was silent the entire trip back to the water, and although he could tell that Thor was curious, he was grateful that his brother kept his questions to himself. His mind was reeling, and he did not think that his words would even be coherent, let alone sufficient to explain the maelstrom of emotion that had raged through him from the moment he had realised that he had been cursed.

The moment he had managed to find his footing, Loki had fled the human tavern without a backward glance. He supposed it was lucky that Hogun noticed his leaving and alerted Thor, who had made the others drop whatever it was they were doing – or whoever they were wooing, as it were – so that Loki wouldn’t need to move through the human settlement alone.

Loki hadn’t waited for them— he had moved as quickly as he could, his feet thumping over the ground, ignoring pain lancing up his legs as he focused on getting back home. He knew it was ridiculous, he knew he couldn’t run from something that was lodged so deeply inside, but he couldn’t help but feel like everything would be better, if only he could return beneath the waves.

When he reached the beach, however, he was forced to wait. Thor had been right about the safety of their chosen hiding place, but the weight of the rock was much to heavy for Loki to be able to move it by himself. So, instead, he walked into the waves as he was, feeling the cold saltwater rushing over his skin and wishing that it was flowing over his fur instead.

Thankfully, Thor and the others were not far behind, and he and Volstagg moved the rock away from the crevice where they had stashed their sealcoats with ease. As Loki sat on the sand and pulled his coat on, there was a horrible, sandpaper dryness in his throat. Because…

Well, he had looked forward to finding his soulmate his entire life. It was something he had *yearned* for, silently wondering how much better things might be once he had located his other
But now that he had, all he could think about was that this entire time, he had been blindly hurtling toward a sad existence with no possible hope of a happy ending.

Perhaps he should have known. Every story he had ever heard was a sad one. Selkies, after all, were creatures born to suffer, and were only ever granted happiness so long as they kept their heads beneath the waves— the moment he had taken Thor up on his challenge and placed a foot on the sand, he had sealed his own fate.

Loki, though— well, his fate was worse than the usual selkie fare, because while stories were always sad, there was at least a little hope. But Loki’s soulmate… was a human. It was a curse of the worst kind, something in which no happiness could ever possibly be found.

Even in all the tales he had been told, in those stories which ranged from tragedy to horror, never once had he heard of a selkie doomed right from the very start, paired with one of the monsters that haunted the nightmares of children and adults alike.

His story would likely be one of the nightmares passed down through generations, and there was not a single thing that he could possibly do about it.

When they reached home, all Loki wanted was to curl up and fall asleep, to try and drown away the horror of the impending future. Thankfully, Thor had long since worked out that Loki was not in the mood to talk, and let him go without protest. The others were not happy that Loki had cut their visit short, but Loki ignored their glares and headed for privacy. After all– they, at least, ran only the risk of having their coats stolen. Their freedom would be taken from them, but they at least would have the chance to return if they could get their hands back on their sealcoat. But Loki… well, he didn’t even have that distance promise. If he wanted to be with the one he would, apparently, be happiest with, then he needed to give up his home— and if he wished to remain with his family, he would need to give up the chance of being with his soulmate.

It was a cruel paradox without a possible end, with no way to tease happiness out of the strands.

Oh, people lived without their soulmates, of course— it was an indicator of potential, not a theft of choice.

But now that Loki had found his soulmate, had seen him… it was difficult to get the thought out of his head, to shove away that curiosity. Loki had spent his whole life imagining. Did he want to spend the rest of it wondering about what might have been?

Ha. What might have been. That was ridiculous notion, because there was no chance for a human and a selkie. Even if that was something Loki wanted, it was simply impossible.

Wasn’t it?

It was in that moment that Loki remembered the old story of the selkie who had fallen in love with a human woman. His sad ending had come not because she had stolen his freedom, but because he had been forced to choose between his love and life of suffering away from the sea. A selkie cannot live permanently on land, and a human will drown in the ocean. So even if Loki managed to find some measure of happiness with his soulmate, the happiness would only last the few years that he could survive out of the water. Could anything be worth that? Giving up centuries of life for a mere few years with a human?

Of course, there was another story of a selkie who had not been tricked, but had found happiness
with a human. However, she had been forced to transform back into what she was to save his life from drowning, and after that was unable to return to land. It was another sad ending, another cautionary tale of becoming too involved with humans— but it proved that there was a chance there, the smallest sliver of a chance that there were good humans in the world.

And maybe, just maybe, Loki’s soulmate was one of them.

It would be logical, of course, since if he were cruel he surely would not be the soul best suited to Loki’s own.

Perhaps it wouldn’t be unwise to least learn more about the person who held the potential of Loki’s greatest love. After all, he had survived one trip on land and his coat had remained undisturbed— and Thor and the others had been doing this for years.

One short visit— not to interact, not to try and cause any trouble. Just to look.

Surely that couldn’t hurt.

Unlike Loki’s first journey toward the shore, this time the strokes he made with his tail were swift and sure. It was like now that he had made up his mind, he could focus on his goal and force away the fear. He had considered telling Thor where he was going, but knew that the other would demand that Loki not go alone.

And yes, he knew that what he was doing was reckless, that if he were to become trapped, no one would even know where to start looking for him.

But… it was something that he needed to do.

He told himself that his reason for doing this was to settle his mind, that if only he could see his soulmate once more, it would be enough to tide him over for the rest of his days. That once he had confirmed the human was not a person worth giving up his life for, he would then be able to live the rest of his life in peace.

But deep inside, he knew that was not the truth, and he knew that the flutter in his stomach was not only from the nerves. Some of it, at least, was rooted in excitement.

When he crawled onto the sand his fur slipped from his legs easily, as if now that he had done it once the difficulty had melted away. It still took a moment for him to steady his footing, but soon he was stepping over the cool sand toward the breakwater.

That, of course, was where he encountered his first problem, for the rock was much to heavy for him to move by himself. He could shift it just enough to be able to pull out some of the clothes, but there was no way he would be able to properly stash his coat— but he knew that he could not risk taking it with him, either.

Cautiously, he glanced about, checking for evidence of humans. There were plenty of footprints over the sand, and he could see pieces of food packaging around— an unfortunately familiar sight, since plenty of it had made its way into the sea.

But other than that… there was no more evidence of humans, nothing to indicate that there would be any on the beach before dawn. For one night, his coat should be safe.
He folded it carefully and placed it as far between the rocks as he could. It was out of sight unless one was right above it, and besides. Thor had been hiding clothes under those rocks for years.

The chance of it being disturbed was very slim, and the chance to see his soulmate outweighed any further concern over the risk.

He kept his steps slow and cautious as he made his way toward the human settlement, staying to the very edge of the road so that the wheeled vehicles did not crash into him and cause him injury. He didn’t know much about human customs beyond what he had been taught by his schoolmasters, and while he understood it was unlikely that his soulmate would be in the exact same place as the night before, he did not know where else to start looking.

Thankfully, it seemed that luck was on his side.

The man was sitting in the same stool as he had been the night before, his head bowed. He was staring into his glass of amber liquid as if it held all the answers of the universe, swilling it around in circles so that the ice clinked against the side.

He looked… sad.

Completely invalidating every reassurance he had given himself on his swim to shore, Loki allowed his feet to draw him toward the bar, sliding into an empty space beside the man. He kept himself angled away, and didn’t draw any undue attention. He ordered the same drink as he remembered Thor had the night before, his voice confident despite the turmoil inside. His skin felt far too warm, but he kept his gaze resolutely ahead, refusing to give in to the urge to turn.

Even when he heard the shift of material at his side, even when he felt the prickle at the back of his neck that let him know he was being examined by a piercing gaze, he tried not to let the human know of his interest– at least, not until the human spoke first.

“Hello,” the human said. His voice was quiet, and there was no indication that Loki was the one he was speaking to.

“Hello,” Loki said, just as quietly.

They considered each other for a moment, both equally curious. Then the man held out his hand, his fingers straight, palm facing to the side. Loki stared at it for a moment, unsure at first of what he was supposed to do with it– but he took a guess, and lifted up his own. The human’s fingers felt warm against his own, and he curled them together so that they were holding hands.

Then, having guessed that it was a human gesture of greeting or introduction, Loki met the man’s brown gaze with a warm smile. “My name is Loki,” he said.

The man had seemed surprised when Loki had accepted his hand, but he didn’t draw away. “Loki,” he echoed, turning the syllables over as if he found Loki’s name pleasant to say. Loki certainly found that he enjoyed the way the human said it. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Loki waited for a moment, to see if anything else was going to be said– but the human merely offered a small, awkward smile, his eyes flicking down to where their hands were still clasped.

“It’s nice to meet you as well,” Loki said– and he let the last word trail off, raising his brows as further indication that he was still waiting.

Did humans not have some kind of reciprocal etiquette when it came to introducing themselves? Was he to be matched with a disrespectful cur?
“Don’t…” The man tilted his head, his brow creased in confusion. “Don’t you know who I am?”

That felt like a loaded question—more than just a belief that they had met before. For a moment, Loki wondered if he was asking whether Loki knew they were soulmates— but of course, that question was redundant. They had both seen each other now, so they both had been through their realisation. Loki had already seen in his eyes, in the way that he had considered Loki with interest, that this man was intelligent. He must have already deduced why Loki had sat next to him in the first place.

So, instead of thinking of a proper answer, Loki simply tilted his head and arched an unimpressed brow. “Should I?”

For a moment, the man simply appeared to be stunned—then his expression was awash with something bright and cheerful.

“No,” he said, the word punctuated with a delighted laugh. “No, I suppose you shouldn’t. My name is Anthony.”

Loki’s smile was smaller than Anthony’s, but no less true. “Then, I am glad to meet you, Anthony.”

The conversation that followed was easy. There was nothing stilted, nothing awkward. Their hands remained entwined, resting on the bar between them— and even though Anthony continued to glance down in bemusement every now and then, neither of them wanted to move their hands away.

It was a good hour before they even paused, and even that was just so that Anthony could order another drink. He stalled for a moment after, and glanced to Loki’s own tankard, as if wondering whether he should ask if Loki wanted another, as well.

“You haven’t touched that,” Anthony said.

Loki wrinkled his nose. “I don’t care for it,” he said. “I just…”

“Needed an excuse?” Anthony asked.

Loki grinned.

“You know what, never mind,” Anthony said, looking again to the tender. “Don’t worry about that drink, we’re leaving.”

“We are?” Loki asked.

“Yeah,” Anthony replied. He threw a pile of human currency onto the bar, and then he stood and tugged at Loki’s hand. “Come on. Let’s go somewhere a bit quieter.”

And Loki, drawn in so easily by that bright smile, followed.

The hours that followed were easily some of the best of Loki’s life. They walked through the town first, every step feeling easy and buoyant until Loki no longer even had to think about it, the motion of walking coming just as naturally as it was to be with Anthony.
Because, even though they were ill matched, even though Loki was talking with the monster of every selkie-child’s nightmares, even though this was little more than a horror story and Loki was no doubt hurtling toward an unhappy end– it felt like it was natural.

Even though all they did was walk, Loki found that he was enjoying himself. It wasn’t the thrill of being on land, in a place rife with danger, as his brother likely would have said. And it wasn’t even the fact that he had finally found his soulmate, after so many years of waiting. It was just… Anthony himself. And Loki quickly became lost enough in the conversation that he lost track of how much time had passed.

When the chill grew too much for Anthony, the human offered hesitantly that they return to where he was staying, asked whether he could try and find a drink that Loki would like.

Loki cast a glance over his shoulder, toward the direction of the sea, back toward his home. But the hesitation was fleeting, because… Anthony was intriguing, even more so that Loki had ever imagined that he could be. Even though Loki remained a little unsure, he knew this was something he couldn’t allow to pass him by.

And besides– he enjoyed talking to Anthony. If he went home now, he would merely have to face questions from his brother – if Thor had even noticed his absence – and then he would be left alone again, either to his duties or to entertain himself while he watched time pass him by.

Should he not enjoy this moment for as long as it lasted, even if it was to end badly?

So he turned away from the direction of the sea and looked to Anthony instead, his lips curving up into a smile.

Anthony’s room was inside a tall building, right at the very top with wide open windows. Loki was glad for them– it made the room seem larger, and far less constraining than the bar had been.

“It’s not much, I know,” Anthony said, shrugging his shoulders. “Normally I’d be somewhere better, but of course Pepper had to pick this tiny place to banish me to—”

“You’re banished?” Loki asked, alarmed.

“Yes,” Anthony groaned, throwing himself onto the couch in the centre of the room, throwing a dramatic arm over his eyes. “Apparently I ‘work too hard’ and ‘need a break’, something about sea air or whatever, I don’t know. So she threw me up here to the middle of fucking Nowhere, up to the Scottish highlands because apparently freezing my ass off and suffering a lack of ability to get my hands on any decent tech is just what I needed to calm myself down.”

“Her plan appears to have worked well,” Loki commented, and Anthony rolled his eyes.

“Exactly, right? Anyway, this place was the best Pepper could manage in the area she wanted to dump me to—”

“You’re banished?” Loki asked, alarmed.

“Exactly, right? Anyway, this place was the best Pepper could manage in the area she wanted to dump me into.”

“I don’t think it’s so bad,” Loki tried. Of course, this was the only human settlement he had ever visited, and he couldn’t truly say that he liked it– but it wasn’t entirely horrible, either.

Anthony, however, did a double take, his face going pale. “Oh, crap,” he said. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to talk down on your home or anything, I, uh. It’s lovely, really—”

“Please,” Loki chuckled. “Don’t hurt yourself. I’m not actually from these parts, anyway.” At least, he wasn’t from the settlement. His home was not far, but Anthony did not need to know that.
“I didn’t think so,” Anthony said, sighing with obvious relief, and flashing Loki a smile. “Different accent.”

“I am rather interested by the fact that you would have said those things anyway, even if I were,” Loki said. “Do you often go around insulting people’s homes on the first meeting?”

“No,” Anthony said immediately, almost spluttering, “Not... always?” Loki couldn’t contain his laugh, and Anthony narrowed his eyes. “Oh, you asshole.”

From that point, they talked for hours, crossing through any and every topic, probing each other to test boundaries, learning how far they could push. It was only after Anthony had finished telling a story which involved his friend Rhodey, a lizard, and six golden necklaces which’d had Loki roaring with laughter, and when Loki went to tell an entirely dissimilar but far more hilarious story about Thor that he realised they had been talking all night.

He paused mid-sentence, remembering all the warnings, all the reasons why he should never stay on land past dawn.

“Is everything okay?” Anthony asked.

“I should go,” Loki said, glancing to the windows to see that the sun was already beginning to stain the horizon with a touch of orange. “My family will be wondering where I am.”

“What, have you got a curfew?” Anthony teased.

Unlike during the rest of the night, Loki did not rise to the bait. “Something like that,” he muttered.

Anthony seemed to turn that over in his mind for a moment. “Can you call them?” he asked. “You can borrow my phone, if you want. Let them know you’re alright. Maybe then… you could stay a little longer, if you wanted?”

Loki shook his head, not wanting to explain why a phone call would not work.

But then… Thor would probably not be worrying at all. It wasn’t rare that Loki would find somewhere private, so that he could do as he wished without being bothered by any of the other selkies, and he would often hide away for more than a few days on end. His mother would likely be the first to notice his absence, but she had been busy of late, taking on more duties as his father grew older. He could stay a little longer, and not be missed.

His coat was hidden well, and he hadn’t suffered any ill effects from being on land. It would be an opportunity to learn more about humans, to learn more about the world above the waves. Perhaps that knowledge would come in handy one day.

And, by staying longer… not only would he grow to know his soulmate better, but maybe his soulmate might come to understand him.

All of these excuses, all of these thoughts simply led to a single, indisputable fact.

Loki didn’t want to return home— at least, not yet.

“One more day shouldn’t hurt,” he said.

And as a bright, delighted smile stretched over Anthony’s lips in response, Loki was sure that he had made the right decision.
Sleeping on land was rather uncomfortable. Anthony called down to the desk of the building they were staying in, and had some extra blankets brought up to be spread over the couch. Anthony did offer to take it himself, but Loki wasn’t willing to oust him from his bed.

Thankfully, the number of blankets was enough to dispel some of the oddness of feeling only light air over his skin instead of the weight of the sea, but it wasn’t quite enough to make him feel normal. But even though Loki’s sleep was restless, he still met Anthony with a smile when the human rose several hours later, excited to continue their conversations.

The day was as simple as the night before, and Loki didn’t want his time with Anthony to come to an end– but as the sun lowered once again, Loki knew that it must– at least, it had for now. He would need the cover of darkness to be able to safely return to his preferred form, because he could not risk a human seeing him don his fur. So once he had finished the food that Anthony had ordered them and there was a lull in the conversation, Loki drew in a breath and announced his intention to leave.

Anthony tilted his head, his eyes suddenly worried. “Why?”

“I must go back to my family,” Loki said. “It has been a full day, now, so I must. They will be worried.”

This time, Anthony did not try to argue, though… he seemed almost concerned.

“It’s not far, is it?” Anthony asked. “Will you get back late?”

“No,” Loki replied, the small smile that had become so common those last few hours once more painting his lips. “It isn’t far at all. I shall be fine.”

Anthony nodded firmly, a sharp movement that betrayed the feeling behind it– though there was still something hopeful in his gaze.

“I’m supposed to go home tomorrow, but… I’m going to stay here a bit longer,” Anthony said. “I… I would like to see you again, Loki.”

And even though it would mean coming back on land, even though it would mean leaving the sea again, breathing air and walking on two cumbersome feet rather than slipping through the water with strong strokes of his tail, Loki knew that he wanted to see Anthony again, as well.

It wasn’t quite a longing, not yet anything powerful– but it was stronger than mere curiosity, as well. Potential. Loki was interested, he liked Anthony, and he wanted to see where this might go.

So he nodded, and he said, “I would like that, as well.”

Anthony grinned at that, and grabbed a notepad from the coffee table, scribbling something down. Then he tore the sheet away, and held it out for Loki to take.

“I still have no idea how you’re surviving in this day and age without a cell phone,” Anthony told him, “But if it takes longer than you’re expecting, and you come back and I’m not here– or even if you just want to talk. Call me, okay? Whenever.”

Loki curled the paper in his hand, not needing to look, knowing already that Anthony had written
the number which could be used to reach his phone. But he also knew that it was useless to him– it
would be destroyed by the damp of the beach if he left it in the breakwater, and he could hardly
take it home with him.

But he tucked it into the pockets of his jeans nonetheless– jeans that were too short, for they were
clothes that Anthony had let him borrow when they had woken, since he’d brought only the single
set with him from the beach.

Their parting felt easy then, because Anthony seemed content with the promise that Loki would
stay in contact, and Loki did intend to return. It wasn’t a goodbye, not really– because they would
see each other again, and they would be able to pursue this thing between them, to see just where
they could end up.

As he walked back to the beach, Loki pulled out the paper to read over the numbers, running his
fingers over Anthony’s writing as he committed them to memory, hoping that, at least, would be
enough.

He was focused enough that he almost did not notice where his feet were taking him, until he heard
the crash of waves over the shore– and then he glanced up with growing excitement, unable to curb
the sudden thrill that the sound of the sea was able to spur inside him.

After spending the whole night and the better part of the day on land, the sight of the shore was a
welcome one. Loki breathed in the salty air eagerly, his feet speeding up as they brought him
closer to the swooshing waves. He grinned when his toes curled into wet sand, cool water washing
around them, and just stood there for a while.

He found that he wasn't all too eager to let go of his legs and take on his fur again. The time he
spent with Anthony had been incredibly wonderful and easy, and Loki was already looking
forward to seeing him again. He wasn't used to having someone who matched him so well and kept
up with him so effortlessly– at home, Thor was the one who understood him best, and Loki always
felt that that was only because they were brothers and had to know and understand each other,
somehow. With Anthony, there were no strained conversation or feigned smiles. They didn't talk at
cross purposes, they actually heard each other and they wanted to hear each other, because what
the other had to say actually mattered to them.

Loki would go back to Anthony as soon as he could, but first he had to return home. Thor and their
mother were probably worried about where he was, and Loki hadn't forgotten them. Therefore,
telling Anthony that he had to go and talk to his family had not been a lie, but it had still felt like
one. Loki knew that, if he wanted to see Anthony again regularly, he would have to tell him the
truth.

But well, they had time for that. They had to get to know each other properly first, then Loki would
tell Anthony everything.

Loki turned away from the sea and made his way toward the breakwater. He was still smiling
when he reached down between the rocks, but that smile faded quickly enough. His breath caught
in his throat and his eyes widened, hands moving frantically as he scrabbled over stone, reaching as
far between the rocks as he could, scratching his fingers and the skin on his arms.

There was no denying it.

The hiding place was empty.

Loki’s vision blurred and he couldn't remember how to breathe. He just stood there and stared at
the spot where he had put his fur, and after some time he dropped into the sand. His mind was blank, couldn't process what this meant because it didn't make any sense. His coat couldn't be gone. He had put it here, it had to be here somewhere, it couldn't– he couldn't not be able to return home. Loki wanted his fur back, he wanted to get rid of these rotten legs and swim again. The sand was too hot against his skin, the air hurt in his lungs, he didn't want to stay here.

His coat was gone. The sound of the waves was mocking him, and his coat was gone.

Loki knew the stories, of course. It always went like this. Why was he surprised? Why had he thought, even for one single moment, that leaving the sea was a good idea? It had been a horrible idea. It had cost him his life. Somebody had stolen his coat, of course somebody had stolen his coat, and whoever had it would force him to—

Whoever. Anthony. That was the first clear thought that ripped through Loki's mind, Anthony. Because who of the wretched humans in their wretched village had the biggest interest in forcing Loki to stay on land? Who of them knew Loki at all? He had been very careful, he hadn't talked to anyone but Anthony and he hadn't given any hints, but maybe… Anthony was a clever man, maybe he had figured out that Loki wasn't who – or rather what – he pretended to be. Maybe Anthony had found a way to steal Loki's coat, to have it be taken away.

Loki's soulmate was a human, after all. And humans were not to be trusted.
Loki didn’t know how long he sat there, in the sand by the empty hide-out where his fur had been. But eventually he forced himself to get to his feet—feet that he hated, suddenly. Every step he took stung, but he kept walking anyway, stoically making his way back to the human settlement.

Anthony lived in a place he called a ‘hotel’. Loki ignored the odd looks other humans gave him as he trekked the familiar route through the corridor. He knew that he must look very out place with his sandy clothes and haunted eyes, but he couldn’t care less. He was livid when he finally knocked on Anthony’s door, willing the happy flutter in his chest to stop, because it was not the right time to get excited about seeing his soulmate.

Anthony opened the door, his eyes widening when he saw Loki. They skimmed Loki’s frame, getting caught on his messy hair and clenched fists. His worry was immediate and intense—Loki could see it in his face.

“Loki? I thought you wanted— What’s wrong, are you—”

“Don’t you dare ask me what’s wrong,” Loki hissed, and Anthony’s eyes grew even rounder. Loki shoved him, making Anthony stumble backwards, and firmly shut the door behind them. “You know exactly what’s wrong. Where is it?”

Anthony stared at him. “Where is what? I don’t understand, what—”

“My coat! You stole my coat, I know you did!”

“Your— But you weren’t even wearing one! Why would I—”

“Don’t take me for a fool!” Loki spat, grabbing Anthony by his shirt and slamming him against the wall. “Do you think I don’t know the likes of you? I’m not naïve! Give it back. I will not stay with you, I would rather die than—”

“Hey hey, no, hold on a second, I have no idea what you’re—”

“Give it back!” Loki shouted again. He glared down at Anthony, his hand firmly keeping him in place, and swore to himself that he would not back away, that he would get his coat back, whatever it took.

Anthony just stared at him for a moment more before holding up his hands and speaking in a calm but firm tone. “Look,” he said. “Whatever you think I took from you, I didn’t. I don’t have it.”

Loki wanted to accuse him of lying. He wanted to shake the truth right out of him, wanted to hear him say what he did. But Anthony just looked at Loki with wide, innocent eyes, obviously confused and… scared, maybe, just a little.
Loki frowned, his blood rushing in his ears. “You don’t have it,” he echoed, his voice too quiet.

Anthony shook his head. Loki let go of his shirt, unable to deny that Anthony wasn’t lying at all. He didn’t have it. He hadn’t stolen Loki’s coat, he didn’t have it. Someone else did, then. But that someone could be anyone.

Loki cursed and turned away abruptly. He wanted to storm out of the room, but he started swaying as soon as he moved, the room spinning around him. Anthony’s hands kept him from falling.

“Woah, Loki, okay, come– come on, sit down. Here.”

Loki was pushed down until he sat on a soft surface, but he barely noticed. Anthony sat down next to him and put his arm around his shoulders, his warm hand rubbing carefully up and down Loki’s arm. He gave Loki some time to catch his breath, then spoke up again.

“Tell me what happened, Lo. Slowly, okay? I want to help. Whatever’s wrong, we can fix it.”

Loki swallowed, his fingers digging into his pants. He hated these pants. He didn’t know what to say, but in the end, the words came on their own. “I can't go home.”

Anthony was silent for a moment, waiting for Loki to elaborate. Then he asked, “Why not?”

“Because…” Loki trailed off. He had no idea how to explain this. He hadn’t wanted to explain this so soon, he thought that he would have more time to prepare.

“Is your family not– not okay with us being soulmates, or something?” Anthony asked, his tone very careful. “Is that it?”

“No.” Loki's voice was hoarse, so he cleared his throat. “No, I– they do not… They don’t even know yet.”

“Aren’t you scared to tell them? If you want me to come with you—”

“No,” Loki said again, shaking his head. He almost wanted to laugh. This had to be a very bad dream. “It’s not that, even though I…” He was scared to tell them, he was, but that was really not the point right now. “I can’t go home,” he repeated, his throat tightening. “Somebody stole my coat.”


“I hid it on the beach,” Loki whispered.

“And you need it to go home?”

Loki pressed his lips together and nodded again. He could feel Anthony staring at him, but didn’t dare to meet his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Anthony said, sounding helpless and confused. “But I really don't understand. What, uh… What kind of coat are we talking about? Why is it so important?”

“I’m not human,” Loki said. The words fell from his lips too quickly, and appeared to stun Anthony speechless, his eyes wide and his lips parting.

It took a while until he said, “Not… human.”
Loki still couldn’t meet Anthony’s gaze, and the single word tore from his throat in a coarse whisper. “Selkie.”

“What?”

“I am a selkie.”

It was silent for a long, long time. “Would it be very rude if I googled that?” Anthony asked eventually. There was an almost hysteric edge to his voice, but he tried to mask it with humor.

Loki shook his head. He knew what Google was by now, just like he knew that the device Anthony pulled out of his pocket was called a phone. Anthony did some very quick research, and Loki waited. He closed his eyes and tried not to think. It was the only thing he could do, otherwise he would have fallen into a panic. He didn’t want to panic. That wouldn’t help him.

“Loki.” Anthony sounded hesitant, and maybe a little bit suspicious. “This isn’t a prank or something, is it?”

*I wish it was.* “No.”

Anthony didn’t say anything, and after a while Loki forced himself to look at him. Anthony was staring at him, a crease between his confused eyes, his phone still in his hand.

And Loki wanted to feel safe with him. Anthony was his soulmate, Loki should be allowed to feel safe sitting next to him, should be allowed to trust him. And he did, he did trust Anthony, and he knew that he was telling the truth, but Loki still felt—naked, somehow. Lost. Even the soothing presence of his soulmate couldn’t change the fact that his coat was gone.

“All right,” Anthony said, sudden and fierce determination melting the uncertainty in his expression. “Let’s go to the beach, then.”

“Why?”

“To look for your coat. We’re gonna find it.” Anthony stood up and pulled Loki onto his feet, keeping his hand on Loki’s arm to make sure he remained standing. “Don’t worry, okay? Everything will be fine. I’m with you.”

Loki wanted to say that their being together was the reason Loki had lost his coat in the first place, but he bit down on the words in time. It wasn’t Anthony's fault, it was Loki’s own. He should have known better.

“Hey,” Anthony said, reaching down to take Loki’s hand. “We’ll fix this. I’m good at fixing things.”

Loki couldn’t help it— one corner of his mouth twitched up into a small smirk. “I know.”

They drove to the beach in Anthony’s odd vehicle. Loki led his soulmate to the secret stash of clothes, which was dangerous, he knew, but he was so tired. He couldn’t bring himself to care about how he shouldn’t let Anthony in on these secrets, and besides— Anthony already knew, anyway. And he was a firm, soothing presence at Loki’s side, and it didn’t seem like he was angry that Loki had accused him. He just listened patiently as Loki painstakingly described his coat, and then he went to look for it himself.

Of course, he couldn’t find it, either.
It left them standing on the beach, helpless and clueless. Loki had turned away from the sea and tried not to listen to the waves, his arms firmly wrapped around his middle as he tried to hold himself together. He was freezing and didn’t know why— the coldness of the sea had never bothered him before, so the coldness on land shouldn’t, either. But he was cold, and his legs were tired, and he didn’t want to stay on his feet anymore.

He didn’t know what to do.

“It really isn’t a prank, is it?” Anthony asked, making Loki look at him. Anthony was frowning, and while he didn’t seem confused anymore, he did look a bit… shocked. “You really are a…”

“Selkie, yes,” Loki finished curtly. “Well, I was. I am stuck in this skin for now, it seems.”

“And you don’t want that.”

“Of course I don’t,” Loki snapped, and Anthony lifted his hands, trying to soothe him.

“Sorry, I know it’s— hard. But I’m still trying to understand what’s going on, cut me some slack.”

Loki huffed and looked away. He didn’t want to be angry with Anthony, because he hadn’t done anything wrong. He was just trying to help, and Loki needed him.

For without Anthony, Loki would be completely and utterly alone.

The silence stretched into minutes. Eventually, Anthony came over to Loki and carefully touched his arm. When Loki didn’t protest, Anthony wrapped his arm around Loki’s shoulders, and Loki couldn’t resist leaning into the embrace.

“Come on,” Anthony said softly. “You can live with me as long as this isn’t sorted out. We rest a bit, and then we start looking for your coat, okay?”

Loki nodded.

It wasn’t like he had a choice.

Over the course of the next week, they searched everywhere that they could. They started with the beach and then worked their way out, scouring every inch of sand, every rock and dune, in every bush and under every bench. Anthony used his phone to check the internet, searching that vast place for any mention of a selkie, or of a sealskin put up for sale.

But no matter how hard they looked, they never found a thing.

Loki was beginning to grow disheartened. In the beginning, with Anthony’s optimism shining so bright, Loki had been so sure that there was at least a chance. After all, Anthony’s ignorance of what he was indicated that the selkies’ attempts at secrecy these past decades had proven successful, and the humans had forgotten what they were. Maybe, the human who had stolen his coat did not realise what he had, and had either thrown it away or would try to sell it somewhere.

Either way, Anthony at least seemed sure of their ability to find it, but as time wore on, Loki began to feel shrouded in doubt, weighed down by the future that was pressing upon him. And Anthony, of course, noticed.
“I think we need to do something fun for once,” Anthony said. “All this searching plays on the mind, you know? Maybe if we just, get out, do something else, maybe it’ll refresh us, and spark something that we missed.”

“I thought that was your Pepper’s reason for sending you here,” Loki pointed out, not moving his gaze from the ceiling, not changing his position from where he was splayed out over the couch.

“You know, Pepper’s ideas are usually good ones,” Anthony replied. “I mean, she made me come here, and that was how I found you, wasn’t it?”

Despite his mood, those words sent something warm blooming through Loki’s chest, and he turned his head to pin Anthony with a sarcastic glare that was mostly meant to hide something else.

“What would we do?” he asked, knowing there was little point to staying stubborn– not because he thought Anthony would go against his wishes, but because he knew Anthony would be able to convince him sooner rather than later regardless.

“I was thinking of heading out for dinner?” Anthony said, appearing nervous for a reason that Loki did not entirely understand, because they had dined together every night since Loki had been forced to stay.

So of course Loki had agreed, because what reason did he have to do otherwise? He would be spending the evening with Anthony, and if it was in a place that Anthony would prefer over the hotel room, then Loki was not going to say no.

At the restaurant, Anthony had ordered something called ‘haggis’ and dared Loki to eat it– and then had watched wide-eyed as Loki had done so, not seeming to believe that it was actually rather delicious.

Loki only managed to convince Anthony to try it through manipulation and bribery, and afterward, he knew that Anthony was only attempting to remain stubborn when he said that he did not enjoy it– but he allowed him to keep his pride, and only responded with an arched brow.

All in all, the evening was a pleasant one, and Loki found himself thinking that Anthony’s friend Pepper truly did give good advice– for he was almost able to forget that he was not there entirely by his choice. At least until he heard his name called by a familiar voice while they were on their way back to the hotel, stopping him in his tracks.

Loki’s ears pricked, sure that he had imagined things. Anthony paused when Loki did, but Loki hardly paid him any notice, not able to with the sudden surge of emotion that rushed through him, the sudden yearning for all he had left behind.

“Thor?” he asked, turning, searching the dark street until he found a familiar face framed by blonde hair. “Brother?”

“Loki!” Thor raced forward, his steps long and lumbering, not quite matching the proper length of his stride. Loki realised then that for all the numerous times Thor had been on land, he had not ever stayed long, and Loki was already the far more graceful of the pair when walking on two feet. Yet the sight of him was near enough to bring tears to Loki’s eyes, and he ran forward to meet his brother, throwing his arms around Thor’s shoulders and not caring of what any of the surrounding humans would think.

“Whatever are you doing here?” Thor asked, holding Loki tight enough that Loki almost couldn’t breathe. “Mother has been worried sick. We were afraid that you had been harmed, and then
Heimdall said he had seen you swimming toward the land one week ago, and I realised that you must have gone ashore. What happened, Loki? Why haven’t you come back?” Thor’s voice was strained, as if he knew exactly why but was too afraid to give it voice, was still hoping that he was wrong.

The reminder of what had happened was sudden and fierce, and Loki shoved Thor away from him with all the strength he possessed.

“You must go,” he said firmly. “You must, you can’t stay here!”

“Loki?” Thor asked, his frown deepening into something scared. “What’s wrong, what’s happened?”

“My coat,” Loki whispered harshly. “It was stolen. There is a thief, you must go back, you must go, Thor, lest they steal yours as well!”

He expected Thor to flee, to turn tail and run as fast as his legs would carry him, back to the breakwater, back to the sea. But, of course, that was not Thor, and Loki’s brother had already begun to shake his head before Loki had even finished his sentence.

“I cannot leave you—”

“You must,” Loki insisted, pushing again at Thor’s chest, pushing to make him go. “Thor, go back home and tell mother what has happened, let her know that I am fine—”

“How can you be?” Thor asked. “How can I return when I know that you are stuck here, when I know that you can’t? Loki, perhaps I can help you search, perhaps together we can find the one who took it and force them to return it to you—”

“I have help already,” Loki interrupted. “I am more worried that you will become stuck here as well. Thor, my coat is already stolen, but you still have yours. Go and keep it safe!”

But no matter how much he pleaded, no matter how many times he pointed out the risk, Loki could tell that even with the threat to his own coat, Thor was not going to leave, not when he thought that Loki was in danger.

Just as Loki was debating whether or not to tell Thor the whole truth, he felt a light, familiar touch to his shoulder.

“Is everything okay, Lokes?”

It happened rather quickly. Loki felt himself being torn away from Anthony’s touch, tugged by a strong grip on his arm and pulled around until he was behind Thor’s bulk.

“Is this him?” Thor demanded harshly. “Is he the one?”

“No,” Loki snapped immediately, yanking his arm from Thor’s hold and shoving him to the side. “I told you, I have someone who is helping me search from my coat. He didn’t steal it.”

“Am I seriously being accused of stealing your coat again?” Anthony asked. He looked confused, though the crease in his brow also betrayed an undercurrent of serious concern– and Loki hurried to reassure him.

“No,” he said. “Don’t worry, I know you didn’t.” He turned to Thor and repeated the words firmly. “He didn’t.”
Thor did not look convinced, still sizing Anthony up with narrowed eyes. “How can you be sure?”

“I know—”

“He is a human—”

“He is my soulmate,” Loki snapped. He pinned Thor with a glare— even though he hadn’t meant to say it, he wasn’t going to let Thor see a single glimmer of hesitation in his words. If he was to be stuck here, he wasn’t going to let Thor drive a wedge between him and the only good human he had managed to find.

Thor blinked. “Oh.”

Loki was glad that there wasn’t any arguing. He didn’t think he would be able to cope with disbelief on top of everything else, not in that moment.

“Yes,” Loki said. He could feel Anthony’s gaze on him, but he didn’t look over. “And he’s promised to help me.”

“But you can’t come home,” Thor said, his voice agonised.

“Do not worry, Thor,” Loki said. “I am safe here.”

“But not free,” Thor whispered.

“No.” Loki smiled sadly. “Now go, and make sure you spread the word. Make sure that this will not happen to anyone else.”

Thor was still hesitating, his gaze flicking between Loki and Anthony without giving any indication that he was intending to leave.

“You cannot risk being caught here as well,” Loki said, reaching out again— but this time, not to shove, but rather to clasp his brother’s shoulder.

Thor’s voice remained pained. “If we are together, we will have a better chance—”

“We cannot allow our people to lose us both to the humans,” Loki cut in— and when it seemed even that would not be enough, he added— “Mother cannot lose both of her sons.”

Thor’s expression hardened at that. “You’re going to come back home,” he said. “Promise me, Loki.”

“I am.” Loki felt the edge of a half lie cutting like poison across the tip of his tongue, but the intention was true enough that he was able to keep any indication of it from his expression as he gave his vow. “I promise.”

Thor’s expression crumpled into something familiar, his lips turning down in that way they did when he knew Loki had won the argument, and when he did not like the result— while his eyes shone with sadness and concern. Then, without any other warning, he reached out to throw his arms around Loki’s shoulders, pulling him for a hug.

“Good luck, Loki,” Thor said, his words muffled into Loki’s shoulder. “Fare thee well.”

“And you,” Loki replied, retuning the hug just as tightly. “Give mother my love.”

“I will,” Thor said. Then he leaned back as he said, “And your promise.”
Loki had to avert his gaze at that, but he was glad that Thor did not notice, for his attention had already been diverted.

“And as for you,” Thor said, his expression about twenty leagues past stern. “You will keep my brother safe.”


“You had better, human,” Thor spat. “If I hear that any harm has come to him during his time on land, then I shall ensure that you will never be safe anywhere near the sea. Not ever again.”

Loki knew he probably should have felt a little irritated with the way they were speaking of him as if he needed their protection, but in that moment, he could only feel touched. And as Thor left after drawing Loki in for a final, short hug, he felt like his brother was taking a piece of Loki with him– or at least the last touch of his hope.

“He didn’t mean it, did he?” Anthony asked, turning to Loki with a look of concern that was clearly only meant to cheer him up.

“Of course he did,” Loki said, his voice flat.

“Well. Um. I’m glad you have such caring relatives?” Anthony said, his tone overly light and turned up at the end so that it almost formed a question.

Usually, it would have been more than enough to at least make Loki smile, but in that moment, even Anthony could not lift Loki’s spirits. “I’m never going to see him again, am I?” Loki whispered.

“Hey, no, don’t think like that,” Anthony said. He reached out almost hesitantly, and curled their fingers together. “We’re going to find your coat, Loki.”

“How?” Loki asked, his tone breaking with a touch of desperation. “We have searched everywhere for a full week. We have looked on your internet, we searched every shop. The beach, the parks, even the surrounding beaches lest it was blown away– there is nowhere else to look.”

“I don’t believe that,” Anthony said. “It can’t just have vanished, and you said you’re sure it hasn’t been destroyed, right?”

Loki had said that, and it was true– if he closed his eyes, even now he could still feel the touch of… something over his fur, though it was a ghostly sensation, too far away to be anything other than a reminder of what he no longer had.

“Then it has to be somewhere,” Anthony insisted. “And if it’s somewhere, then we can find it. I’m not giving up on this, Loki.” He squeezed Loki’s hand gently, his smile somehow fiercely determined and yet gentle all at once. “I’m not giving up on you, and I don’t think you should, either.”

Loki drew in a sharp breath, trying to put everything in order so that he could properly understand what that meant. Anthony was a human. He couldn’t possibly understand the way that Loki was feeling, couldn’t comprehend what Loki was going through, save for his own empathy and his concern for Loki. He was doing this only because he knew that Loki was in pain, and… other than his family, Loki could not think of a single other person who had ever done that for him before.

His breath left him in a heavy sigh as he realised the implications of what that meant.
Well. Anthony was his soulmate, so perhaps this was something that should have been expected—
but being soulmates only meant that there was potential. Anthony must have seen something in
Loki that he liked over these past weeks, enough to stay in this place that he so clearly wished he
could leave, just so that he could help Loki find his way home.

Perhaps that level of devotion in so short a time should have scared him. But as with most things
with Anthony, Loki found it be the contrary, and he was able to find something grounding in the
way that Anthony held his gaze as he waited for the assurance that Loki believed him, that he was
able to hold on to the hope Thor’s appearance had eliminated.

“Thank you,” Loki said, his voice a little more steady. And as his lips curved into the smallest of
smiles, Anthony’s whole expression softened.

“That’s better,” Anthony replied. He raised his spare hand, as if he were thinking of touching
Loki’s face, and Loki was almost holding his breath— but then, he allowed it to fall to Loki’s
shoulder instead. “And you’re welcome, Loki.”

Loki responded with a another smile, this one far more real. Anthony smiled back for half a
moment, his eyes shining, his lips parting just slightly— then he released Loki’s shoulder with a
suddenness that left Loki feeling a little surprised. But Anthony kept their hands clasped as they
continued their way through the darkened streets, moving back to their hotel. Anthony’s hand felt
warm and comforting in Loki’s, and he curled his fingers a little tighter, not wanting to let go.

And true to his word, the moment they returned to the room, Anthony fetched one of his StarkPads
and began the search anew, pulling up a map of the area and beginning to mark away the places
that they had already searched, as well as pinpointing locations in surrounding towns that might be
good places to try and sell a sealskin.

It wasn’t the act of searching itself that had Loki staring after Anthony in awe, feeling a sense of
wonder as he watched the man work— it was the way that through it all he kept his spirits high,
cracking jokes and glancing to Loki out of the corner of his eye to check whether Loki had laughed.
He sat too close to Loki on the couch so that he could show him what he had done on the map, and
even when his quick mind was jumping between thoughts at an incredible pace, he was always
sure to check whether Loki had kept up— and when he realised that Loki was managing to follow
along with ease, he simply upped his pace even further with a grin, seeming to enjoy being able to
discuss a problem with someone more than capable of matching his intellect. It was… well, it was
the way that Anthony cared, that he made sure Loki was feeling as comfortable as he could, that he
hadn’t slipped back into sadness.

But even though Loki still did not truly believe his coat could be found – because the stories all
ended sadly, didn’t they? – he was easily able to keep up the façade of optimism. Though that, of
course, was more due to the realisation that if he had to be stuck on land, then maybe, perhaps…

Being stuck with Anthony would not be as bad as it would have been if Loki was forced to suffer
through this alone.

It took them three months, in the end. Or rather, it took Anthony three months, because it was him
who found Loki’s coat. Loki himself had long since given up hope to ever see or wear it again.

Because all the humans in the hotel had made Loki uncomfortable, Anthony had rented an
apartment for them to live in. It was not big and Anthony kept complaining that the shower was too small, but Loki liked it. He actually liked it. After spending weeks on land, he had’t feel unnatural anymore. Breathing air was just as easy as breathing water. All in all, he was content in this form—or maybe he would have been if there hadn’t been that nagging awareness that he was not staying like this by choice.

But even that was fading. Loki slowly learned to– well, not to accept, but at least to live with the knowledge that he couldn’t return home. And he thought that, maybe, this could become a new home in time. That was mostly due the fact that Anthony was there, of course. Anthony not only distracted him, he also took care of Loki when distraction didn’t help anymore, and he never seemed to mind. No, he was happy that Loki was with him, even enduring Loki’s mood swings with impressive patience, and he never judged. Oh, they quarreled more than enough– it had turned out that they were both extraordinarily stubborn people who didn’t like being bossed around. They got bored easily and they pushed too far too quickly, and when they fought, anybody who would have listened in would have thought that they hated each other, probably.

However, Loki was rather sure by now that he couldn’t hate Anthony. Sure, the human annoyed him now and then, with the way he could get lost in thoughts and in his work for hours on end and simply ignored Loki until he was done with his project. He also seemed to carry around some sort of baggage he refused to tell Loki about, and even though Loki knew that he had no right to be bothered by that, it did bother him. More about worry for Anthony than anything else– Loki didn’t like it when Anthony seemed sad, and he seemed sad so often. Loki always gave his best to cheer him up, and relaxed only when Anthony was laughing again. And then, when Anthony was laughing or even just smiling, Loki was completely and utterly sure of it– he could never hate this man.

Loki had fallen for him. It was as simple as that, really. He had fallen for his soulmate– for the way the light shined in his eyes, for his unhealthy addiction to coffee, for his awful jokes, for all those little things. And that shouldn’t have been at all surprising, but somehow it was. Or had been, anyway. Loki had accepted that by now, too, and actually it made everything easier. He knew that he could stay with Anthony, that he would be happy at this odd human’s side, and he could tell himself that it was his choice in the end. Being with Anthony was not uncomplicated, but it was good, and even though Loki could have discovered the entirety of the human world on his own now that he had to stay ashore, he didn’t wish to. And since he didn’t have the opportunity to live centuries anymore, anyway, he had made peace with having just a few years left. In the end, making the decision to stay with his soulmate was surprisingly easy.

Until it suddenly wasn’t anymore.

Loki was lounging on the couch, a book in his hands – in his opinion, books were the best inventions humanity had ever made – when Anthony came back. He had left early in the morning for some sort of business, Loki hadn’t asked about details. They didn’t spend every day together–Loki often went his own ways to explore the human settlement, and Anthony often worked at home on his many technical devices. Even after months, Loki had no real idea what exactly Anthony was doing. Loki liked to hear him talk about it, though. Anthony often murmured to himself when he was working and sometimes he just rambled excitedly about his inventions, and Loki never needed to do anything more than to listen and nod at the right times. Well, and make sure that Anthony ate and drank, because sometimes Anthony deemed such things far less important than telling Loki about his day.

Loki expected something like that when he heard the sound of keys and readily closed his book. There was not much that was better than seeing Anthony again after being apart for hours– it wasn’t that being apart for hours was hard, but most of the time being together was just better.
Anthony always seemed to be excited to see Loki again, too, at least usually.

Today, he just stood awkwardly in the living room and stared at Loki with a strange expression, his fingers fiddling around with the clasp of the bag he had thrown over his shoulder. Loki frowned and sat up, putting his book aside.

“Anthony? Is something wrong?”

“No,” Anthony said, his voice a little raspy. He cleared his throat and shook his head. “No, not really, I just—”

He broke off, and after a moment he sighed and took off his bag. Loki watched, concerned, as Anthony came closer to the sofa. He held out the bag, offering for Loki to take it.

“I found it,” Anthony said, carefully studying Loki’s reaction.

Loki looked down at the bag, then up at Anthony’s face again. “You found what?” he asked slowly.

“Your coat,” Anthony said, just like that, as if it was simple to say something like that, as if he wasn’t claiming that a very part of Loki was in that shabby bag Anthony was carrying.

Loki couldn’t make himself take it. He was frozen, and the only thing he could do was stare and wait for an to explain, because Loki didn't understand.

Anthony stared back at him, shuffling on his feet when the silence became uncomfortable. He filled it, eventually.

“There was this— this, uh, tramp, and he found your stash of clothes on the beach. He took some of them, and also your coat, because he—” Anthony drew a breath, and Loki realised that his soulmate was angry. “Because he thought it was pretty. He tried to sell it, but nobody wanted to have it, and he only put it up online a few days ago. I’d already went through eBay and all the other sites, but thank god I did it again.” A lopsided, uncertain grin curled at his lips. “I found his ad, and the date and stuff, everything matched. It looks exactly like you said. It’s yours.”

Loki gaped, and Anthony held out the bag and looked at Loki expectantly, his lips pressed together as if to keep more words from tumbling out.

Minutes ticked by very slowly– Loki didn’t know how many. But eventually he forced himself to move and reach out for the bag. Anthony met him halfway, stepping closer and pushing it into Loki’s hand, and somehow it ended up in Loki’s lap. It was heavy – exactly the right weight – and Loki’s heart suddenly skipped a beat, his breaths turning shallow.

He opened the bag slowly and glanced inside. What he saw was silver-grey fur, his fur, and suddenly he couldn’t pull it out of the bag quickly enough. The bag slipped from his lap down to the floor and his coat was back in his hands, soft and warm and still a part of him even after months– it was still his. Loki had stopped breathing altogether now, he just tightly grasped his coat, burying his fingers in the fur and pressing it against his chest. He swore that he would never lose sight of it again.

He could go home. He could go home and wear the skin he had been born in again. He ached to feel water flow over his fur, to breathe saltwater, to escape the burning sun and swim all the way down to the darkest depths. He would see Thor and his mother and he wouldn’t have to be around humans anymore, and Anthony—
Anthony.

Anthony looked like the world had been swept away under his feet, as if he had lost the very ground he stood on. Not because he was swaying, no, he was still standing steady, but the look in his eyes was devastated. *Lost.* It didn’t match the smile that was frozen on his lips, that he was forcing to *stay* there because he was trying to be happy for Loki. And maybe he was happy— Loki knew that Anthony had wanted to find Loki’s coat almost as much as Loki himself, if only to make Loki feel less trapped. But it was overshadowed by a sadness Loki could very much relate to. It was the same sadness Loki had felt the last months, just… the other way around, maybe.

Loki let his coat sink into his lap, still holding it tight. He knew how to breathe again and the shock about *finally* having his coat back was already fading, because Anthony was… well, it had only been a few months, but yes. Anthony was just as important.

“Anthony?”

And Anthony forced the shattered look away from his face, just like that, and his smile became brighter and started to reach his eyes. “I told you we would find it.”

Loki looked down and ran his fingers through his fur, trying to reassure himself. “Yes.” He met Anthony’s eyes again, studying his soulmate’s face. “You could have hidden it.”

Anthony frowned. “It’s yours,” he repeated, and that was it.

Loki nodded and looked away again. His mind was reeling. He knew what this meant, and Anthony knew it, too. There was nothing Loki could say right now, nothing he could *do* to make Anthony feel better— to make himself feel better. He hadn’t expected it to be like this. Returning home, leaving this behind as soon as he had the chance... the decision should be simple. He didn’t have to simply accept this anymore, he could *choose.* He could do whatever he wanted.

But… he didn’t know what he wanted.

Anthony seemed to think that he did, though.

“Come on,” he said, his tone light— and it was the saddest thing Loki had ever heard. “I’ll bring you to the beach, okay?”

Loki swallowed thickly, unable to look at Anthony. He nodded, though, and he stood up when Anthony walked away to get the keys. They went to Anthony’s car in silence and they drove to the beach in silence, and that silence was heavy enough that Loki thought he could *taste* it, bitter and heavy on the tip of his tongue. But that didn’t change anything about Loki’s excitement when he saw the sea, when he realised that he would *swim* again, very soon.

When Anthony stopped the car, Loki’s hand was already on the door handle. He only stopped because Anthony made no move to get out. Loki stared at the human, but Anthony kept his eyes fixed on the wheel. He cleared his throat.

“I think I– I’ll stay here, okay?”

Loki frowned. “Why?”

“I can’t.”

“Do you not want to—”
“I can’t, Loki,” Anthony snapped, still staring at his hands, still not looking at Loki.

Loki actually flinched, but Anthony didn’t apologise. He just gripped his wheel so hard that his knuckles turned white. Loki didn’t know what to say. He just looked at Anthony and waited for something— for his soulmate to say something, to look at him, for anybody else to make this decision for him.


“Anthony,” Loki said, but stopped there. There was nothing he could say.

“It’s fine,” Anthony repeated, even though they both knew it wasn’t.

Loki couldn’t help it, he reached out and put his hand on Anthony’s arm, trying to comfort him in some way. And suddenly Anthony turned to him, his arms coming around Loki and pulling him tight against his chest. It was a bit awkward, in the narrow space of the car and with Loki’s coat trapped somewhere between their bodies, but Loki didn’t care. He melted into the touch immediately, held Anthony as tightly as he could, his eyes pinched shut. Anthony’s body was trembling a little, and it was only when Loki realised that Anthony was crying when he noticed that his own eyes were wet, too. He took a deep, crumbling breath, breathed in his soulmate’s scent, and maybe Anthony took that as a sign to pull away, because he did.

“Hey,” he said, and grinned. “If you return crying, your brother will break my spine.”

Loki huffed out a choked laugh and was about to say something, but then Anthony leaned in and kissed his cheek, making Loki’s breath hitch.

“I’ll stay here,” Anthony said quietly, and Loki half wondered for how long. But he forced himself to nod, and then he got out of the car before anything else could happen.

Before anything could make him stay.
Loki had barely taken his first gulp of salt water before he realised that he had made the wrong choice. Swift strokes of his tail carried him back to the home he had once known but his heart remained on shore, and even as he strained his muscles to race to his family he was already missing the person he had left behind.

The first to meet him when he arrived was Thor– he threw his arms around Loki’s shoulders with such force that they both went spinning backward through the water, laughing and causing enough of a ruckus that it wasn’t long before Frigga was swimming toward them with all haste.

Loki embraced her as well, relishing the feel of her comforting presence– and then, as he leaned away, he let his gaze pan over the both of them, drawing in every detail and committing this moment to memory.

“I’ve missed you both so much,” Loki said.

“Loki?” Frigga asked, never slow on the uptake. “What is it?”

Loki’s smile was sad. “I need to go.”

“Go?” Frigga’s brow creased with confused incredulity. “Go where? You have only just returned —”

“You mean to go back,” Thor realised, his words soft, already accepting what Loki was about to do. Of course, Thor had met Anthony, and he knew what it was that Loki had left behind.

“Yes,” Loki said. “I came to… let you know that I am safe, and that I will be fine. I know what I need to do.”

Frigga looked as if she were about to protest, but even as she moved closer to Loki to lodge her argument, it seemed that she saw something in his gaze which made her pause. And instead she asked–  “Will you be happy?”

It was a simple question on the surface, but in reality it was so very weighty. It wasn’t something that Loki could ever promise, because the truthful answer relied upon so very much that was out of his control– but insofar as Loki hoped, he knew there was only the one answer he could give.

“Yes,” he promised. “I believe that I will be.”

“Then go,” Frigga said. “But promise me that you will never forget who you are.”

It was an easy thing to agree to– after all, how could Loki forget that? Frigga still looked sad as she pressed a kiss to Loki’s cheek, though her smile remained honest. She truly was pleased that Loki had found something that was worth leaving the sea for.

“This isn’t goodbye,” Thor said, his firm tone leaving no room for argument.

Loki offered a sharp grin over his shoulder, already half turned back in the direction of home. “It never is, brother.”

And then, with another sharp flick of his tail and a speed and enthusiasm that outshone even that
with which he had hurried to see his family, Loki swam back toward the shore, back toward the humans.

For the first time in so very long, he finally felt like he had purpose, like there was a firm direction in which he wanted his life to go– and he wasn’t going to hesitate any longer when it came to acquiring it.

It felt like a repeat of something that had already happened before, when Loki stood in front of the door to their apartment. Only that it was their apartment, not Anthony’s room in a hotel, and Loki wasn’t angry, either. He also had his coat– it was firmly tucked under his arm and he would not let it out of his sight anytime soon.

Loki knocked, but Anthony didn’t open the door. So then Loki rang– and when the door still didn’t open, he rang a second and a third time. He began to wonder if Anthony wasn’t home, but then, finally – after ringing for the fourth time – Loki heard some angry muttering from the other side of the door, which was opened just a second later.

It was obvious that Anthony was about to hurl some insults at Loki, but he seemed to nearly choke on his tongue when he actually saw who was standing in front of his door. He stared at Loki, eyes comically wide.

“Hello,” Loki said. His eyes flickered over Anthony’s frame, and he frowned at the stains on the human’s shirt and the differently coloured socks. “You look awful.”

“I look awful,” Anthony echoed, but Loki wasn’t sure if he was aware that he was saying something at all.

Loki’s frown deepened. “Are you...”

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

Loki blinked, then arched his brows. “Excuse me? Would you like me to leave?”

“No, I– you– I thought you—”

“Can I come in?” Loki interrupted his soulmate’s stuttering. Anthony stared at him for a moment, but then he wordlessly stepped to the side and let Loki enter. Then he turned on his heels and stalked into the living room, leaving Loki alone in the hallway.

Briefly, Loki contemplated just leaving again, but then he just closed the door and followed Anthony. The human had reached the small bar by now and was pouring himself a drink.

“What are you doing here?” he asked again, his voice tight.

Loki carefully approached his soulmate, but made sure not to come too close. Anthony didn’t seem too happy to see him at the moment– Loki wanted to give him space. He hesitated before he said anything and looked around, frowning at the various items that were scattered about the room, and the open traveling bag sitting next to the sofa. He decided that was a problem which could wait, though, because first Loki had to figure out why his soulmate was acting so... hostile.

He took care to keep both hurt and confusion out of his voice when he eventually said, “I wished to
“To see—” Anthony huffed a laugh and shook his head, then lifted the glass to his lips and drank half of the amber liquid in one go. He didn’t even glance at Loki. “Look, I don’t get it. I told you that I couldn’t, that you should just go, and you—”

“Anthony,” Loki interrupted again, trying to stay calm. “I’m sorry if—”

“Nope. No. If you came here to apologise, you can just go again. It’s fine.”

“It’s obviously not,” Loki said dryly. Anthony just glared as he walked past him, his glass filled to the brim again—and Loki thought he might be starting to understand. “Anthony, I’m not here to apologise.”

“Then what are you here for?” Anthony spat, turning around to face him again, the look in his eyes still searing. “I helped you find your coat, didn’t I? I let you go, and I didn’t complain, and I didn’t try to hold you back. You never really wanted to stay with me, I know that and it’s fine, it is, but—” Anthony stumbled over the words and took a breath, then pressed his lips together, his eyes flickering away. He sounded more defeated than angry when he continued. “You can’t just... come here and make me say goodbye to you all over again.”

Anthony swallowed, hard, and took another sip of his wretched drink. He refused to look at Loki. After a while Loki sighed and carefully put his sealskin over the backrest of the sofa before he stepped closer to Anthony.

“I do not wish to hear any goodbyes,” he said, gently taking the glass from Anthony’s hand and placing it on the side table. “I want to stay with you.”

Anthony’s expression slackened in shock and lack of comprehension. “What?”

Loki sighed. “For how you always claim to be a genius, you are truly acting like a fool right now.”

Anthony frowned and was evidently about to say something, to argue, but Loki didn’t let him. He leaned down and pressed his lips to Anthony’s, as firmly as he could while also keeping it gentle. Anthony made a surprised sound and put his hands on Loki’s chest. But he didn’t push Loki away, just waited until Loki pulled back on his own, which he did after just a few seconds.

Loki opened his eyes and found Anthony staring at him. He could positively watch as the gears turned in his soulmate’s head. Loki smiled and leaned in again, this time just to touch his forehead to Anthony’s. His hands were resting on the smaller man’s hips by now and carefully pulled him closer. Loki waited for Anthony to pull away, but he didn’t—Anthony’s eyes were wide, shocked, confused, and it looked like he wasn’t even breathing anymore, but his fingers were grasping Loki’s shirt now, wanting to keep him close in return. Loki tried to ignore his too loud and too fast heartbeat, tried to even out his breaths, because at least one of them should stay calm until they had this sorted out.

“I swear to Tesla,” Anthony said suddenly, his voice weak, his breath brushing Loki’s lips. “If this is some sort of game—”

Loki kissed him again. Anthony’s grip on Loki’s shirt tightened and the air he’d been holding left him in a rough exhale even as he pressed closer and finally kissed back. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Loki thought that this wasn’t a kiss like one of those in the stories selkie-children were told—this kiss was nothing more than a firm press of lips against lips, fingers clinging to cloth, eyes falling shut. It was desperate, yes, but it wasn’t sad. Maybe it should have been, but it wasn’t, and

see you.”
Loki had not known that it could be like this.

He didn’t, couldn’t think of anything else. Anthony’s lips tasted like the alcohol he had drunk earlier, but Loki didn’t mind. He forgot about it, even, although he had never liked the taste of these human drinks. It wasn’t important anymore when Anthony’s hand found its way to the back of Loki’s head and buried itself in his hair, tugging as if to draw him closer, even though they already were as close as they could possibly be. Anthony opened his mouth, tongue flicking over Loki’s lips, and Loki met his soulmate’s unspoken wish with a soft, pleased sound.

Everything else faded away and at the same time it felt like Loki’s feet had finally found a solid spot of ground to stand on, as if the world had been spinning around him the whole time without him noticing it and now, everything had finally fallen into place again.

When they broke apart after who knew how long, they were both breathing heavily. Their arms were wrapped around each other and while Anthony didn’t look at all heartbroken anymore, he did still seem to be a little confused.

“What about your family?” he asked, his voice a bit rough.

“I saw them,” Loki replied softly. “They understand. And it is not as if I will never be able to see them again.”

Anthony’s eyes didn’t even flick to the sofa, where Loki’s coat was still lying. He nodded without the slightest sign of hesitation.

“So there is nothing to stop this,” Loki murmured, pleased, and nuzzled Anthony’s nose with his own. “To stop us.”

“You’re serious,” Anthony breathed, and as Loki pulled back to look at him, it was to see that Anthony’s lips had curved up into a reverent smile.

“I want to stay with you,” Loki repeated firmly. “If you’ll have me.”

Anthony nodded and kissed Loki again and, no, it wasn’t sad. It wasn’t a goodbye kiss, or a forced kiss, or the only kiss. It was real and hopeful and, maybe – just maybe – it was the start of something good.

They remained curled together for long enough that the sunlight no longer bathed them in warmth through the windows, long enough for the sky to darken and for their limbs to complain. But they were too caught up in each other to spare a thought to such things, exchanging soft kisses and lingering touches that held a stronger promise than words could. It was something that they had both so sorely wanted, something that neither of them had dared to hope they could have. But in giving Loki back his coat, Anthony had reopened so many avenues that they could explore– because Loki was no longer trapped on shore, but he could choose to be here, and with his coat, he would be able to visit his family whenever he wished.

The future was opening up before him, and it looked bright enough that there was nothing Loki could do in response but smile.

So it was that when the ringing of Anthony’s phone grew far too frequent to continue ignoring,
Loki urged him to pick it up—because what were a few lost minutes when they had a lifetime to enjoy?

“It’ll just be Pep,” Anthony said, his arms curling a little tighter around Loki’s waist, seeming reluctant to let go of Loki for even those few minutes—and that thought made Loki’s smile all the warmer. “She’s probably sorted out those flight times I asked for.”

“Flight times?” Loki asked curiously, stroking his hand lightly over Anthony’s forearm.

“Yeah. I was… well.” Anthony swallowed, his voice turning hesitant. “You see I… I didn’t think that you were going to come back. And when I came in here, I knew that I wouldn’t be able to stay. I knew that it would…”

Anthony didn’t finish, but as his fingers curled in Loki’s shirt, it didn’t really matter. Loki already knew what he was going to say. It would hurt too much. Loki hadn’t truly considered staying beneath the waves indefinitely, not wanting to be without Anthony. But Anthony had come back to this place steeped in reminders of their life together, and he had thought that he would never see Loki again.

Loki’s gaze panned over the room, all at once remembering the open bag, the items strewn haphazardly as if they had been thrown about in a rush to decide which would be taken away and which would remain.

“You were leaving,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Anthony said, pressing his head into Loki’s shoulder. “I was.”

Loki swallowed hard. “And now?”

“I have already made the arrangements with Pepper,” Anthony replied. “She’s expecting me back home. She’s more than sympathetic, but I know that wasn’t the only reason why she’s been so swift. I bet the pile of paperwork sitting on my desk could rival Everest.”

Loki hardly heard the words that followed after the confirmation, too focused on trying to breathe. The future Loki had only known to hope for these past few hours was already beginning to crack. It wasn’t fair. Surely, surely he had seen his share of pain, surely he deserved just a moment’s peace.

“Loki?” Anthony asked, the nervousness still not entirely gone, but now laced with a touch of concern. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” Loki asked, his voice cracking. “You’re leaving.”

“Well, you’re here now, but, I should still go home,” Anthony said. “Pepper’s the CEO and she’s been handling everything, but I am still needed, and there’re a lot of meetings she’s been putting off that can’t really be handled over a conference call. It’s my company, Lokes, they need me.”

What about me? Loki thought desperately. I need you.

The words were on the tip of his tongue, though he knew they were not entirely true. He trusted Anthony enough to know that he was not talking of leaving forever, and during the time in between his coming back Loki could go back home—except… he knew that the sea would never feel like home, not anymore. For Loki, home meant wherever Anthony happened to be. And the thought of spending so much time without him just left Loki feeling empty.
But it was clear that even if this was a sudden decision, it was something Anthony needed, and besides—Loki knew better than anyone what it was to miss the place where you belonged. So he offered Anthony a smile that he hoped hid the storm that was brewing inside his mind.

“For how long?” he asked.

“Well, I *could* come back as soon as possible,” Anthony said, shifting slightly so that they were facing each other, his hands running up Loki’s sides and then coming to gently cup his cheeks. “I can come right back here, to be with you—because there is nowhere else that I would rather be. But…I hope…”

It was Anthony’s turn to clear his throat, and Loki tilted his head curiously.

“What now?”

“Well…” Anthony leaned a little closer, his eyes bright and happy despite the touch of nervousness that still hid within the curve of his smile. “Loki, I hope you might consider coming with me?”

Loki’s mind stalled for a moment, half on the fact that Anthony was asking, and half on the complications that would follow if Loki said *yes*.

“Go… with you?” he whispered.

He would have to leave behind everything he knew, in a manner that was so completely different to what he had already done. This was more than just living on the land with Anthony, because at least here Thor could still come ashore, or he could go to the sea to visit his mother. If he flew across the whole world… he would not be able to see them at all.

Anthony seemed to sense his hesitation, and stroked Loki’s cheek with his thumb. “I will not force this,” he said. “It’s your choice, okay? And if you do say yes, we would still be able to come back, to visit—just as I came here before, yeah? Pepper might even *like* that.”

Loki let his eyes fall closed as he leaned into Anthony’s touch. Had he not just thought that his home was wherever Anthony lived? And yes, to go with him, he would have to leave everything behind, but it would not be *forever*.

And besides… When it came to choosing between his family and his love… well, he had already made that decision, had he not?

“Yes,” he said, the word little more than a sigh.

“Yes?” Anthony asked, equally quiet, as if he were still holding his breath. “Do you mean—”

“Anthony, I made my choice,” Loki said, opening his eyes and holding Anthony’s gaze, seeing the growing wonder in his expression. “Were you not listening? I want to be with you.”

Anthony leaned forward and brought their lips together, kissing Loki with relief and affection and the press of something joyous. Loki returned it with everything he was, running a hand through Anthony’s hair.

The water, the land— it didn’t matter. *This* was where he belonged.

When they parted, Anthony’s smile was bright and excited.

“It’ll be tricky getting you into the States, but not impossible,” Anthony said. “I’m going to have to
work out how to get you a passport, though that shouldn’t be too hard, and if we use the private jet I should be able to get your fur through quarantine. It’s a sad but true fact that money goes a very long way to get you what you want. That’s going to work in our favour. I’ll talk to Pep—we probably won’t even have to delay all that long from what she already had planned.”

Loki was following along well enough, and gave Anthony’s hand a squeeze.

“But, uh. There is one thing you should probably know before you agree to this,” Anthony said, rubbing the back of his neck nervously.

Loki frowned. Surely Anthony already knew it would take a lot to scare him off at this point. For him to be this concerned, it must be something big.

“I mean, I know you don’t really like crowds,” Anthony said, wincing. “And, uh. Well, I’m kind of. Famous. Everyone is going to want to know about this new guy that I’m with, and—well, I don’t want to hide you, okay? I want the whole world to know that I’m yours, but that means… well. The whole world is going to want to know.”

Loki smiled at that. Anthony was worried that Loki was going to feel overwhelmed with attention—which, while that would be a valid concern for any other selkie... Loki was glad that Anthony’s worry was something he could so easily dispel.

“Oh, I am sure it will hardly be different to my life back home,” Loki said. “As a prince, attention is not something I am unfamiliar with.”

Anthony blinked. “Wait, what? Hang on, you’re a—”

“My brother was always more in the spotlight, of course, but, that does not mean that I am unrecognisable, or that people were not trying to guess where my affections might lie,” Loki continued, hoping to quell any other concerns. “I grew rather proficient at avoiding them. I am sure it won’t be a problem.”

Anthony was still gaping, and Loki came to the realisation that this wasn’t about his worry any more. And as he arched a brow with an amused smirk, Anthony snapped his jaw shut.

“Hey,” Anthony complained. “Give me some slack. You have literally never mentioned that you were a prince before.” He paused, then asked weakly—“So, this means that you’re like… royalty?”

“Yes,” Loki said, his amusement growing. “And besides, you are only just now informing me of your own status. Do not think I have been entirely ignorant of the people calling you Tony on the street. I know you told me your name was Anthony on purpose.”

“Well, maybe—”

“So I have been calling you by the incorrect name this entire time?” Loki asked, still feeling more amused than annoyed— and from the glint in Anthony’s eyes, Loki knew that he was the same way.

“I admit, Anthony has grown on me,” Anthony admitted. “And, okay. Sure. My soulmate is a prince, I can totally deal with this.”

“Good,” Loki said. “I would be rather put out with you, otherwise.”

Anthony laughed at that, and Loki found himself melting at the sound.

“Loki,” Anthony said then, his voice going soft. “Thank you. I know what this means for you, and
I’m sorry that I had to ask.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Loki told him. “I’m glad that you’re giving me the opportunity to be with you. It sounds like it won’t be easy.”

“We’ll be okay,” Anthony replied. “Like I said, money fixes most problems and I’ve got quite a lot of it. And as soon as you’re in the States, we can work on making you legit. I’m sure Pepper will know where to start. And in the meantime…” He drew Loki closer again with hands on his hips and a warm smile. “It’ll be nothing that we can’t handle.”

The city of New York truly was bigger than anything Loki could have imagined. The buildings towered so high that it hurt his neck to try and see the tops, and there were so many people that it felt like every street, every corner, every place was alive. There were lights and there were cars, there was music and a truly horrible smell of something that Loki did not want to think about. There weren’t many trees but Anthony assured him that there were plenty in the centre of the island– and oh, the fact that it was an island had Loki near vibrating with joy. For if this place was an island then that meant there would be water nearby, and he could not wait for a chance to explore it.

As he had promised Anthony, he was more than capable of dealing with the press. Anthony’s electronic assistant JARVIS was able to set up a ‘backstory’ for Loki that would be difficult to dispute, and all Loki had to do was stand to the side and let Anthony speak to them all. He listened as Anthony claimed that his reasons for being away so long had to do with his business, and although he hinted that Loki was the reason for his extended absence, he never outright stated that it was so.

In a way, it was like being back home, when he would stand by as his brother gave important speeches– only with Anthony, Loki would be hearing the words anew, rather than hearing a speech that he had constructed himself.

But the part that Loki was most excited for was seeing the place where he would now live– the place that Anthony called home. The tower itself, which apparently was owned by Anthony’s company, was one of the tallest in the city. It had Anthony’s second name written on top in shining letters that made Loki smile, and when they entered through the main doors, many of the people there greeted Anthony by name.

“I don’t usually come in through the lobby,” Anthony reassured him as the doors of the elevator finally closed and cut them off from all the noise. “I have a back entrance, but since I’ve been gone for so long, and since I want them all to see you…”

Loki’s smile softened even further, and he leaned happily into Anthony’s side. He liked the fact that Anthony was proud of them, because he was so used to being second best, so used to being the one that people would rather not know. But Anthony wanted the whole world to see Loki by his side, and that made Loki feel treasured.

The elevator ride was quick, despite how high they had to travel. Anthony lived right at the top, and oh, that first time walking into Anthony’s penthouse, Loki realised why his soulmate had been so displeased with their apartment back in Scotland. It was large and open, with shiny and tasteful decoration that created an atmosphere Loki was sure he would enjoy. But the most striking feature were the windows, larger than any that Loki had seen before. And oh, the view. Loki could see all
through the city, towering so high above the ground that he almost felt like he was flying, or like he
was back home and swimming over a very deep section of the sea.

They were so high up that between the buildings and past the edge of the land, Loki could see a
glimpse of the ocean. It wasn’t the sea that he was used to– it was greener, not the stormy blue-
grey that he knew so well. The Atlantic, as Anthony had called it, was far vaster than the North Sea
which was his home. Still, he liked that he could see it, that even as the days wore into weeks he
knew that the ocean wasn’t far away, that the life he once knew was not gone forever.

But as those weeks turned into months, that glimpse of the Atlantic almost began to pain him.

Selkies, you see, are born with two forms. It was the point Thor had always made when he was
younger, the argument that any selkie used whenever they wanted to go ashore. They weren’t
meant to stay in only one form, they were meant to share their time between the two, but the
humans had taken that from them. So long ago now the selkies had been forced to choose between
the safety of the sea or the perils of the land, and so very many of them had chosen wrong.

Loki had always been cautious though. He had lived his whole life in the water and he had never
suffered for it– but now, after so long on shore without the comfort of the sea, his entire body
began to ache.

It was not a sudden transition. He did not change from being fine to being in pain overnight. He
supposed it began in his heart, in that yearning for the sea which he would later realise went
beyond missing his family. Then it was a deep ache in his muscles, in his bones, the lightness of
the air feeling too much and not enough all at once– though that, he thought, was surely a normal
reaction. Then, as more time passed, his skin began to itch. He would run his hands over it, as if he
could peel it off– he burned with a need to submerge himself, to swim.

But Loki could not get to the ocean, because he did not know how. He had taken to walking
through the city, and Anthony had taken him on many outings– but he didn’t know how to find the
sea. He was on an island, but… well. Standing on the edge of the Hudson River, staring out over
the railing and into the murky brown water, Loki remembered how he had felt when he had first
realised that Manhattan was an island. He had been so full of hope then, so excited for his new life.

And at first, it had been perfect. Being with Anthony had been everything he had ever wanted,
because they truly did match together better than any two other people ever had– or at least, it
certainly felt that way to Loki. There was nothing that had come between them that they could not
solve, and he had never felt so happy in all his life. But still Loki ached for something that he could
not reach, something that was missing no matter how content he felt in his new life with his
soulmate.

It seemed like… whenever he thought he was within reach of something good, it was snatched
away before he had the chance.

Sometimes, Loki on his walks, every step felt like a reminder of what he no longer had. He would
walk all the way to the water, right to the edge of the land, and the river would stand as a taunt.
Because standing there at the Hudson, staring at the water that he would never be able to swim in
without someone seeing him – and certainly not without becoming horribly sick – the only thing
that Loki felt was trapped.

But as time went by, as he began to feel weaker, as he remembered the old stories his mother used
to use to scare him into staying away from the land… he knew exactly what it was that plagued
him, and he knew that it was something he could not fight.
Loki didn’t tell Anthony. He didn’t want Anthony to feel guilty, because he truly did believe that Anthony cared for him above all else. He didn’t want him to think that in being with Anthony, Loki was putting himself in danger—because Anthony was happy here. Loki could see it in his eyes, in the way that he smiled when he came home from his business to draw Loki into his arms, and in the way that Anthony held him close at night with whispered promises of forever.

Loki knew that his forever would soon be nearing its close, but still he did not speak up. He had long since made his decision— a few years with his soulmate was far preferable to uncountable centuries alone.

So he remained silent, and he tried to deal with the pain by himself. Some days, it was okay—when he was with Anthony, when he was able to focus on all the things which were good. But then there were the days when Anthony was busy, when Loki was alone—when he was left to stare out the window at that single glimmer of the ocean, with nothing to do but to ache.

On one such day, when Anthony was out and Loki had no company other than JARVIS, he drew his sealcoat out from the safe Anthony had hidden it in underneath their bed and he ran his fingers through his fur, closing his eyes at the sensations it sparked in him.

Then he went to the bathroom, and he turned the taps on as strong as they would go—and then he pulled his skin over his legs.

His breaths were quick and his hands were trembling as he slid into the water—but instead of relief, all he could feel was disappointment. Anthony’s bath was large, but it still wasn’t enough. He was submerged but he could not swim, the water barely lapping over the length of his tail even when the bath began to overflow, the water spilling out onto the tiles. The water was fresh, and it didn’t feel right over his fur.

Loki ended up sliding out of the bath and onto the tiles, the shallow, fresh water only making him feel worse. He slid out of his coat and curled his knees to his chest, burying his face into his damp fur and trying, trying to hold everything together.

He could hear a worried voice in his ears but he couldn’t focus, too caught in his own horror, in the knowledge that he was never going to be able to feel right ever again. Then…

“Oh, Loki.” There were hands on his shoulders, stroking his hair. Then Anthony was wrapping a towel around him and pulling him against his chest, seeming to not care that Loki was still soaking wet.

Loki didn’t wonder what Anthony was doing there, or why he had left work, and he didn’t worry about Anthony finding him in this state. Loki merely curled into him, pressing as close as he could, one hand clenching into Anthony’s expensive shirt even as the other held tightly to his own fur.

He was aware that the harsh sobs were tearing from his own throat, he was aware that he had just ended any hope of keeping Anthony oblivious of the hardships that plagued his body and mind. He just held on to his one anchor in the terrible storm, just let himself fall apart while he knew Anthony was there to hold him together.

Through it all, Anthony didn’t say a thing of consequence— he didn’t question, he didn’t worry, he didn’t argue. He merely held Loki as tightly in his arms as he could, humming a soothing tune and whispering reassurances that whatever it was, however unfixable… Loki would always be loved.
It took some time, but Anthony calmed Loki enough that he was able to dry himself with the towel, and dress in the clothes that Anthony had brought him. He put his fur away with the utmost care, locking it up so that it could never be taken from him again— not, he thought bitterly, that such a thing would make a difference to his predicament. He might have his coat, but when there was no sea for him to swim in it could hardly do him any good.

Anthony seemed to be seeping with worry, his hands outstretched in front of him as if he wished to reach for Loki and concerned that his help would not be welcome. But Loki accepted his hand as they made their way to the living room, and when Anthony offered him a mug of steaming tea, he accepted that as well with the beginnings of a thankful smile.

“Loki,” Anthony started, after they had sat in silence for a few moments. “Are you—”

“I am fine,” Loki said, not looking up from the tea he held in his hands. “There is nothing that you need to concern yourself with.”

“Don’t give me that, Loki, please,” Anthony said, his tone both frustrated and pained, as if he were feeling a little helpless. “What’s going on?”

Loki paused for a moment. He wished to be able to deflect, to push the question away, to just go back to how they were while Anthony was blissfully ignorant. Because while he wanted nothing more than to be able to curl into Anthony’s arms and let his soulmate fix all of his problems— while he knew it would take but a word for Anthony to fly him back to Scotland, Loki didn’t want that. Anthony was happy here, and Loki would not take that from him.

And… he didn’t want to leave.

“I miss my family,” he tried— and it wasn’t entirely a lie, but Anthony didn’t believe it regardless.

“No,” Anthony said firmly. “There’s something else, there’s something wrong, I know there is. There’s been something wrong for a while.”

“Is missing my family not enough?” Loki asked, glancing up sharply.

“Of course it is,” Anthony said. “I’m not… Loki, I’m not unaware of everything that you’ve given up to be with me. Fuck, I’m, I know that I’ve been selfish, that I’ve got everything that I’ve ever wanted, everything that I could ever want, and all that you’ve done is lost the things you care about —”

“No,” Loki interrupted, not quite letting go of his frustration but not willing to listen to Anthony say such things regardless. “I have not only lost. I gained you, and these few months have been the best of my life.”

“But they can’t have been,” Anthony said, his voice impossibly sad, almost desperate in his attempt to get to the truth. “Loki, you’re not happy, and it’s killing me that I don’t know how to help you.”

Loki glanced away, unable to hold his gaze. “You can’t help me,” he whispered.

“The hell I can’t,” Anthony replied, his immediate reaction almost making Loki smile. Almost. “Loki, if you know anything about me then you should know that I don’t believe in I can’t. If you tell me what’s going on, if you just let me try—”

“There isn’t anything to try.” Loki shook his head, finally glancing up. “Anthony… there’s no way you—”
“There must be.”

“No.” Loki deposited his untouched tea onto the side table and lifted his hand to cup Anthony’s cheek. “Really, you don’t need to worry. This is… nothing unexpected.”

Anthony paused for a moment, his frown deepening – and when he spoke, it was with a touch of suspicion. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“Oh, Anthony,” Loki sighed, gently stroking Anthony’s skin. “Have you not read the stories? I am a selkie, and selkies never get their happy endings.”

“Well, those are just stories,” Anthony insinuated, pulling Loki’s hand from his face, but keeping his fingers curled around Loki’s wrist. “They’re not true—”

“They are based in fact—”

“Then they aren’t about us,” Anthony snapped. “They aren’t our story. I’m not going to sit about and let this happen, I refuse. We’re going to find a way to fix this.”

“Anthony, you can’t just change the way it works,” Loki said weakly. “It is natural that I—”

“Loki, I swear to god,” Anthony threatened, “If you are about to tell me that it is natural for you to be unhappy then I will get angry.”

Loki couldn’t help it – the words pulled a huffed laugh from his chest. Anthony’s expression softened at that, and he tugged Loki close, wrapping him in his arms once more and burying his face in Loki’s hair. Loki rested his head in the curve of Anthony’s neck, breathing him in and letting Anthony ground him, just like he always did. But even there, in the arms of the man he knew that he loved, Loki still felt that itch under his skin, that knowledge that the longer he stayed, the shorter a time he would have left to live.

“Why do you think selkies always get unhappy endings?” Anthony asked after a while, when both of their hearts were beating in a slow, steady rhythm that spoke to the calm they had found. And resting there, in Anthony’s arms and knowing that every moment, every heartbeat was more precious than the last, Loki couldn’t find it within him to remain silent any longer.

“When I was a child, my mother used to tell me stories,” Loki told him, his fingers curling in the hair at Anthony’s nape to calm himself, his head still resting on Anthony’s shoulder. “They were the same stories that we were all told, the kind designed to scare children just enough so that they would keep themselves safe.”

“Let me guess,” Anthony said, his hand stroking up and down Loki’s back. “Humans are the bad guys who hide in the shadows, waiting to steal children from their beds so that they will never see their families again?”

The words were said in jest, but Loki merely sighed.

“You’re not entirely incorrect. We were told of the selkies who ventured ashore just to feel the sand on their toes, who would have returned peacefully before the end of the day had a human not stolen their coat and forced them to be their husband or wife. There were stories of selkies who chose to walk among the humans, who found something worth leaving the sea for. Of those, many were forced back into the waves, unable to stay no matter how much they would miss their human partner, doomed to live the rest of their lives in loneliness. But there were others of those who found their soulmate on land, those who stayed to be with the one they loved… and their stories were always cut short. Always.”
Anthony leaned back so that he could meet Loki’s gaze, his eyes wide. “What are you saying?” he asked—though Loki could tell from the pain in his tone that Anthony had already deduced the truth. He was merely holding out on the hope that Loki would tell him he was wrong.

Unfortunately, Loki knew that his next words would bring only disappointment.

“Selkies live far longer than humans,” Loki said. “But unless I return the sea, I will not live beyond a few more years.”

Anthony’s whole body shuddered, his expression desperately horrified, eyes shining with the kind of self-hatred that Loki had hoped to avoid. “No,” he pleaded. “Loki… tell me that you didn’t.”

“This isn’t your fault,” Loki said, already knowing that it wouldn’t be enough but hoping to curb some of Anthony’s pain nonetheless.

“If we had stayed in Scotland this wouldn’t have happened,” Anthony whispered. “This… you would be fine, you’d have years—”

“Centuries,” Loki corrected, and Anthony’s only response was a low whimper. But Loki shook his head, and spoke with just as much fierceness as Anthony had earlier.

“Don’t you see?” he asked. “This is why I did not wish to tell you. I knew that you would blame yourself—but Anthony, I chose a short life with you over a long one alone. And given the option to change my mind, I would choose the same again, a thousand times over.”

“You can’t mean that,” Anthony whispered— and Loki only smiled.

“Of course I can,” he said. And every piece of him was still aching, but he knew that for this, it was worth it. For Anthony, Loki was willing to withstand a little pain. “Anthony, I love you. There is nowhere in this world I would rather be than right here with you, even if I can only stay for a little while.”

Anthony stared for a moment, as if Loki’s words had struck him dumb. But only for a moment, before his expression began to blaze with that fierce determination once again. “No,” he growled, his hand clenching in the back of Loki’s shirt. “Loki, I love you too, and that’s why I’m not going to accept this. We can fix this, I know we can. All we have to do is get you back to the sea, right?”

Loki shook his head. “I will not leave you—”

“And I don’t want you to. But Lokes, I’m not going to let you die, either. Not when I can do something about it. Now, go and pack your things. J, arrange a flight, offer my pilot whatever, I don’t care. Wheels up the moment we’re ready to go.”

“Of course, Sir.”

Loki blinked, entirely thrown by the sudden and unexpected change.

Anthony pushed off the couch and tugged at Loki’s hand, urging him to follow.

“Where are we going?” Loki asked, his suspicion already enough to paint his brow with a frown.

“Somewhere better,” Anthony replied. “Somewhere that you’re not going to be wasting away.”

“No, you’re happy here,” Loki insisted. “You weren’t back in Scotland, I know that you weren’t. You would grow bored in days—”
“We’re not going back to Scotland,” Anthony said. “Loki, I am so sorry that I didn’t realise— that I made you come here, that I somehow made you feel like you couldn’t talk to me. I will spend the rest of my life making up for that—”

“That’s not necessary,” Loki said immediately, but it seemed that Anthony was not done.

“But I’m going to try anyway,” he said. “I would move back to Scotland in an instant if that—”

“I don’t want that—”

“Then we won’t,” Anthony said simply. “But that’s fine, because I know another place we can go where we can make this better.” Anthony’s eyes were shining now, but the sadness, the fear had been replaced with hope. “Loki, please. Trust me.”

It was that final plea which did it, because in that regard, Loki knew exactly where his heart lay. So Loki gave his agreement, and they made their quick preparations.

He packed a small bag, not having much that he wanted to bring, and then followed Anthony into the car. He tried not to be concerned when they stepped into the very same plane that had brought them to New York from Scotland all those months ago, and he settled into his seat with his book. Anthony sat next to him, and as the minutes turned to hours, Anthony’s head began to droop onto Loki’s shoulder.

With something heavy in his gut that Loki didn’t really want to name, he put his book away then and curled his arms around Anthony as best as he could manage, letting his soulmate lean more comfortably against him. Loki ran his fingers through Anthony’s hair, and soon began to feel a little drowsy himself.

He was snapped into wakefulness by the pilot informing them over the intercom that they were about to begin their descent. Still unaware of their destination, Loki immediately reached over to throw open the window cover, disturbing Anthony as he did so, and staring out with wide eyes at the expanse of colour below them. He could hardly believe it, although at the same time, he didn’t know how he had ever expected anything else.

It was the sea.

It wasn’t the stormy grey of the sea he knew from home, or the green of the Atlantic that had taunted him over the buildings of New York. This water was a deep, deep blue, the caps of the waves visible even from the plane— and the sight of it both made Loki tremble with both anticipation and concern.

“It’s called the Pacific Ocean,” Anthony said. “It’s the largest ocean in the world.”

Loki nodded, not feeling like he would be able to speak.

The largest ocean, a place that would no doubt be cleaner than the Hudson river. Water so deep and so blue, somewhere that Anthony would never be able to traverse.

But Anthony said that he had a plan, and Loki had promised to trust him.

Loki did trust him.

So, despite his lingering concern, Loki sat back and waited as the plane continued its descent, relaxing with the knowledge that Anthony had everything well in hand.
When Loki walked into the house, he was so distracted by the lovely furnishing and Anthony’s words that it took him ridiculously long to notice the windows. He listened as Anthony spoke about how he’d bought this house ages ago but never actually lived in it, because the better part of his business was based in New York, and waved off his soulmate’s apologies that he hadn’t thought about moving here sooner. Meanwhile, Loki made his way to the long and low and comfortable looking sofa, where he put down the small bag that contained the few possessions he had wanted to carry with him on the flight. The phone Anthony had given him, because he could use it to contact Anthony in case of emergency, the book to avoid boredom, a package of chewing gum – he liked chewing gum – and, of course, his seal coat. And then he looked up, and saw that the windows were not technically windows but a whole glass front, and that the endless blue Loki could see was not just the sky, but—

Loki rushed forward and practically pressed his nose against the glass, eager to soak up the sight. Behind him, Anthony stopped speaking and then chuckled, but Loki barely noticed.

The Pacific Ocean.

He had known that something like this was coming, of course– he had seen this sea already from the plane after all, and then they had taken a coastal road to come here. Anthony had refused to tell Loki any details about their goal, grinning and claiming that it was a ‘surprise,’ but it had been obvious enough. A house on the coast, by the sea. A home, for both of them.

But now, standing here… Loki couldn’t quite believe it. He stared at the ocean, at the deep blue and the rolling waves. In that moment, it was the prettiest thing he had ever seen, and it made his throat tighten and his chest ache with a yearning that he could only compare to… missing Anthony, perhaps.

Said human had just come to stand beside Loki– he could feel the press of Anthony’s gaze, and then the brush of his arm. Loki wanted to look at him, to say something to him, but he couldn’t quite manage to yank his eyes away from the sea.

“It belongs to the house, by the way,” Anthony said. His casual tone could not hide his excitement, his happiness. “I bought it because I didn’t want any prying eyes or cameras down there, so we have our own private beach. There’s a staircase leading down the cliff.”

Loki did look at Anthony then, his eyes wide. “I can…?”

“Whenever you want, yeah.” Anthony grinned. “I forgot how hot it gets here in summer. You up for a swim?”

Instead of replying, Loki grabbed his soulmate’s hand and dragged him to the couch, where Loki pulled his coat out of the bag. Only a few seconds later they had left the house, Anthony leading the way to the stairs he had mentioned. Loki nearly fell several times on their way down to the beach because he was in such a hurry, and he had to let go of Anthony’s hand because the man just wasn’t running fast enough.

As soon as there was sand beneath Loki’s feet, he got rid of his shoes, not stopping to take them off but hopping further on one foot at a time until he could toss both his shoes and his socks away. His shirt followed, then his pants, and by the time his toes touched wet sand he was naked, his coat pressed tightly against his chest.
The sound of the waves was gloriously loud in his ears and the breeze that ruffled his hair smelled and tasted like salt and there were gulls crying high above his head and water was splashing around his feet and it felt so much like home that Loki stilled and closed his eyes, unsure whether he wanted to laugh or to cry.

Anthony had already made that decision, it seemed, because when he came to a slithering halt next to Loki, he was laughing. The sound was even prettier than the cries of gulls or the rushing of waves.

“God, you’re fast,” Anthony said, breathless from laughing and running. “You okay? Do you like it?”

Loki beamed at him, his smile so wide that his cheeks had started hurting. He couldn’t say anything, but he laughed when he finally waded into the sea. The salt water was warmer than he was used to, but it felt wonderful on his skin either way. He looked over his shoulder back at Anthony, still grinning. A thought flashed through his mind, a memory— “If you ever set foot ashore, you have to hide your coat well. And you should never let a human watch you change, for they will try to take that freedom from you.” But Loki dismissed his mother’s voice and her warning, because he knew now. He was entirely sure. Anthony would never try to take anything Loki was not willing to give.

So Loki turned to the horizon again and ran his fingers over his coat. His hands trembled as he slid it over his legs, but it was because of excitement and anticipation, not anxiety. He had to take a deep, quivering breath when he finally felt the strength of his tail again, the water washing over his fur. It was all too easy to dive, and then it was even easier to breathe and to swim, to properly swim for the first time in ages.

Loki didn’t think about where he was going and before he knew it, he had left the coast far behind. He swam all the way to the seabed and buried the better part of his tail in the sand. It allowed him to rest and stretch out, and he looked up at the surface that was only a faint gleam somewhere high above him. It was dark and cool in the depths, and Loki hadn’t been so comfortable in a very long time. Their bed in New York might have been almost as good, especially when Anthony was also in it, but this was still the environment Loki had been born in. He relished the quiet, the feel of being surrounded by water again. A few fish swam past him, obviously curious, and after some time a crab began tugging at his flipper, but all Loki had to do was give it a gentle nudge and it started minding its own business again.

He wondered if there were selkies living in this ocean, too. He had heard stories from other tribes, other kingdoms, but he didn’t know where they were based. Maybe he should look for them. He scrunched up his nose at the thought of not finding other selkies, but merfolk instead, and dearly hoped that there wasn’t such a settlement near his new home. He had always found mermaids a little annoying, even though they were kind enough. Sirens, though… He really should watch out for them, for Anthony’s sake. The last thing he needed was having to convince a bunch of sirens that his soulmate was not edible.

Speaking of—

Loki blinked and sat up, quickly orientating himself. He didn’t know how long he had been gone, but he suspected that Anthony was already worrying. So Loki left his comfortable makeshift bed in the sand and headed back to their beach, swimming a little faster than he had earlier.

When he emerged he was still quite a bit away from the shallows, but still close enough to Anthony to see his hunched shoulders and the lost look in his eyes. Immediately Loki felt bad, so he swam closer and called Anthony’s name, waving. As soon as Anthony spotted him, his face lit up with
Joy and relief as he waved back.

“I thought you might’ve drowned!” he shouted, grinning from ear to ear.

“I can literally breathe under water,” Loki called back, rolling his eyes for show. “Are you coming now? I thought you wanted to take a swim!”

He could hear Anthony’s laugh, and then got the chance to watch his soulmate undress, which was always nice. He kept his boxers on when he waded into the water, though. Loki watched as Anthony approached him, raising a brow. Watching a human swim, with legs, was odd. It looked a bit awkward, and Loki felt like he should teach Anthony to swim properly. He didn’t yet know how to do that, exactly, but he was sure he could think of something.

“Hey,” Anthony greeted him when he stopped in front of Loki, having to move both his arms and his legs to avoid being swallowed by the waves.

“Hello,” Loki replied and pushed himself forward with his tail, reaching out to put his hands on Anthony’s waist. His tail was strong enough to keep them both above the surface, which made it a little easier for Anthony. He held on to Loki’s arms, his eyes fixed on Loki’s.

“Give me a warning before you disappear for so long, okay?” he asked softly. “I began thinking you’d left.”

“I am not going to leave you.” Loki pulled Anthony closer, wrapping his arms around him. “Ever.”

And Anthony smiled again and leaned in to bump their noses into each other, which was ridiculous and made Loki laugh. “Good,” Anthony said. His eyes wandered lower, then, and he angled his head to catch a glimpse of Loki’s tail. “You’re gorgeous, by the way.”

“Thank you,” Loki said, sincerely, and Anthony laughed and put his arms around Loki’s neck.

“So, are you going to drown me now?” he asked idly. “Isn’t that how the stories go?”

Loki gave him a dry look. “Don’t be ridiculous, love. I’m not a siren.”

Anthony blinked, then frowned, and when he opened his mouth it was probably to ask if sirens really existed or if Loki was just messing with him. But Loki didn’t give him the chance to ask anything– he kissed Anthony before he could say a single word.

Anthony didn’t seem to mind. He just made a soft sound of surprise and then kissed back, holding onto Loki as tightly as he could. And while Loki had always enjoyed kissing Anthony, there had always been something overshadowing them– his fear of humans, his sickness, his yearning for the sea.

Those shadows were gone now, and in their place, there was only hope.

Living here, on the ocean’s edge… Loki could swim whenever he wanted, and he didn’t have to give Anthony up. The private beach meant that Loki would be safe from prying eyes whenever he shed or donned his sealskin, and he would no longer need to worry about wasting away. He doubted that there wouldn’t be some kind of catch, perhaps a shortening of his lifespan in relation to his time on land, but if it meant that he could grow old with Anthony then… he could not truly consider it a consequence.

When their lips parted, Loki continued to hold Anthony close, not willing to let him go for a moment. Floating there in the salt water, with Anthony in his arms… well, he did not think he
could imagine anything that could feel more perfect.

“I’m glad that you’re happy, that you can swim as deep as you want, here,” Anthony said, his gaze moving over Loki’s shoulder and out toward the horizon. “I wish I could see it,” he continued, his voice wistful. “But unless those legends are true about a kiss letting me breathe underwater—”

“I’m not a mermaid, either,” Loki said, wrinkling his nose.

Anthony glanced back to him with a touch of amusement. “Not a fan of mermaids?”

“...No.”

“All right, then. Shame, though, because it would be a neat trick. Although…” Anthony’s eyes brightened with the gleam of a new idea, a look that Loki had long since become familiar with. His movements had stopped as he lost himself in thought, his hands coming to rest on Loki’s shoulders, his feet brushing lightly over Loki’s fur as Loki held them both up. “I could build something, a suit perhaps, that would let me swim with you even into the deepest parts of the ocean.” He grinned, catching Loki’s eye. “I mean, I could just use scuba gear, but that wouldn’t be half as fun. Or as glamorous, for that matter. I’m going to build something that’ll make you proud— and then, maybe I can impress your family with it when we visit.”

“Oh, Anthony,” Loki chuckled. “There’s no reason to want to impress them.”

“Of course there is,” Anthony said. “They’re your family.” Loki smiled warmly, touched by that— but before he could say a thing, Anthony was talking again. “Also, if I build this thing and take it with us to Scotland, you could show me where you grew up.”

“I would like that,” Loki said. “Very much.”

“Yeah?” Anthony said, his excitement clearly building. “And hey, maybe I should see if I can have a house built in Scotland, somewhere close to the sea. It would give your family and friends somewhere safe to hide their coats, so that what happened to you could never happen to anyone else ever again. I mean, it might take them a while to trust me, but it could work. What do you think?”

Loki couldn’t find the words to match his thoughts on the matter, so instead, he leaned in and kissed that incredible man with all the gratitude and awe and love that he possessed. He could feel Anthony’s lips curve into a smile against his own, the man’s legs wrapping around Loki’s tail, his hands burying into Loki’s hair. In that moment, Loki knew it with more certainty than he ever had before— this was where he belonged, half way between land and sea, and wrapped in the arms of his soulmate.

In every story Loki had ever heard, the selkie was doomed to an unhappy end. But Loki knew that he had beaten the odds, that he and Anthony were not doomed at all. Their story was far from ending, for it had only just begun. And despite the way that the odds had stacked against them, despite every painful obstacle they had faced, Loki knew that their future would be bright—

For they would live happily ever after, together by the sea.
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