Again

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Again

by silver_drip

Summary

When Loki invaded Midgard he did not expect to meet another god.
The clinking of ice cubes being angrily tossed into a glass unnerved Loki more than he was willing to admit. It was the only sound that penetrated the room other than his frantic heartbeat. He was frozen in place by a spell he did not recognize.

Loki tried turning his head to look out the window, to look at the battle, but his body would not comply. The only glimpse he caught was from his peripheral. Outside everything was motionless, no that’s not right. If he looked hard enough Loki could see the gliding Chitauri moving in slow motion. It was another spell that he didn’t recognize.

“You come to my realm,” Loki’s attention snapped back to the mortal, no to the god in front of him, “you come to my city, to my tower.” Anthony Stark, genius billionaire, or at least that’s what one of Loki’s thralls told him. The archer had neglected mentioning that Stark was actually not mortal, that he was an Aesir. Loki tried to speak, but the air in his lungs refused to do more than provide him with oxygen. “You steal my cube, you threaten my people.” The other god poured himself a drink. “The arrogance of it.” Stark shook his head and took a sip.

Despite being rendered motionless, despite not being able to speak, and being surrounded by unfamiliar spells Loki could not help but feel relieved, because there was an absence of another in his mind. He did not feel the presence that made it hard to breathe. He couldn’t feel the pressure on the back of his neck as if a strong hand was gripping him, forcing him to look at the ground.

Loki’s mind was his own, but now it was locked in an immobile body.

He wanted to speak, to plead his case to the other god, but Stark was glaring daggers at him and once more Loki knew he’d be punished, tortured, and perhaps this time killed.

“I can’t decide if I should pull you apart or send you to Odin’s dungeons and let the guards do it for me.” Stark continued and Loki felt a shiver race up his back.

Yes, send me to the All-Father. Loki wanted to plead. At least there I’ll be safe from Thanos and the Other.

“I will destroy you for perverting one of my creations.” Stark stalked forward, each stride powerful and fueled by rage. Loki could feel the dread filled acceptance settle in his stomach. “I will capture you and I will break you down into little pieces, put you back together, then pull you apart again.” Loki understood the words Stark was using, but they didn’t make sense to him. He was already captured, already a prisoner.

To say he would be captured was- unless… Unless!

Loki tried not to feel hope bud inside of him. He tried not to let his sudden burst of giddy disbelief cloud his thoughts.

“I will reach through space, through the realms, through the Void,” Stark raised his arm, his hand almost touching Loki’s face, but a hair’s breadth away. “To hook your mind to another’s. Are you really so daft as to not see the drawbacks of such a spell?”

Stark’s fingers brushed against Loki’s cheek with a surprising amount of warmth. Stark’s hand trailed down to Loki’s neck and the heat started to grow, started to boil. He wanted to scream in pain, to pull away, but he couldn’t.
Trapped all over again. First in a lifetime of lies, then in Thanos’ clutches, and now… and now-

Loki fell to his hands and knees, gasping for air. The hectic breaths quickly changed to painful
coughs. His throat was on fire and he was instantly reminded of how the Other forced him to drink
some sort of acid before he was flung into this realm.

Loki forced himself to raise his head and was surprised to see his doppelganger walking causally to
the balcony, scepter in hand. With a flash of green that he knew usually accompanied him whenever
he teleported the doppelganger disappeared.

“What-” Loki’s throat was raw and his words were rough. Before he could try again he saw Iron
Man take off, entering the fray that now felt so distant to Loki.

He was startled when a hand grabbed him by his upper arm and hefted him up effortlessly. His eyes
widened as he saw Stark’s expression. The god looked perturbed and tired.

Before Loki could say anything he was dragged then dropped onto a plush couch and a glass was
shoved into his hand, full of the same liquid Stark had been drinking earlier.

Loki followed Stark with his eyes as he sat down across from him, a different glass in hand. The
Aesir made a hand motion that Loki did not recognize. Colors blurred in front of the other god,
before solidifying into the image of a woman.

“Perfect timing.” The red headed woman said. “I just found a Cradle in your workshop in London.
Do you have the cube back yet?”

“It’s in the works.” Stark smiled cheekily at the woman and she made an exasperated sound.

“For once would you take something seriously? We wouldn’t be in this mess if you bothered to keep
track of your things.” She scolded him thoroughly, but it only served to make him smile wider.

“Pep, it’s not my fault you wanted to go to Jotunheim and my workshop got bombed in your
absence.”

“And you didn’t think to check if any of your things were still intact?” Stark only shrugged in
response. “By the Three Sisters! I can’t even talk to you right now. Just take this would you.” The
woman held out an ink black sphere and Stark reached through the image, his hand blurring as he
grasped the item then pulled it back. “Call me when you have everything in order so I can start
damage control.”

“What would I do without you, Pep?” Stark said while eyeing the black sphere.

“Probably accidentally kick off Ragnarök then begin another life where you burden me constantly.”

“That is surprisingly accurate.”

The woman huffed out a laugh before the image blurred and disintegrated.

Loki watched as Stark raised the sphere to eye level as dark red magic oozed from his fingers,
engulfing it. The sphere lit up with golden marking, runes, many of which Loki didn’t recognize.
The symbols shifted slightly and the sphere turned white.

Stark let it go before performing a spell that Loki was familiar with, a simple displacement spell
causing the item to completely disappear. He sunk further into his seat, closing his eyes and leaning
his head back.
Loki opened his mouth, but was quickly cut off.

“Don’t.” Stark said without even opening his eyes. “I’m annoyed with you for leading that inelegant beast to one of my cubes.”

Loki didn’t know what to say, didn’t know what to think. Thanos was out of his head, but his throat felt wrong, like the skin there was too tight.

He stared a moment longer at the Aesir before turning his attention to the battle outside. Whenever one of the Chitauri drew close to the tower they suddenly veered off slightly, a spark of red magic moving them like a spur to a horse. Without warning the various aliens fell from the sky motionless, dead.
Loki watched the alien invaders fall from the sky like rain drops before he glanced back at Stark. There was a line of concentration on the man’s forehead and his eyes were scrunched shut. His grip on his glass was almost damaging.

“Sir,” a disembodied voice said, startling Loki, “I have begun changing the flight pattern of the suit to be more erratic to mimic heavy damage in need of immediate repair.” Loki looked around frantically trying to identify the source of the voice, but it sounded like it was coming from all directions.

“Good, J. Make sure to relay to the other team members that I’m going straight to the tower and that Loki escaped. Send the corresponding video to Fury.”

“Yes, Sir.” The voice faded into nothing and a flash of red momentarily blinded Loki. When he could see once more Stark was holding the Tesseract. His lips moved silently, hands glowing dark red. The blue cube expanded and contracted in quick succession before vibrating and fluxing between every color of the rainbow.

There was a spark of red and the Cradle appeared. Stark slowly brought the two items together. As the sphere engulfed the cube it turned an ethereal purple. The shade was so familiar to Loki, but he didn’t know why.

Stark cast his brown eyes upon Loki. The younger god froze up, not able to read Stark’s expression. He felt a buzzing warmth sweep over him.

“Keep quiet. The other Avengers are coming.”

“No, you can’t-” He began to stand in protest, but a strong hand quickly pushed him back into his seat.

“Silence young godling. Or should I bind your voice as well?” Stark’s voice lacked the anger Loki assumed it would. Instead it almost sounded reprimanding. “I am not giving you to them.” He stared up at the other god, utterly confused. Stark carded his fingers through Loki’s hair in an almost bemused fashion. It was strangely comforting. “There is no need to worry. As far as they know you have escaped.” The world blurred for a moment and a pink box was in Stark’s hand. “Here, you look like you could use a little sugar to bring you back to life.” Loki was handed the box that read ‘Delicious, Delectable, to Die for Donuts’. Inside there was twelve glazed pastries. He hesitantly bit into one and found it to be delightfully sweet, in contrast with the sharp drink he was still holding.

When he was half finished with the box there was a pinging in the distance, causing him to freeze. Muffled voices became coherent. Loki looked towards Stark. The god was completely relaxed, leaning against the bar while pouring another drink.

The archer stumbled in with the assassin’s arm slung over his shoulder. The captain was limping and the berserker looked like he was half a step away from passing out. The last to enter the room was the thunderer. The look of disappointment on his face was almost crippling.

Out of all of them Stark was the one who appeared to have fared the best, a dark bruise across the left side of his face had appeared in the brief moment Loki took to look at the other Avengers.
“J, call up Fury. Tell him his favorite boy band has assembled.”

“Calling now.”

“Super. Feel free to grab a drink if you want one. Food is on the way.” Stark said nonchalantly before plopping down beside Loki, slinging his arm over the back of the couch. The younger god tensed up, waiting for the rest of the team to spot him, but they all just took different seats.

An image of a dark skinned man with an eye patch appeared on a black screen in front of him.

“How they hell did you all lose him!?” The man shouted, a vain on his bald head throbbing.

“Director, he disappeared with the Tesseract before we could apprehend him.” The assassin reported before taking a large gulp of some unidentified alcohol from a long bottle. Now that she was closer Loki could see her shoulder was dislocated.

A hand brushed across his shoulder, making Loki freeze up before he realized it was only Stark’s.

“I think I might have scared the wily wizard away.” Stark announced, drawing the attention of everyone in the room. “He was in my penthouse when I came in to change out of my broken suit. We flew a bit while I stalled for time.” The image on screen changed to one of him and Stark standing on opposite sides of the bar, clearly talking. “He tried to use his stick of destiny on me, but my reactor blocked the path of his mojo.” The image followed Stark’s narration, even though Loki knew that Tony hadn’t even moved away from the bar before his spell froze Loki in place. “He tried to cut my throat, but my awesome tech flew to protect me.” Loki was knocked aside by a suit of armor before it encased its creator. Stark fired a volley of shots, pushing the fake Loki into a marble wall. The real Loki glanced at the wall where he was supposedly shot. It had scorch marks and the outline of a tall man. On screen the doppelganger fell to his knees before disappearing in a flash of green. “By the time I fought my way to the top of the tower he was there and stole the Tesseract.”

“It usually takes more than that to halt my brother.” Thor said, a look of concern on his face.

“He did look pretty winded when he popped onto earth.” Tony gestured to the screen and it showed Loki arriving from the Tesseract, then cut to him stumbling to sit down in the back of a jeep.

“And how the hell did you get this footage, Stark?” Fury growled out.

“What? I thought this was standard Avenger issued.” He said innocently before glancing around the room. “You mean you guys didn’t get your copy?”

“You are right, Son of Stark. Loki does look as if he has come from a long quest only to be thrust into another one.” Thor said, ignoring Stark’s joke.

“Regardless, he still killed many of my agents, mind controlled them, and attacked a US city. We need to find him. A helicopter should be arriving in an hour. Dr. Banner I need you to come to our DC branch and make another one of those Tesseract tracking devices. Agent Romanoff and Agent Barton, what are your conditions?”

“Low on ammo and winded, but we’re still field ready.” The archer said, glancing at the assassin who nodded in agreement.

“Good, I want you back on the street-”

“Hold on there, Nicky, I have food arriving in-” Stark paused.
“ETA twenty minutes, Sir.” The AI reported.

“In twenty minutes. Let them eat and catch their breath then they can go back to being your lackeys.”

“Oh sorry, I didn’t know you were director of this mother fucking operation. By all means why don’t you all go on a little vacation while the rest of the world cleans up this mess?”

“Actually that’s a great idea.” Tony leaned forward, an excited smile in place. “My surveillance is showing that all the portal aliens are inactive. Your SHEILD agents are already in New York cleaning up the alien. Firefighters are shuttling in from surrounding states to help with the clean up. The police are helping the civilians and I just sent out my suit to help free people from the rubble. Let the heroes catch their breath.”

“Stark-”

“Natasha’s shoulder is dislocated and her side is bleeding. Clint’s wrist is sprained, possibly broken and he’s missing a shoe. Bruce is one dull moment away from going into hibernation. The only ones in working order are Capsicle and Flash Gordon.”

“I must look for my brother before I attend to your people.” The thunderer added in. “I will call on Heimdall and ask if he sees Loki since he is in a weakened state.” Loki tensed up, but Stark clasped his shoulder, silently telling him to calm down. He watched as the tall blond left, heading to the patio. “Please alert me shield brothers and sister if any new information arises.”

“I can still help.” Captain America said, brandishing his shield as if to prove a point.

“Fine, but at least grab a bottle of water and granola bar and eat them in the elevator.” Stark waved towards the kitchen and Steve nodded resolutely and left.

“Regardless of all that,” Fury cut in, “I’m still sending a helicopter to pick up Dr. Banner.”

“Unnecessary. I’m sure we have all the components here. It would waste time for him to leave.” Stark waved dismissively.

“Dr. Banner is coming to SHEILD headquarters stat.” Fury said with all the authority his position granted him.

“Brucie, do you want to go? I have a feeling that the government really isn’t your friend.” The berserker glanced from the screen to Tony.

“I think I’ll stay here and get started right a way.”

“Wonderful! Jarvis can you direct the good doctor to one of the R&D labs and get Dum-E to deliver the necessary parts there.”

“Of course, Sir. Dr. Banner if you would enter the elevator. The lab is located on a separate level.” Loki watched carefully as Bruce left.

“J, make sure food is sent to him as well.”

“All ready done, Sir.”

“Super. I don’t think there’s much else we can do until the tracker is complete. I already have most of the cameras in the city looking for him.” Stark glanced at Natasha and Clint. “You two look like you could use some rest. Tasha, do you need help popping your shoulder back in place.”
“No, I’m just fortifying myself for it.” She lifted the bottle up in explanation.

“There are spare bedrooms two floors below. You might want to take a power nap before the food gets here.” The archer and assassin looked at each other, the redhead nodding to him. The stood up silently.

“Thank you for your hospitality.” Natasha said, in almost an afterthought as they hobbled to the elevator, leaving only Stark and Loki in the room.

“An invisibility spell?” Loki asked.

“No, it was an elf spell that averts eyes. Had they been focusing they could have smelled the sulfur that lingers on your cape and they would have heard the creaking of the leather couch.” Stark made a waving motion and the scorch marks on the wall disappeared.

“What did you do to me? Who are you? Why couldn’t I sense your magic earlier?” The questions flowered from Loki in quick succession.

Stark glanced to his side at him, fatigue clear in his eyes.

“Not everything is as evident as you may hope it would be.” Stark sighed. “Do you really want to talk about this now? I haven’t expelled this much energy in decades.” Loki jumped up.

“Of course we have to talk about it now! Who are you?! What did you do to me?! Why didn’t you hand me over to that bolstering fool Thor?!” He was shaking by the time he finished shouting at Stark. The older god grabbed Loki’s wrist and yanked him down so that they were sitting by each other again.

“I have a headache that could cow a bilgesnipe. For the love of all things good please keep your voice down.” Stark pressed his cold glass to his forehead, eyes still tightly shut. “Abridged version: you can’t sense my magic because it’s not like any you’ve ever come across before, I didn’t hand you over to Thor because I need you here for the time being, I bound the tendrils of Thanos’ mind to the runes on your neck, and for as to whom I am…” Stark opened his eyes, finally looking at Loki. “In this iteration while in Asgard I went by Ásviðr, more commonly known as The Builder, but in this realm I go by Tony Stark and I am the God of Fortification.”

Chapter End Notes

God of Fortification... Do you think it fits his personality?
“I’m going to take a nap.” Stark announced while pulling himself up. “Stay on this floor or the link I have containing Thanos will weaken.” Loki watched him go, stunned into silence.

He didn’t recognize the name Ásviðr, but he did recognize the moniker The Builder. He had never heard it, but he had felt it, read it as a child. He had been hiding from Thor and his friends after some mischief or another. It was one of the many golden rooms in the castle, but there was only a long alter. Loki had brushed his fingers against the many runes and glyphs carved into the strange structure, then towards the very bottom where the only shadow in the room was cast: The Builder.

When he was older he realized it was the room the king went to when he fell into their healing hibernation, the place he rested. It had been given to Búri Odin’s grandfather when the castle had finally completed. But that was…

Loki’s eyes widened.

That was at least twenty millennia ago. No being could live that long, not even the drakes of Muspelheim. It was impossible.

But then again it was impossible for a mage as strong as Loki not to be able to sense another with such talent in his proximity, yet somehow he’d missed that fact.

Stark had mentioned that he had bound Thanos’s presence with runes on Loki’s neck. He glanced around the room. There was a mirror behind the bar. His reflection showed a series of dark red runes woven around his throat, so clustered and small that it almost looked like someone had slit his throat.

Every time he tried to use his magic the runes around his neck flared painfully and his magic rebounded inside of him.

Loki touched the runes. They almost burned under his fingertips, a slight surge of power made him gasp. It was not the familiar magic that usually coursed through his own body nor the searing magic that Stark seemed to use- Instead it was a cold, haunting magic, Thanos’ magic. It was only an instant, but it served to remind Loki that his mind was still not his own.

“What?” Loki asked, feeling wary.

“Yes, Mr. Odinson.” Loki frowned at his former name.

“I am no son of Odin.”

“Yes, the scans confirm that fact. You are of Jotun origin. King Odin is of Aesir origin. I was merely trying to be delicate on the subject.” Loki scowled. “Do you have a preferred name that you’d like me to use instead?”

“Loki is just fine.”

“Very well, Loki. How may I help you?”

“Who exactly is your master?”
“As Sir stated earlier he is Ásviðr The Builder. He is presently known as Tony Stark and Iron Man. He is the God of Fortification.” Jarvis’ posh voice answered.

“I have read all the tombs and annals in Asgard’s royal library and many of the books in the other royal libraries. There has never been a God of Fortification listed.”

“Rightly so, Loki. Paper records do not tend to fair well through Ragnarök, let alone more than one Ragnarök.”

“What are you implying?”

“I thought it was quite obvious what I was saying.”

“No one can survive Ragnarök.”

“My creator, the God of Fortification can and has.”

“Impossible.”

“Improbable actually.”

“And how long have you been with your creator?”

“A very long time, but when there is nothing I sleep so I am uncertain of the exact amount of time. Besides, it becomes difficult to measure time when there is no movement of the planets to measure it by- And by what measurement would I use. A Midgard’s minute? An Aesir minute? And what of the other iterations? Each realm, each iteration has its own means of measurement. After a while it just becomes an exercise in futility.”

“And what race is he if not Aesir?”

“In the last iteration he was born into a realm that was the equivalent of the current Asgard. For all intents and purposes he is Aesir.”

“So even he is Aesir while I am…” Images of blue skin and icy terrain flashed through his mind, accompanied by a feeling of disgust.

“A Jotun, as is Ms. Potts.”

“Ms. Potts?”

“The woman Sir was conversing with earlier. She is his partner.”

“His partner? And he chose a Jotun?” Loki asked in disbelief.

“When he was young he used to visit the equivalent of Jotunheim. It was his favorite realm to study in.”

“What do you mean?”

“There are many things that stay the same during each iteration. One of those things is the grandeur of Jotunheim’s library.” A blue illusion appeared followed by seven others, all stone like cathedrals. “Unfortunately some disaster or another always befalls them.” The images changed to ruins. “The one in this iteration was destroyed by an onslaught of ice.”

“What else stays the same?”
“Ms. Potts, no matter which gender, race, or age is always efficient and hard working.”

“She does not survive Ragnarök with Stark?”

“That is Ms. Potts’ private business.”

“Of course.” Loki sat at the bar. “What can you tell me about this spell?” He said after a few minutes, touching the runes on his neck.

“It is not a spell I am familiar with.”

“Your tone almost implies that not being familiar with one of his spells is an anomaly.”

“Very astute of you. I know each of Sir’s spells. I must conclude that he created the spell recently. From the symbols I read it is a binding spell.”

“I am unfamiliar with many of them.”

“Many are not from this iteration. Sir does not feel the need to limit himself to only this one.”

“And why is your creator helping me?”

“The main reason? As he stated previously he does not like when people touch his things. The ‘Tesseract’ as the mortals and Aesir have named it is one of Sir’s creations. It has been warped since he last held it. He takes great offense to that.”

“I didn’t warp it, merely unlocked its ability to open vortexes. Is he going to…” Loki’s mind got sidetracked, recent memories of torture flooding his thoughts.

“From what I can gather Sir plans on extracting Thanos from your mind.”

“What will he do to me after that?”

“Unknown, but I suggest you do as instructed. Any attempts to leave will be seen as an act of aggression and I’ll be forced to restrain you.”

“You presume to restrain me? You? A being with no body and no magic?”

“As I already stated I know all of Sir’s spells. I also have various reserves of magic independent of Sir and any corporal form.” As if in demonstration the room shifted. Loki’s heart froze.

“No- No, please no-” Loki gripped his head, panic tearing him up inside. “I was free- I can’t be here-”

“Jarvis, restrain yourself.” The room shifted again, back to the penthouse. “That’s no way to treat a guest. Showing him the place he fears most. Daddy is very disappointed.”

“Sorry, Sir. I was merely proving a point.”

“Hmm, I can see that. Has the food been delivered yet?” Stark asked, pouring himself a drink.

“Ms. Cook has already delivered it to the kitchen. I had her put it in the refrigerator since you were resting.”

“That was an awfully short nap.”
“It doesn’t take a lot to charge my battery backup.” Stark tapped a glowing circle on his chest.

“What is it you have planned for me, Stark, since I’m clearly at a disadvantage here.” Loki tried to smile confidently, but he could feel his façade cracking.

“Calm down, Bambi. I’m not going to lie to you. This is going to hurt.” Stark moved closer to him and Loki refrained from flinching away. In a quick move the older god grabbed Loki by the back of his neck and pulled him close so that they were eye level with each other. “I’m going to dig into your brain, scrape away at all the filth and lies, see the real you, and then use the link you have to Thanos to pull his mind out of his own damn body and tear it apart.” Stark released his grip and Loki jerked backwards. “But first, I need a drink.” The older god’s tone changed from the edge of insanity to lighthearted so fast Loki almost got whiplash. “So tell me about the Realm Eternal. I felt the Bifrost shatter. What happened?”

Loki flinched at the mention of the rainbow bridge.

“You felt it break?” Loki asked, trying to steer the conversation in a different direction.

“Yeah, I built the golden solarium. I could feel when the web of spells became unwoven.” Stark shook his head. “No matter though. It’s weaving itself back together again. It will take a decade or two.” Loki didn’t know why, but knowing that one of Stark’s inventions was self repairing was comforting. “You might want to have a drink. This is going to be horribly intimate, both physically and mentally.”

“I don’t care how intimate or painful it will be. I want him out of my head.” Loki said resolutely.

“Good then we’re on the same page!” The glass in Stark’s hand disappeared. He grabbed Loki by his elbow and dragged him to the couch. “The best thing you can do is relax.” Stark plopped down on the couch and Loki stood awkwardly, unsure of what he needed to do. “Horribly intimate.” Stark mumbled before quickly yanking Loki down so that he was straddling Stark’s thighs. Loki gasped as calloused hands forced him to stare into brown eyes, and then his skull felt like it was splitting open.

Chapter End Notes

Just a lil' more info to set the story up. I decided to make Pepper a Jotun at the last moment. Hope you enjoyed it :)
Totally said I was going to update this yesterday, but I was halfway through editing when a short story kept distracting me. I took a break to write down the gist of it, but ended up just writing the whole thing. It's called Unforeseen if you're interested. I just posted it ;)

It was worse than when Thanos invaded his mind. With Thanos Loki had already been in a weakened state after weeks of physical torture, his mind was already open.

But now, but this time… Loki’s mind was almost as sharp as it had been before- before the fall. And that meant that every defense he had erected was being destroyed.

His eyes were being drilled into his skull. Waves of nausea- His breathing was stuttered.

He wanted to shout, to struggle, but once again he was trapped.

The pain was thrashing inside of his skull and all Loki could see was dark brown with flashes of red. A brushing sensation that simultaneously felt like silk and sandpaper.

He felt weak, he felt raw. Completely defenseless- Just like when he was plummeting through the Void, but now he was plummeting in his own mind unable to latch on to a single thought beyond the pain.

Brown eyes that flashed red-

Every piece that made him Loki was tossed aside carelessly- Every façade was destroyed effortlessly by the other god. Each lie Loki had built up to protect himself, to make him stronger-

*No, Loki.*

He screamed, because this pain was worse than the torture. It was worse than falling through the Void.

*No, Loki.*

Just two words spoken by the man he considered his father- over and over again.

*I chose you!* Loki wanted to shout to the voice. *I never wanted to be a monster! Can’t you see I did this for you?! For mother?!

*No, Loki.*

*I was only following in your footsteps! Killing those monsters as any Aesir would!*

*No, Loki.*

His worst moment relieved a million times over.
I just wanted to show you-

No, Loki.

I tried! I swear I tried so hard!

No, Loki.

Why? Why can’t you see I just wanted your respect? To be Thor’s equal instead of his shadow?

No, Loki.

I don’t understand! I chose you! I chose Asgard! Can’t you- can’t you just for once choose me?

No, Loki.

The voice echoed the same two words in his head until they lost all meaning. The blurry noise cycled and the younger god wasn’t sure where the agony was coming from anymore. He only knew was that it was all consuming-

Hush now, godling. Another voice whispered. I’ve found you a place to rest.

Silence reigned.

The pain ceased.

The faintest of crackling, a fire. Loki could feel its serene warmth.

If you’re just going to fall asleep, wouldn’t it be wiser to do so in your own bed? A kind… a loving voice asked him.

No, I like sleeping here. Loki responded while stretching, his fingers brushing against Frigga’s favorite pair of silk slippers.

Very well, my son, but you must roll over. You are using my bag of yarns and threads as a pillow. How am I to finish this tapestry if I cannot use your favorite shade of green to bring the whole image together?

Loki yawned, taking his time just because he knew it would make Frigga pretend to frown when she really wanted to smile.

Fine, mother, but I refuse to move an inch further.

Frigga laughed, warming Loki straight to his soul.

The crackling of fire.

If you’re just going to fall asleep, wouldn’t it be wiser to do so in your own bed?

The scene began again, and with each subsequent repeat it never lost its warmth, its overwhelming love.

Loki was stuck in that brief moment for what felt like ages, yet not long enough.

He wanted to stay there forever, but a dull ache was pulling him away, pulling him back to reality and the present.
He gasped as his eyes flew open, revealing a high white ceiling. It was spinning and sparks of silver flashed and disappeared. He could feel cold, half dried tears on his face. He felt like an egg that had fallen to the ground, shattered and was oozing its insides everywhere.

After a few harsh, yet calming breaths Loki realized he was laid out on a couch in Stark’s penthouse. He carefully touched his neck, but did not feel the flare of heat that used to accompany the motion.

Despite sweat, grainy ash, and dirt covering his skin Loki hadn’t felt this clean in what felt like decades. He could no longer detect the tendrils of Thanos’ mind in his own.

Whispered words caught his attention. It took almost all his energy to turn onto his side to see the source. Stark, but of course.

Loki was oddly relieved. Seeing Stark meant that his freedom from Thanos wasn’t just another dream as he slept in a crumbled heap in a black room.

There was an icy blue mist between Stark’s hands. It thrashed restlessly against an invisible barrier. A red ribbon of magic was slowly winding around it, strangling it like a boa.

Loki shivered. He could sense the being contained in the mist, Thanos. Loki half expected the mist to solidify and for Thanos to grab him by his throat and drag him back to the crater they tortured beings in.

The slithering red magic suddenly tightened around the mist and Loki could almost hear Thanos’ screams of pain. Loki grinned.

Red claw like daggers appeared on Starks fingers. He dug them into the icy blue mist. The ether burst outwards like a bubble before contracting into a small sphere. With one claw Stark etched into the sphere a tightly woven fractal pattern. The etching turned from dark red to gold before the sphere shattered into small identical cubes.

Stark’s hands moved quickly as he pieced the cubes back together again to reform a sphere, this time larger than the last one. He did the process repeatedly, each time the mist fighting less against him and dulling to a pale blue.

Loki’s eyes drifted up towards Stark’s face. The Aesir had a look of unparalleled concentration on his face. His brown eyes were glowing bright red with magic. His lips whispered silent words. His dark hairline was damp with sweat.

Loki had seen many mages craft spells and runes, but never with such vigor and speed, yet with a finesse that suggested a comprehension of magic that was unheard of.

It was almost hypnotizing, soothing.

Loki felt the exhaustion from the past year slowly creep up on him. The rejection, silent screams, helplessness… He was so tired and the couch beneath him was so soft.

His eyes became bleary.

The mist constricted, burst, contracted, red etching turned gold, shattered to cubes, then put back together again. Repeat.

Somehow it reminded Loki of a lullaby as he drifted to sleep.
Loki was slowly pulled out of his rest by the scent of food cooking. He looked towards the source to see a woman in the kitchen. She was... stunning. Taller than the average light elf with black hair that cascaded down her back, silver and golden chains laced in her locks. She wore a soft sage green dress that flowed around her as she moved effortlessly around the kitchen. Her skin glowed ethereally.

She waved her hand towards one of the pots and a golden wave of magic cascaded over the food. Two plates of food appeared in her hands. She glided across the floor and to Loki, handing him one of the plates with a smile.

Hesitantly he took a bite.

Loki wanted to weep. The dish, it smelled, it tasted, it felt just like a meal from his home.

Loki went to thank the woman, but her image dissipated into a red light that faded slowly.

The other plate was on the table between him and Stark.

“Did you get Thanos out of my head?” Loki asked, even though he could feel the absence. Stark was weaving golden threads of magic together with his fingers. Each subsequent twist, loop, and knot was tighter than the last, making the woven parts look solid.

“All traces of him are gone from this realm and all the others. I killed him.”

Loki nodded, somewhat disappointed that he didn’t get to exact his revenge on the Mad Titan.

Loki reached out for his magic, but it was still bound. He hissed in displeasure.

“Why can’t I access my magic?”

“Can’t have you disappearing on me. We still have business to attend to.”

“And what business would that be?” Loki was itching to run, but knew he wouldn’t get far without his powers, especially not against someone like Stark.

“Two things: your mind is still fragile and unstable. I refuse to leave any project in a weakened state. I am the God of Fortification after all.” Stark smiled goodheartedly.

“The other reason?” Loki asked cautiously.

“You’re the one who fell into the Void.” The golden threads disappeared and Stark picked up his plate, surveying the food there.

“How do you know about that?”

“I was in your head, remember Lokes?”

“Why does it matter that I was in that place?”
“Jarvis already mentioned to you that certain things happen each iteration. A soul falling into the Void is one of those things.” Stark seemed to age right in front of Loki’s eyes. “I thought there was more time. I thought I had created more time.”

“Shall I inform Ms. Potts, Sir?” Jarvis asked sounding just as tired as his creator.

“No, I’ll tell her when she gets here.”

“Is that wise? Shouldn’t we start preparing?”

“What’s happening?” Loki tried reading Stark’s expression and didn’t like what he saw there. The older god was frowning.

“We can make more time. This is a new opportunity. I won’t waste it.” Stark said, ignoring Loki’s question. “We have at least a decade. I can feel it.”

“What does my fall have to do with anything?” Loki’s anxiety was creeping up.

“A decade is nothing, Sir. We should just try for the next iteration.”

“No, I’ve already made up my mind.”

“Stop ignoring me!” Loki shouted, jumping up to his feet and feeling like a petulant child. Stark looked at him stunned, having completely forgotten about the other god’s presence.

“Calm down, Bambi. You’ll wake the neighbors.”

“Then tell me what’s going on.”

“You’re a link in the chain of events that kick starts Ragnarök.” Stark stated plainly. Loki fell back into his seat.

First Jotunheim, this city, and now all the realms. Monster.

Loki laughed, a hint of insanity leaking in.

(Of course… Of course! Why not! Of course I’d cause Ragnarök! Who else would be so sick-”

“Woah, hold your reindeer Lokes. No one said you caused it. Falling through the Void is just, uh, sort of a precursor.” Stark approached him carefully. “You need to get that self hatred under control. The Jotuns are a fine people. I was a giant for at least seven iterations. Pepper, my right hand lady is a frost giantess. They’re people just like the rest of us. There are good ones and bad ones- I can see you don’t believe me. Come here.” Once again Stark took Loki’s head in his hands. As Loki met Stark’s brown eyes an icy wind cut through the air.

A light blue hand- his own light blue hand turned a page. The language of the book in front of him was unrecognizable, but the All-Speak allowed him to read it.

“Njal,” a female voice called him.

“What? You know I’m trying to figure out this spell before my father comes back.” I responded, not looking up from the book.

“The feast is going to have foreign dignitaries. Don’t you want to see them? Have you ever seen a rock giant?”
“Of course I have, Asta. You know who my father is. I need to finish this. I swear I’ll go to the next feast with you.”

“You say that every time.” In my peripheral I could see delicate purple legs walk in my direction. The raised lines on her skin curved, wrapping around her calves then dipping down to her ankles. Her hands felt warm as they brushed up my arm, tracing my own lines. She settled her hands on my shoulders and began massaging them.

“Uck, how do you always hit the right spot?” I could feel my skin contracting, lines rising out of pleasure.

“Hmm, I just know you, I guess.” Asta draped her arms over my shoulders, leaning against me. “Come on, you don’t have to go into the feasting hall.” She whispered in my ear. “Just one dance, Njal. You need a break.” She kissed my cheek and we both knew my resolve was weakening. “I’ll even show you a spell I saw the high priestess perform yesterday.”

I snapped my book closed.

“You’ve convinced me, but don’t blame me if Elhaym ambushes us.”

“For what you did to her sister, I wouldn’t blame her.”

“Consenting adults, Asta, that’s all that matters.” I wrapped my arm around her waist before kissing her on the cheek.

“You’re the worst fiancée imaginable.” She said while giggling.

“You know I’ll be good to you when we’re married.”

“Hmph, we’ll see.” We linked hands as she led me out of the library. The frozen halls carried music. Carved into the ice were the images of dancing women.

Asta leaned against me, humming along with the music. I glanced at her. She was wearing the golden necklace I had bought for her.

The sun filtered through the glass ceiling.

“You look beautiful tonight.”I whispered to her while pulling her into my arms, swaying to the music, cheek to cheek.

“I look beautiful every night.”

“On our wedding day you’ll be prettier than the high priestess.” I could feel her skin contract slightly against my cheek.

The sensation faded along with the vision.

Brown eyes… Loki jerked backwards, freeing himself from Stark’s grip.

“What was that?” Loki asked while gasping.

“One of my past lives.”

“No one remembers their past lives.” Loki narrowed his eyes at the other god, believing him, yet refusing to voice the sentiment.
“God of Fortification.” Stark tapped his temple. “Ragnarök destroys us, leaving behind only our essence, magic, and base characteristics. I just had to strengthen certain aspects of myself and memories that were precious or important so that they wouldn’t be destroyed by the time I was reborn.” Stark grinned widely. “I also kept a wealth of unique spells and runes that I stumbled upon during my travels.”

“So you really don’t survive Ragnarök, only your memories survive.”

“At first, yes. My furthest back memory is actually me getting a blowjob from a dark elf queen.” Stark chuckled. “Figures I’d choose that memory to experiment with.”

Loki fell back into his seat.

“So then that was…”

“One of my earliest iterations.”

“Then they were no real Jotuns. One was purple after all.”

“There’s usually slight differences between each iteration. Here, show me your true body and I can prove that they’re the same.”

“No, I refuse.” Loki looked to the side away from Stark. The other god sat beside him on the couch.

“You’re a stubborn one, aren’t you? You know I could just dispel the glamour for you.”

“You violated my mind already. Must you violate my body as well?” Loki asked, still staring out the window. Stark snorted indignantly.

“You royals are always so haughty. Anywho, if I ever ‘violate’ your body I assure you that it would be consensual and pleasurable for the both of us.”

“You’re a terrible flirt.”

“Not flirting, just a statement of fact. So come on, Lokes. Show me your other skin.”

“No, absolutely not.”

“I can shape shift into a Jotun if it will make you more comfortable. There’s nothing wrong with being a frost giant.”

“I don’t want to see you as a Jotun, nor do I want to see myself as one.”

“You know Loki,” Stark’s voice changed to deadly serious causing Loki to finally look over at him, “you’re going to fall in every iteration. You’re going to fall into the Void every time.” Loki’s back straightened and he balled his hands into fists. “It’s just a part of your true essence.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“No, you don’t want to believe that. I know the tenor of your magic now. In the next iteration I might be able to get to you before you fall, but there’s no guarantee. Years, centuries, millenniums… they just slip away from me sometimes. I already plan on repairing your mind to be as strong as it was before the fall, but if you cooperate I can teach you how to save memories so that in your next life you may be able to avoid falling.”

Loki took in a deep breath, trying to calm down. His whole body was shaking. He kept imaging the
last glimpse of Asgard he had while falling. It had looked like a golden star, but then in the blink of the eye it was gone and he was truly alone with only his thoughts, confusion, and self-hatred.

“I don’t want to fall again.” Loki despised how weak he sounded, but then again, the older god had been in his mind. He already knew how weak Loki was.

“Good, then we’re in agreement. I haven’t had a student other than Pepper in at least thirteen millennia. We’ll have to set down a few ground rules though since your situation is unique considering you’re a wanted criminal in at least two realms. Obviously you have to stay under the radar. I’m a hero in this faux-life. I’d have to get a brand new life if they saw I was ‘harboring the enemy’ and that’s just too much of a hassle.”

“Understandable, I will endeavor to stay hidden, but I can’t use my magic currently to properly hide myself.”

“I know. You’ll have access to it again soon as your mind is strong enough to handle it again. You’re no good to me if you go insane.” Stark chuckled and gave Loki a disarming smile. “Another rule: you must not teach anyone else the spells I’m going to teach you. They’re too powerful. Having foreknowledge of an iteration they were just born into could give them too much of an advantage. This is nonnegotiable.”

Loki stared at Stark for a moment before bursting out laughing.

“You say that like I have someone I could actually tell them to. You’ve seen inside my head. There is no one I trust, let alone would gift with such power- and if these spells are truly so powerful why are you teaching them to me?” He could feel his suspicion prickle, putting him on alert.

“To stall Ragnarök in this iteration and subsequent iterations. Do you agree or not?”

“Yes, I agree. Are there any other terms?”

“Just one last one. You cannot hate yourself, especially not your Jotun form. Who knows what you’ll be in your next life. If you are born Jotun with memories of hating Jotuns do you really think you’re going to have a happy life?”

“I don’t know if I can… They are- The frost giants are monsters. They kill indiscriminately-” A warm hand touched his shoulder, causing him to flinch.

“Hey now, enough of that.” Stark gripped his shoulder comfortably through Loki’s armor. “The Jotun are just like any other race. The last three millennia have just been hard on them. All those bedtime stories were just that: stories. Now release this façade. I don’t want to see this false face again until you’re comfortable with your real one.”

Loki stared down at his perfectly white hands, but they weren’t actually perfect. There was dirt and dried blood under his nails. A half healed gash flared painfully on his left palm. Two of his nails were still half grown, recovering from being pulled out by Thanos.

He didn’t want these hands. He didn’t want the dirt from when he stumbled to the ground nor the blood from when Thanos told him to stab into the mortal. Loki didn’t want the gash from when he had stumbled and he never wanted to become Thanos’ plaything. These weren’t the hands he wanted, nor the life he had worked so hard for.

“I don’t know how to dispel Odin’s glamour without using the Casket of Ancient Winters, and even then it’s only temporary.” Loki said under his breath, still looking at his hands.
“That’s okay. Just give me a second to look at the spell.” Loki felt a small surge of magic beside him and glanced at Stark. His eyes were glowing red again. His stare was intense, to say the least. It made Loki feel exposed, Loki was exposed to this ancient god. “It’s a fairly complex glamour, but nowhere close to the stuff Pepper can make.”

Loki felt his skin crawl, itch, and tickle all at the same time as the glamour came undone and white shifted to blue. The dirt and blood were still under his now silver fingernails. The red gash on his palm was now dark blue, and two of his nailbeds were still exposed. The same hands, just a different color.

His eyes trailed up his arm, rolling up his sleeves. The raised lines… They were similar to the ones Stark showed him in his vision, but more angular.

“What do they mean?” Loki asked while touching one that split into three at his wrist.

“They don’t mean anything, though some Jotun cultures will tell you they are conduits for your magic. They’re more for… Well I’ll just show you.” Stark gently took Loki’s arm and turned it so that the softer underside was facing up.

“Why isn’t my skin giving you frostbite?” Loki asked, his voice just a whisper.

“It’s a defense mechanism. You’ll only hurt me if you let your anger or fear overwhelms you.” Stark ran a calloused finger on one of the raised lines for a few moments.

“I don’t understand. Nothing’s happening.” He couldn’t help but feel disappointed. He was a failure even in his ‘natural’ form.

“Relax and just wait for it.” Loki sighed and leaned back in the chair, trying to ease the tension in his shoulders. He closed his eyes, focusing on the sensation. It wasn’t a bad feeling, almost soothing like lazing around in a warm bed.

It was almost sensual, yet somehow dulled in comparison.

Loki realized that his own breath felt warm on his lips. He licked them and they almost felt too hot.

He felt something inside him shift.

His mind focused on the finger brushing against one of his lines. He could barely feel it now, yet he couldn’t think of anything else.

A thumb brushed against the skin between his lines-

Loki gasped and let out a broken moan.

Stark released his arm and Loki suffered from the loss of contact.

His eyes fluttered open.

“What… was that?” Loki felt breathless, warm and cold at the same time.

“Ice giants live in cold windy places. Their skin is thick with the nerve endings hidden from the damaging cold.” Stark paused and Loki tried not to squirm in his seat. “When aroused the skin bunches up at the lines, pulling the skin thin, pushing the nerves to the surface.” Loki touched the sensitive skin and felt a rush of pleasure. “Only your arm’s skin contracted this time, but when the rest does it can be rather maddening, even the slightest movement can-”
“Pardon the interruption, Sir.”

“What’s up, J?”

“Dr. Banner is requesting your assistance with the construction of the Tesseract locator.”

“Tell him I’ll be down in a few minutes.” Stark glanced over at Loki. “Finish your meal. There’s a guest bedroom down the hall and to the left. Feel free to get cleaned up and rest.”

Loki watched the other god leave and he tried to calm himself down.

Chapter End Notes

I've been dying to write out my idea on why Jotuns have those lines. What do you think?
Loki quickly finished his plate of food, savoring every bite. He hadn’t had a good meal since before his fall. As a prisoner he was only fed the equivalent of half rotten potatoes. Ever since he arrived in Midgard he had been constantly on the move. The only real food he had were packaged cookies that he found in the helicopter they stole.

He was surprised that his skin hadn’t frozen his meal now that he was in *this* form.

Loki set the plate in the sink, feeling oddly sleepy. When he found the guest room he came to a standstill. It looked exactly like his room back home, back in his former home. The same dark wood bedframe, soft black sheets that held in warmth on cold nights and expelled it on warm ones, the toy horse he had whittled as a boy was on his reading desk, his books… all his books. It even smelled like his room back home. The only difference was that the room was a bit smaller and missing two of his windows and the doors were in the wrong places.

He wondered when Stark had the time to cast such a strong and specific spell. Even more than that he wondered how Stark’s magic penetrated the protected castle, let alone stole a whole room from it.

The God of Fortification, The Builder… He probably knew the castle better than Loki did, possibly even constructing large parts of it.

Loki shrugged off his armor and clothing wanting nothing more than to get rid of the filth that had accumulated on him in the last year.

It felt strange, feeling the cloth slide off his new, his ‘original’ skin. It no longer felt over-sensitive, but the texture of his clothing didn’t feel as soft as it had in his other form. It dragged against him instead of gliding off. It was no wonder why Jotuns wore so little clothing. Taking it on and off was a hassle.

The bathroom was different than his own, modern and sleek. Loki avoided his reflection, instead figuring out how to use the shower. The hot water he usually favored surprisingly didn’t hurt. The warm spray didn’t make him feel uncomfortable, but made him even sleepier.

He didn’t even have enough time to relish his cleanliness before he collapsed into his bed, falling asleep instantly.

Loki woke up slowly, nuzzling into his pillow, wondering what would be served in the feasting hall for breakfast-

But this wasn’t Asgard, and he was no longer a king nor prince.

“Good morning, Loki. Shall I inform Sir that you are awake?” Jarvis said in a low voice, trying not to startle the god.

“No, not yet.” Loki stretched and hated how his skin grated across the soft sheets. “How long have I been asleep?”

“Just shy of three days.” Loki was surprised. He hadn’t slept at such lengths since he was a child.
“Breakfast shall be complete in ten minutes. Would you like to have it served here or in the kitchen?”

“Where is your creator?” Loki asked while staring at his hands. Both his fingernails had grown back and the wound on his palm was completely healed.

“Sir is presently in his lab. You should be aware that Ms. Potts is in the living room. I recommend that you introduce yourself to her.”

“Very well. I’ll take my breakfast in the kitchen.”

Loki changed into some of his less formal outfits before quietly exiting his room. He wished he had access to his magic. He felt exposed and weak without it. If Ms. Potts attacked him he’d only have his physical combat abilities to fall back on. He used to be comfortable in his fighting skills, but since Thanos he felt less sure of himself.

Also, he didn’t want the other Jotun to see how small he was.

When he entered the living room he spotted Ms. Potts sitting on one of the armchairs talking on the phone about a business meeting that needed to be rescheduled. She was wearing her human glamour and seemed unperturbed when she saw him, even giving him a friendly wave.

The same mirage woman as before was just finishing cooking as he sat down. She smiled at him while pouring a glass of orange juice.

“Who and what are you?” Loki asked, trying to sound polite despite his overwhelming curiosity.

“Ms. Cook is incapable of speech. She is a combination of spells created by Sir and one of Ms. Potts’ previous iterations. She specializes in the culinary arts, but she is well versed in the creation of clothing, first aid, and house cleaning.” Ms. Cook set a plate of food in front of him before disappearing in a haze of red magic.

He ate in near silence, only the one sided conversation of Ms. Potts accompanying him. His thoughts drifted. He felt slightly light headed and like he was forgetting something. He chalked that up to the fact that Stark said that his mind was still fragile.

“I must admit that it is strangely comforting to see a fellow Jotun.” Ms. Potts said to Loki, pulling him from his thoughts.

“And yet you hide your blue skin.”

“I’d shift to my natural state, but I’d just end up tearing my clothes and breaking my shoes.” She chuckled. “I’m Pepper Potts. You may call me Pepper. I’m Tony’s business partner. We help each other in our various endeavors.”

“It is nice to meet you, Pepper. I am Loki. I am very curious about your partner.”

“People usually are when they find out about who he really is.”

“Exactly how many people actually know who he is?”

“Currently only you and I. Seven millennia ago when we were staying on Svartalfheim he revealed himself to a man who was a lover from an earlier iteration. Unfortunately when we found him he was very old so Tony only got to spend two decades with him before he died again.”

“How did he know it was the same person? I thought each iteration casts us in a different form.”
“They do, but Tony recognized his magic and then after a short conversation his personality.” Pepper poured herself a cup of coffee. “Oh, that reminds me. Tony wanted me grab a book for you to read. I’ll be right back.” The clicking of her heels quickly faded. She reappeared a moment later, book in hand. “Reading will help your mind realign itself naturally. It’s a Jotun history book. It should be informative even though it’s a few thousand years old.” The book was surprisingly sturdy for its age. “I’ll be in the living room for the next half an hour. If you need anything feel free to ask Jarvis or me.”

“Pepper,” Loki called out before she left.

“Yes?”

“Why haven’t you—” Loki cut himself off, regretting his moment of weakness.

“Why haven’t I what?” Pepper asked, tilting her head to the side slightly. Loki could feel his face warm up, annoyed with himself. “No need to be embarrassed. I may not look like it, but I’m Odin’s age. Whatever your question is, I can pretty much guarantee that I’ve heard it before.”

“It is not important.” Loki waved his hand dismissively at her.

“Is this about you Jotun form? Tony mentioned that you were raised as an Aesir. I know the two realms have a strained relationship as of late.”

Loki looked at his nails, wishing they were clear again instead of the unnatural shade of silver they currently were.

“Why haven’t you commented on my height?” He finally asked through clenched teeth, refusing to look at the other Jotun.

“Why would I?”

He was annoyed that he was going to have to say it, but hid the emotion well.

“Because I am short for a giant.” He spit out the last word. She didn’t respond immediately and he felt like he was insignificant, only good for being ridiculed. Pepper placed a hand on his shoulder and he flinched away.

“You know, the Jotun people did not dub themselves giants. That was what some of the other realms called us. The term eventually caught on. Yes, you are much shorter than the average Jotun, but that’s a good thing.”

Loki looked at her in a stunned silence. He could not see any deception in her light green eyes. He took in a deep breath, not having realized he had been holding it.

“Why is being a runt a good thing?”

“You’re not a runt. The height of a Jotun indicates their proclivity towards magic. Those who have the potential to be great mages tend to be short. They don’t need the extra strength that being tall gives the less magically inclined Jotun. It also makes them a smaller target when in battle so that they’re less likely to take a physical blow.” Pepper smiled at him and Loki could feel his damaged mind reeling. “Your height is absolutely remarkable. I’ve only seen three other Jotuns that were anywhere near your size and they were all very powerful.” She gave him a kind smile. “Just read the book. I’m sure you’ll learn a lot of things that will give you a clearer picture on your heritage.”
A lil more info on Jotuns because they're so cool (pun intended). lol
The Task at Hand

Chapter Notes

FYI I posted the sequel to I Think, Therefore I Kink.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The book on Jotunheim was enlightening, to say the least.

He hadn't been abandoned on the steps of a temple like a misbegotten baby. Magic beyond that of the elemental variety was rare in Jotuns so many parents did not know how to handle a child who had it. All babes with a proclivity towards magic were given to a temple to be raised until they had proper control over their powers, then they were given back to their family. It was normal to swaddle a small baby in the banner of their house then place them in a temple. No Jotun would dare hurt a child, especially not one with talent.

From what Loki gathered it had all been poor timing. They were at war. The priests and priestesses were most likely away from the temple healing the wounded. He had been placed in one of the ice cradles that decorated the front of every temple, but Odin had found him before one of his holy people could take him in.

The knowledge did raise many questions for Loki though.

If his realm was currently at war with enemies so close, why would they leave him defenseless, wearing the banner of the royal family?

Had Odin known he wasn't really abandoned?

Did he know what Loki's small stature truly meant? Or had he taken him specifically because he knew Loki would likely be a strong mage?

He didn't want to think about the circumstances of his adoption/abduction, but he couldn't escape his thoughts. There was no way he could ignore his heritage when his skin was blue. He had a plethora of new information that was impossible to ignore.

Loki wanted to talk to someone about it, to fully understand instead of just believing the rumors, but Pepper had left earlier and he hadn't seen Stark since the day of the battle. That was almost a week ago and his head still felt wrong.

Ms. Cook made him three delicious meals a day and there were Midgard books to take up his time, yet Loki felt like he was at a standstill, like he was waiting for someone to tell him that it was all a big trick- That he was still in that crater screaming in pain as Thanos or the Other tortured him, that this was just some pain induced dream his mind conjured up.

What made it worse was he still couldn't access his magic. Without his magic he wasn't himself. It was all rather frustrating.

Other than seeing Ms. Cook he talked to Jarvis. The incorporeal entity occasionally even told him stories from different iterations. But whenever Loki would ask him about Stark Jarvis would only give curt answers, not telling him about who the god was other than his titles and mentioning a few
of the things he had created.

To his surprise Loki felt lonely. Even in Asgard there had been others around, when he was falling he was too scared and confused to be lonely, and while being held prisoner he didn't have the luxury of feeling anything beyond agony, disbelief, and anger.

Now he was alone with his thoughts.

He had time to contemplate his actions as king of Asgard, as their rightful king. He didn't have enough information about how he became a part of House Odin in order to make a proper judgment about the actions of his surrogate parents. Frigga knew he was adopted of course, but that didn't mean she actually knew what he was. He doubted Thor knew. The thunderer was too blunt to keep a secret like that from him.

Loki thought about his short reign, how no one obeyed him, how they disregarded him blindly- And it hurt so much. He might not have had the best of plans, but he was their king, and more than that he was a new king. No newly anointed king was perfect, but they never gave him a chance to… to be a good king.

It was that thought that brought frustrated tears to his eyes. Loki never wanted to be king, but he knew he would have been a good one once he understood why his plan to destroy Jotunheim was foolhearted. He would have been fair to the people even enacting reforms that their economy needed.

But he had been blinded by betrayal, self-hate, and the overwhelming need to just be the son his father always wanted…

He even killed Laufey, the father who may not have abandoned him. For all Loki knew Laufey had mourned the loss of his son… and Loki just killed him without a thought, all for Odin. All for the god who lied to him his whole life.

Loki now had time to think about his fall and subsequent landing. He wasn't certain for how long he fell or was tortured. He hated that he had been completely helpless, that he sang sweet promises of retrieving the Tesseract if only Thanos would give him his own realm.

He hadn't known about Thanos' ability to latch onto his mind. He had planned on just disappearing, never returning to the father who was disappointed in him, just disappearing, starting a new life in a different realm.

Maybe he would have chosen Midgard. Its population was greater than any of the other realms. One more person would surely go unnoticed.

But then Thanos was in his head and any dissention would mean his mind and body would be pulled apart with no chance of recovery. So Loki had played his part, making a grand entrance and causing enough chaos to draw the attention of Heimdall or Odin in order for them to retrieve him. When Odin had only sent Thor for the Tesseract it had hurt and Loki almost wanted to destroy Midgard to show he wouldn't be ignored. He had pushed that emotion down though, instead opting to create a bottlenecked invasion point. He even stalled long enough for the 'heroes' to get to New York before he unleashed the Chitauri.

Loki knew that Thor would insist he'd be punished in Asgard. Then when he was finally home, if it could be considered home, Odin would notice the Mad Titan in Loki's mind and hopefully have some sort of spell to banish him.

But that never happened. Stark happened instead.
Loki went through so much pain, a lifetime of lies and he never wanted to experience that again. Not in this lifetime or in any of his next.

The news that he fell in each life was disturbing and made him laugh madly while crying. The nothingness of the Void… and he had to endure it every iteration.

How the Norns loved to weave a cruel fate!

That's why he wanted the help of the God of Fortification. He wanted to carry the knowledge of his inevitable fall onto his next life so he could hopefully change his fate. Even if he was suspicious of Stark's motives for wanting to teach him they couldn't be as bad as falling through the Void again.

The older god also piqued Loki's curiosity. Having such a wealth of knowledge was rather appealing to Loki. He had always wondered how the rainbow bridge worked and now he was acquainted with the god who made it.

Stark had also known about the function of the skin ridges Jotuns had even though the book Loki read did not state it.

Such intellect was very attractive to Loki.

Pepper had mentioned that Stark's last lover male so that wouldn't be an issue. Well it really shouldn't be an issue if what Stark said about being different genders in different iterations was true.

Stark had mentioned that he was a version of Aesir, yet his mortal glamour was quite convincing. Loki ached with curiosity to see how the older god really looked.

But it had been a week since they officially met and Loki still hadn't seen the other god again. The two times he asked Jarvis why that was the case he would just say that his creator was busy.

Loki hated being ignored, even if it wasn't on purpose.

Just as Loki was heading to his room to retire for the night he heard the pinging of the elevator. He stilled and looked towards the hallway, unsure if he should hide in case it wasn't Stark or Pepper.

In the corner of his eye Loki saw Ms. Cook appear. He relaxed. Jarvis would never summon her if a mortal was here.

"Hey Lokes." Stark said while yawning. He collapsed on one of the barstools in the kitchen, leaning heavily on the counter. "Wanna do me a favor and grab me a bottle of scotch and glass from the bar." Loki nodded, silently retrieving said articles. "Thanks." He poured himself a large glass, downing half of it in one go before filling it again.

"Any progress on your Tesseract locating device?" Loki asked, sitting beside him.

"Yeah, no, we finished that days ago. It works perfectly, but now my cube has a different energy signature and isn't in this realm so they won't find it." Stark grinned while taking a sip. "Thor left yesterday. He was hoping that you'd be too exhausted to travel between realms, but as time passed he figured the chances of you still being here were less and less likely."

"It is good to know that he won't be close enough to sense my magic once you unbind it."

"Oh… that's what that post-it note was about! Yeah, sorry I forgot." Stark said with a sheepish grin and Loki smothered his annoyance. "Let me just see if your mind is up to task." Tony gripped Loki's chin. "Don't worry. It won't be as painful this time. You ready?"
"Ready enough." Loki responded, bracing himself.

Stark's brown eyes flared red before Loki was blinded by pain. Just as quickly as it started it ended. When his eyes and mind were his own again Loki realized he was slumped forward and Stark was gripping his upper arm to keep him from falling off his stool.

"Yup, your mind has recouped enough to handle magic." Stark said while helping Loki sit back up. "And may I just say that your mind is much more orderly than the other ones I've explored. It made things much easier."

"Thank you, now will you release my magic?" He was more than a bit anxious to get it back.

"Just a second. I need to heal my hands." Loki looked at the older god's hands in confusion. They were black as if-

"I did that to you." He stated, not knowing how to feel about accidentally giving someone frostbite.

"It's my fault. I should have been expecting it. I doubt you've had any real practice trying to control it." Stark shrugged. Ms. Cook rummaged through one of the cabinets before pulling out a jar. Loki quickly recognized the contents as healing stones. She handed one to Stark who crushed it in his palm. The black, broken skin quickly knitted back together and shifted to a lighter color.

Loki raised an eyebrow, impressed. It would have taken at least three of Asgard's healing stones to do that and even then the results would be much slower. He wanted to ask Stark which specific properties made it so much more effective than the kind Loki was used to, but there were more important matters to be addressed.

After dusting the last of the healing stone away Stark placed a hand on Loki's neck, over the ring of runes. He did not say any words of power, merely stared at Loki's neck. The magic binding him receded into Stark's palm.

Loki's own magic uncurled itself inside of him like a listless snake. It spread throughout him with a rejuvenating force that made him almost feel like his old self, like the man he was before the coronation.

He tried a few spells to make sure everything was as it should be. He could feel Stark's eyes on him as the older god ate. Loki wondered what must be going through his mind. Would Loki's spells look like child's play? Was he listing everything that was wrong with the spells, knowing how to do them bigger and better?

It made Loki annoyingly self conscious.

"Better?" Stark asked while finishing his meal.

"Much better." His magic was actually stronger and he wondered if it was because he was in his natural form. "When do we get started on strengthening my memories?"

"I suppose tonight even though it's been a long week. When I wasn't playing my role as a mortal going to meetings, public appearances, and the like I was trying to repair my cube. If I go another day without sleep some of my distant spells may weaken." Stark said while handing Ms. Cook his dirty plate. She put it in the dishwasher before disappearing. "Here," Stark conjured up the woven golden threads he had been working on last time they spoke and handed it to Loki. It turned grey and lost its shimmer. "These are regular threads. As you weave them together focus on imbuing them with your magic. Think of the threads as a part of you. That will make it easier. Your goal is to have the thread retain your active magic without you concentrating on it. When you can do that we'll
move on to the next step."

Stark gave a brief wave while heading to his room.

Loki stared at the threads and frowned. The task sounded easy, but he had a feeling that it was anything but.

Chapter End Notes

Accidentally giving people frostbite #JotunProblems lol
The task at hand was impossibly hard. Loki had imbued countless weapons with his magic, but that magic had always been inactive, only flaring back to life when commanded to do so or hit with magic.

The actual weaving aspect was at first cumbersome, but his clever fingers quickly picked up the rhythm.

When Loki imbued the threads with his active energy he had to focus so that it wouldn't dissipate now that it wasn't anchored to him. If his concentration wavered even a second he had to start all over again.

Stark advised him to think of the threads as a part of him, but he didn't know how to do so. Perhaps if the item he was trying to imbue was one of his daggers it would be easier since he already considered it a part of himself. But Stark had been very specific on which object Loki should focus his energies on. He had studied under many mages before and if there was one thing he learned it was that they hated when their directions were disregarded.

Loki only realized it was morning when Ms. Cook placed a plate of pancakes in front of him. He nodded in thanks, but did not touch them.

An hour later he heard Stark leave his room. Loki refused to let his frustration show as the older god walked by him, not even glancing in his direction.

He did his best to ignore the noise of Ms. Cook doing her duty then the subsequent clinking of utensils against a plate.

He wove in silence letting the magic run from his fingertips into the threads. His magic just wouldn't stick. As soon as the thread turned green it was back to grey.

"Will it distract you if I work up here?" Stark asked from behind him

"No," Loki lied, refusing to show any more weakness than he already had. Stark sat across from him, resting his feet on the coffee table. With a lazy hand motion the Cradle, as Pepper called it, appeared and separated from the Tesseract. Stark set the Cradle beside him before holding the Tesseract loosely, eyes closed.

Loki could not sense him doing anything to the cube, but he was sure that Stark was. Every few minutes the Tesseract would shudder. Loki tried not to stare, but his eyes drifted to the strange Aesir and the object he held.

When Loki finally gave up trying to figure out what Stark was doing and concentrated back on the threads there was a flash of gold. His eyes snapped back to Stark. The Tesseract was alight with red runes. What was more startling though was Stark's look of absolute fury.

"Jarvis, inform Pep that I won't be back till tomorrow evening." Stark said while putting down the Tesseract on the coffee table, still glowing.

"Very well, Sir. Would you like to give a reason for your absence?"
"Tell her I finally found the son of a bitch who took my cube from Asgard and lost it on Midgard."

"Shall I prepare a cell?"

"No, I don't think they were aware of what they were doing, but I have to be certain. He wasted a few centuries that could have been important." As Stark stood up his image shifted, turning him into a dark elf.

"Safe travels, Sir."

"Thanks, J."

Before Loki could ask him what exactly was going on the God of Fortification disappeared.

Loki sighed in frustration before going back to imbuing the threads. The lasted a full five minutes before his gaze lingered on the Tesseract sitting only two feet away, still glowing brightly. He glared at it. It was Stark's active magic, not even flickering slightly despite its creator most likely being in a whole other realm. Loki could hardly make his active magic stick to the threads for a second, yet Stark could keep his active magic in an object from a different realm.

It was both frustrating and motivating. If it was possible than it surely was within Loki's capabilities.

Despite his surge in confidence half a day later Loki still had not made any progress.

*Think of the threads as a part of you.*

That was Stark's advice, but how could he? Loki didn't feel pain when he pulled the threads tightly. It was string. Not a part of him.

He decided to take a break since he could hear Ms. Cook making him lunch. He wondered into the kitchen feeling his fatigue from constantly using his magic and having not slept the night before.

Two weeks ago he was screaming in a crater. Now he was watching a beautiful ghost of a woman make him soup. Loki chuckled and tried not to think about where he'd be in two more weeks. A good portion of Midgard was looking for him, some of which were probably in this tower. Thor was definitely still looking for him. He didn't know how many on Asgard even knew he was alive. He hoped that Frigga did. Even if she had lied about his origins he knew that she loved him like a son.

Frigga… she had been there in the memory Stark put him in while extracting Thanos from his mind.

She had mentioned threads.

When he was a young boy she seemed to always be weaving or embroidering something.

Loki looked at Ms. Cook gauging how much longer till the food would be finished. Deciding that it still had a ways to go he went to his room and stared at the tapestry Frigga had made for him. It was simple compared to most of the ones she made.

The background was a shade of green that was so dark it almost looked black. Around the edges were the constellations, the sun, and moons of Asgard. Then in the middle was a perfect representation of the golden city.

He reached out to brush the delicate stitches but froze when he saw his blue skin. A Jotun touching Asgard. The concept felt wrong and absurd.
He had to remind himself that he was Loki and this was the place he was raised. Just because he wasn't born there didn't mean it wasn't his home.

Loki carefully traced the image of the tower his mother was most likely sitting in at this very moment.

When he fell… when he let go he had not considered how she would be affected. Had Odin told her the truth that he chose to die? Or had he lied to her? Did she even know he invaded Midgard? It wouldn't surprise Loki if Odin had decided not to tell her in case Loki wasn't captured.

Frigga had always put so much work into each tapestry. She put her love into them and even said that… they were a part of her.

Loki paused, his hand still resting on the fabric. This was a part of her. He hesitated before sending out a gentle pulse of magic. He felt it bounce back surrounded by cornflower blue magic, his mother's magic. Hidden runes flared to life.

He almost cried when he deciphered their meaning. They were intricate spells to give him good luck, safety, fortune, and most of all happiness. A message of love hidden right in front of him for most of his life.

Loki blinked back his tears watching the blue runes fade, becoming hidden once more.

It was inactive magic, but it did give him a better idea on how to imbue his active magic as he wove the threads together.

He went back to the living room, retrieving the threads and immediately going to work on them.

It wasn't about incorporating the threads into his being. He had been trying to force the threads to be a part of him instead of actually believing that they were. The threads were an extension of him. It was about using them like they were a part of him, giving them a purpose beyond an exercise. Giving them purpose the same way Frigga gave every stitch a bit of her love.

After that realization each attempt got him closer to success.

Chapter End Notes

I threw in a few feels. Hope you don't mind :/
Loki woke up on the couch to the afternoon sun bright in his eyes. His fingers were still tangled in threads. He frowned when he saw that they were grey. Not that he had really expected them to last the whole night.

The best he had done was when the thread stayed green for five minutes without him having to manipulate them.

It was slow progress, but progress none the less.

He hadn't struggle with learning a new spellcraft in centuries. It was simultaneously pleasing and frustrating.

After untangling himself from the threads he went to his room and got cleaned up. He was once again startled by his blue appearance. The surprise wasn't accompanied by his usual disgust though. It seemed that he was getting used to this form.

There was a hardy sandwich waiting for him after his shower. He had no idea how Ms. Cook seemed to always know what he wanted to eat. It should concern him, but considering the fact that Stark had been in his mind multiple times he wasn't too worried about Stark's creation doing any damage.

He decided that once he learned how to strengthen his memories he would ask Stark about what combination of spells came together to create such a being. Where ever he went after this, surely a cook would be useful.

Loki stared at the Tesseract as he ate. He was tempted to examine it properly, but wasn't sure how it would react to his magic, or for that matter how Stark and Jarvis would react to him touching it.

The runes that he could read seemed to be unrelated to each other. Runes for binding, protection, absorption, restraint, longevity, growth, patience, and even one for hope. He couldn't decipher what they could mean all together.

Loki had used the Tesseract as a means of opening a portal, but he now doubted that was its intended purpose.

He shook his head and went on to his exercise with the threads. The weaving aspect had become almost therapeutic and had long ago become automatic. Weaving required the same amount of thought as it took to blink. The threads were an extension of himself and he made them dance while they slowly began to glow green.

Loki's whole attention was on the task at hand as the sun set so when a flash of red and loud crack emanated from right in front of him. He automatically went into battle mode summoning four throwing daggers. He threw the first two at the dark elf as he vaulted over the back of the couch. The elf quickly blocked them with his long axe, which was covered with blood. He was about to toss the other two when the elf spoke.

"Relax, Lokes. It's just me." The elf’s features shifted back into Stark's. Loki let out a breath remembering that the older god had left disguised as a dark elf yesterday. "Geez, talk about a warm welcoming." Stark made a sweeping motion with his hand and the blood on the axe disappeared.

"Sorry. You startled me." Loki said while displacing his daggers.
"Evidentially." Stark plopped down onto a chair with little grace, letting the axe rest on his legs. "How goes the weaving?" Loki stared at the axe admiring its fine crafting.

"It is progressing. I understand the concept. It is only a matter of time before I master it." Loki said confidently and Stark grinned. "How did your hunt go?"

"It was a success. Asgard has a few holes in her security that the dark elves know about. If you ever decide to go back there I can make you a list."

"That could buy me a bit of good will, but I doubt I'll be going there anytime soon." Loki shrugged, not really wanting to think about his home, his former home.

"Either way." Stark summoned a pen and paper and wrote for a few minutes. He let go of the paper and it glided to Loki's hand. The younger god glanced over it and was surprised by how many weaknesses the dark elves had known about and how many he didn't know about.

"Aren't you worried that I'll use this for some sort of mischief?"

"Mischief isn't necessarily a bad thing. Besides I think you'd much rather help that realm than hinder it." Stark examined the edge of his axe as he spoke. His eyes were discerning.

"Perhaps," Loki stored the note away, undecided on what to do with it. Stark seemed unconcerned. Loki figured that if he had seen whole realms grow, flourish, and then be destroyed multiple times that he wouldn't be concerned by a bit of mischief.

Stark pulled out a whetstone from his pocket and began sharpening the axe. Every few strokes he would stop and examine the edge.

Loki idly wondered if that was the reason Stark was the God of Fortification. The man never seemed to stay still. He was always tweaking something, making it sharper, stronger, faster…

He continued watching the other god while working on the threads. Loki found the slight distraction to actually be useful. With more than one thing to focus on the whole act of imbuing the threads felt more natural to him.

As the night dragged on Ms. Cook set down two plates of food for the gods, both of which ignored the food instead focusing on their own endeavors.

Stark seemed to have a whole vault of weapons somewhere. When he finished adjusting one weapon he went onto the next. Many of the devices Loki didn't recognize. One in particular looked odd to him. It was a long chain with a small weight on the end. Each link was sharpened into a blade. He didn't see any way someone could handle the weapon without cutting themselves. Stark only took off two links and changed the weight on the end, all the while gathering knicks on his palms.

"I was told," Loki said, looking away from his weaving, "that in this realm you once were a weapons manufacture. That you came from a long line of weapon manufactures." Stark did not look away from the three barreled hand gun he was pulling apart, but he did respond.

"The realm that is situated in the very middle of the tree always lacks magic. The last seven iterations I decided to spend time developing their weapons so that they can have a fighting chance when they encounter outside forces."

"So I would have won if not for you?" Loki joked, glancing at his work. He was pleased to see that it was still glowing strongly.
"It would have been a hollow victory and short lived. This realm is always the first one to be destroyed by Ragnarök."

"You sound so certain of that." Loki may not be the sanest of creatures, but he was hoping to live a very long life.

"Statistics, Lokes. They're a bitch." Loki frowned. The fact that the other god had quantifiable evidence on the subject matter was disturbing. Loki was still trying to figure out just how old the God of Fortification was. He spoke of iterations the way the Aesir spoke of centuries. Loki could see the faint glowing on Stark's chest. The media attributed it to a kidnapping, but Loki doubted anyone could kidnap Stark unless he wanted to be taken. "Lokes."

"Hm?"

"Your concentration is slipping." Stark pointed towards the threads just as they turned grey.

"Damn."
“I wish to know more about you.” Loki said a few days later, sitting down in front of the God of Fortification. He could now successively sustain active magic in the threads for almost an hour and a half.

“There’s not much to know.” Stark said with a shrug before taking a sip of his scotch. Loki scoffed loudly.

“You’ve lived and remember countless lives and you say there is not much to know? Surely you jest.” Loki made a flippant gesture.

“I don’t remember all my lives, just the important bits. Besides, after a while all the details become trivial.” Loki could see a hint of well hidden sadness in Stark’s eyes.

“I cannot claim to understand, but I doubt much if any of it was trivial.”

“Maybe.” He set down his glass. “I’m going down to the lab. Would you like to join me?”

“Won’t there be mortals there?”

“No, my lab is private. Bruce is still in the tower, but I gave him his own lab. He won’t bother us.”

“Alright. I have been wondering what your lab looks like.” Loki reached for the glowing threads on the table.

“Leave it. The distance will give you another challenge since you’re progressing nicely.” Loki was taken aback slightly by the complement. The older god had only given him one other, and that was to complement the orderliness of his mind.

“You give good advice and I’ve always enjoyed learning.” Loki followed Stark into an elevator.

“A rare quality. Once I learn something I have to see if I can put the knowledge to use.” Stark chuckled, scrubbing a hand over his goatee. “It’s gotten me in trouble many times.”

“May I have an example?”

“Dragons are ticklish. I was a fire giant, I think. The factoid had come up while I was drinking with a group of dwarves. I of course had to test to see if this was the case. The only dragon I knew about was owned by the queen of the realm. I snuck into the palace fairly easily and started tickling the dragon. It twitched like crazy and let out what was clearly laughter. I should have expected those laughs would be accompanied by fire. It didn’t affect me of course do to my race. What the dwarves failed to tell me was that if you tickle a dragon for more than a minute it starts suffocating. Moral of the story: If you want to kill a dragon quickly tickle it.”

Loki grinned widely.
"I honestly hope I get to utilize this information. Dragons are not easily sleighed. As a boy I dreamed of." Loki cut himself off.

"Yes?" Stark inquired.

"Pardon me. I’m just finding it difficult to believe that I used to be that person. I was just so overwhelmingly foolish and naive. I can scarcely believe that is who I used to be." Loki shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts.

"Trust me when I say I understand. In one iteration I was born in a whore house on Alfheim. I knew Ragnarök would come eventually, but I decided to live a peaceful life. I never went further than twenty miles away from that city for my whole 3000 years. I was the highest paid prostitute there and eventually became the madam of the place. I was renowned in all nine realms. Legends of my abilities even filtered to Midgard. Now look at me. I travel all the realms freely and I’m seen as a great hero.” Stark paused and gave Loki a thoughtful look. “Things change, often for the better if you want them to.”

Loki wanted to believe that Stark was just talking about the next iteration, but he had a feeling that he was talking about this lifetime, about his former life on Asgard.

“I plan on living this life to the fullest. I do not want to live in captivity.”

“There is one tried and true way to stay free while being wherever you want to be.”

“And what exactly is that method?”

“You just have to be so valuable that it would hinder them and their pursuits if you were hurt or imprisoned.”

“How do you suggest I do that?”

“Do you want to return to Asgard?”

“I want to be able to see my mother freely. I want to get the truth from Odin.”

“I have a solution for the latter part. Once I have fixed my cube and put it back in the Cradle I have to take it back to Asgard so that it can perform its function. If you came with me no one would dare stop you.” Loki frowned as the elevator decended. From what Loki has seen Stark was likely to hold sway over such matters. Perhaps he finally could get the truth from Odin.

“Why are you trying to help me? I understand why you want me to strengthen my mind, but I don’t understand why you’d help me beyond that.”

“I assure you that I have purely selfish reasons.”

“That’s a hollow answer if I’ve ever heard one.”

Loki could almost feel Stark considering him as they walked into the lab. Loki wanted to know what the other god was hiding, but knew pushing the subject would probably hinder that process.

Loki tried not to be amazed by all the technology, but he could not contain his admiration when Stark opened a hidden door revealing another lab with artifacts of legend, devices that surely did wonders, and active magic imbuing so many things.

“This place is amazing.” Loki said while cautiously touching a vase that glowed. In an instant he was
in a whole other world, one filled with a variety of flowers that graced the air with their scent. Before he could panic Stark appeared and tugged him back to the lab.

“I didn’t think I’d have to tell you not to touch anything.”

“Sorry. I may have been a bit overzealous.”

“It’s alright. It’s an endearing feature.” Stark flicked a gyroscope to life and strange music emitted from it. “Any item in particular that you want to know about.”

“The Tesseract.”

“Other than that one.”

“It seems more important to you than the other items.”

“That’s because it is.”

“And you’re not going to tell me why?”

“Not yet at least. I don’t trust you enough.”

“Yet you’re willing to teach me how to keep my memories for my next iterations.”

“As I stated. It’s only for selfish reasons.” Stark shrugged, picking up an oblong tool and tossing it between his hands. It changed colors every time he caught it. “So is there any other item you want to know about before I start tinkering.”

“Yes, what is glowing in your chest?”

“You’re good at asking about the most interesting things.” Stark tapped the item in question.

“I was always good at finding the pertinent information.”

“I suppose you do deserve a bit of a reward for your impressive progress.” Stark took off his shirt, revealing the strange object imbedded in his chest. “I’m sure you’ve noticed that my magic has two colors: red and gold.” Stark brushed the object and the light went from faint blue to gold. “I met a mage in multiple iterations and he always had a terrible life. In one iteration I decided to take pity on him and teach him how to keep his past knowledge so that he wouldn’t make the same mistakes and wouldn’t be so trusting of others. Unfortunately the Norns abused him in every iteration regardless of what he did.

“Eight iterations later he sought me out and begged me to help him die a permanent death so that he would no longer have to suffer. When I say suffer I really mean suffer. Each iteration he was constantly beaten, raped, tortured, betrayed, his children were killed out of spite, and a slew of other horrible things. I was his only friend in all the realms, but I didn’t know how to really kill someone permanently. We spent a few years trying to figure it out, but one day when I was in another realm bandits broke into the house we shared and killed him. It was extremely fucked up. It was twenty-five millenniums later that we met again. He had the same request and by then I had a solution.

“This device is a trap of sorts. It only worked because we were both willing. He imbued all his active magic into it and when he was done he died. I haven’t sensed him in any iteration since.” Stark brushed the object again and the magic inside appeared light blue.

“You have access to his magic.” Loki stated as Stark pulled his shirt back on.
“Yeah, and he always had a larger reserve of magic than I did. It’s really helped me out. Also it’s nice to have the presence of someone else with me. When all the realms are destroyed it can be rather lonely with only Jarvis and Ms. Cook to keep me company.”

“That must have taken a lot of trust on his part.”

“Hey, you let me into your head multiple times. That takes a lot of trust.” Loki chuckled.

“I let you in for selfish reasons. I wanted to be free and now I want to be stronger.” Loki frowned. “I do find it quite annoying that I don’t know your full reasoning for helping me.”

“I guess I can give you one reason.” Stark glanced at the ceiling before looking back at Loki and smiling. “I find you exceptionally good looking and interesting.” Stark’s grin widened, tilting his head slightly to the side. “Your magic dissipated from the threads. It seems that arousal distracts you immensely.”

Loki pouted slightly, unsure if he should be annoyed that he had once again failed at his task or happy that the other god found him attractive. He settled on the latter.

Note: I posted an alternative start to this fic called: Hidden Path in case you're interested.

What do you think of Stark's reasoning?
Loki sat in silence, watching the other god tinker. He seemed to favor working on multiple projects at once, moving around the large room quickly and effortlessly. The Tesseract was outside of its Cradle again. Periodically Stark would pause and touch it, shifting runes on it or merely letting his magic glide over it.

Loki was drowning in curiosity, but tried to subdue the feeling. He knew that it would take time for the other god to trust him enough to divulge the function of the Tesseract.

Instead he tried focusing on imbuing the threads from afar. He could sense them as if they were a part of himself, which in a way they were. It was only in his body that his active magic resided. Now his body just had a new part, woven threads.

It was very strange to consider something so small and trivial as a part of himself, but now they were and he felt fiercely protective of them. He hadn’t been this attached to an inanimate object since his first dagger.

The feeling gave Loki a better idea on why Stark had been so angry that someone had messed with the Tesseract. He had no doubt that whoever removed it from Asgard was now very much dead.

To have a part of him warped against his will, Loki knew the feeling all too well. It was no small wonder that Stark had been angry at Thanos.

Stark suddenly paused mid spell. Loki cocked his head to the side. The red energy dissipated from his hands and the strange noises of the machines and items Stark was working with silenced.

“It seems I have another reason I should be annoyed with you.” Stark said as the items around him whirred back to life.

“What did I do this time?” He hated being blamed for things that weren’t his fault.

“My cube on Jotunheim was damaged recently, within the last three years. I hadn’t noticed till just now.”

“I had no intentions of harming your property.”

“Yeah, you just wanted to destroy the whole realm.”

“I was misguided and naïve.” Loki really didn’t want to discuss this, but he saw no way around it.

“I know. That’s the only reason you’re still alive.”

“You would dispose of me so easily?” He felt a weight settle in the pit of his stomach. Was he always so easily dismissed?

“You misunderstand, godling. Your mind wasn’t the only one I entered. Thanos would have had you tortured then fed to his dogs if you were how you are now. He wanted a puppet, but you are no longer fit to be one.” Stark waved dismissively, turning back to one of his projects. “Once I am finished with this I’ll be leaving for Jotunheim. You should come with me and see the damage you have done.”

“I do not think that is a wise idea.”
“You can’t hide from your past.”

“That is not why I don’t want to go. Have you forgotten that I’m trying to avoid imprisonment and torture?”

“I doubt anyone will recognize you, let alone figure out who you are. Besides I know the tenor of your magic. So long as I know which realm you’re in I can find you easily.” Stark glanced at the Tesseract before fusing it back with the Cradle and displacing it. “Weren’t you talking earlier about building some good will? I might know a few spells that will repair some of the destruction you caused.”

“I doubt the All-Father would see it as good will, helping his age old enemies.”

“He didn’t want you to destroy their whole realm. He must have his reasons. I’m fairly certain that the All-Father will see you helping a realm you hindered as a good thing.”

“Fine. How long will the trip be?”

“Less than a day if things aren’t too chaotic. I’ll go in a Jotun form to make things a bit simpler.” Loki glanced backwards as he heard a shuffling noise. Ms. Cook was walking in with clothing under her arm and two plates in her hands. She gave her usual smile as she set the items down. “Eat up. Food on Jotunheim is notoriously bland.”

Loki slowly ate, not wanting to think about the coming trip. His first trip to Jotunheim had more or less been a disaster even if it was of his own making. In the back of his head he was still fighting between what he had been taught about frost giants in Asgard and the information in the book he read. He was still not certain which category he belonged to: monster or merely as imperfect as all the other immortals.

A part of him hoped that he would find the acceptance there that he never got on Asgard. According to the book Pepper had given him Jotun society was disbursed, only yielding to the authority of their religious leaders. That called into question any birthright he may have had if there was technically no monarchy on the planet.

He wasn’t a prince of Asgard. He wasn’t a prince of Jotunheim. He was just a mage who had fallen through the Void and attacked a realm, possibly a footnote in the annals of history at most. On the other hand he apparently had some sort of connection with Ragnarök, so there’s that.

Loki was so lost in his thoughts that he hadn’t even noticed the older god shift into a Jotun form, a good two feet taller than Loki.

“You’ll stand out if you’re that short.” Stark said, no inflection in his tone, just stating a fact. “Can you shape shift or use a glamour? If not Pepper is upstairs and illusions are her specialty.”

“No, I can shape shift. Just give me a moment. I’ve never tried to be a…” Loki shook his head.

Alright, I’m going to grab a few things from upstairs. The elevator is using an express protocol so you won’t run into anyone. Just head up when you’re ready.” Stark ducked slightly under the doorframe as he left, seemingly comfortable in his new form.

Loki pictured himself and his now familiar blue features as he stripped out of his Aesir clothes. He did a quick measurement of the Jotun clothes that had been left for him. Shape shifting was one of his specialties though he rarely got a chance to utilize it. He rolled his shoulders a few times and tried to relax. Slowly his body shifted, his limbs growing longer and a bit bulkier. His spine stretched upwards, taking his ribs with them. For good measure he changed his facial features a bit, but
couldn’t bring himself to change the pattern on his skin. For some reason he rather liked them, now that they didn’t invoke disgust.

After inspecting himself and being pleased with the results Loki put on the simple leather loincloth that dipped down the front and back, yet left the sides of legs completely exposed. He clasped on the velvet black cape, appreciating the golden chain used to fasten it in place.

A stray thought left him curious if this is the sort of thing he would have usually worn if he had never been taken from Jotunheim. He let the thought pass, not wanting to dwell on such matters.

Loki quickly decided that he didn’t like being this tall. He could already tell that it would hinder his versatility and slow him down.

His head just barely touched the top of the elevator and he wondered if his long hair would be acceptable in Jotun culture. He had not considered the locks, really hadn’t had the time to, since before everything happened.

The longer hair made him feel even less like who he used to be, but he that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

Stark was idly spinning a war axe in his hand, the same one he had come back with bloodied. Loki assumed it must be his weapon of choice, contrasting greatly with the Iron Man suit that had projectile-based weapons. He let the axe fly and dance in the air for an instant before catching it left handedly.

“Just a few more things and we’ll look like proper Jotuns.” Stark said while performing a displacement spell with only one hand, impressing Loki. A slew of golden ornaments appeared. Stark handed Loki his axe to hold while he clasped a necklace on Loki, his fingers brushing the base of his neck. Loki was slightly miffed with the distant clinical look in the older god’s eyes as he laced thin golden chains around Loki’s waist, having them hang down the front of the loincloth.

“I am uncertain that they wear these sorts of things. On my single visit they did not have so much jewelry on.”

“Those Jotuns were in the military. We’re going to a city and a temple.” Stark said while adorning himself. Loki handed him back his axe.

“Should I bring a weapon?” Loki asked, idly wondering where exactly his staff was.

“No, this is more of a… calling card. I expect we won’t run into much trouble.” He brushed a thumb over the edge of the axe, careful not to cut himself. “If you want to bring one Pepper said that Jotuns tend to favor the long-spear.” Another one handed displacement spell, an ornate spear appearing. “Here.” Stark handed it to him and Loki tested its balance while admiring its craftsmanship. The shaft was of dimpled uru that would easily be mistaken for a lesser material. The base was slightly larger with a knob of silver and the blade looked positively wicked. The edge seemed to catch the light on the curved blade that hooked at the very end. “I wouldn’t recommend toting that one around though. Most Jotun don’t carry weapons.”

“Then why give it to me. I have my own stock of weapons.”

“True, but they’re all Aesir weapons I’d assume.” Loki pictured his own spear. It was definitely not as long as this one and reeked of Asgard.

“Point taken. How are we traveling? Is there a branch of the tree nearby or do you have other means?” Teleportation between realms could kill a mage who lacked enough magic. Very few had
enough skill to perform such an act.

“Have you forgotten that I made the Bifrost?” Stark pulled out a golden ball from his bag, no larger than his own hand. He brushed his thumb against the rough surface, activating a spell Loki didn’t recognize before dropping it between them. Loki was not prepared for what happened next.

He could no longer sense his own body. It was as if it never existed. Yet he could feel everything, he was a part of everything. The distinction between him and every other being blurred. He wanted to weep. He wanted to chuckle.

Most of all Loki wanted to feel like this forever, to never be alone again, to be a part of everything, thus actually being something instead of just the one who fell-

And then it was over.

The ball bounced on impact with the icy terrain and Stark caught it, quickly putting the object back away.

“That was… very unexpected.” Loki said, at a loss for words.

“I’ve been told it gives people a new perspective.”

“Yes, that describes it perfectly. I do believe that my next attempt at imbuing active magic will be much more successful.”

“Good, just don’t get lost. If you put too much of yourself into an inanimate object you’ll die.” Stark tapped the spot on his chest where the ball of magic must have been hidden. Loki nodded in understanding before surveying his surroundings.

They were a few miles away from a large city. It almost looked like a mirage and he snorted when he realized it was a silver city, a fitting contrast to the golden one he had grown up in.

The landscape was speckled with low shrubs with waxy, dark green leaves. There were a few houses that seemed to jut out of the ice between them and the city.

What was most fascinating was the road they had landed on. Not surprisingly it was made of ice, which his bare feet easily treded on. Instead of a simple outline to lead the way figures were carved into the road.

“Why would they… surely this road becomes covered every time it snows.” Loki said as they started walking towards the city. The images seemed to be playing out some sort of story.

“This part of Jotunheim is a frozen desert. It never snows in this region unless a large storm from the south makes its way over the mountain.” Stark said nonchalantly.

Loki glanced at the houses as he passed them by. They were large and made of some sort of dark blue ice.

Through one of the windows (technically just holes in the wall to let in light) he spotted a female Jotun nursing a baby. They made eye contact, red meeting red, and she smiled at him with a nod before going back to watching her swaddled baby.

It was very domestic and Loki didn’t really know how to interpret it. He focused back on the road. The images seemed to be about a family with seven children that became distant from each other as they grew older. In turn each of the siblings had some sort of problem they could not solve on their
own and ended up going to one of their other siblings for help.

By the time they reached the city the family was back together again and very happy.

The story struck a chord in Loki, which he smothered quickly.

The silver city was a sight to behold. Icy spires thinner than Loki pierced the clear sky. Every building had its own unique design carved on its walls. The contrast from building to building was amazing. They all looked different, yet seemed to work perfectly together.

After gaping in a very uncouth manner Loki noticed that something was wrong with the city.

“Where is everybody?” Loki asked, his voice a whisper in the silent city. Stark frowned, but did not answer, only holding his axe a bit tighter.

Loki kept casting his gaze around, searching for any sort of movement. He wanted to send out a pulse of energy to widen his senses, but knew that could be a bad idea if it hit any destructive inactive magic.

He faltered mid-step.

It was like the city had been cut in half. On one side was the pristine empty city while on the other was a blighted expanse of ice and rubble.

This is what he had done to this realm.

Buildings were destroyed. The ground had gouges deep enough to come up to Loki’s waist even in his elongated state. The devastation stretched as far as the eye could see.

Loki could barely breathe as he stared at the line where his attack had come to an abrupt end. Looking to the right- the city was perfect. Looking to the left- only ruin.

A hand on his shoulder made him flinch. Stark pointed and Loki followed the gesture, answering Loki’s earlier question. Far in the distance there was a large crowd of Jotuns.

Loki cast a simple spell to temporarily enhance his eyesight.

It was- They were-

He broke down into sobs, not being able to handle it.

Loki was awash with conflicting emotions. He was disgusted with himself for causing such ruin. He hated Odin for ever letting him believe that Jotuns were somehow less than Aesir. Despite that he was infinitely grateful for Odin and Thor stopping his ill advised attack on Jotunheim.

He had done this. First Jotunheim and then Midgard. What would he destroy next? Asgard? Alfheim? Niflhiem?

Strong arms pulled him up and into an embrace.

“Hey, what did I tell you about self-hatred?” Stark said softly while running a hand up and down Loki’s back. It only made Loki cry harder. “Come on. Let’s go inside. I have a spell or two that may help them out.” Loki held on to the older god a moment longer before composing himself.

Stark led him to a half destroyed building and Loki kept his eyes on his feet, unable to handle seeing the countless Jotun working together to repair the damage he had done.
“We ask for shelter for the night so that we may help come tomorrow.” Stark said and Loki looked up. The God of Fortification was talking to a Jotun woman who appeared to be ancient and a foot shorter than the average Jotun.

The woman sat unmoving and at first Loki thought she didn’t hear Stark. He was proven wrong when she flicked her finger and a set of large doors opened.

They both gave their thanks before entering the ornate, half destroyed building. It was different than the other buildings. The light seemed to cast no shadows and came from nowhere in particular.

Another door to their left opened and Stark did not hesitate in entering it. The room was sparse, only containing a nice sized bed and nightstand.

Stark sat down on the bed, leaning against the headboard, gesturing for Loki to do the same. The God of Fortification rummaged through his bag. Loki noticed that he had displaced his axe at some point.

“Tell me you have some sort of plan to fix all this.”

“More or less, though it can’t really be fixed only repaired and prevented.”

“Prevented?”

“Well, not prevented in this iteration, but possibly in the next one. I do not know if the attack on Jotunheim is always done by one of your iterations.”

“It happens… every iteration?” Loki’s dread was back full force.

“Not every time. Sometimes Ragnarök comes before destruction is laid upon it.” Stark sounded dispassionate. He pulled out a light pink bottle. He uncorked it and sniffed the contents hesitantly. His scrunched up expression made it clear that Stark did not like what he found. “It will have to do.”

He tapped his fingers against the bottle a few times. Red magic rippled over the glass. When he lifted it to his nose again the liquid inside of it was clear. He took a sip and frowned.

“You might want to get some rest. This is going to take me a bit.” Stark said without looking away from the bottle. Loki grabbed one of the pillows, making himself comfortable. He wasn’t planning on falling asleep. Seeing foreign magic and spells was too interesting to miss.

Stark’s spells always seemed to skip over the usual methods that channeled magic. Most of his hand movements looked unconscious.


“Alright, Bambi. I’m not opposed to sharing.” The room seemed to light up with tendrils of red and gold magic. The ribbons all originated from Stark’s hands, reaching out to touch everything around him. Loki could feel them warmly brushing up against him. A few peeked under the door. “Right now I’m getting a feel for the composition of the things around me.” The ribbons caressed him and he shivered at the sensation. They pulled away from him. “Once I know what the land is made of I just have to adapt this lovely brew to mimic it. I’m thinking of forcing the potion into a vapor. Make
“it into a Christmas miracle.”

“Christmas?”

“A holiday on Midgard. Pretty much I’m going to make it snow. Actually you’re going to make it snow. I’m going to go to sleep.” The ribbons retracted lightning fast, the liquid in the bottle glowed red. “Give me your hand.” Loki did so. “This is going to feel super weird for you.” There was a tugging, a *leeching* feeling. His vision grayed at the edges. He felt his body go limp, the only thing that felt solid was the hand holding his own.

“What…” Loki could barely form the word. A bolt of energy made him gasp and lurch up.

“Easy, Lokes.” A distant voice told him. Loki fell on side against the bed. His eyesight came back.

“My magic…” He reached out weakly. The bottle was glowing green, *his* green.

“Had to take a bit of your magic. You don’t have enough practice to make your active magic stick to something like this.” Stark corked the bottle. “You should be up and running by nightfall if you rest.” Stark gently pulled the blanket out from under him before pulling it up to his chin. “I have to do a few things, but I won’t be gone long.”

“No…” He couldn’t just leave him here defenseless and in a land filled with people who would love to kill him.

“Don’t worry. I’ll ward the room.” Stark said in a low voice, his expression unreadable. Loki sighed in relief, shifting in the bed to get comfortable before falling asleep.

A dip in the bed roused Loki from unconsciousness.

The room was dark save for the glowing bottle on the nightstand.

From the scent of the new occupant Loki knew it was Stark, though he did not know why he knew the other God’s scent so easily.

In the dim light he could tell Stark was holding a sphere, similar to the Cradle, but tinged green instead of hazy purple. Loki could tell Stark was manipulating the orb. His focus was on a crack that blemished it. Dull waves of red pulsed over it, only visible due to the darkness of the room.

He wanted to move closer, to feel the power of Stark’s magic. It was strange how compelling the need to get closer was. Perhaps it was because the magic was familiar. It had rushed through him more than once. It had pulled him out of slavery and mindless destruction.

Despite his pride Loki pushed himself flush with Stark’s leg, resting his head on Stark’s thigh. His uncertainty was eased when Stark adjusted the blankets, bringing Loki closer.

His hand rested lightly on Stark’s leg. He was tempted to trace his raised lines, but figured it may be an unwelcomed gesture considering the older god was so focused on the sphere in his hands.

Instead, Loki drifted off back to sleep, enjoying the physical contact.
“Bambi, it’s time.”

A hand gently shook his shoulder. Loki pressed his head further into his pillow, fighting consciousness.

The hand drifted to his neck then the base of his head before brushing through his hair.

“Lokes, if you want to help the Jotun people it has to be now. The city is asleep.” Loki reluctantly sat up. Stark handed him the bottle that was still glowing. “This shouldn’t be difficult for you to use. Just will it to disburse over the damaged land. Once it’s spread let your control of it go.” Loki nodded in understanding. “It will be easier if you go to the top of the temple and release it from there.”

“Oh which temple?”

“The one we’re in right now. Just go down the hall and you’ll find the stairwell.”

After climbing over Stark to get out of bed Loki followed his directions and found himself high above the world. As he felt his cape brush the ground Loki realized that in his sleep he had shifted back to his usual height. That didn’t bother him though. His thoughts were caught up on the three realms he could possibly consider home.

Asgard’s night sky was dark purple, Midgard’s navy blue, but Jotun’s was the same deep shade of green of Loki’s magic.

The city behind him glittered faintly while the destruction in front of him looked like a black hole, an open maw waiting to swallow him up. It reminded him too much of the Void and he could scarcely look at it for more than a moment, but he had to if he wanted to repair it.

Taking a deep breath Loki let the potion escape the bottle. It slowly wound its way into the air, continuously expanding- with it Loki could feel himself growing bigger, felt himself stretching over the land.

A sentiment… this was his land, in the tenderest of ways.

This was his land… and he had to heal it the way he so often healed his physical wounds.

When the green cloud touched the horizon Loki released his hold over it. The verdant flickered once before it dissipated. Loki frowned, thinking that he had somehow messed up the spell. Then he saw the snow. The flakes were as large as his fists, yet fell as if they were feathers.

He couldn’t look away from it, even though he felt like he was losing a large part of himself.

Loki couldn’t say how long he stood there in his natural Jotun form, encased in Jotun clothing. It was beautiful and if the Norns had just shifted their plans slightly this is how he could have lived his whole life, admiring the serene landscape and feeling at peace.

Yet, it left him feeling hollow.

This was not his life and the grand feat he just performed was facilitated and orchestrated by another.

He was a fugitive in three of the realms, a mass murderer, a toy, and above all else he was doomed to fall through the Void in each iteration.

Such a pitiful life filled with confusion, self-hatred, and anger.

Loki looked down at his feet, no longer wanting to see the snow falling. He shuffled slightly, feeling
uncomfortable in his own skin before going back inside.

Stark was asleep, sprawled out on one side of the bed, not having dropped his form in his unconscious state.

Loki felt small compared to him, both physically and ability-wise.

This older god was trying to help him though, trying to give Loki the tools to not fall into the Void again.

Loki settled in beside him and sighed. In this bed, nestled against the other god and burrowed under blankets things didn’t feel so bad. He almost wished that he could stay in this moment forever.

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I started another Aesir!Tony fic called **Our Paths Unfold** in case you're interested.

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**Hope you liked this chapter!**
It is the Frost

Loki and Stark woke up to a dull noise that was slowly building up outside.

Stark merely huffed and pulled a pillow over his head, blocking out the ruckus. Loki’s curiosity was not so easily stifled. He shape shifted himself taller before wondering back to the roof to get a view of the commotion.

Once again Loki was at a loss for words.

Below him countless Jotuns were using their elemental magic to harden the snow that filled up the pocked land. Among them were children of all ages, some helping while the less experienced ones packed the snow down with their hands.

Where the city brushed against destruction stood many Jotuns male and females holding infants and passing food and drinks to the Jotuns who wondered over to them.

No one noticed him so far above.

“Are you satisfied?” Stark asked from behind him, startling Loki. The God of Fortification was surprisingly silent on his feet. Very few people were capable of sneaking up on Loki.

“No, but I feel a little bit better. I would like to go and help them further.”

“That’s understandable, but a bad idea. The whole area reeks of your magic. If you go out there they’ll know it was you.” Stark stood beside him, looking down at the crowd. “They’d hail you as hero. You’re no hero.” Loki couldn’t argue with that. “If any Jotun is here from your first visit to this realm they may recognize the magic as belonging to one of the Aesir that attacked them then figure out you’re from Asgard.”

“How long will it take for my traces to fade?”

“A year at most.” Stark shrugged before turning to go back into the half wrecked temple.

“When the Aesir search this realm, they’ll know I was here. What I have done.” Loki said under his breath.

“Wasn’t that kinda the point?”

“Perhaps.” Loki stared a moment longer before joining Stark inside.

“Our business here is concluded. We should leave before anyone gets close enough to pick up your tenor of magic.” Stark grabbed his bag and the orb from earlier was gone. The elderly Jotun woman who had granted them access to the temple was sitting in the same spot as before, seemingly having never moved. “We thank you for this shelter.”

Loki echoed the sentiment and the elderly woman gave them a sincere smile. Loki wondered if she perhaps knew they were behind the sudden snowfall. It was unlikely, but her short stature spoke of her real power.

He glanced away from her to the face of the temple.

Stark kept walking a couple paces before he realized his companion was no longer beside him. He backtracked to see what was distracting Loki.
The God of Mischief could not pull his eyes away from the small niche seamlessly carved into the front of the temple. He ghosted his fingers over the silver furs, his throat constricting with emotion.

"Is this…” He couldn’t finish the sentence.

"Yes, this is the place parents leave gifted babies to be taken in by the church. Though I believe the one you were left in is far to the east.”

The crib was carved from ice, yet padded with furs and the softest pillow Loki had ever felt.

“I wasn’t abandoned…”

“I already told you that you weren’t. Whether your adopted father knew the significant of his action we won’t know till later.” Stark pulled him away from the temple. “Come on. You can do the whole introspect thing when we’re back and I have a glass of scotch in hand.” Loki reluctantly fell in step with him his eyes trained on his bare feet as he tried to piece together everything.

When they reached the edge of the city where the story-walkway began it had changed, showing a new tale. Loki watched it to keep himself distracted. It was a story of growth. A snow fox getting lost in a blizzard overcoming adversity after adversity. Just as they came to the spot of their arrival the story ended with the fox finding its mate.

Stark bounced the golden ball and it was just like the last time. The same sense of being part of everything washed over Loki and ended far too quickly.

The second Stark caught the ball he walked off to his room, dropping the bag by one of the couches while mumbling about scotch.

Loki shrunk back down to his usual height before heading to his own room. His automatically went to the tapestry of Asgard, sending out a pulse of magic into it, feeling Frigga’s inactive magic flare in response. He hoped that it somehow got to her, told her that he was alright.

He took a shower and donned Aesir apparel. He almost missed the scant Jotun clothing when he felt the Aesir cloth grate annoyingly against his skin.

Stark was laid out on the couch a bottle of scotch in one hand and a blurred image of Pepper in the other.

“No, Tony. Yeah, I’m scared, but we should just pack up shop. It will take at least a year for us to gather all your toys on Midgard- and don’t get me started on your toys on Helheim! I don’t mind gathering most the cubes, but I won’t be responsible for your ray guns and hover targets.”

“Uck! Pep, they’re not ray guns and you know it. How many times have I saved your life? Why do you have so little faith in me?” Stark pouted at her. Loki took the seat across from him, picking up his threads.

“It doesn’t count if you’re the one who almost killed me!”

“I’m really not seeing the distinction.”

“You wouldn’t. Just be at the meeting tomorrow at ten. No excuses.” Pepper said strictly and Stark took a swig straight from the bottle. “And stop celebrating! Director Fury was looking for you yesterday. Leave one of your drunk shades here next time so he’ll leave with less of a fuss.”

“You’re such a joy-kill.”
“Why am I the adult?” She asked in exasperation, tucking a stray strand of her hair behind her ear.

“It’s funny because you say that to me every iteration.”

“Goodbye, Tony.” Before he could respond the image disappeared. Stark took another swig before setting down the bottle onto the coffee table.

“What are you celebrating?” Loki asked while easily imbuing his active magic in the threads he was weaving together.

“My brilliance, my sheer genius, my-”

“Inflated ego.”

“That too.” Stark sat up. “It’s time to up the difficulty of your task.” The God of Fortification grabbed his bag from beside the couch. “You’ve been focusing on solid objects, but memories are anything but. Since you moved so quickly we’ll skip liquids and move onto imbuing active magic to vapor.”

“How exactly will this strengthen my memories?”

“Magic and your own core characteristics are the only things that survive Ragnarök. Strengthen a memory with your magic- make it a part of your magic and you’ll be able to keep it in the next iteration.” Stark pulled out a small golden apple and shined it. “Get it?”

“Got it. What vapor am I imbuing?” Loki asked while displacing the threads. They were a part of him now and he wasn’t going to give them up. Stark flicked the half empty bottle of scotch, a spark of red went through the drink, turning it into its gas form.

“For now I’ll keep the vapor contained in one spot. Once you get the hang of it I’ll set it loose.” Loki carefully picked up the decanter, examining the twisting mist inside of it.

“How many steps are there before my memories are secured?”

“This is the second of three.”

“And the next one is?”

“Harder than the last one.”

“You have a way with saying a lot without giving any actual information away.”

“I told you how many steps there were.” Stark performed a quick displacement spell and a lit cigar appeared in his hand as he took a bite of apple. “I’ve gotten you this far, haven’t I?” Loki pursed his lips, not satisfied with the answer, but knew he’d get nothing more from the god. Instead he focused on the bottle in his hand. “Let me know if I’m distracting you.” Stark said while breathing out cloying tendrils of smoke. Red and gold intermingled in the haze before solidifying into an Iron Man racing around Stark’s head. Another breath out and another one with its colors inverted appeared. They began battling while Stark moved his finger from side to side like a conductor.

It was distracting, but Loki refused to let that keep him from his goal.

The mind expanding trip to and from Jotunheim had given him a better understanding on what it meant to not be confined by his own physical form. His body was just a vessel, the same way the bottle he was holding was a vessel for the vapor. Each iteration he’d get a new vessel. He just had to
Yet he couldn’t focus.

His eyes drifted to the window, to the destruction he wrought upon this realm. How much worse would it have been if not for Stark? What if the invasion had succeeded? Would Loki have ever gotten his mind back?

He tries not to think about what may have happened and what he’ll do after Stark finishes teaching him all he wants to. Ragnarök was close. Stark made that clear. Loki didn’t want to die, even knowing that he’d come back in the next iteration, but then Loki wouldn’t be Loki. He was going to lose so much of himself.

Loki wondered if Stark really would seek him out next iteration, to keep him from falling again.

A sense of hopelessness overcame him.

Ragnarök… Loki had known since he was a boy that it would come and destroy the realms and then he’d be reborn into a new life, but the way Stark talked about iterations… Everything would just be on repeat. He’d be born into a new body then spend his whole life trying to escape his fate of falling into the Void only to die and start all over again.

Knowing the end was close, knowing what would happen in his next life it was depressing and made everything feel futile.

“Stark,” Loki said before he could stop himself, “how can you stand it, knowing that everyone is going to die soon? Already knowing what’s going to happen next? I only know just the smallest amount, yet I can feel it fray at my sanity.” Stark didn’t respond immediately, instead looking at the cigar in his hand.

“My divine inclination is to strengthen things.” Loki could tell Stark was measuring his words carefully. “That urge, that need covers a lot of things. I spend a good portion of my day binding my memories, my thoughts to my magic. Staying sane is hard. You know what Ragnarök is, but you have no idea what happens after it.

“Ragnarök is the frost that kills all the leaves on Yggdrasil. It is only the start of a barren winter. For countless years there are only two things in the universe, Yggdrasil and me. The first time I survived I was unprepared. I didn’t understand what it would mean to live in that land of nothing. You may be the only one who can understand. If I wasn’t looking at my own hands or the tree there was nothing to look at but the Void. I was surrounded by it with only the branches of the tree to cling onto. There was no food. There was no air. All I could do was dig my nails into unyielding bark, trying to find a place to hold on because there is no gravity if I let go for just one second I could drift off. I didn’t even last a decade I… as you’d put it ‘let go’.”

“What happened at the end of your next iteration?”

“I was better prepared.” Stark took a huff of his cigar before letting out the smoke. An image of the Yggdrasil appeared, all in gold.

“Why face such isolation? Why survive Ragnarök if your memories will be preserved regardless?” Loki asked, knowing Stark was still holding back. The Void was merciless. The idea of willingly facing it for so long sounded like pure insanity.

Stark’s whole expression fell, but he quickly hid behind a facade.
“Another time, Lokes. Just focus on imbuing the vapor with your magic.”
The Joys of Being a Jotun

Loki hadn’t seen Stark in three days. He felt strangely alone, despite being used to long bouts of isolation in the pursuit of advancing his magic.

Pepper had stopped by once complementing his progress and asking how Jotunheim was doing. Loki could barely look at her as he spoke of the damage he inflicted and the small positive impact he made while trying to help. She had patted him on the shoulder with a small smile that spoke of forgiveness and understanding.

Imbuing the vapor was getting easier, mostly because of how his mind expanded both during his trip to and from Jotunheim and when he was controlling the cloud before letting it snow.

Loki released the vapor from the bottle and tried to control it the same way Stark had done so with his cigar smoke. At first he could barely keep the vapor from dissipating, but after a few choice swear words under his breath he got it under control.

The first images he could create were vague smudges, then blurred shapes, before finally become definable images- all in green.

He found this form of imbuing to be much harder than the previous way. His energy dissipated from the vapor quicker than it did from a solid object. The idea of making his memories, something so incorporeal, into a part of his magic seemed impossible, but if Stark could do it Loki was sure he could too.

Loki had fallen asleep on the couch again, the bottle lightly clasped in his hands. His magic was bordering on dangerously low, but he felt safe enough in Stark’s home to let himself become this weak.

“Fury wants answers.” A low, female voice said, alerting him to another’s presence.

“As a scientist I can appreciate that urge.” Stark responded flippantly. From his spot Loki was in the peripheral vision of the red headed assassin. He felt a tinge of panic until red words appeared in front of him.

She can’t see you.

“Tony, we’re still on high alert after the invasion. Fury and Hill both think he’s going to come back for round two. We need to know we can trust you to have our backs.” From the look of annoyance on Stark’s face it was clear that they had been discussing this for far too long.

Loki silently stood up and walked to the hallway, simultaneously putting on the glamour of a young, beautiful woman with mussed hair only wearing one of Stark’s button up shirts. She emerged from the hallway, purposefully being louder than she actually was. Loki pretended not to see the Widow’s hand flash to her holster. Loki yawned in response, her bare feet paddling softly across the cold tile floor. The assassin was watching her closely as Loki poured a cup of coffee before leaning against Stark. The older god quickly looped his arm around her waist.

“Good morning.” Loki said before taking a sip of coffee and giving the other woman the once over. “And you are?”
“I could ask the same of you. She hasn’t passed through security and I doubt she’s been holed up here since before the invasion.” The SHEILD agent accused. Stark snorted.

“You think I don’t have ways around my own security?”

“I’m guessing she’s the reason you’ve been out of contact?” Natasha’s lips were drawn into a thin line.

“I’ve been told I can be quite time consuming.” Loki let out an undignified squeak as Stark suddenly lifted her by her hips and sat her on the counter, before positioning himself between her legs. He gave Loki a fleeting questioning look and the younger god nodded subtly.

“Unless you want to join us I suggest you tell Fury to mind his own damn business. I flew a nuclear missile into a wormhole. I think I deserve a bit of a break.” Stark grinded obscenely against Loki as he spoke. Loki let out a gasp before pulling him closer.

“Some things never change with you.” The assassin said unfazed by their crude display. She left without another word.

Stark slid his hands up Loki’s legs.

“I can see why you are the God of Mischief.” Stark leered at Loki’s fake form. “You’re very pretty like this, but I’d prefer you in your real form.” Stark whispered while kissing Loki’s cheek and running a hand up his side.

“I might burn you on accident.” He pulled at Loki’s hair, exposing his neck.

“Only if you feel defensive. Am I making you feel defensive?” Stark asks in his usual teasing manner and Loki shivered under his touch.

“No.” Loki arched his back, bringing him closer to the older god.

“Then let me see your real form, let me touch you in your real form.” With every word Stark’s lips brushed against Loki’s skin. The younger god let his glamour slip and immediately felt the contrast of their temperatures. “You’ve never really been touched in your Jotun form. This will be quite the experience for you.” Loki could feel his skin already contracting, exposing his nerves that amplified every touch. “Hmm, but what should we do? There are so many options. I could fuck you till you forget your name,” Stark pushed Loki onto his back as he started to strip him down. “Fuck you till your lines spasm, your body not knowing if it can handle another orgasm.” The blue skin of his chest was revealed. Stark stared at the four lines that started on Loki’s back and followed the curve of his ribs before sharply turning downward before disappearing below more cloth. “You know, I don’t even have to take off these leather pants you tend to favor to make you come undone. What do you think about that?”

“Anything just-” Stark flicked his tongue out on Loki’s collarbone. Pleasure swept outwards from that spot, yet it was contained, never passing over his raised lines, like flowing water contained by a river.

Loki could suddenly feel everything. The calluses on Stark’s hands, the cold granite counter at his back, the leather rubbing up against his skin, Stark’s warm breath-

“Ah!” His whole body tensed with just the slightest of touches when Stark brushed his thumbs over Loki’s hips.

“Yes, I think I’ll leave you untouched. I’ll make you come again and again without being inside of
you or touching you where you need it the most.” Stark bit down hard on Loki’s neck, and the younger god let out a strangled gasp. He turned his head to give Stark better access, but the feeling of his cheek brushing against the smooth granite was almost just as painful, making him feel light headed.

Loki tried pawing at Stark’s shirt in hopes of touching his skin, but the feeling of the soft fabric on his fingertips was almost too much-

He hooked his legs around Stark’s hips and cried out as his leather dragged against his skin. His ankles hooked together and the soft inlining of his boots almost burned him with the intensity

“Oh, Norns, Stark- I don’t understand- I can’t” Loki couldn’t form sentences, making Stark grin. He ran his tongue between the lines of his chest and stomach before circling around Loki’s navel.

Everything hurt, but felt so good. He was quivering and the wet trail Stark left behind was aching. Loki wanted more, but he could barely move without a pleasure that was just on the precipice of a climax made him lock up, leaving him completely open and vulnerable to the other god.

Every old knick and callous on Stark’s hands grated against Loki’s skin sending waves of hysteria through him.

And Stark’s goatee scratched against his dark blue nipple-

Loki wanted to cry, because he couldn’t process it all- it was too much, but not enough.

With one hand Stark traced the V of Loki’s hips while the other reached behind him and pulled Loki flush with him.

Then their lips met and the pleasure somehow amplified. Loki could barely respond to Stark’s fervent kisses and nips purely because he was not certain he’d be able to survive the fall that would come after the climax he was quickly building up to.

Loki didn’t realize he was trying to grind his hips against Stark’s until the other god pushed them back down onto the counter. He whimpered in response.

“Please, Stark- Please!” Loki begged, wantonly rubbing his torso against Starks, his whole body feeling like it would explode with just one well placed touch.

“Not tonight.” Stark whispered into his ear, the soft brush of his breath making Loki cry out.

“Please!” Tears escaped his eyes and they blazed a path across his skin.

Stark’s shirt rubbing against him, the soft fur of his boots, his slick leather, and Stark’s rough skin-

It all made Loki’s whole body pulse right on a level of pleasure he’d never experienced before. He was so close to shattering into a million pieces-

And then Stark bit down on the column of his neck-

Loki screamed. His whole body tensed and came undone. Loki was completely lost in the sensation. He couldn’t see or move and the all encompassing pleasure didn’t relent. All he could do was quiver under the onslaught as the orgasm hit him repeatedly.

Slowly the pleasure ebbed. Loki realized that he was breathing harshly as he looked at Stark with hooded eyes.
“Do you still know your name?” Stark asked, still hovering over him, yet leaving an inch between them.

“Yes- Loki.” He said disjointedly.

“Good, that means I’m still not done with you.” And then the process started all over again.

What do ya think? I'm a bit nervous, but would love your opinion.

Also, I posted a baby!Loki one-shot called From the Heart in case you're interested.
Loki woke up in his own bed in a daze. He stretched and the feeling of his skin against the sheets was almost painful. Actually, his whole body was bordering on painful. Presently he was sore all over. His muscles ached and he felt dehydrated.

He had vague memories of how he ended up in his own bed. He knew Stark carried his boneless, panting form from the kitchen to his room, then laying him down.

Loki shifted and noticed he was nude, strange considering he tended to wear long lounge pants while asleep.

The memory became clearer.

Stark pulling off Loki’s pants.

Loki distinctly remembered thinking: Finally, finally! But it’s not fair. I’m too tired to even lift my eyes, let alone fuck.

It hadn’t come to that though.

Stark ended up cleaning him off with a warm washcloth that felt heavenly against his oversensitive skin and neglected cock.

In the kitchen they had spent hours just touching and true to his word Stark had never touched Loki where he wanted to be touched the most.

Stark had said something along the lines of, “I rather like when you look all debauched like this,” before giving Loki a kiss that lingered. His eyes couldn’t stay open and he vaguely heard the God of Fortification leaving as he fell asleep.

“Jarvis, how long have I been asleep?”

“Just over 18 hours. Ms. Cook has started preparing a meal for you. I recommend having breakfast in bed. Also, Sir placed a book and a glass of water on your nightstand an hour prior.”

“Where is Stark?”

“Sir and Ms. Potts are currently at a board meeting. He won’t be back till late in the evening. You’ve been given access to most floors of the building. Sir has also set up two accounts for you in each gender in case you would like to go out or if you happen to run into Agent Romanoff again.” Loki considered that news briefly.

“Can you have Ms. Cook bring in my decanter of vapor as well?”

“Of course.” Once again Loki wondered how exactly Stark had created such a useful entity.

Loki propped himself up, feeling his muscles strain, still feeling fatigued from his earlier escapade. He now had a better idea of why the Aesir thought so lowly of the Jotuns. The Aesir were prudish by tradition. Sex was only between a married man and woman and solely for the sake of creating children. If the sort of mind numbing, body shattering touching that happened between him and Stark
earlier was a benchmark than he was sure Jotuns did not have the same social stigma towards sex.

Loki felt a bit stunned when he realized he hadn’t even had sex. They had just been touching, rubbing, biting, and licking. Stark only touched his cock when at the end and that was in a nonsexual manner.

Ms. Cook delivered twice her usual amount of food to Loki and he was more than grateful for that. He hadn’t felt this physically spent in centuries, but at least this time it was a good aching as opposed to when he had been trapped deep underground with Thor’s merry band of morons and no food.

Loki devoured his food and contemplated spending the day in his bed. It was very tempting, but he smelled like sweat and sex, scents that were too distracting. When he was finished showering the empty tray of food was gone, leaving only the bottle of vapor behind. His bed was also stripped down and he figured Ms. Cook was washing the bedding.

He sat on the window seat and began practicing imbuing the vapor with his magic.

By the time Stark got back that night Loki was able to make the vapor form into two battling figures. Loki didn’t know exactly how to greet him, nor did he know if their status was that of student and teacher or as lovers. He settled on nodding with a smile.

“Would you like to get up to some mischief with me?” Stark asked while grinning widely.

“Yes, what sort of mischief do you want to get into?” Loki looked Stark up and down trying to get any clue of what he had in mind. He was in a well tailored suit, giving nothing away.

“The Avengers, excluding Big Brother Thor, are getting together for dinner. It might be entertaining to have you there in your female disguise, make a few biased comments, weird them out and the like. Should be fun.”

“Yes, that should be enjoyable. Shall I use a glamour or do you have any female clothing I can use when I shape shift?”

“Jarvis ordered you some outfits for your different identities.” Stark glanced around.

“They’re being delivered via the service elevator now, Sir.” Jarvis announced. Stark tilted his head to the side and murmured a spell under his breath.

“It should be in your room now.” Tony said while pulling off his tie and heading to his own room.

Loki paused before nodding to himself and going to his own room. There was a large stack of boxes waiting for him. With the wave of his hand they were all laid open and in a row. He perused the different contents. Loki settled on a blue dress that was far too short by Asgard’s standards, but this was Midgard. Besides that he wanted to look good, even if it wasn’t his true form.

He discarded his usual sparse clothing while shape shifting, losing inches and softening his edges. He examined himself in the mirror. This female form was desirable, functional even, but it still made him frown. At some point he started preferring Jotun-blue to his old cream palette.

Loki pulled on his dress and heels, musing up his hair a bit and reddening his lip.

Very attractive, very not Jotun.
Loki rolled his green eyes before meeting Stark in the living room.

When they arrived the team was already halfway through their main course.

“Avengers this is my lover, Lover these are my Avengers.” Stark gestured vaguely while glancing at the menu.

“Hello, I’m Lola Bjornson.” Loki introduced himself, eyeing each one sharply. “It’s nice to see you again Ms. Romanoff.” Loki leaned forward, leering at the red headed woman. “You were rather good at avoiding the cameras when those scary aliens attacked.”

“I like keeping my anonymity.” Natasha glared at Stark assuming he was the one who told ‘Lola’ her name.

“Some of us work better from the shadows.” Clint spoke loudly, drawing Loki’s attention away from Natasha. “Tony over there is all about being flashy, but the problem with the flashy heroes is that they spend so much time showing off that they get hardly any work done. The real heroes are the ones who work behind the scene, shooting down the bad guys before you even know there’s a problem.” Clint winked at Loki. “So what is a lovely thing like you doing with an old has been like him?” Clint nodded his head towards Stark, who only snorted without looking up from the menu.

“You are much closer to my age.” Loki said while leaning forward to show him a glimpse of cleavage. “But you seem to forget the benefits of age. Tell me- Wait, what’s your name?”

“Geez Clint. You have no manners.” Stark goaded while placing a hand on Loki’s thigh.

“Sorry, Lola. I’m Clint and I may not be as experienced as Tony, but I’m twice as talented and very spry.” He tried to be charming and Loki had to hold back quite a few jokes.

“Then tell me my spry spy-” Clint and Natasha both narrowed their eyes at ‘Lola’. “Oh hush, you both are clearly spies. One hides from the cameras and the other admits he works from the shadows.” Loki flicked a lock of his light brown hair over his shoulder. “So tell me my spry spy, what’s your record? And I don’t mean how many women have you bedded.”

“My record? As in how many rounds I’ve gone in one night?”

“No, how many times have you made a woman, or man if it’s your preference, come in one night?”

“I really don’t think now is the time to be talking about these sorts of things.” Steve was trying to control his expression, but his embarrassment was clear.

“Is this the usual sorts of conversations you have over dinner, Tony?” Bruce asked while taking a bite of garlic bread.

“I usually don’t eat. Anyway, Lola raises a good question. Clint if you’re going to try and poach my woman you better be more than just talk.” The archer took up the challenge, finishing his beer swiftly and set it down loudly.

“I’m sure I can do better than that. Fine. My record is six. I made a fine blond lady come six times during one marathon.” Clint sat a bit straighter, proud of himself. Loki turned towards Stark, an innocent expression in place.

“Tony?” He made his voice honey sweet.

“Yes, dear?” In contrast Stark’s voice was mocking.
“On the kitchen counter last evening how many times did you make me come?”

“I lost count after ten.”

“At least ten. That’s much better than six, my not so spry spy.” Loki fluttered his eye lashes.

“I thought you were in a relationship with Ms. Potts.” Steve cut in.

“Pep and I were, but then I met Lola.” Tony shrugged before telling the waiter his order.

“You just end your relationship with her for another woman at the drop of a hat?” The captain sounded more confused than accusatory.

The assassin and archer exchanged a look while Bruce stayed focused on his meal.

“She’s the one who encouraged it, dirty bird that she is.” Tony chuckled.

“I find that hard to believe. Ms. Potts is a no nonsense woman.” Steve said while cutting up his steak into perfect little triangles.

“She has to be a wild one to go out with me. Is it so hard to believe that she’d invite Lola into our home?”

“Pepper is all sorts of crazy.” Loki added in. “Red heads usually are.” Loki winked at Natasha. “Speaking of crazy. What happened to the would be dictator? He was rather good looking. I wouldn’t mind kneeling for him.” Clint’s whole face shut down. “What? Did I say something wrong?”

“Dear, we just fought him. Of course we are going to be a bit put out at the thought of him being anything less than a villain.” Stark gave Loki a quick peck on the cheek.

“Well it’s not like being sexy and being a villain are mutually exclusive. Some of the sexiest people have the worst personalities, like Tony.” ‘Lola’ made a flippant gesture towards him.

“Oh, baby, you always say the naughtiest things to me.” Stark said drolly.

“I only speak the truth.” An odd sentiment coming from the God of Lies.

“She has your number, Tony.” Bruce grinned, having spent many hours with the eccentric billionaire since the invasion.

“Brucie, is that your way of telling me you think I’m sexy?”

“Heaven’s no! That’s my way of telling you Lola is smarter than the usual floozy you tend to make the headlines with.”

“Oh, because you’ve met so many of those actresses and debutants?” Tony asked, humor evident in his voice. “I’ll have you know that some of them can be rather stimulating even outside of the bedroom.”

“Can we please talk about something else?” Steve groaned.

“Certainly.” Loki sat up straighter as he spoke, a look of complete seriousness on his false face. “How is your sex life, Captain?”
I have a whole rant on why Loki's pronouns should be masculine unless he identifies himself as anything other than male, but I'll save it.
The Hangover

Loki woke up in an unfamiliar bed. Stark’s scent was thick and heady under the soft covers. Loki could feel his warmth, just inches away. Unfortunately, Loki’s head was pounding and the world was off kilter.

He wasn’t one for drinking to excess, and honestly he hadn’t been completely aware that he was drinking so much at the time.

It was Stark’s fault. He was certain of that.

It had happened the night before during the dinner with the Avengers. As their main course was being served Stark used a spell that switched their bottle of wine with a bottle with a honey-gold colored liquid. He filled his glass to the brim before offering Loki some.

The younger god had agreed, and yes maybe Stark did warn him that the drink was strong and maybe he had given him a questioning look when Loki poured himself a third glass during dessert, but honestly it was all Stark’s fault.

Loki didn’t realize the drink was that strong until he was giggling lapping up the bite of ice cream Stark had offered him.

It was a miracle that he didn’t shape shift back to his true form- Actually that was probably Stark’s doing.

Now that he was awake and feeling terrible, he could see that his skin was once more blue in the dim light. Loki was still wearing his dress from the night before, his heels abandoned at some point between the restaurant and Stark’s bed. The tight lacey undergarments were decidedly uncomfortable on his male anatomy.

Loki held back an annoyed groan as he wiggled out of them before laying on his side facing the other occupant of the bed.

Stark was still asleep, looking wholly mortal save the glowing circle in his chest. He was hiding in plain sight- more than plain sight. Stark was hiding front and center, letting the paparazzi capture his image whenever he went out.

Loki still couldn’t fathom how old he was or how he survived staring into the Void for centuries on end. He was so powerful and knowledgeable that Loki almost felt inadequate, inadequate in the only thing he ever truly excelled at.

The God of Fortification… and Loki was his lover. Well, technically they still hadn’t had sex and Loki still hadn’t come up with a word for the activities they did on the kitchen counter.

Loki now had a better idea on why the Aesir looked down on the Jotuns.

If the Jotun’s skin was a sex organ (which Loki had no doubt of) then it was highly likely they partook in such carnal indulgences, especially since there was no risk of pregnancy without penetration.

To the uppity Aesir it must seem downright lecherous and indistinguishable from real sex.

Loki could remember the brief, drunk conversation he had with Stark while in the elevator.
Apparently the orgasmic touching was socially acceptable between friends on Jotunheim and seen as good for the health.

Loki had no doubt that the Aesir would have seen such actions as barbaric and deplorable.

It ruffled Loki’s metaphorical feathers.

He wanted to set straight each and every one of their minds, but did not want to go back to Asgard and the Aesir’s accusing stares. The Mad Titan was dead. Loki had no need for Odin All-Father anymore.

Just the thought of his false father stirred up all sorts of emotions in Loki’s already painful head. Hurt, betrayal, confusion, love, and most of all anger— all because of one man who claimed him as his son.

Loki wanted to know what he’d say to him now, now that he wrought so much destruction, was bedding the God of Fortification, and learning magic that even the All-Father didn’t know.

By the Norns Loki wanted to dig into Stark’s head just so he could know more. He wanted to learn and the god could offer him so much knowledge if he chose to. But he seemed to be willingly only teach Loki how to keep his memories. After all, Loki was just his lover and Pepper made it clear that Stark had various lovers and it was only happenstance that none of them were alive when Loki invaded Midgard.

Loki wouldn’t be surprised if he was nothing to the older god…

But Stark did say he’d seek him out next iteration, but that was only to prevent Loki from falling into the Void again— so it really had nothing to do with who Loki was only that he was a signal for Ragnarök being a step closer to starting.

And Loki still wasn’t certain why Stark was so focused on Ragnarök, nor did he have any idea why the Tesseract was so important to him or what it even did. There had been another one on Jotunheim, and possibly many other scattered throughout the realms.

Finally, Loki decided that mindlessly speculating was useless. He knew he wouldn’t be able to fall back asleep so he slipped out of warmth of Stark’s bed. The other god did not stir as Loki went to his room then got cleaned up.

Breakfast was ready by the time he exited his bedroom courtesy of Ms. Cook. After eating he tried to focus on imbuing the vapor, but his headache was too much of an obstacle. He decided to just savor a cup of tea while waiting for it to dissipate.

“Loki, you should be aware that agent Romanoff is trying to access this floor. I have already alerted Sir and he has given her permission to proceed up.” Jarvis announced, making Loki’s head hurt.

“Thank you.” He threw on his glamour of Lola, feeling too lazy to actually shape shift. A minute later Loki heard the pinging of the elevator. Natasha’s eyes immediately zeroed in on Loki. There was a file tucked under her arm.

“Where is Tony?”

“Sir is pulling on proper attire presently.” Jarvis answered. She frowned and sat across from Loki.

“You seemed to have fun last night.” Natasha’s tone switched to lighthearted, automatically making Loki raise his defenses.
“I always have fun with Tony.” Loki made himself blush, but raised one of his eyebrows to make it clear that he knew what the assassin was playing at. Natasha’s face was stoic, but Loki could sense the beginning of a frown.

“You never mentioned what you do when you’re not warming Tony’s bed.” The quick shift in questioning would have startled most people, but not Loki.

“I’m glad you were paying attention. Why were you so twitchy when anyone got close to Clint?” Loki tried to shift the conversation, but his question was ignored.

“I ran your image against various databases. No IDs that were close to your image had the name Lola. Care to tell me who you really are?”

“Is that a Russian tilt I hear in your voice?”

“Ladies, ladies, calm down. There’s plenty of me to go around. You don’t have to fight each other.” Stark said while entering the room, his arms held up in surrender. Loki snorted and Natasha ignored his comment. She stood and handed him the manila folder.

“This is classified so keep it away from prying eyes.” She glared pointedly at Loki. “The director wants an answer by four this evening.”

“Yeah, I’ll look at it and keep your super secret super secure. I just need coffee first.” He waved the folder at the assassin while walking to the kitchen. “This brings back lots of memories Tasha. If not for the whole spying thing you were a pretty good PA.”

“Just answer the director before he sics me on you.” She gave one more warning glare to Loki before leaving. When Stark heard her leave he dropped the folder on the counter.

“J, what’s going on?” Stark asked while fixing himself a cup of coffee.

“A copy of this folder was also given to Dr. Banner. Last evening a small delegation of Aesir arrived in New Mexico. SHEILD intercepted them. They are aware of the device used to track your cube previously and are asking to buy it from us. Sir, I am frankly surprised that Fury didn’t outright sell it without consulting you or Dr. Banner first.” Stark paused in thought.

“What are they offering in way of compensation?”

“Ten chests of gold and rare gems.”

“How very Viking of them.” Stark chuckled. “What does Brucie think?”

“He is still reading his folder. I estimate that he will be finished in three minutes.”

“Are you going to sell it to them?” Loki asked, letting his glamour drop.

“I see no harm in it.” Stark handed Loki a cup of strange purple liquid. “For the headache.” He explained. Loki took a tentative sip and instantly felt relief.

“What if they alter it to your cube’s new tenor?”

“They don’t know its new tenor and I have it warded from discovery.” Stark flicked his wrist. “I’ve made the machine tamper proof. It is essentially useless to them, they just don’t know that. Not that I need any more capital or anything.”

“They are surprisingly mobile considering the Bifrost is broken.” Loki observed.
“I snuck into Asgard after you told me about it breaking and placed a few spells on it to speed up its recovery. It’s nowhere close to being complete, but it is minimally functional.”

“God of Fortification… I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that you’d be compelled to fix one of your creations.” Loki finished off his drink, feeling much better and clearer.

“God of Mischief… I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that you teased the Avengers at dinner last night. You almost slipped up a few times though.”

“I was not expecting the drink you offered me to have such an effect on me. The mead on Asgard is not even that strong.”

“Yes, well my liver is fortified from countless years of drinking so only the strongest drinks will make me feel buzzed. That one was actually made from an earlier iteration of the golden apple. I have a whole orchard of them hidden away along with a few choice rare fruits.”

“How did you get them to survive Ragnarök?”

“With a very, very complex displacement spell. It nearly killed me, but was definitely worth it.” Stark slumped in his chair, but was grinning proudly.

“Somehow you become more interesting with every day that passes.”

“Thanks, I find you interesting as well.” Stark leaned forward slightly, trying to read Loki’s expression. “And not just because you’re the one who falls into the Void.”

“Have you been inside my head again?” Loki asked, suspicion rising inside of him.

“You may have been rambling drunkenly last night on our way back here.”

“Oh Norns, what else did I say?”

“You have an impressive list of things you want me to do to and with you.” Stark wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and Loki covered his eyes with his hand, trying to hold back his blush.

“Sir, Dr. Banner is requesting you to join him in his lab.” Jarvis mercifully pulled the older god’s attention away from Loki.

“Allright, let him know I’ll be down in a jiff. Lokes, keep practicing with the vapor. My cube should be fully repaired in the next couple of days. Once it is good to go I’m heading directly to Asgard and you’re coming with me.”

Author's Note: I added a new one-shot called A False Horizon. It's just a lil' ficlet :)}
Stark did not return that day, nor the following one. In his time alone Loki threw himself into learning how to properly imbue his magic into the vapor. It was a difficult task, but he relished it.

Pepper stopped by once to let him know that the Aesir delegation had left with the Tesseract tracking device. It was a relief to know they were no longer on Midgard. If he had to face Asgard again he’d rather do so on his own terms.

Stark teleported into the suite unexpectedly, startling Loki into almost letting his magic escape the vapor.

“Well done.” Stark complimented. “It’s time to go to Asgard.” He handed the younger god a sheet of paper. “Here’s the glamour Odin cast on you. It would probably be prudent to show up looking like an Aesir considering the strained relationship with Jotunheim.” Loki looked over the paper, absorbing the new information. He understood the spell and quickly cast it on himself.

It felt strange, yet familiar, to be in is Aesir form again.

“I’m going to change into proper garb.” Loki announced and Stark shrugged, not bothering to change out of his AC/DC t-shirt and well worn jeans that were a few inches too long. He did summon his axe, though.

Loki felt nervous jitters creeping up on him. He made a conscious effort to push them down.

At best going to Asgard would yield answers, at worst it would end up with him imprisoned and stripped of his powers.

He just wanted the truth and to see Frigga.

Loki could already feel the judgmental eyes of the Aesir. He had been their rightful king and they had not even given him a chance to prove himself. It was certainly the shortest reign in Aesir history. Now all that they knew about him was that he had attacked the infantile realm of Midgard and lost pathetically.

Monster…

Loki shook his head.

They were just ignorant. The only Aesir whose opinion he should care about was that of the woman who raised him, even if she had lied to him his entire life.

Loki gave himself a quick mental pep talk while pulling on his best armor and slicking back his hair. He looked different than he did on that fateful day he fell into the Void. He knew he’d never be the same again, that he’d never lose the slight wrinkles around his eyes from clamping his eyes shut while trying to keep from screaming in agony for hours on end as his body was eviscerated. He’d
never be able to look at the Realm Eternal without feeling a stab of sorrow and regret.

There was a knock at his door and he realized he had been staring at his reflection for far too long.

“Here,” a dark silver scepter appeared in Stark’s hands. He twirled it twice between his fingers before tossing it to Loki who caught it easily. “I thought you could use a new one.”

Loki ran his hand over the weapon, feeling its strength and resilience.

“Thank you.” It was a beautiful piece of work and Loki could feel ancient magic pulsing through it.

“I made her last night and calibrated it to the tenor of your magic. If need be it can stand up against Mjolnir. I haven’t named her yet. Thought I’d give you that honor.” Stark said nonchalantly, as if his gift was not making Loki’s heart race and emotions swell.

“Frelser, it’s the only proper name for her.” Frelser… Savior. It was the most apt name for a weapon made by Stark for him, because was that not what Stark was to Loki, his savior? He had saved him from Thanos’ clutches, protected him when he was helpless, and hidden him when so many were seeking his death.

“A wonderful choice. Are you ready?”

“Almost.” Loki bridged the area between them before kissing Stark, trying to show his thanks with more than just words. “You have done more for me than anyone in this life has before. I wish to be your lover even after you’ve taught me how to hold onto my memories and even in my next iterations. I want you.” He kissed him again trying to convey just how much all of Stark’s actions meant to him.

“Hm, it’s strange.” Stark smiled softly. “I feel like I cannot deny you anything. Very well. I think I’ll keep you.” Stark returned his touch in kind, but with much more tenderness than any of their previous encounters. It was unhurried and seemed to promise countless hours ahead for such activities. “We have to leave soon.” Stark said between slow caresses. The reminder of Asgard quelled all of Loki’s lust and happiness. He stepped back from the God of Fortification and nodded.

They walked to the balcony and an intricate pattern formed on the tiled floor. Loki felt the Bifrost’s magic before he was pulled inside of it.

The golden solarium at the end of the rainbow bridge looked the same as the last time he saw it, yet it seemed to lack its usual luster and brilliance.

“Halt, lost prince!” Heimdall shouted, brandishing his sword. “Yield to the authority of King Odin and lay down your weapons.”

“Yeah, no, that’s not happening.” Stark said, stepping between the gatekeeper and Loki.

“You dare bring a mortal to the Realm Eternal? Was your list of crimes truly so short that you felt the need to add to them?” Heimdall completely ignored Stark’s words, opting to instead scold Loki and move in closer, sword still raised.

“Peace gatekeeper. We are here on business.” Loki tried being diplomatic even though his anger about Heimdall’s previous actions was monumental.

“The guards are on their way, little prince. Best you lay down your weapons now than face their wrath.” Heimdall edged to the side, trying to get a clearer view of Loki.
“Enough.” Stark said in a controlled voice and the whole solarium glowed brightly, startling Heimdall. Stark used his brief moment of distraction to surge forward and place his hand over the image of Yggdrasil on Heimdall’s breastplate. He yanked the armor off the gatekeeper and Heimdall collapsed instantly, his golden irises turning grey.

“What did you do to me?!” Heimdall shouted, scraping at his eyes. “I can’t see! Why can’t I see?!” He was curling up on himself shouting, but a quick spell from Stark had him lying prone and silent.

“It’s as Loki said. We are here on business. He is under my protection and I won’t have you getting in our way.” Stark performed a displacement spell and Heimdall’s armor and sword disappeared. “I reserve the right to take back my creations. You should have been told the risks of the armor when you accepted the role as gatekeeper. A spell as powerful as allowing you to see everything would of course have a high price.”

“Blindness?” Loki asked, unsettled by how poorly their trip was already going.

“Yes, his other senses will start to fade too. Höfuð and the armor are not my best creations, but they are powerful ones.” Stark sighed and walked past the prone god.

Loki caught his first glimpse of the Bifrost since…

It looked frayed and far too narrow to have two people walk side by side on it. Loki’s grip on Frelser tightened and he felt dizzy as he looked at the Void. His breath quickened and his vision seemed to narrow until all he could see was the vast emptiness.

A strong hand gripped his upper arm and he was pulled back into the solarium. His eyes landed on Stark who was looking at him with a worried expression. The older god pulled him into a hug before giving him a brief kiss.

“Just hold on.” Stark whispered before letting him go and walking out of the solarium. There was a burst of magical energy that helped bring Loki out of the dark area in his own mind. When he looked back outside, the Bifrost was completely different. It was no longer broken and instead of it being a rainbow bridge it was a rainbow tunnel. “Better?” Stark asked and Loki could only nod. “Let’s go. I haven’t seen this city in ages.” There was a faint trace of excitement in the God of Fortification’s voice.

“It must be strange seeing a place change so drastically, yet be so similar to a place you’ve been to before.” Loki carefully stepped one foot in the rainbow tunnel, hesitant to go anywhere near the Void.

“It’s more entertaining than strange. Architecture is always a bit different in each iteration and I can sometimes find unique pieces. Though there is always this one fountain Asgard seems to have somewhere in the royal gardens. It never changes.” Stark made an illusion and Loki recognized the fountain. He frowned as a memory from his childhood surfaced.

“We still have that fountain. I nearly drowned in it as a child.” It had been a stupid dare issued by Thor and his friends. At the very top of the large fountain was carved one of Odin’s ravens. They had been told many times not to play in the fountain, but when Thor goaded him into trying to tie a cape onto the stone raven he couldn’t refuse. Just as he reached the second tier of the fountain, Thor and his friends had disappeared to go tell on him without Loki’s notice. A few minutes later he reached the highest tier and was tying on the cape when he slipped, falling and hitting his head. The next thing he was aware of was him spitting up water and coughing with a guard hovering over him.

It had been so long ago, but the childish betrayal stung freshly.
In the distance he could see guards on horseback riding towards them. Stark pushed himself and Loki flush against the wall of the Bifrost and the four guards rode right by them.

They walked silently the rest of the way, invisible to those around them.

It felt like an eternity since Loki had last set step into the city. Unsurprisingly, yet saddeningly, everything looked the same, especially the citizens. Loki had been through so much- the desolation of the Void, countless hours of torture, and being a prisoner in his own head- yet these people who once were his citizens were unfazed by his untimely demise.

But he never truly was their king.

A Jotun on the throne of Asgard… it was preposterous.

They wanted the golden prince, not the one who lived in his shadow.

These were never his people.

Loki suddenly hated his false Aesir skin and wanted to switch to Jotun blue, but he knew that would just make things more difficult for him and Stark.

At the gates to the castle Stark unshrouded them.

“Tell Odin that Ásviðr The Builder is here to see him and that Loki is under my protection.” Stark announced as guards surrounded them, readying to strike. The older god made a slow circling motion with his hand and all the guards’ weapons fell to the ground. “Now, unless you want me to storm in there myself and tell him.” One of the higher ranking guards nodded to the youngest guard, silently telling him to alert the All-Father. The other guards did not move closer or away from Stark and Loki, merely eyeing them menacingly.

Far above, Loki spotted one of Odin’s ravens appear and start circling them. He glared at the familiar.

Less than five minutes later the captain of the guard appeared, trying to be impassive, but his façade was broken by the hint of a frown.

“This had better not be another one of your tricks, Liesmith.” He said while motioning for the guards to move aside.

“Loki! You’ve come back to us!” Loki held back his annoyance at Thor’s boisterous voice as he ran into the courtyard, eyes alight with excitement. He faltered when he saw who Loki was with.

“Friend Tony, what are you doing here? Asgard is forbidden to mortals.” There were no accusations in his voice, only confusion as his blue eyes widened.

“Yeah, you don’t really have to worry about the mortal thing, Point Break. I’ve seen my fair share of millenniums and plan to see many more.” Stark let his presence be felt and a shudder ran through the crowd as Stark’s magic touched them.

“From which realm do you hail and why did you not tell me of your origins when we first met?” It was clear that Thor could not decide on whether he felt suspicious or betrayed.

“I am from a realm unknown to you, though it is very similar to Asgard. I didn’t tell you I’m not human because it wasn’t important. Now hurry along. I’m here to see the All-Daddy, not his son.” Loki glanced at Stark and could tell he was annoyed, though he did not know why.
“He is the King of Asgard and should be shown your full respect.” Thor touched the hilt of Mjolnir in what was clearly a threat.

“Trust me. This is me showing restraint. Now are you going to take me to him or stand in our way?” Stark let the blade of his axe catch the light in his own silent threat.

“Thor, I suggest you stop hindering us. Stark has many powers beyond even me. He already disabled Heimdall when he prevented our progress.” Loki stared down his former brother, trying not to let any tender emotions he may have once had swell up.

“Heimdall is hurt?” The gatekeeper had been there long before either of the princes and had always seemed immovable.

“Yes, though his wounds can be reversed if I chose to help him within the next few hours. Otherwise the once all seeing god will never see again, nor have access to any of his other senses.”

“You dare invade our realm, hurt one of her greatest citizens, and make demands of me?” Dark clouds started forming above, already rumbling with anger.

“Invade your realm?” Stark scoffed. “The door was left open. You cannot blame me for using it. We warned Heimdall that we were here on business, yet he still insisted on trying to take Loki into custody. And as to me making demands of you, young godling?” Stark held up his hand and Mjolnir flew into his waiting palm. The clouds instantly dissipated. “I am Ásviðr, The Builder, and the God of Fortification. I have seen realms destroyed and reborn, I have killed kings, and I have seen countless of your kind die at my feet. You call this place the Realm Eternal, yet I was here before it and I will be here once it is no more. Your childlike threats and toys are meaningless to me.” Mjolnir disintegrated in his hand before the remains were caught in the wind, lifted away. “Now either step aside or show me the way to your father.”

The courtyard was silent for a long, tense moment in which Thor gaped at Stark’s empty hand. One of the guards sidled next to the thunderer.

“Sire, I think it would be wise not to fight this battle. Your father has already decided to grant them an audience,” the guard whispered to Thor.

“But…”

“Thor, for once in your life use your brain. Take us to Odin.” Loki hissed out and Thor flinched before nodding and leading them down the golden halls.

Loki forced himself to look relaxed and a bit bored. Beside him Stark was looking around like a tourist, not bothered by the hoard of guards that surrounded them.

The large golden doors that led to the throne room were closed and Loki could already hear mumbling. He wanted to move closer to Stark, but knew it would just make him look weak.

The golden doors slammed open with a wordless spell, silencing all those inside of the large room. There was already a crowd lining the walls, all Aesir nobility, all glaring at Loki and looking at Stark with curiosity. Loki recognized every face, remembered every slight done to him and every action he took against them. They had all been tricks with no real bite behind them, yet they hated him for it, thought he was devious and jealous of Thor because of it.

And in the very front of the golden room on his golden throne sat Odin All-Father, his expression completely unreadable. His single eye shifted from Stark to Loki then back to Stark.
“You help my oldest son fight against my wayward son then refuse to yield him to me.” Odin said, silencing the room.

“I am not your son, be it wayward or otherwise.” Loki cut in before Stark could speak.

“Loki, you are my—”

“Anyway,” Stark interrupted, “this is not an episode of Maury and we’re not here to debate paternity. For the hundredth time, we’re here on business.”

“You are an imposter, claiming first to be a mortal, and now you claim to be a god that has long since passed onto to Valhalla. Why should I consider the words of a liar?” Odin said with all the regality his position implied.

“There’s a difference between being incognito and straight out lying. I never said I was a mortal and I prefer going by the name Tony Stark in this century. You, on the other hand, young king, lied to my dear friend Loki from the time he was able to speak till he found out the truth himself. Of the two of us I am the one who is most trustworthy. I suppose I should shift back into my real form, if that will make you more assured of my immortality.” Loki looked at Stark, filled with curiosity, having never seen the older god’s actual form.

Stark’s skin smoothed out and he grew three inches taller. His laugh lines faded and his shoulders broadened. His brown eyes became clearer and his features became more rugged yet refined.

“That still does not prove that you are who you claim to be. Loki has played similar tricks before.”

“You’re stubborn. Fine, at the first feast after the castle was built a painting was made of all those in attendance. I should be in the upper left corner with a buxom blonde sitting on my lap.” Stark lifted his axe a bit higher. “I even have this axe in the painting.” Loki knew of the painting, he just hadn’t known Stark was in it. It was by far one of the most obnoxious pieces in the library, frame to frame filled with drunken merrymaking. “That blonde was your great great great aunt. I’ve never met a woman who can take down a bilgesnipe the way she does.”

Odin motioned for one of his attendants to look at the painting.

“Assuming that you are who you say you are what business do you have here?”

“Lots of business.” Stark did a displacement spell and the guards tensed up. An old scroll appeared in his hands. “Your ancestors owe me a debt for the construction of various items in Asgard, notably the Bifrost. Along with that, your ancestors swore that the subsequent lines of your family would protect my cube and keep it here in Asgard. I found it earlier this month on Midgard, damaged.” Stark held out the scroll. An attendant quickly took it from him and brought it to the All-Father.

“This… this is an impossible sum,” Odin sputtered.

“Yes, well, the Bifrost is priceless. As you can see your family seal is in place and you can still sense the former king’s magic. I’m sure if you go through your archives you’ll find his copy of the contract.” The room was silent as Odin read the fine print, looking for loopholes.

“You can’t expect me to accept such an outrageous agreement made by a man who has been dead for so long.” Odin said gruffly, the contract in his hands wrinkling under his tense grip. “Especially since the Bifrost is in such a state of disrepair.”

“You haven’t noticed that I fixed it, even made it better? No, I don’t expect you to accept this contract. I expect you to honor the agreement the former king made. Unless honor has no meaning
any longer in this realm.” Loki held back a grin as Odin’s face became a new shade of red. “I am a generous god though, and I’m willing to negotiate.” Stark nodded his head in false modesty.

“What exactly do you want?”

“Have things really changed so much since I was last here? Do we not usually feast before official business gets underway?”

“Friend Tony, you are trying the All-Father’s patience.” Thor stepped forward as he spoke. Stark merely shrugged. “Perhaps a feast would be best, as a means to ease tensions, father.”

“Besides, shouldn’t we all be celebrating the return of one of Asgard’s princes? A feast is definitely in order.” Stark raised his voice with levity. “It’s a glorious day for all of Asgard.”

“Indeed it is.” Odin said, with notably less bravado. He slammed down Gungnir. “Three hours hence we shall have a feast the likes of which Asgard has not seen in many centuries. All nobility shall be in attendance.”
After Odin’s announcement Stark and Loki were escorted to the guest quarters since Loki’s room had ‘mysteriously disappeared’, in other words was magically whisked away to Stark Tower.

“You have a way with theatrics.” Loki said once they were alone.

“Only when it works in my favor.” Stark glanced around the welcoming room before plopping down on one of the beds, toeing off his shoes lazily. Loki stared at him for a moment, not used to his actual form. It was… very pleasing to the eyes.

“What is it that you plan on bartering for?” Loki asked if only to distract himself.

“For you of course. I’m going to get them to drop all their charges against you and put together a lil’ sit down so you can finally get your answers.”

“If that was your plan all along then why did you talk about building up good will?”

“The building up good will was your idea. I just chose not to discourage it. Anyway, didn’t it make you feel a bit better when you helped out on Jotunheim?”

“Yes, immensely so.”

“Well there you go. Making yourself feel a bit better by doing something good for others is reason enough to do it.”

“You make things sound so simple.” Loki said, standing awkwardly in front of the bed that Stark was sprawled out on.

“I guess,” Stark sat up, rubbing his goatee, “well, when you’ve seen countless situations similar to your predicament it’s fairly easy to dissect them, to cut through the emotions and platitude in order to see the moral ramifications.” He gave Loki a knowing look. “It helps that I’ve been inside your head. I know where you were coming from when you attacked Jotunheim.” Stark waved flippantly before laying back down, arms pillowed behind his head. Loki looked at the intricate stitching on the bedspread.

“What else did you see when… you were in there?” Loki wasn’t sure where this sudden bout of shyness was coming from.

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“What else did you see when… you were in there?” Loki wasn’t sure where this sudden bout of shyness was coming from.

“A lot, but not as much as you’d assume. I first sought out a memory for you to rest in while I pulled your mind out of Thanos’ clutches. After that I found your first point of trauma and worked from there. Why do you ask?”

“You said you’ve seen countless situations similar to my own. You’ve been in my head. You’ve seen who I am. I can’t help but think you’ve met countless people just like me… It makes one feel as if they are of little importance.” He hated how weak he sounded, how he surely must sound like a child complaining to the god.

“Situations are similar, you are unique though, and not just because of your reoccurring fall. I’ve taken many people to my bed, but I’ve had relatively few lovers. Very few people catch both my physical and mental attention. You’re a very adept mage. The turns of your mind are interesting. I find your hardships familiar, your presence calming, and most of all I like your determination. You put all of yourself into your work. You are important to me.” Stark sounded so nonchalant as he
spoke, yet his words filled some part of Loki that he didn’t know was hollow.

Before he could respond someone knocked on the door. A guard walked in without prompting.

“Heimdall has been brought to the healing room. Prince Thor requests you restore his sight and requests a private audience with Loki.” The guard did not look at either of them as he spoke. Loki vaguely remembered scolding the guard many years before. Stark looked to Loki questioningly.

“I do not wish to speak to Thor at this time. I will consider talking to him once I’ve had words with Odin.” Loki cocked his chin up slightly in a show of regal arrogance.

“Very well. I’m sure you can show your guest the way.” The guard turned to leave.

“You assume we wish to help the gatekeeper.” Loki sneered. Stark gave him a pointed look. “But perhaps we shall do so as a token of good will,” he acquiesced. The guard nodded. Loki waited for the guard to leave before speaking again. “It seems you have a calming effect upon me as well.”

Loki led him down the winding halls. The few servants they passed gave Loki scathing looks and Stark curious ones. It was expected, but still disheartening.

Heimdall was catatonic, yet gaping when they entered. Asgard’s best healing mages surrounded him, chattering to each other.

“Out.” Stark ordered quietly, yet firmly. The healers glanced at each other in question, before silently leaving, many giving sidelong glances to the strange god.

“What exactly is happening to him?” Loki asked once they were gone.

“He was able to be all seeing because the armor he wore channeled my magic.” Stark tapped his chest, the glowing well of gold magic visible beneath his shirt. “He grew dependent on it, his own magic and strength weakening from disuse. When I tore the armor away I also tore my magic with it. His body is in shock and does not know how to compensate.” Stark pulled a thread of magic from his chest. “For now I will give him a boon. If bargaining goes according to plan I’ll return the armor and sword.”

“And if bargaining goes poorly? Are you willing to sacrifice him just so I may get some answers and be free?”

“Yes, my magic has already extended his lifespan past its natural limit. Besides, Ragnarök will come in a decade or two and this iteration will end for him. I do not let things stand in the way of what I want, and you are what I want.” The intensity of Stark’s response was startling.

Stark’s thread of magic split in two and dove into Heimdall’s eyes, turning the lifeless blue irises golden once more. The dark skinned god gasped back to life before turning to his side to cough roughly. The healers scrambled back in, hearing their patient’s wheezes.

The two gods left wordlessly, heading back to their chambers.

Loki’s steps faltered when he spotted Sif and the Warriors Three blocking their way.

“Friends of yours?” Stark asked, humor thinly veiled. Loki made a noise halfway between a hmph and snort.

“Friends of Thor’s.”
“I should have figured considering the general lack of knowledge beyond the battlefield in their eyes.” Stark said under his breath as they got closer.

“What game are you playing at, Liesmith?” The woman said, stepping forward from the group.

“Accusations before introductions? How positively predictable of you, Sif.” Loki responded glowering at her before looking at Stark with a much kinder expression. “Tony Stark, this is Sif, Frandral, Hogun, and Volstagg. You do not need to remember their names.” He turned back towards the group. “I have not forgotten your betrayal. You are more loyal to Thor than you are to the crown or to Asgard. Once that becomes clear you may no longer be the privileged playthings of the favored prince.” Loki performed a spell that pushed aside the group before quickly pulling Tony back to their room.

“They were pleasant.”

“As pleasant as horse ride with no saddle up a steep hill.” Loki sighed and settled himself in front of a window, looking at the landscape he’d never thought he’d freely see again.

Stark made himself comfortable on the bed, sensing Loki’s need for silence. He pulled out his cigar and idly played with the smoke, imbuing it with his magic and shaping it as he saw fit. Images circled overhead as he fell into an almost hypnotic state.

Loki used the silence to consider what sort of questions he’d ask. And even if he did ask, there was no way he could be certain Odin would answer.

Loki had always considered himself keen to pick up on lies, but that clearly wasn’t the case when it came to the All-Father.

The younger god felt so stupid for not having noticed the deceit until proof was roughly shoved in his face, or in this instant onto his skin.

Every whispered tale at night of fearsome frost giants and the brave Aesir that slew them felt like a direct attack in hindsight. Why else would Frigga tell him those tales if not to instill a sense of shocked inferiority once Loki found out the truth? Why else other than to drive a wedge between him and Thor- to show Loki his proper place was as Thor’s inferior.

Loki could feel the panic and anger bubbling up inside him again.

Before he could burst into flames a miniature red and gold magpie fluttered above him, gliding high. It descended in a lazy circle before landing on Loki’s folded hands and disappearing.

“Everything’s going to be alright.” Stark said with total confidence. Loki did not share the sentiment.

“You can’t know that.”

“I know kings. I can read Odin. He wants to keep up the appearance of honor. Besides, I’ve already woven my magic into the walls of this place. Should it be necessary I can shift the perceptions of all who are surrounded by it.”

“You are very prepared.”

“I’ve been trapped and imprisoned enough times to always have an escape route.”

“A sense a story coming on.”
“Oh, there are many stories.” Stark chuckled and gestured for Loki to join him on the bed. The younger god hesitated, not used to a nonsexual invitation, but after a brief moment he laid beside him. The God of Fortification pulled him close so that Loki was laying in his arms. Stark took a deep breath of his cigar, letting the smoke billow out of him and form a picture. “About seventeen iterations ago I was living with some very naughty dwarves in one of the deepest caverns in the kingdom. My first mistake was running into this beautiful elf, I believe her name was Miska, the second mistake was letting her tie me to her bed post…”

Loki was in a comfortable haze, resting his head on Stark’s chest when there was a knock on their door.

“Enter.” Stark called out, his eyes hooded in relaxation.

“The feast will be starting in fifteen minutes. Her majesty had these garments made for you.” A servant who Loki recognized as one of Frigga’s attendants said. There was a bundle of clothing in her hands.

“Super, just put them on that desk and we’ll join the festivities soon enough.” Stark said through a yawn.

The servant gave a tight bow and did as she was told. When she was gone Loki reluctantly slipped out of bed, looking at the two piles of clothing. Emerald green for him and sapphire blue for Stark.

Loki’s breath caught. He could feel his mother’s magic in the threads. He could smell her subtle perfume—a comforting scent he had longed for when all he knew was the Void, where the air had been ripped from his lungs, and he believed he’d never stop falling.

A soft touch on his lower back made him flinch.

“Stay with me. You’re in Asgard. The Mad Titan is dead.” Stark said in a calming voice. Loki realized he was breathing heavily. “There’s no need to worry anymore.” Stark pulled Loki into his arms. “I won’t let you fall again.” With those words Loki melted into his embrace.

Loki wanted to cry, he wanted to yell, to let all his pain out, but most of all he just wanted to curl up in Stark’s arms and fall asleep.

He couldn’t though, not with a whole feasting hall of people waiting for them.

Instead, Loki took in a deep breath, calming himself down. He captured the other god’s lips letting out some of his frustration.

“Thank you.” Loki whispered after a moment, pulling back.

“Anytime.” Stark had an almost indulgent smile on his face. “Now let’s go show these Aesir what we’re made of.”
Stark in Aesir clothing was vastly different than his usual attire, and had an unexpected effect on Loki. His dark blue shirt fit nicely, the laces were left loose to reveal the orb of foreign magic that now glowed golden. A variety of clasps and leather formed a lightweight armor that was more ceremonial than functional. His leather pants fit nicely with a metal belt for Stark’s axe.

He looked regal, yet relaxed. Dashing, yet carefree. An Aesir, yet more.

It was intoxicating, but Loki knew he could not indulge with the other god’s touch, not in this castle. Loki knew the guards and servants were already talking. He could read their lips and hear their whispers as they walked to the great hall.

“Why would anyone help that traitor?”

“I’m sure the Trickster must have placed a spell on him.”

“Thor’s shield brother destroyed Mjolnir with his magic. That is power even beyond the All-Father. I doubt Loki could enchant someone like that.”

“What else does the disgraced prince have to offer?”

“Magic is a womanly art and Loki has always been so… effeminate.”

“Such a disgrace. Of course he’d use his body to secure an ally and use blackmail to get the All-Father’s ear.”

Their implications were clear and none of them were new to Loki, yet somehow they were worse now that they were no longer his people. He was an outsider now. The name Trickster was no longer a term of endearment.

When they entered the great feasting hall it got decidedly quieter.

“Welcome.” Odin’s voice carried over the murmurs. “Please take these places of honor beside me.” The All-Father gestured to the two lavish seats flanking him on either side. One beside the queen and the other beside the prince.

Stark gave Loki a subtle glance, telling him to choose which ever seat he wanted. The younger god hesitated, but did not let it show. On one hand he’d get the boisterous overtures of his not-brother, on the other he’d get the soft kindness that felt like the cruelest of jokes.

He’d take obnoxious idiocy over the subtle twisting of a knife any day. He avoided her gaze as he sat next to Thor.

“It has been far too long since we last supped together.” The thunderer said, surprisingly quiet. Loki could feel the whole hall’s eyes on him and realized how monumental this moment was. How he responded to the favored prince would set the tone for how all of Asgard regarded him.

“Time is meaningless in the Void.” It was the most diplomatic he could be with the oaf that represented so much of what he hated, so much of what had hurt him.

Thor’s expression quickly turned to devastation, alerting the other Aesir to Loki’s less than kind words. The murmurs picked up, harsh whisperers barely discernible above the clatter of servants and
dishes. He wanted to see what Stark thought, but looking in his direction risked catching the eye of his adoptive mother.

Frigga, she was the only one who was ever kind to him, who encouraged him to learn about everything their realm had to offer and more. She was the one who told him it was alright to be different than the other children.

And she had lied.

How would things have gone if he was strong like Thor? If he loved fighting as much as everyone else did? If he was more muscle than brain?

If he wasn’t Loki.

He ate his first course in the chaos of his own mind, ignoring Thor’s comments and slaps on the back. Glares and scathing remarks from the Aesir went unnoticed, the only thing that broke through was the tittering of his mother and Stark’s well rehearsed laugh. Odin did not try to speak to him, nor acknowledge him in any way.

It became white noise, a sea of meaninglessness- that is until there was a loud crashing. Loki’s head snapped up to the source of the noise. Volstagg was standing up, chest puffed out and chair knocked to the ground behind him.

“You flirt with our queen, blatantly do your magic tricks, and expect us to respect you?!” The voluminous god shouted, his flushed jowls jiggling. The entire hall fell silent.

Loki expected the All-Father to put a stop to his insolent citizen, but he didn’t, his ire from being cornered earlier still in the forefront of his mind.

“Are all Aesir this hot headed? Would you rather I snub her majesty by ignoring her? And to call magic a trick is show that you have no true understanding on what strength is beyond one’s ability to swing an axe.”

“You dare equate your petty spell tossing with my axe?!” Somehow Volstagg’s voice grew louder as he grabbed the hilt of his labrys axe.

“How is it that you so easily miss the point of what I’m saying? Either you’re belligerent and in need of a lesson, or you’re purposefully annoying me and in need of some manners.” Stark paused for dramatics, taking a sip of his drink. “So which is it? Will you learn some manners or shall I teach you a lesson?”

“Ha! The mage thinks he can teach me a lesson!” Volstagg glanced at the other Aesir. Most were laughing with him hesitantly while others hid their expressions behind their goblets. “I would very much enjoy seeing you try to teach me a lesson, you imposter!”

“Then a lesson will be learned here tonight by all those in attendance, for what is a feast without a fight and a teacher without a lesson?” Stark stood up smoothly and glanced toward the king. “With the permission of His Highness of course. I wouldn’t want to be rude to my host.” Stark bowed at the waist, mocking the king. The All-Father was composed, but Loki could sense his ire.

“No truer words have been spoken. A feast of this magnitude and splendor would be hollow without a proper fight.” Odin gestured towards the end of the hall that had plenty of empty space for just an occasion. The barely discernible scuffs and dents in the wall and ground made it clear that many fights had taken place there.
Stark made his way over, as casual as can be. The Aesir were whispering words of encouragement to Volstagg. The God of Fortification seemed not to worry, pulling his axe from off his waist.

“Are you not worried for Friend Tony?” Thor whispered to Loki, leaning conspiratorially close to him.

“I’m sure Stark knows what he’s doing.” Loki lazily cut a piece of his veal, taking a bite of the savory meat. Thor did not find his words encouraging.

“Ha! You are already using your petty tricks!” Despite being so far away Volstagg’s voice carried. Stark’s hand was oozing dark red magic as he ran the pad of his thumb over the blade of his axe.

“This is for your benefit. I’d rather not be blamed for you losing any limbs, so I’m dulling my axe’s edge.” Stark spoke in a matter-of-fact manner and Volstagg’s face somehow became ruddier.

“Overconfidence will be your undoing!”

“I think I’ll start with showing you that even your physical brawling is no match for me.” Stark said, completely ignoring Volstagg’s comment. “Then once you’ve caught your breath I’ll show you the usefulness of combat magic.”

“How your words sound foolish now! Wait till you’re bloody and on the ground.” Volstagg shifted his doubleheaded axe from one hand to the other, smiling.

Stark did not respond, instead wielding his axe in challenge. Volstagg charged forward without any further prompting, letting out a jarring war cry. Stark sidestepped the god quickly. Volstagg turned on his heels just as fast creating a low arc as he swung his axe. Stark parried the blow, a bored look on his face.

Volstagg aimed for Stark’s shoulder. The movement was wide to build momentum, leaving Stark a small window of opportunity. He moved into Volstagg’s personal space taking advantage of the shortness of his own axe. With the blunted edge of his axe he hit the oversized god in the same spot he had been aiming for on Stark.

Volstagg let out a stilted grunt of pain, but was otherwise silent, redirecting his attack to Stark’s side.

“You’re not used to fighting on your own. That much is clear.” Stark said as Volstagg tried pushing forward. “You attack continuously, not watching for any openings I grant. I’d wager that you’re used to one of your shield brothers creating openings for you.” Volstagg sent down a mighty blow. With a swift motion Stark lashed out, using the curved underside of his blade to hook Volstagg’s arm, yanking down so that the doubleheaded axe hit the ground, sending a painful termer up the axe and Volstagg’s arm. “You rely on your strength and endurance, yet neglect strategy and finesse.” Volstagg swung heavily again, leaving his side open. Stark’s hit was swift and biting, the cracking of ribs loud to anyone close enough to hear them. The larger god curled in on himself, trying to ease the strength of the hit, putting his weight slightly more on his left foot. Stark did not let the chance escape him. He hooked his blade behind Volstagg’s right knee, yanking it out from under him. Volstagg’s limbs flailed wildly as he tried to regain balance.

As Volstagg was falling backwards Stark hit his wrist, knocking his doubleheaded axe out of his hand. Volstagg’s large form hit the ground, knocking off the nearby art from the wall.

Stark retrieved the axe, wielding them both easily. With the boredom of someone waiting in line Stark leaned against Volstagg’s axe, watching him shift from side to side on his back, like an upturned turtle.
“I could have cut your head off thrice over, and your arms and legs off more times than that by now. Be grateful that I don’t believe in maiming the inept.”

“You filthy mage-trickster-deceiver!” Volstagg’s words were barely discernible as he stood back up. Stark moved to the nearby table, pouring himself a goblet of mead and setting down his own axe. He took in a long swig, his back to the other god. Stark raised his goblet up in salute towards the head of the table. It looked like he was mocking Odin again, but he was actually smiling slyly at Loki.

Stark tossed Volstagg his axe back. He moved closer, goblet still in hand.

“No magic is necessary to defeat the likes of you, but let me show you how it can expedite such a fight as this one.” Stark took another sip, grin still in place. “I suggest you make the first move or find yourself flat on your back once more before you even realize it.” Stark’s words were enough to enrage the heavy set god.

Volstagg dashed forward, axe poised to kill shouting all the while. Stark did not even bother trying to dodge. Where metal should have met flesh it met only air, cutting straight through Stark’s image. The goblet in his illusion of a hand fell to the ground with a loud clatter as Volstagg tried to dislodge his axe from the wooden table.

The amber colored liquid pooled at his feet, growing bigger by the second. It flashed red Volstagg was suddenly gone. There was a loud noise, drawing everyone’s attention to the high ceiling. Volstagg screamed as he came careening downwards, hitting the hard ground with a loud crack. He did not rise back up, only moaned in pain.

From the front of the grand dining hall came a solitary clapping. Those who weren’t rushing to Volstagg’s side looked to the source of the mocking noise.

Stark was once more seated between the queen and king, applauding slowly.

“Do you wish to know why magic is belittled from such a young age?” Stark’s voice carried through the hall, unnaturally loud considering his words were spoken just above a whisper. “It is a trick done by the noblest families of the realm. You see there are only so many ways you can swing an axe and thrust a sword. It’s a limited and predictable form of power. A king does not have to worry too much about being stabbed in his sleep if he has proper guards. Magic is a whole other beast though. The only limit is the short comings of the mage. One can summon a volley of fireballs to rain down on a battlefield of thousands, they can create an army of golems to act on their behest, or simply call back to him their blade when it is knocked away.

“Magic is far less predictable than brute force. Imagine being the first king of Asgard, position insecure and threats around every corner. Even the best guards could be rendered defenseless with unexpected spells. If you could dull that threat, make everyone believe that such power is dishonorable would you not do so? They push forward this notion to the lower houses and classes so that they can never be powerful enough to disrupt the current order of things. They say it is shameful, yet Odin is one of the best mages in this realm and married a renowned mage.

“Just like a sword, magic’s morality rests in the actions of its user. You all claim that Loki is the trickster, yet he has always been honest when it comes to the true power and virtue of magic. He is not the one who tricked you. The fault of that lies with another.” Stark’s implication was clear and the whole hall was silent, save Volstagg’s pained groans. Loki could read the suspicion towards Odin in some of the smarter nobles’ faces, but most merely scoffed and ignored Stark.

“Summon the healers.” Frigga’s voice broke the tense moment, making Loki freeze slightly. “A feast
need not be sullied by the injuries of one and conjectures of another. We are here to celebrate the return of my son and the ancient builder.” Her regal voice was a balm over the suspicion and anxiety of the other occupants of the hall. The few that had been considering Stark’s claims seemed to drop the idea in favor of listening to their beautiful queen.

Loki could only shake his head as he saw how Stark’s wise words were wasted on this group.
The rest of the feast was nearly silent. Odin did not deem it necessary to give Loki so much as a sideways glance. Thor did continue his useless chatter, but it was much more subdued now. Those in attendance got their fill and did not linger in the grand hall for any longer.

Volstagg had been taken to the healing room, accompanied by Sif. The remaining members of the Warriors Three stayed, tossing glares to Loki and Stark. Frigga continued talking with Stark as if they had never been interrupted, though whenever she brought up Loki and what happened to him Stark quickly maneuvered the conversation elsewhere.

“Let us put an end to this ‘business’.” Odin said to Stark after the last course was served.

“Of course, though Loki must be in attendance as well considering we are partners in this matter.” Stark gave the king a restrained smile.

“So be it.” He gestured for them to follow.

“Loki,” Frigga called to him, grabbing his arm gently.

“Not now,” Loki recoiled from her. “Not yet.” He revised. She tried pleading with him silently, but he would not meet her eyes, only moving quicker to catch up to the other two gods.

They were lead to a smaller room with a table in the middle. Once Stark and Loki were seated across from the king, he scowled.

“What are your terms?” Odin said, his voice sharp.

“All charges dropped against Loki and the truth of whatever he asks of you and Frigga. Easy-peasy. Also, you will protect my cube as was previously agreed upon by your ancestors.”

“Loki has wronged three realms and he expects clemency?”

“You are unaware of all the circumstances and were the cause of many of his actions.” Stark gestured for Loki to continue.

“I did nothing wrong in this realm other than allowing frost giants to enter, and even that is not explicitly against the law since we were not at war with them.” Loki began, his voice dispassionate. “This is an absolute monarchy, therefore as king all my actions were legal, even the destruction wrought upon Jotunheim.”

“You knew my will and went against it. You were only Prince Regent-”

“I was appointed by your queen and a regent has the full power of the king with all his immunities.
The only thing I couldn’t legally do was depose you!” Loki slammed his fist down on the table, remembering every damn legal lesson he sat through while Thor slept over the drawl of their tutor.

“By your own logic I can imprison you regardless of your actions.”

“Do you really want to refuse this deal and be stuck with the enormous debt left by your forbearers?” Loki asked slyly.

“And how shall I justify this to the people? Are you unaware of the anger you have inspired?”

“No, All-Father, I am quite aware of how they regard me and I have come to realize that their opinions are meaningless. The one who must worry about such things is you. Not me.”

“You have no respect for this realm or any other realm.” Odin sneered.

“Do we have a deal or not?” Loki could feel his temper starting to slip, anger tarnishing his silver-tongue.

“What questions do you plan to ask? I cannot guarantee I’ll answer them if I do not know them.”

“The questions aren’t for you alone. I wish to find the truth of these matters from you, the queen, and possibly Thor.”

“Thor and Frigga have nothing to do with this.” Odin’s one eye narrowed dangerously.

“They have played their roles and as such we shall have words without the lies and deceptions you so easily wield.” Loki glared back, used to Odin’s harsh look of disapproval.

“I did not deceive you.” Odin’s expression became less tense. “I merely wished that you wouldn’t have to suffer knowing the truth of your heritage.”

“Enough! I do not wish to hear anymore if your lies! Agree to our bargain and let the cowl of deceptions you covered us all in disappear!” Loki fumed and Odin’s scowl intensified.

“Regardless of whether you agree,” Stark cut in, “I will get the truth from you.” His hands began glowing red with magic. “Loki deserves that much and I’m more than willing to help him get it, even if I have to resort to more inelegant manners.”

“You may be ancient, but I am still a king and you shall respect me as such.” Odin sat straighter in his seat.

“Did you know that the tenor of one’s magic is the same in every iteration?” Stark asked while leaning forward, his hands still glowing. “This is not the first time we’ve met. Three iterations ago you were the stable boy for dark elf royalty.” Stark grinned and his posture relaxed. “I have been a king. I have been a pauper. Titles and birthrights are meaningless in the scheme of things. I will show you the respect that I deem you worthy of, and currently that is not a lot of respect.”

“Had you less power on your side I’d have you beaten for your insolence.”

“Luckily I’ve had plenty of time to accumulate power so I don’t have to deal with bullshit like this.” Stark grinned in a way that was meant to infuriate. “So go fetch your wife and son, answer all his questions, exonerate Loki, and take care of my cube until I come to fetch it in a decade or so.”

Odin sneered openly at the other god before turning his one eye to Loki.

“Fine, I shall yield to your dishonorable means of getting what you want.” Odin glanced towards the
doors. “Guards, summon Frigga and Thor!” Odin shouted and Stark could see who Thor got his deafening voice from.

As they waited in a tense silence a servant came in and poured a goblet of mead for each of them in turn.

Frigga entered the room, looking more composed than Loki knew she was feeling. Thor did not hide his emotions, worry and confusion evident on his face.

“Brother, friend Tony.” Thor greeted, sitting to the left of Odin and Frigga sitting to the king’s right, a show of solidarity that angered Loki almost as much as when he first found out he was a Jotun.

“I have a handy little truth spell that I made myself.” Stark said and Loki thought he saw a glimpse of worry in Odin’s one eye. “Say this oath and then we can begin.” A piece of paper with Stark’s spell appeared in front of each of them. Frigga glanced to Odin. The king nodded in permission. They took the oath, ancient magic binding their words. “Loki, the show’s yours.” Stark leaned back in his chair, lacing his fingers behind his head and looking far too relaxed for the situation.

Loki looked at the three sitting before him. With the ease of a master spell caster Loki unwove the glamour that hid his true form. Both Frigga and Thor gasped while Odin was unaffected. From the corner of his eye, Loki saw Stark hold back a grin. It gave Loki a burst of confidence.

“What- Why do you look like that, Loki?” Frigga had a delicate hand covering her mouth. The look on her face hurt, it hurt a lot more than Loki was expecting it to- because in those light green eyes that he loved so much, there was a glimmer of disgust.

“Frigga, did you know what I am?” Loki tried to keep his voice detached, like this was all happening to someone else.

“Odin, I don’t understand.” The blond woman said, looking at her husband. He gave her a wary glance. “You said he was the son of one of the Aesir prostitutes that followed the soldiers during the war.”

It was another slap in the face in a long line of insults.

“What are my true origins, Odin?” Loki sneered. Had the story of him being the son of a king been just another lie to placate him?

The All-Father bit his tongue subtly.

“He is the child of King Laufey and Queen Fárbauti. You are a Jotun prince.”

“Would you rather I be the bastard of some Aesir whore or a Jotun, mother?” The question slipped past Loki’s lips before he could stop them. Frigga gaped at him.

“Loki, I would love you regardless. You are my son-”

“Answer the question!” Tears clouded his vision and he stubbornly wiped them away before they could fall.

“I would love you all the same. One or the other-” She struggled with her words and Loki hoped it was due to her emotions and not because she was trying to lie. “I love you, Loki. That’s all that matters.” What she didn’t say was more telling than what was spoken. Loki felt his heart breaking.

“The Jotun are not the beasts you all think they are. I love you mother, often times more than I love
myself, but if you can’t accept me, I… I don’t know what I’ll do. I need you to accept me.” Stark placed a comforting hand on Loki’s knee. The young god quickly laced his fingers together with Stark’s.

“I can have that Jotun history book delivered here, the one you read.” Stark offered after Frigga didn’t respond.

“Yes… yes, please send me that.” Frigga whispered, looking down at the table, wringing the handkerchief hidden on her lap.

Perhaps you would like some fresh air.” Stark offered and both Frigga and Loki were thankful for the out. She nodded and left, sending Odin a confused glance. When the door clicked faintly behind her, Loki hardened his resolve once more.

“She loves you.” Thor said, not looking at Loki.

“I need more than just her love. You can love someone, but if you don’t accept them then that love leaves a bitter taste.” A taste that was becoming all too familiar. “Odin, did you know what it means when a baby Jotun is left outside a temple?” It was a question that had been scraping at his soul since he found out the significance of temples.

“Yes, I was aware.” Odin said gruffly.

“Then why did you take me? I want the whole truth, not just one or two of the reasons.” Loki’s grip on Stark’s hand tightened before he let go.

“We were at war.”

“That is no answer and you know it.” Loki gestured dismissively.

“I had to ensure peace. Your size made it evident that you would be powerful. Frigga had written to me. She knew that Thor was not magically inclined. I could not allow such a powerful prince to become king when Thor would not be able to equal that. I must protect Asgard-”

“So you just stole me away?! You had already won! You had The Casket of Ancient Winters! But that wasn’t enough for you?! You had to steal their prince as well?!”

“It was politics, Loki-”

“It wasn’t politics for me!” Loki jumped up, slamming his hand onto the table, his whole body shaking with restrained fury. “I would have been honored for my abilities! Instead you took me here where everything I am is scorned and hated- seen as weaknesses and disgusting!” Loki’s hands clenched, clawing at the table. “I wouldn’t have had to live in the shadow of some pea-brained prince!” He cast a spiteful glare at Thor. “I would have been a good king in my own right! I killed my father for you! I chose you, I chose Asgard!” Loki breathed heavily, tears falling down his face. His voice fell to a whisper. “And for what? These people do not care about me.”

“I care about you.” Thor said, his voice hushed.

“Good for you, Thor. You’re one of two.” He snapped at the blond. “If only that care had translated into you listening to me every time I told you something was a bad idea. You would have been dead a thousand times over if not for my constant babysitting- and you just thought that all my help was petty tricks!” He turned fully towards his ‘brother’. “I tried so hard to teach you, to help you be a good king, yet you never listened.” Loki let out a humorless laugh. “Then you meet some quim for a week and suddenly you’re the wise king come home to put his pesky little brother back in his place.”
“You will not address Lady Jane as a-”

“Yet you still miss the point of what I’m saying.” Loki fell back into his seat. “Why do I even bother? Why should I bother?”

“Because we are brothers. Come home, Loki. I will listen. I swear it.”

“No, this place is no longer my home. I do not want to be your shadow, your advisor-”

“Then be my equal! You are my equal. We mourned you, Loki. I do not care if you are a Jotun or an Aesir. You are my brother and that’s all that matters.” Loki squeezed his eyes shut, pain briefly overwhelming him. He hardened his resolve.

“You still do not listen. Why do I even bother? Get this through your thick skull. Once our business is concluded I am going back to Midgard and will be there for as long as it pleases me to do so.”

“All of Midgard is still searching for you. Do you really think that’s wise?” Thor’s voice was soft, just making Loki feel worse.

“Have you forgotten that I am a shape shifter? I already had dinner with your shield mates and not a one recognized me.” Loki’s smile twisted with pride and sadness.

“You always play dangerous games.”

“I have nothing else to say to you, Thor. I’ve loved you for so long, but distance is what we need for there to be more than animosity between us.” Loki crossed his arms, staring at the tapestry on the wall. He was still shaking.

“So we can be friends once more?”

“Mayhaps, but not today, possibly not this decade.” Loki did not want to feel hopeful at the prospect of having his brother back, but he did. “Does it… Does it truly not bother you that I am a monster?”

“You are no monster, Loki.” Thor’s words were sincere. Loki nodded faintly, waving him to leave, face stoic. “Best wishes, brother.” Thor clasped his hand on Loki’s shoulder, squeezing in the goodhearted manner he always used to, used to before…

“Any other questions?” Stark asked and Loki realized he had let his thoughts wonder.

“No, that’s all I need to know from them. The promise has been fulfilled. The truth oath is complete.” The ancient magic binding them to speak no lies dissolved. “All that is left is my exoneration and the safe keeping of your cube. I trust you can take care of the rest, Stark.”

“No problem.” Loki stood to leave, but Stark grabbed his arm, halting him. He gently pulled Loki down to his level, placing a soft kiss on his lips then whispering in his ear. “You did a wonderful job.”
At Last

Loki laid curled up on the guest bed for what felt like hours as he waited for Stark to come back. He half expected Frigga to knock on his door, try to have at least one more word with him, but she didn’t.

He was both grateful and sad about that.

This place was only pain and awkward memories.

When he felt like he was on the verge of going crazy he summoned the decanter of vapor. It eased his mind to focus on imbuing the vapor.

When Stark finally got back he was grinning victoriously, while Loki just look exhausted.

“You ready to head back to New York?”

“Yes, I do not wish to be in this place a moment longer.” Loki said, suddenly feeling reenergized. He grabbed Frelser from against the wall, feeling very fond of the bladed scepter. “I think I’d rather teleport to the Bifrost. I tire of Asgard.”

“Shall I teleport us or would you like to have the honors?” Stark asked, an easy grin in place.

“Would you be opposed to a race across the branches? I must admit that I’ve always wanted to run across them, competing against someone else, but there has never been anyone…”

“I understand completely.” Stark assessed Loki’s expression. “Your mind really has gotten stronger.”

“You have given me an interesting perspective on things. Facing the Void once more... Yes, it scares me, but I know these branches, especially the ones in Asgard. I have been flitting across them since boyhood.”

“Your stomping grounds versus my unique spells. Sounds fun.” Stark displaced his axe and Loki followed suit. He could feel Stark’s magic carelessly lop outwards, reaching for Yggdrasil’s branches. Loki found one easily. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then let’s go.” Stark’s magical tether to Yggdrasil shortened, pulling him out of the room and to her branches. Loki pulled on his own connection, feeling the power pulse under his feet as he landed on a branch close to Stark’s. Loki hopped forward, each step sending a cascade of green magic over the distorted branches. Where Loki was taking a direct route Stark was weaving around, feet barely touching the shriveled leaves that should by all rights not support his weight.

Loki grinned, he was already ahead.

Stark’s laugh sounded disjointed at the edge of the Void.

A streak of red bolted past him, heading for their destination.

“You fiend.” Loki picked up his pace, lassoing out his magic then tugging himself forward, hopping over empty junctures that would only lead to the Void.

He should be scared. He should be terrified. He knew exactly what would happen if he slipped off
the winding, gnarled branches- and yet, he felt exhilarated. Alive, like a child once more.

Stark was too far ahead though. His red magic was precariously interacting with the dying leaf’s energy. Even the slightest imbalance would send Stark careening off the leaf, either crashing into the branches or falling into the Void.

It would only take a flicker of Loki’s magic to disrupt that balance.

But he wouldn’t do that.

He could never do that, not to Stark.

Loki reached the closest branch to the Bifrost almost a minute later than Stark.

“How did you do that?” Loki asked, feeling breathless from the excitement rather than the run.

“Years alone on this tree has allowed for me to learn a few tricks.”

“That seems like more than just a trick to me.”

Stark grinned in response before looping his arm around Loki’s waist and taking them to the Bifrost. They walked through the rainbow tunnel and to the unoccupied solarium. The Bifrost took them straight back to Stark Tower.

“I have to go talk to Pepper, but after that we can have a bit of time together. Sounds good?” Stark gave him the briefest of kisses on the cheek.

“Sounds good.” Loki relaxed on the couch, watching Stark walk to his bedroom, shifting into his mortal form while stripping out of his Aesir clothing.

How did they still not have sex yet? They were lovers and Stark just looked so appetizing.

He knew it would happen soon enough though.

Loki had never had a lover like him before.

The first time they touched… they really touched, it was maddening. In his Jotun form it was almost too much. The orgasms were blinding and it had been all about Loki.

His past lovers…

It was never give and take. They always took as much as they could and gave nothing in return.

Sigyn had been all soft on the outside, the perfect picture of proper, but sex was the only thing ever between them. Once they were both exhausted one or the other would leave, never speaking. They always had to worry about Theoric, her betrothed, which was ironic considering she was the goddess of fidelity.

Angrboda, an elf, came to him at night for three years. Their relationship was based on mutual violence. They were both seen as physically weak compared to their companions. They sparred constantly, sharpening their skills then finally fucking at the end out of frustration. The first time she won a fight against him she left without looking back.

Beni, a half dwarf, half Aesir... He was downright cruel. It was during one of Loki’s darker moments that they were together. It had lasted seven years when Loki was in self exile after a particularly bad fight with Odin. Loki had only stayed with him because he was rich and had one of the best libraries
in all of Svartalfheim.

With them, the sex had always been a race, for one’s own pleasure.

Just the same, he had been selfish back then, immature and idiotic. One get’s as one gives, and he wasn’t too inclined to give back then.

Now, after the harsh reality of his fall and subsequent landing Loki liked to think he had matured.

And Stark… Stark was different than the others. On the kitchen counter the older god had not come once, solely focusing on Loki.

Loki was determined to return the favor.

Loki stared at the green vapor in the air, swirling above him. It slowly shifted into a city, the city in Jotunheim- half destroyed half perfect. One day he’d fix it, before Ragnarök destroyed it once more.

How much longer did they have? Stark said a decade or two. Then all the realms would be destroyed, crushed to nothing and there would be no place to hide. He’d die, be reborn, and try not to fall into the Void again. Stark would live on… doing whatever it was that he did.

It was saddening, yet with new life came new opportunity- and Stark did say he’d find him before he fell into the Void again.

Loki woke up to a soft touch on his cheek. He squinted his eyes open. Stark was standing beside him.

“What’s up with you falling asleep on the couch?” He asked playfully.

“Can’t sleep in my room, less chance of me seeing you. Feels wrong to sleep in your bed without you,” he replied groggily.

“Well, I’m here now. Would you like to join me in bed?”

“Depends on what you mean by join you in bed.” Loki stretched as he spoke, feeling his skin contract, becoming more sensitive.

“It means whatever you want it to mean. We could sleep, cuddle, talk, but I think we both know what you really want to do. Look at you, you’re already squirming for friction.” Stark said teasingly and Loki froze. He hadn’t even noticed he was wiggling against the soft fabric of the couch. “Don’t worry. I find it absolutely adorable.” Loki scoffed.

“I don’t want to be adorable. No one has ever accused me of being adorable.” Loki sat up, trying to look indignant.

“Doubt anyone’s ever seen you like this.” Stark pulled him off the couch and into his arms, grazing his fingers over Loki’s sides. “I love how sensitive you are, even for a Jotun.”

“Don’t tease me.” Loki hooked his arms behind Stark’s neck, the sensation of Stark’s soft hair brushing against his skin was intoxicating.
“It was a complement.” Stark kissed him, a grin still on his lips. “There is nothing wrong with seeking pleasure. I’m actually jealous that you’re so sensitive.” He pulled Loki’s wrist to his mouth, trailing kisses along it. “It’s not the same when I shape shift into a Jotun.” Stark’s breath fanned across Loki’s skin, making him ache for more. “Had I thought it through I would have stopped dying when I was a Jotun instead of an Aesir. Jotuns always have more fun. Although it would have been a bitch when I went to Muspelheim.”

“Concentrate, Stark.” Loki pulled him away from his musings by grinding against him. “Bedroom.”

“Of course.” Stark hoisted him up and Loki automatically wrapped his legs around the older god. “To the bed.” The short trip was spent with Loki desperately clinging and Stark nipping at any blue skin he could reach.

They gracelessly fell onto the dark sheets and- Loki moaned as he felt the fabric brush against his skin. He had discarded his shirt after returning from Asgard.

Stark’s touch was just as intense as before, but at least this time he knew what to expect. Stark started working his way downwards.

Loki arched towards him when Stark ran his heated tongue over Loki’s dark blue nipple. From his chest down to his navel.

“Stark!” Loki called out when the older god bit his hip harshly, almost breaking the skin. He couldn’t decide if it was painful or not, but even so he wanted more. He was writhing wantonly.

This wasn’t supposed to be how it happened though. Stark had already brought him to climax countless times in the kitchen, while Loki had yet to return the favor.

Loki bucked upwards, putting Stark enough off balance that he could flip them over. He leaned down, still straddling the God of Fortification, pulling off his shirt. He ground against him, making Stark moan.

Norns, he had been waiting for this moment for so long.

Every inch of him was aching.

“Bottoming from the top. I always knew you were a control freak.” Stark grinned, dragging his nails over Loki’s thighs, once again on the border of pain and pleasure.

“No more talking.” Loki started undoing Stark’s belt.

“Control frea-” Loki cut him off with a wet, open mouthed kiss. He worked at Stark’s belt with nimble fingers and then pulled the last of Stark’s clothing off, enjoying finally getting to see all of him.

Stark looked just as he imagined. Loki touched every inch of exposed skin, sensing the strength hidden in his flesh.

Stark kept caressing Loki, making it difficult to think. His skin was too sensitive, too easily pushed into euphoria. He had to focus on making Stark feel this way.

Loki pushed away Tony’s wandering hands. The older god gave him a bemused, questioning look.

“Can’t concentrate.” Loki said simply while taking off his pants, the brushing of the fabric against his
skin making his thoughts blurry. “Lube?” Loki glanced around, grinding against Stark’s hard length. The older god groaned and Loki spotted a row of small bottles on the nightstand, but they were unlabeled.

“Blue bottle.” Stark’s voice was deeper than usual, making Loki’s heart race.

Loki reached over Stark to the nightstand. Stark’s heady breath against his blue skin was electric. In his haste he knocked over two of the bottles, but grabbed the blue one. As quick as he had gotten the bottle it was taken.

“Stark-”

“This is a team sport, Lokes. You can’t expect me to sit on the sidelines,” Stark said while squeezing out lube onto his hand, coating three of his fingers. Loki took the bottle from him.

“I want to make you come the way you made me come over and over again in the kitchen.” Loki’s words were broken. He couldn’t stop grinding against Stark.

“That night was about showing you the perks of your Jotun skin. Tonight is about us.” Stark pushed himself up until their lips met. “Come on, Loki. Let’s make this about us.” Stark brushed his lips along Loki’s high cheekbones. Loki leaned into the touch, groaning as Tony flicked out his tongue.

“Yes- fine.” At this point he just wanted to feel Stark all over him.

The older god pulled Loki to his chest, the warm sphere of magic there almost felt like it was humming against his skin. When he was flush against it he could feel the energy buzzing, almost sending shockwaves through Loki.

Everything was already becoming too much again- and then he felt one of Stark’s fingers circle his entrance.

“Wha- Oh Norns-” He didn’t think anything could ever be more sensitive than his skin, yet as Tony pushed in a single finger all the other sensations felt petty in comparison. He pushed backwards onto Stark’s finger, but the movement caused him to rub his trapped cock against Stark’s. He froze, sucking in a desperate breath of air.

“You alright?” Stark asked while cupping Loki’s face with his free hand, making him meet his eyes.

“It’s just-” Stark moved his finger slightly and Loki felt like there was only empty space in his head. “It’s a lot to take in.” He said a moment later.

“My fingers?” Stark asked jokingly, running his free hand through Loki’s hair. The younger god swatted him on the shoulder.

“The sensations.” Loki clung to Stark as the older god kissed and nipped at his neck.

“Good.” Tony pushed further into Loki and the younger god realized that the skin inside of him was far more sensitive than the rest of him.

“Stark-” Loki bit his lip, his mind reeling- caught in the sensation of the fabric beneath his knees, the fingers inside him, the hum of the magic in Stark’s chest, Stark’s hand following the paths of his raised lines, his cold skin against Stark’s warmth-

Stark added another finger and Loki squirmed, every movement adding to his building euphoria. Loki reached between them and grabbed Stark’s cock, coating it with lube and stroking it. He could
already feel his entrance quiver, his insides aching for more.

He could feel Stark preparing him, slowly stretching him with expertise.

Loki pushed himself off Stark’s chest, wanting to be filled. The older god easily read him. Stark guided Loki’s hips, lining them up. Loki sunk down taking in all of Stark. The deeper he got the more sensitive his flesh became, until even the sweat running down his chest felt like the caress of the greatest lover. Unconsciously he teetered, on the edge of being overwhelmed.

“Loki,” Stark called out to him and all of Loki’s attention was suddenly drawn to the god between his thighs. “You’re beautiful.” His words were so simple, yet they seemed to suck all the air from his lungs. His chest clenched and Loki was simultaneously grounded and light headed- his body and mind realigned and he started moving his hips, met by Stark’s own thrusts.

Loki couldn’t pull his eyes from Stark’s, even though the building pressure was maddening. Stark’s hands roamed over exposed skin, and the blue expanses flickered under his touch, contracting and lengthening as his body tried to compensate for the overload of sensation. His whole body was vibrating from the inside out.

Loki’s movements started to become more erratic and he grinned when he saw the look of pleasure on Stark’s face. The older god palmed Loki, making him gasp with just the first stroke.

“Stark!” Loki called out, so close to the edge. The older god grinned, his own chest heaving as he added a twist every time he stroked Loki’s length.

This was insanity- this felt like pure insanity! Mind destroying, body shattering-

Loki didn’t know if he shouted or remained perfectly silent as he came undone.

All he knew was that it was Stark making him feel this way.

When his senses returned he noticed Stark was doing all the work, and that just wouldn’t do. Loki clenched around him while taking back control. Stark moaned and Loki let out a breathless laugh.

Just before Stark came he pulled Loki down so that their lips met in a sloppy kiss. The older god held him tightly, moaning Loki’s name.

Loki let all his weight rest on the older god, and Stark didn’t seem to mind, wrapping his arms around Loki’s back, keeping him close.

“That was- perfect.” Loki said, still gasping for air, and Stark kissed him again.

“Perfect.” Stark agreed, turning them onto their side and pulling out of the younger god. Loki shivered at the loss, his nerves amplifying every move. His skin was fluttering, making even the soft sheets beneath him almost painful. “Shh,” Stark whispered. Loki gave him a confused look until he realized he was crying. “Overwhelmed?” Loki nodded and immediately regretted it as his cheek rubbed against fabric. “I almost forgot it can be like for Jotun their first time. Hold on.”

Stark carefully removed the sheets that were somehow tangled around one of Loki’s legs. Loki clenched his jaw to keep from gasping as he was laid out on his back. Stark pulled a blanket around himself while whispering a spell. The temperature in the room steadily dropped and Loki’s skin acted accordingly, his lines becoming thinner as the bunched up skin loosened, hiding his exposed nerves.

Loki sighed in relief around the temperature where Stark’s breaths became visible.
“Better.” Loki said, reaching out one hand to clasp onto Stark’s bundled form. He wanted to hold him, to be held and somehow Stark knew what he was thinking. The God of Fortification shape shifted into a Jotun, still maintaining his height and features. He tossed aside the blanket and pulled Loki to him until they were laying face to face, legs intertwined. Loki closed the small distance between them, sleepily kissing the other god before tucking his head under Stark’s chin. Loki heard him chuckle lightheartedly and he grinned in response, nuzzling against him.

Stark held him tightly as they both drifted to sleep.
Loki was the first to wake. The room was perfectly cold and Stark was still in his Jotun form, resting peacefully. Silently Loki summoned the decanter of vapor before snuggling up against Stark and practicing his imbuing.

He felt so much more relaxed and able to concentrate on the task at hand. He pulled the vapor from the bottle, making it race around the room before forming it into a green cold. The vapor was naturally trying to condense into water due to the cool temperature then a solid, but it was surprisingly easy to make his active magic keep it as a gas even after he purposefully lost his concentration.

Pleased with himself he relaxed and let his consciousness slip away.

The next time Loki woke up Stark was already awake and dressed, looking like he’d just showered and in his mortal form.

“Impressive.” The God of Fortification said, gesturing to the cloud of vapor that was still glowing green with Loki’s magic.

“Thank you. I have a good teacher,” Loki said flippantly. Stark chuckled, setting aside the book he was reading.

“I forgot to give this to you earlier.” Stark performed a displacement spell, a rolled up scroll appearing in his hand. “Your exoneration.” Loki pulled himself up until he was leaning against the headboard.

The younger god unraveled the parchment and snorted as he read his many listed crimes. Odin hadn’t removed any of Loki’s ‘crimes’ as Prince Regent. They had been all legal after all.

“Stubborn old man.” Loki mumbled, happy that he was finally out from under his thumb.

“Yeah, he was an asshole. Actually most of them were assholes. How are you not an asshole?” Stark joked watching as Loki displaced the scroll.

“I was,” Loki said, a deep frown forming. He’d been so stupid, so arrogant before the fall. Loki shook away his bad feelings, quickly deciding to change the subject. “Where did you store your cube on Asgard?”

“In the weapons vault. It’s the most secure place in the realm. Odin still didn’t give a proper explanation on why he didn’t hunt it down when he realized it had been stolen.” Stark narrowed his eyes, clearly annoyed. He stroked his goatee once before letting his hand drop back into his lap.

“You never really did explain what exactly it does, besides open portals,” Loki said and received a pointed look in return.

“It wasn’t supposed to open portals. Thanos had to pry at its delicate runes to force it to become an energy source and lightening rod for tears in the fabric of this realm.” Ah, so that’s how it worked. Stark sighed and seemed to reel himself back in, stifling his annoyance.

“What Thanos made you do to my cube is not your fault.”

“I know, but he would never have known it existed if I had not told him.” Loki flinched, remembering the exact moment he’d screamed out his offer.

“You were being tortured. I in no way blame you for trying to escape that sort of pain.” Stark’s eyes flickered over Loki’s face, reading his expression. He leaned over and kissed him. The tension in Loki’s shoulders eased slightly. “The cube is… complicated.” Stark waved his hand vaguely, getting back to the original topic.

“I’m sure I can follow,” Loki said dryly and Stark smiled at him.

“As you know I have one in each realm, someplace that’s theoretically safe. Each one rests in a cradle that is meant to protect it, but clearly isn’t perfect.” Stark paused and Loki had a feeling the older god was annoyed with himself due to that fact alone. “Like many of my creations the cubes have my active magic in them, well mine and…” Stark tapped at the glowing ball of magic in his chest. He shook his head, dispelling his thought.

“The one who was always suffering.” Loki filled in.

“Yeah, but that’s a story for a different day.” He rested his hand over the golden magic before looking back at Loki. “The cubes… they’re both record keepers and seeds.” Loki gave him a questioning look and Stark licked his lips, looking for the right words. “Each cube has an unbelievable amount of active magic in it, while the cradles are only made of reactive magic- I’m explaining this terribly. Maybe a visual would help.”

Red and gold twisted and an image came together.

Loki reached towards it, but immediately pulled back.

“Is this what is currently happening?” Loki asked, watching the small figures move around the streets of Asgard.

“No, this is a recording from the previous iteration.” Loki looked closer at it and realized that some of the architecture was wrong, especially the layout of the lesser streets. Two more similar cities appeared, flanking the first. “I mentioned to you a few days ago that there is always a certain fountain in Asgard.”

“Yes, I remember.” Loki scowled, hating that damn fountain.

“Well, when I saw how much you disliked it I did a bit of research. I’ve only had time to go back through the recordings of the last three iterations and a bit of the fourth.” The cities changed, the red magic congregating at two points in each image- one over a humanoid, featureless person and the second over what was clearly a fountain. “In each of the iterations there is some form of betrayal associated with each fountain.”

The middle image glowed and Loki concentrated on it. The false sun was low in the sky and most of the inhabitants of the city were inactive compared to the other two images. Loki watched as the glowing red person walked through the castle corridors, slowly getting closer to the fountain. Loki noticed that there were two other figures sitting on the fountain in the beginning stages of undressing each other. The lone figure completely froze when it saw them, before ducking behind a pillar. The figure fell to the floor, curling up into a ball before disappearing and reappearing in another part of the castle.
The image faded and the one to its left grew brighter. There were two beings sitting on the edge of the fountain. One was clearly a child. The taller of the two seemed to be speaking before suddenly turning and slapping the child so hard that he fell into the water. The adult walked away hastily and the child pulled himself out of the fountain before hiding in the garden and crying.

The castle disappeared and Loki immediately turned to look at the last one.

The scene was much more violent than the first and second. It made Loki feel sick. The individual composed of red magic was fighting someone much larger than him before being pushed down into the water. The figure that was being drowned clawed at their assailant’s arms. An arrow shot through the air and into the throat of the attacker. The larger person fell onto the drowning body, pinning it down further before the one who shot the arrow ran through the garden and pulled the body off, freeing the smaller figure.

“They’re me.” Loki concluded, hugging himself, a sense of foreboding cloaking him.

“That’s what I’m theorizing, but there’s no way to tell since the cubes don’t record each individual’s magic tenor. That would take way too much energy.” He looked at Loki before pulling the younger god into his arms. “I assume something similar happened this iteration.” Loki nodded.

“A childish betrayal that almost cost me my life.” Loki mumbled and sighed as Stark rubbed one of his shoulders.

“Now you’ll know to avoid that fountain once you master keeping memories.” Stark tried to comfort him and it did help a bit. “Come on. Let’s get out of bed. Ms. Cook is almost done with breakfast. We can discuss the cubes more once we’re fed. Does that sound like a good plan to you?” Stark asked in a calming tone. Loki scoffed, pulling away from him.

“I do not need to be coddled, Stark,” He said while standing. The God of Fortification chuckled.

“Adorable. You’re blushing, Lokes. I think you like being coddled.” Stark watched Loki gather up his abandoned clothing, pulling them on and trying to hide his heated face.

“I only like when you coddle me with your hand or mouth, not your words,” Loki responded in turn.

“Feisty.”

When they reached the kitchen Ms. Cook was plating eggs and bacon. The four slotted toaster popped and she buttered the various slices, adding them to the plates before pouring them each a cup of coffee and orange juice.

Loki tucked into his food, surprised by his own hunger. Stark on the other hand ate slowly, looking like he was lost in his own thoughts. Loki used his slow pace to his advantage and escaped to the bathroom briefly to brush his teeth and use the restroom. When he returned Stark was only halfway through his meal. Loki put his own empty plate into the dishwasher and Stark lost interest in his food, instead watching Loki.

“Are you done?” Loki asked, pointing at the plate.

“Hmm, yeah I guess,” Stark said distractedly and Loki took the plate, throwing away the leftover food and putting the plate into the dishwasher.

“Are you alright?” Stark blinked a few times at Loki’s questions.

“Oh, yeah, sorry I was reviewing the recording of Asgard from four iterations ago.” Stark’s eyes
became clearer and he focused on Loki’s face.

“Reviewing them in your head?”

“Well, yeah. The cubes are mostly just active magic with runes containing them. I just have to take the magic back in to review the information.”

“So you have all the records just… in your head?” That had to be millions of years worth of recordings-

“No, definitely not. That’s way too much energy and information for even me. Just taking in one is almost too much energy for my body. I have a library of old cubes.” Stark paused. “Active magic, when it’s been away from its host for too long, can feel stale, foreign. That’s part of the reason I didn’t realize that my cube was here instead of in Asgard. I didn’t recognize its tenor even though it was so close. It makes it easier for me to separate that magic from me once I’ve looked at the recording. The images I showed you earlier were, for a lack of a better term, re-recorded since they seemed important, copied from their original cubes. I reabsorbed only a small part of the active magic in the old cube and just sensing it, letting it tell me a story without words.”

“Fascinating,” Loki said, trying to imagine that much knowledge at his disposal.

“Not really. Most of it is terribly boring.”

“Sir,” Jarvis cut in. “SHEILD has launched three quinjets. Their flight plans list the tower as their destination. I am looking for the reason behind their actions.” There was a long pause and Stark took a sip of his coffee, unperturbed. “It would appear that a representative of Asgard approached SHEILD last evening to alert them that Loki is currently at your residence and has been staying there since the invasion.”

“Vindictive bastard.” Stark said and Loki felt his anger flare up towards his false father. “Alright, J. Get me a line directly to Fury and put the defenses up.”
Loki could feel a magic current shoot from the base of the tower to the top. He flinched at the onslaught of strange magic.

“That’s just Jarvis securing the tower.” Stark explained, putting a calming hand on Loki’s arm. “Stats, J?”

“313 employees present. I have informed them that we are conducting a bomb drill and to remain in their current rooms. I’ve cast a calming spell on all business floors. I have contacted Ms. Potts and alerted her of the situation. She is in Germany and would like to know if her presence is necessary?”

“Naw, but keep her informed of the situation and have her do any PR she thinks is necessary.” Stark took a sip of his coffee and Loki enjoyed how calm he was about the situation. “Any luck on contacting Fury?”

“He is continuously disconnecting the call. Shall I force connect it?”

“Hmm, who all and all are on the quinjets?”

“Director Fury, Agent Romavoff, Agent Barton, Captain Rogers, and 13 low leveled SHIELD agents. I can connect to the intercom if you would like to communicate with them,” Jarvis offered.

“Brief message, just tell them that the helipad on Stark Tower will only allow one quinjet to land and that only the Avengers, Fury, and five other SHIELD agents will be allowed to enter the premises. All others will be seen as hostile and will be dealt with accordingly. Also, make a point about how this tower remained pretty much unscratched despite all the other skyscrapers around it sustaining major damage during the invasion. That should get his imagination running.” Stark paused and Ms. Cook appeared and started preparing some sort of food.

“Message sent. He is not pleased and is cursing profusely.”

“Super.” Stark glanced over to Loki. “As much as I enjoy your crazy bed head I don’t think that feeling will be shared. Which form do you want to be in when they get here? You know I’m fine with either, but this situation is minimally delicate.” His implications were clear. Loki frowned slightly, more at the fact that he had to hide again than Stark’s actual comment. He felt the unsettling sensation of his Jotun skin being replaced by Aesir skin. Loki ran his hand through his hair and felt the unruly curls straighten out. He summoned a fresh pair of clothes and changed into them.

“Presentable?” He asked Stark who had been watching him the whole time.

“You’re always presentable- better than presentable. A damn fine specimen of Jotun and Aesir.” Stark looped his arm around Loki’s waist. “Did I ever mention how picky I am when it comes to choosing a lover, let alone choosing someone to teach my spells to? The fact that you fall into both of those categories is amazing. You are the rarest of rare and I find you to be incredibly sexy and interesting.”

“You flatter me, Stark.” Loki tried keeping his tone dry and his face straight, but a smile broke through his façade.
“I only speak the truth.” Stark placed his hand over his heart and Loki rolled his eyes.

“Yes, and that’s why everyone from this realm believes you to be mortal.”

“In my defense I never said I was a human. It’s not really something people talk about here. That would be like saying that a house has a door. Everyone just assumes so why clarify?”

“Because when a house doesn’t have a door I’d consider that pertinent information if I was trying to enter it.”

“Are you trying to enter me? After all, every top is a bottom, Lokes-”

“Sir, the quinjet has landed on the roof. Another is circling the tower while the last has set down on a skyscraper a block away and is currently unloading its occupants in order to surround the tower. Shall I unlock the roof’s door and allow elevator access?”

“Yeah, direct route. You want a drink? I’d recommend the good stuff, but you didn’t hold it so well last time.” Stark asked and Ms. Cook grabbed a glass. A bottle of honey-gold colored liquid appeared in her hand. Loki cringed remembering how he lost his wits last time he drank that particular beverage.

“I’m fine with coffee.” Loki topped off his drink and added in a few sugars cubes, as if to prove his point. Stark grinned at him before they both went to the living room, taking seats that faced the hallway that lead to the elevator.

Stark took a languid sip of his drink and his eyes became distant until a ping alerted them to the fact that the elevator arrived. Heavily booted feet stomped forward.

“Don’t worry about the fine lady in the kitchen,” Stark said loudly when he heard two pairs stop there. “She’s just making something for us to eat. She’s harmless, but has my permission to defend herself if she deems it necessary.”

Loki almost regretted not taking up Stark’s offer for a drink once he saw the scathing look Director Fury gave him when he and his posse entered the room. Everyone’s guns were drawn, save Captain America since he did not have one and Clint who had his bow at the ready.

“How is it possible that you are still so childish?”

“I’m young at heart.”

“Stark!” Fury shouted, interrupting their lighthearted bantering. “You want to explain why you’re harboring a fugitive?”

“Actually, Nicky, if you would check your records you’d see that last evening they were updated and Loki was officially listed as an innocent civilian.” Stark pointed towards the cell phone on Fury’s belt, daring him to check it.

“Innocent my ass.” Clint pulled back the drawstring of his bow a bit tighter as he spoke.
“Trust me, there’s nothing innocent about that ass.” Stark winked at the archer.

“You’re in quite the mood,” Loki observed.

“What can I say other than you put me in quite a mood?” Stark gave the younger god a suggestive look.

“Tony, just come with us. He’s mind controlling you. We have ways of fixing this,” Natasha said, her voice cool.

“Woah there, Mrs. Roger Rabbit, I know all about your ‘cognitive recalibration’. I’m a-okay. Bambi is in no way mind controlling me- Are those apples I smell? J, please tell me Ms. Cook is making those caramelized apple things that I like.”

“They should be out of the oven in a moment, though I recommend you allow them to cool before you bite into one, lest we have a repeat of last time,” The AI drawled out, startling a few of the SHIELD agents who swung around their guns, looking for the source of the voice.

“Capsicle, you’ll love these. They’re very all American pie.”

“Perhaps we should stay on topic.” Loki said before Fury could shout at Stark again.

“Fine, let’s make this quick and easy.” Stark turned serious. “Tell me exactly why you are here so I can get you to leave.”

“We’re taking you two into SHIELD custody.” Fury held up two pairs of handcuffs. Loki frowned. Odin must really have been angry to have sent down a pair of magic dampening shackles like those.

“Why?” Stark asked simply, looking over their shoulders for Ms. Cook.

“You damn well know why. The reason is sitting right next to you.” Fury gestured to Loki with his gun.

“Yeah, no, that’s not happening. I was serious when I said Loki was cleared of all charges. If you would just check your databases-”

“I don’t give a flying fuck what they say.” Clint interrupted, his eyes dead set on Loki. “He has to pay for what he did.”

“By that logic you should be in jail for the three SHIELD agents you killed while under mind control.” Stark craned his neck and spotted Ms. Cook. “Make room boys and girls. You wouldn’t deny me a slice of heaven would you?” Evidently that was the wrong thing to say. One of the SHIELD agents tried to grab her arm, but his hand went straight through her. Ms. Cook glared at him before giving Stark a questioning look. The older god did not say anything nor did his eager expression change, but it caused Ms. Cook to grin. She disappeared then immediately reappeared beside him, steaming platter of pastries still in hand.

Loki and Stark were the only ones who weren’t startled.

“I fucking hate magic.” Clint murmured, his eyes never leaving Loki.

“I fucking love it.” Stark said in response, eyeing the platter as Ms. Cook set it down. Before she could even dissipate into red magic Stark was already holding two of the pastries. He was about to bite into one, but Loki waved at them, cooling them down slightly with a flick of his wrist. The whole room tensed up again and Stark just nodded in thanks while biting into one. “Seriously you
guys. You have to try these.”

“If you’re trying to say that Loki was mind controlled into doing all those things, including that eccentric speech in Stuttgart, then you’re going to have trouble convincing anyone.” Natasha said, bringing them back on topic.

“Lokes, why don’t you show them the exoneration daddy dearest gave you. I had him clarify in the third paragraph exactly why you weren’t guilty of any actions after your fall.”

“I’m about to perform a spell. Feel free not to shoot me.” Loki warned, before performing a displacement spell. He held out the scroll and Fury gestured to one of his agents to go get it. The tall female agent edged closer to Loki nervously and he had to refrain from purposefully scaring her just because he could. When she took it, she quickly scurried back over to her comrades.

Fury opened the scroll, holding it away from his body as if it might explode. His one eye narrowed.

“I can’t read this chicken scratch.”

“Oh, right, not in English.” Stark shook his head. “Take a pic and get it translated or I can have Jarvis translate it for you if you’d like.”

“No damn piece of paper is going to tell me what to do.” Fury tried to rip the scroll apart to prove his point, but the delicate looking paper did not budge. He opted to just toss it on the ground and stomp on it.

“Hey we had to go all the way to Asgard to get that. Anyway, you’re a bureaucrat. Papers telling you to things is pretty much your job.” No one responded. Stark looked at his glass, seemingly in thought. “It looks like we’re at an impasse. Loki was mind controlled the same as Barton. That’s the long and short of it. Odin only sent down his emissary because I humiliated him in front of a ton of people.”

“And you expect us to just believe you?” Fury asked.

“No, I expect you to do what I said from the beginning. Check your system. There should be a shiny new presidential pardon with the name Loki on it.”

“Presidential pardon?” Fury looked skeptical, and even Loki was unsure if Stark was telling the truth.

“It’s very hush-hush of course. His poll numbers would be hit rock bottom if the media caught wind of it.” Stark tilted his drink carelessly. “Pepper is in Germany right now working out the details on his pardon there.” As if perfectly timed Fury’s cell phone started ringing. “That may or may not be the director of the FBI. There’s about a 50/50 chance.” Fury scowled at him, but answered his phone regardless.

He made a lot of wordless grunts into the phone and his scowl deepened. The second the call ended he smashed the phone on the ground and for a split second Loki thought he was going to shoot it too.

“We’re pulling out for today. This isn’t over, Stark-”

“You’re damn right this isn’t over!” Clint shouted, letting loose his arrow. Loki reacted quickly, throwing a shield in place that protected both him and Stark. The older god didn’t react at all, merely brushing aside some of the crumbs that had fallen on his shirt as the arrow hit the shield.

“Barton!” Fury shouted, but the archer was already on the move again, drawing another arrow and
trying to edge around the shield. The green shield just grew larger, surrounding the two gods. When he couldn’t find a direct opening he shot an arrow up, ricocheting it off the high ceiling. Loki was vaguely impressed as he caught the arrow that would have otherwise hit his throat. Before he could voice his amusement Stark plucked the arrow from his hand and threw it into the air. Just as it went sailing over the shield it exploded.

“It’s one of my old designs.” Stark explained, drinking from his glass as if nothing had just happened.

Outside of the shield the archer charged forward, enraged. He raised his bow up to hit it directly, but Natasha tackled him to the ground, instantly subduing him. He fought against her grip, shouting obscenities.

Loki couldn’t help but feel a bit… sympathetic. He knew what it was like to be helpless, not in control of one’s own body.

“Stark.” He called out to the older god and brown eyes met green. He understood the look on Loki’s face, nodding glumly.

“If you’re an Avenger and you want a more in depth explanation you can stay, especially you Clint. There’s a lot I want to tell you.” Stark said with a long suffering sigh, as if this was the most bothersome thing he’d dealt with all year.

“You son of a bitch! You’re supposed to be on our side!” Clint screamed, thrashing beneath the assassin.

“Tasha, please calm him down. You know this is me being cooperative.” Stark looked at the SHIELD agents dressed all in black. “Shoo, go away. They can report back to you if they deem it necessary. I don’t care about that, I just don’t like you.”

Stark set aside his half empty glass and stood up, rolling his shoulder until it made a popping noise and he sighed in relief. Loki wanted to comment on how it made him look old, but refrained due to the tense situation.

Loki lowered the shield around them as a show of good faith. He nibbled on one of the apple pastries while observed those around him. The redhead was whispering something into the archer’s ear and he was slowly calming down. Fury and his nameless agents where leaving, but Loki spotted one drop something on the ground. Before he could do anything he felt Jarvis’ strange magic zap the small device.

“Would you like one of these delightful apple treats?” Loki offered to Captain America who was standing awkwardly near the mouth of the hallway. Steve looked at the tray Loki was pointing towards. The blond’s Depression era sensibilities would not allow him to pass up free food. Tentatively he walked forward and sat on the couch across from Loki. He reached forward like he was approaching a rabid dog, a sentiment Loki could appreciate considering how they last met, well when the last met at knew the identity of the other. Loki didn’t count the time they met when he was disguised as Lola.

“These are delicious.” The captain said after trying one of the apple pastries.

“Ms. Cook is an excellent- well cook.” Loki said and he could feel Stark watching them with an amused look on his face. He flicked the older god’s thigh subtly and Stark made an undignified noise.
“You two seem rather… friendly.” Steve stared at the tray of apple pastries as he spoke. A few feet away Clint started back trying to get free of Natasha’s hold.

“Very astute of you, mon capitan.” Stark gave him a suggestive look that made it very clear what type of relationship he and Loki had. The blond haired man blushed. “Tasha if you can’t calm him down soon I’m going to knock him out. He’s giving me a headache this early in the morning.”

“Tony, it’s one in the afternoon.” The captain said just as the redhead said: “You touch him and you die.”

“Impossible.” Loki scoffed at her and she sent him a killer glare. “Stark, why not just tell them the truth?”

“Hmm, I am telling them the truth. I certainly haven’t lied after all.” Stark picked his drink back up and was the picture of innocence.

“Omissions are just a weaker version of a lie.”

“Geez, you sound like Pepper. Fine. I’d just like to state ahead of time that no one bothered to ask if I was mortal so I never corrected them.” That caught their attention. “I am a god.” He said nonchalantly and Loki had to hold back a laugh when he saw the expressions on the human’s faces.

Clint used Natasha’s brief moment of distraction to break free.

“You’ve got some fucking ego Stark!” The archer took a swing at the older god and Loki was surprised when he did not try to dodge it. The hit landed solidly on Stark’s jaw. Before Clint could throw another one Natasha grabbed him and forced him into one of the chairs. She sat on his lap in a much subtler means of restraint.

“See, Lokes, this is why I don’t tell people things.” Stark rubbed his jaw as if it was sore.

“Don’t complain when you could have easily dodged that.” Loki sat up straighter, trying to look indignant.

“And make him angrier because of it? No thanks.” Stark took another one of the apple pastries and popped it in his mouth.

“Would you stop kidding around? Tony if you have something to tell us, please do so.” Steve said, acting very professional despite how tense everyone was.

“I’m not kidding. If I do anything with my magic you’ll just assume Lokes is the one doing it. I am the God of Fortification and I have nurtured this realm since it was young. I am the one who captured Loki and I am the one who pulled the monster that was controlling both him and Clint out of his head. You don’t have to believe me. The only reason I even bothered to tell you all this is because a few dead tendrils of Thanos’ presence are still in Clint’s head, probably in all the heads of those he controlled.”

“You’re so full of shit.” The archer reached for the quiver on his back, but all the arrows had fallen out during his scuffle with the assassin and his bow was broken and laying on the ground.

“I can practically smell the tendrils starting to decay. Let me guess, these past few days you’ve been seeing thing in the corner of your eye, but haven’t been able to identify them. Nothing has tasted right. You constantly feel uncertain. You know you’re in control of your own mind, but you also know something is out of place. Am I right?” Clint did not answer right away, but Loki could see him crumbling, hidden pain coming forth. “I can fix it. This is not my first time dealing with the
aftermath of mind control and I doubt it will be my last.”

“Fuck! Just get that bastard out of my mind!” Clint grabbed onto his head.

“I already have Ms. Cook starting on the drafts now. It’s you and thirty-seven others who will need it. It will be a bit painful, like someone is using a melon-baller on your brain and you’ll likely pass out, but once you wake up you’ll be as right as rain.” Stark made an okay sign with his hand and performed a displacement spell, a cigar appearing in his hand. “She’s in the lab right now, but should be up in a few minutes.” Stark took in a puff from his cigar. The resulting smoke was red with his magic twisting into the form of a drake as Stark relaxed in his seat.

Loki could not relax quite as easily. The redhead still had her eyes trained on him, the archer was descending into an inner madness, and the captain just looked uncomfortable, eyes flickering between Loki and the images Stark was creating.

“What is in this draft you’re having her make?” Loki asked, as always curious about Stark’s different abilities.

“I haven’t made one in a few iterations. It briefly opens the mind then targets a specific tenor of magic, purging it. It would not have been strong enough to get Thanos out of your mind though since he was still alive and would have clawed at your mind to stay there. It probably would have killed you.”

“And it won’t kill Clint?” the assassin asked, still sitting on the archer’s lap, subtly holding his hand.

“It shouldn’t. I’m going to check his mind first though, just to be certain I’ll take a gander into his head.” Stark set aside his still smoking cigar. “Come here, Legolas, and sit on daddy’s lap. Let me see into those pretty peepers of yours.”

“You must be out of your mind.” The archer practically growled at him.

“It is necessary, I assure you,” Loki said, not really enjoying the idea of someone else sitting on Stark’s lap.

“A part of my mind will be going into yours. Your body will go completely limp since all your focus will be on trying to stop my mind.” Stark patted his lap. “Don’t worry. You’re not my type.” Natasha moved out of his way and Clint reluctantly went over to Stark.

“If you ever tell anyone about this-”

“Oh hush. This won’t be making the tabloids anytime soon.” Stark pulled him onto his lap. “This is going to hurt.”

Loki felt the slight surge of magic as Stark entered Clint’s mind.

It was strange watching this from the outside. The archer’s expression became lifeless while Stark’s became tense. His hold on Clint’s neck twitched.

“Is he an Asgardian like you?” The captain asked.

“I’m no Aesir.” Loki frowned. “I suppose there’s no reason to remain in this false form.” Loki dropped his glamour and ignored their gaping. “I am a Jotun and Stark came from the equivalent of Asgard.”

“So… does that mean Thor is a joe-dun?”
“That is not the case.” Loki ignored his horrible mispronunciation, instead looking back over at Stark. He always enjoyed seeing the older god give his complete concentration to a spell. It made Loki want to have a repeat of last night.

Stark suddenly blinked and picked up Clint, laying his unconscious form on the couch.

“Jarvis, send a message to Fury. Tell him to gather up those who were controlled and isolate them.” Stark paused, looking out the window. “It seems that someone has taken up where Thanos left off.”

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if you see any errors. I didn't have enough time to properly edit this.
The mug in Loki’s hand fell to the ground, shattering on impact. He jumped out of his seat and grabbed onto Stark’s collar.

“Who is it?! Who is it, Stark?!” He shouted at the older god. Stark grabbed him by the wrist, his face completely calm.

“It’s the Other.” Stark said under his breath. Loki’s shoulders slumped and his knees gave out. Before he could hit the ground Stark pulled Loki into his arms. The younger god knew Stark was whispering comforting words in his ear, but Loki couldn’t hear him.

The Other… the Other- the monster who had been Thanos’ second in command. He’d always been next to Thanos during Loki’s time as a prisoner there. He’d only stepped in to torture the god when Thanos grew bored of Loki’s screams. He was Thanos’ dog, let loose every time Loki even considered going off script.

Now he was…

“How… how is he doing it?” Loki asked when he came out of his daze. At some point Stark had pulled him onto his lap and was cradling him.

“He’s attuned to Thanos’ magical tenor. I don’t know how. He probably has some of his inactive magic somewhere and is using it as a channel for his own power, pushing out Thanos’ dead tendrils in the mortal’s minds and replacing it with his own control.” Stark said, his jaw tensing up. “Tasha, can you go to the kitchen and grab a jar from the right-most cabinet. It should be full of crystals.”

“We have to stop him! I have to kill him!” Loki pulled away from Stark, summoning his armor and Frelser as he stood up.

“We can’t just go head first into this, Lokes.” Stark reached out for the younger god and Loki paused, staring at his hands. Both were black from frostbite. Loki dropped Frelser and immediately started performing a healing spell on Stark’s hands. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I’m sorry.” He said, his voice breaking midsentence. This was the second time he’d burned Stark. All because he was a Jotun- but there was nothing wrong with being a Jotun. He had to remind himself of that.

Stark took his hands back and Loki was about to protest, but then the assassin handed him a jar full of healing stones. The older god could not control his wounded hands enough to open the jar so Loki had to do it for him, feeling worse. Stark smashed two of them, rubbing them into the cracked skin of his hands. Loki sighed in relief as they healed quickly.
“You were scared. No harm done.” Stark smiled good heartedly at him before glancing towards the ground. He made a *tsking* noise. “Well, if I knew you’d treat Frelser like that I wouldn’t have given her to you.” Stark joked and Loki quickly scooped up the bladed scepter. “Perhaps I should take it back.”

“You shall not.” Loki held the scepter close to his body. She was a treasured gift and he still had yet to use the well designed weapon.

“Super, then how about you sit down so we can make a plan of action?” Stark asked with an easy going grin in place. Loki glanced around. The assassin and captain were both tense, watching them closely.

Loki breathed out slowly, reigning in his emotions.

“Yes, that would probably be prudent.” Loki vanished his armor, leaving him in the clothes he’d put on earlier. He still kept Frelser in hand, feeling more secure with it there. He sat down beside Stark, tilted towards him.

“I want in.” Natasha said. “If he had a hand in hurting Clint then you can’t deny us vengeance.” She rested her hand on Clint’s forehead, trailing it down till she was cupping his cheek.

“Same here. I won’t allow another attack.” Captain America’s chest puffed up with indignity as he spoke.

“Hmm, I guess you guys could be useful. What do you think, Lokes?”

“I don’t care, so long as I’m the one who gets to take apart the Other.”

“Alright, assault party of six.”

“Six?”

“Pepper will want to come. She usually watches my back, catches onto the things I’m too hasty to notice. We’ve fought many battles together, but she prefers to stay near the back and observe.”

“Is she an Aesir too?” Steve asked.

“Naw, she’s a Jotun like Loki.” Stark pointed his thumb towards Loki.

“I can’t imagine her being blue.” Steve scrunched up his nose in thought.

“Blue and ten feet of bad ass lady. This realm would still be in the dark ages without her.” Stark picked up his cigar again, breathing in its smoke before letting it out. An armada of miniature red ships appeared before them. “The one who was behind the invasion of Midgard- Umm, Earth, I mean was Thanos. I already sent SHIELD a file on him when I heard you all were coming. I dug around in Thanos’ head a bit before I killed him. This is the fleet he controlled.” A fifth of the ships disappeared. “That’s what I’d estimate is left of the fleet considering I took out a nice chunk with that nuke.

“From the progression I saw in Clint’s head the Other doesn’t have enough presence for me to just pull him into this realm like I did with Thanos- and I doubt a mortal could even survive that anyway.” The image dissipated. “I don’t know the fleet’s exact location, but I can throw together a few calculations to see how far they could have traveled.”

“And when you do know where they are?” Natasha asked, still staring at spot in the air the image
had been.

“Identify the Other’s location, sneak attack, take out the ships on the flanks with a few of my lovely bombs, infiltrate the base ship, snag the Other, get out of there, big explosion- Quick and simple.”

“That doesn’t sound quick and simple.”

“That’s because you’ve never seen me in action before.” He winked at them. “You all are taking this surprisingly well.”

“I still have many doubts about this god business and I don’t trust him at all.” Natasha gestured towards Loki, glaring at him.

“Doubts are fine, so long as you follow through when the time comes.” Stark perked up slightly. “At least I can pull out some of my more interesting toys. I rarely get the chance. Capsicle, let me see your shield. I’ve been dying to give it a boost since I first saw you throw it in person.” Steve reluctantly gave Stark his prized weapon and defense. The God of Fortification held up his hand and a thin silver sheet of metal appeared. With a single finger he cut it into a perfect circle, overlaying it on the red, white, and blue design of the shield. “Catch.” Stark tossed it towards the blond and the shield split into three identical copies. He tried to catch them in quick succession, but each disappeared on impact.

“What-”

“It never left my hand.” Stark explained, holding up the shield. “Only the one who owns it will be able to tell the illusions from the real one, well- I’ll still be able to tell, but that’s beside the point.” He handed it over.

“How did you...” Steve asked while testing the shield.

“Marriage of dwarven innovation and dark elf technology, but for you we can just say magic.” Stark was clearly proud of himself and it made Loki grin. “For the lovely lady, hmm, would you like throwing knives that will come back to you or a lightweight gauntlet that shoots silent bursts of energy?” She looked intrigued.

“Let me see the knives.”

Six black knives, each the length of the average hand appeared on the coffee table between them.

“These lovely ladies are well balanced. To anyone not wearing this ring,” he brushed his thumb over the black ring on his middle finger that hadn’t been there moments ago,” they’re just standard throwing knives, albeit superbly crafted.” Stark threw two daggers across the room at once and they hit just an inch apart from each other. “There’s two ways to call it back. You can call them back by saying their name, Spurv, or by holding your hand out open palmed. How it comes back depends on your intent.” Stark held his hand open and one of the daggers flew back, landing their harmlessly. “Spurv.” This time the second dagger came flying back, blade first, right towards Stark. Before Loki could panic a red shield appeared, intercepting it. “You wanna try?”

“Yes.” She took them before he could give them to her, along with the ring. The assassin sent three off quickly, all hit in a cluster where Stark’s had. “How do I make it so that only one in particular comes back?”

“It’s all about intent.”

“Reactive magic?” Loki asked while Natasha tested them out.
“Yup, with just a dash of active magic in the ring to cause the reaction.” Stark watched her closely as he spoke. “If she had any accessible magic I’d tune the knives to her magic so she had better control of them, even curving their path easily. I can control them if need be since they’re tuned to my magic.”

“How long ago did you make them?” Loki asked, moving a bit closer to the older god.

“Not too long ago, I think. J, when did I make those?”

“Approximately 32 millennia ago. There were originally 66 in the set, but the majority of them were tossed into the Void. The ring was only recently crafted, 3 millennia ago.”

“You tossed them into the Void?” Loki gave the God of Fortification a curious look. Stark shrugged and almost looked embarrassed. That piqued Loki’s interest. He’d never seen the other god look so vulnerable.

“You know how the Void is, the darkness, the emptiness.” Stark’s eyes became distant and Loki nodded sadly. “Sometimes I just liked making it explode with color. I’d launch orbs of energy far out into the Void then hit them with one of the knives, fireworks.” Stark lifted his hand in a fist then opened it, imitating an explosion. “Maybe I’ll show you it someday.”

“I’d like that.” Loki said while nodding slightly.

“The ring is too big.” Natasha cut in, interrupting the moment. Stark held out his hand and she placed the ring there. He glanced at her hand before bringing the ring up to his mouth, blowing on it.

“Try it on now.” He tossed it to her and she easily swiped it out of the air.

“Like a glove.” She said under her breath. “And for Clint?”

“I have a full room of just bows and arrows. I’ll let him decide when he comes to.” Stark picked back his cigar and took in a puff in thought. “Now that I think about it he won’t be able to join us on the attack though.”

“Why not?” Natasha gave him a deadly look.

“Three reasons: If he knows about the attack there is a chance the Other will read it in his mind. He can’t take the draft until the attack is underway. The Other will know something is wrong if he’s pushed out of one of the mortals’ heads. And we can’t take him with us since the Other could try more forceful methods to take over his mind with their proximity being so close.”

The redhead looked down at the sleeping man, pursing her lips unhappily.

“Fine. He won’t be happy about it though.”

“Better unhappy than dead.” Loki remarked offhandedly. She clearly did not appreciate the comment, glaring at him. Stark held back a laugh at their interaction.

“J, start doing the calculations on the maximum distance the fleet could have traveled, set up a 3D map in the war room, and how are those drafts Ms. Cook is making coming along?”

“Calculations have already been completed. Probes are at the ready, but we are not in possession of a proper transportation device to reach that far into the Void. Ms. Cook is in the elevator now. She made two different drafts due to there being two assailants.”
“Good. Cap, there is a spare bedroom a floor below this one. Can you take Clint there?”

“Sure, Tony.”

“And Tasha, I assume you don’t want to leave him here.”

“Considering your other house guest, yes, I don’t want to leave Clint here.”

“There are two other rooms on that floor that are fully furnished. Feel free to borrow one. Same goes for you Cap, though I’m sure Fury will be knocking on my door again if one of you doesn’t report in soon enough.” Both nodded in agreement. “Tentatively speaking, everything should be set up to launch our attack around tomorrow evening. Don’t let Clint know any of the details since he’s compromised.”

“He won’t like that, but fine.” The assassin pulled out her phone just as Ms. Cook walked in, a rounded bottle in each hand. Steve carefully scooped up the younger man and they took him away. Ms. Cook set the drafts onto the table before disappearing.

When Loki was sure the others were gone he let out a long sigh and sunk into his chair.

“You doing alright?” Stark asked, moving closer to Loki.

“I was so distracted… When you captured me- when you pulled Thanos from my mind and I was free again, I was so thrilled- and then you told me I was bound to fall into the Void each iteration almost immediately after. I was devastated, but you said there was a way I could stop it from happening again.” Loki brushed a hand through his hair, feeling both frustrated and tired.

“Yeah…”

“I was so set on not falling again- I was so distracted that I didn’t consider what the Other would do. I should have sought vengeance earlier while their fleet was still destabilized by your bombing and Thanos’ death- now they’ve regrouped around the Other. I was foolish.”

“No, Lokes, you weren’t the foolish one.” Stark sat on the coffe table in front of the other god, tilting his chin so that their eyes met. “I was the foolish one. I knew from Thanos’ mind that the Other was still alive, but I was selfish. I didn’t even care about the Other. I was only focused on the one who had corrupted my cube. I was blinded by my anger and didn’t even take into consideration your need for vengeance. It didn’t even occur to me that you’d want to take revenge. All I could think about was what Thanos did to my cube and that Ragnarök was coming soon.” Stark leaned forward and gave Loki a brief kiss. “This is my fault and I plan on setting it right.”

“This is hardly your fault.” Loki said, sitting straight again.

“But it is!” Stark jolted upright and began pacing. “I’m the God of Fortification! I have to make things stronger. I have to make things better than they were. I was aware of the pain they both caused you! I should have taken into consideration that leaving one of them to die with everyone else during Ragnarök would not be enough for you. I’m supposed to be making your mind stronger so that you won’t fall again, not allowing a weakness to persist.”

“Stark, I’m not one of your projects.” Loki said coolly and Stark’s pacing faltered. “You can’t control everything. I’ve had countless bad experiences, and yes many of the worse revolve around Thanos and the Other, but you can’t protect me from my past, nor should you feel obligated to. Once I properly learn how to save my memories from Ragnarök I’ll commit to memory the tenors of their magic and avoid them in my next iterations.”
“You don’t understand.” Stark scrubbed at his face with a hand. “You’re too important, too crucial to not have your memories saved correctly, or for the wrong ones to be saved. The smallest error can change the course of your next lives monumentally. I should have been thinking further ahead. You’re just too important…” Stark’s words faded on his lips as he continued pacing, lost in his own mind.

“And why am I important? Because I am the one who falls? Or because we’re lovers?” Loki asked, more to pull Stark out of his thoughts than from any bitter feelings of inadequacy. The older god completely froze.

“Oh, Lokes. You’re important for a million reasons. First and foremost for whom you are at your core, not by any association you may have with me or the Norns.” Stark pulled Loki out of his seat and met his lips with his own. “You’ve been crazed more than once, but you’ve never truly been crazy. If you keep bad memories or emotions from your last iteration you can completely lose your mind. That’s why part of our deal was that you had to accept your Jotun form if you wanted me to teach you how to save your memories. I should have known that giving you closure in this iteration was important so that you wouldn’t bring that malice into your next life.

“I wasn’t always this strong. Every iteration where I was reborn had been a trial and error. I was not always wise when it came to the knowledge I brought with me into a new life, and sometimes it pushed me to do terrible things. Other times I couldn’t take it, all the information, the paranoia and fear… I’ve lost count of all the times I’d taken my own life because the knowledge was so immense that it caused my mind to collapse in on itself.” Stark kissed Loki again and the younger god pulled him closer, hating the idea of him killing himself. “I just don’t want you to get hurt like that because I was short sighted.”

Loki buried his face in the crook of Stark’s neck, holding him a bit tighter.

“I’ll be fine. I am certain of it. You have already saved me once and I know you won’t allow me to fall again, whether it is into madness or the Void, you won’t let me fall. I trust you.” Loki heard Stark catch his breath. There was a long pause before he whispered a response.

“Thank you.”
They embraced a moment longer, before Stark pulled away.

“Want to come down to the lab with me? I need to make a proper device.” Stark’s features suddenly darkened. “Not like that abomination Selvig made.”

“You really do take pride in your creations,” Loki observed, smiling faintly. Stark picked up the last apple pastry, looking at it thoughtfully.

“It’s very rare for me to have a lover and Pepper usually isn’t born until halfway into an iteration. At the start of each iteration I keep Jarvis asleep. Usually all I have to keep me company is my creations. I spend years just tinkering with various things I’ve made or collected.” Stark chuckled humorlessly. “I’m not nearly as powerful as you think I am, at least when it comes to raw strength. Without Yinsen’s magic I’d only have a pittance compared to the amount you readily wield. When there is nothing outside I pull apart the different spells I have observed. I work at finding their base, knowing exactly how each spell works, then cutting away at any excess magic usage, and creating quick sequences as shortcuts.”

“I have seen you do amazing things. Even if your raw power is not as strong as mine your skill makes up for that. You destroyed Mjolnir, a feat countless have tried and failed at.”

“Actually I didn’t destroy it and I had a bit of an unfair advantage. I had observed his weapon closely when he tried to take you away from the quinjet.” Stark performed a displacement spell and said hammer appeared in his hand. “I dispelled the requirements for ownership and added some of my own, then threw in a lil’ illusion.” Stark tossed the hammer to Loki. It was surprisingly lighter than Loki had imagined. After a moment he handed it back to the other god.

“It’s a bit too blunt of an instrument for me,” Loki joked and Stark grinned. “Lab?”

“Lab.” Stark nodded in agreement.

The trip down was made in a comfortable silence, yet Loki’s mind was busy thinking about what Stark had said. He just couldn’t imagine it, being alone for so long like that. Just being in the Void for eleven months had broken him, yet Stark spoke of clinging to Yggdrasil for almost a decade after Ragnarök, all alone.

The God of Fortification…

No one could survive such emptiness without possessing an unyielding strength, yet Stark claimed to be weak. It didn’t make sense to Loki.

There was still so much he did not know about this god. Even if they were lovers Stark had millions of years of experience while Loki only had a couple thousand.

He was still uncertain on what exactly Stark’s motives were for surviving Ragnarök. What could be worth suffering absolute isolation for? It amounted to torture in Loki’s mind.

Even as Loki watched the other god work on a beautiful machine of interact wires and runes, he could see a weariness in his eyes, something that could only come from seeing far too many tragedies. It was well hidden behind cockiness and an idle enjoyment at crafting a new object, but it was definitely there.
“Lokes, you in there?” Stark asked, pulling the younger god out of his thoughts.

“Sorry, were you saying something?” Stark was elbow deep in the device.

“Yeah, I was asking for your help.” Stark tilted his head towards an open hatch on the device.

“There is a rune on the copper plate in there. It looks similar to berkanan, but inverted with a dash over it. Do you see it?”

“Yes, I see it.” He didn’t recognize the rune though. “Is it from a different iteration?”

“Yup, I don’t remember its name anymore, but it’s helpful for long distance travel. I used it quite a bit while constructing the golden solarium. Fun times.” Stark paused and the rune lit up with red magic. “Did it change?”

“It turned red briefly.”

“Good, can you send a small burst of energy through it? I need to be sure the path between these two runes is well worn in both directions so it doesn’t use as much energy when we finally make the trip.” A green bolt came out of Loki’s finger, hitting the rune. “I felt that. A little more powerful this time.” He sent another bolt. “Good, close the panel and seal it please.”

“Shall I weld it?”

“Do you know how to cold weld?”

“Cold weld?”

“Two metals of similar properties touching in a vacuum.” Stark moved around the various items until he found a small sheet of copper. He bent it into a cylinder. “Try it with this.” Stark said while handing him the cylinder.

“How do I create a vacuum?” Loki asked, staring at the small metal item. Stark looked up from the machine he was working on.

“Create a sphere.” Stark demonstrated. “Pull all the air from it. Once you’ve gotten the hang of it try doing so on a smaller scale.” The red sphere between his hands shrunk down, till it rested on the tip of his finger. “Then you can apply it just about anywhere.” He ran his finger over the seam of the panel, welding it shut. “It can be rather deadly, too, when used correctly.” There was a soft popping noise as the sphere disappeared. “Though the magic to destruction ratio is a bit too skewed for my taste.” Stark smiled, giving Loki a once over. “The difficult part is getting the metal into the vacuum. Of course you can start it off with the metal in the sphere, but that is the easy way and limits the usefulness of the technique as a whole.”

“You like teaching others, don’t you?” Loki asked while forming a green sphere.

“Not really, I just rarely get the chance to, especially not with someone as talented as you.” Stark focused back on the portal machine. “I enjoy your presence, Lokes, and I enjoy sharing with those I like. You value knowledge and security, so I share knowledge and give security.”

“And what can I give in return? I have no knowledge that you have not already had yourself. And security is something I have not had for myself in far too long.” As he spoke, he tried pulling the air out of the sphere, but it caused the sphere to shrink like a balloon with a leak.

“Give? There’s nothing I need. And there were a few spells I had not seen before entering your mind. I meant it when I said you are talented. Your skipping spell is rather ingenious.”
“Skipping spell?” His sphere imploded and he created another one.

“Well, you never gave it a name, so I had to create one myself. It’s the simultaneous illusion spell and variation of a teleportation spell. You leave an afterimage as you teleport to an area in close proximity.” Stark looked up from the machine. “You only touch Yggdrasil briefly for your teleportation, you almost bounce off it. Your timing has to be perfect in order to maintain the illusion that you’re still on that plane. The spell actually uses a bit of active magic to keep the illusion there while you bounce off Yggdrasil. It’s rather quite elegant and one of the reasons I figured you’d be able to learn to save your memories.” Stark shrugged and Loki was silent for a long moment.

“Somehow I almost forgot that you’re not like all those I grew up with, that you actually see the value in magic. No one has complimented any of my spells in many centuries.”

“You grew up with ignorant fools and it’s amazing that you rose so high above them.” Stark pointed towards a row of metal rods in a variety of colors. “Can you hand me the three with a golden hue to them and the one on the far left?”

“You flatter me,” Loki said while gathering them up before handing them over to Stark.

“I don’t flatter people unless I’m trying to sell them something, and I’m not trying to sell you anything.” The rods that were solid in Loki’s hand seemed to yield in Stark’s as he bent and elongated one until it was a thin wire. Loki smiled and sat back across from him, focusing on trying to create a vacuum.

Practicing spells, mastering them, understanding their workings- this was Loki’s domain, what the majority of his life had been spent doing. When he wasn’t obligated to play prince and clean up other’s messes this was what he chose to do, and Stark seemed to open up new possibilities for improvement every day, showing Loki new and brilliant ways to improve the very thing he prided oneself most in.

The magic sphere between his hands imploded again, yet Loki smiled.

He was with someone who respected him and cared about him. He was doing the very thing he loved most. This was always how he wanted his life to be, and it was beautiful.
I'm having a bit of difficulty with this story (or more accurately I can't focus on any story other than Our Paths Unfold) so I'm going to be updating to every week and a half instead of every week. (Plus side: This is a long chapter.)

“Visual confirmation established,” Jarvis announced as Stark sharpened his axe. Loki was leaning against him, trying to get the damn cylinder into the vacuum sphere. Natasha was staring at the hologram of the remnants of the fleet. Captain America was standing by the door, intimidated by the enormity of Stark’s war room.

It was a two story room. The first floor’s walls were covered with different weapons, a few of which Loki had seen Stark tuning when he first started learning to strengthen his mind. The areas that weren’t filled with weapons had maps made of anything from hide to light. The open floored second story was lined with bookshelves.

Earlier in the morning when Tony had showed them the room Loki had pulled out one of the books out of curiosity. He didn’t recognize the language, but the All-Speak allowed him to read it. It was a history of a battle Loki had never heard of before. He glanced at a few others and noticed that they were all filled with the same handwriting, Stark’s handwriting. Many passages were from his perspective, listing the stratagems he recommended to the leaders of the battles, and which generals and kings actually listened to him. He wrote out every mistake, every botched attack, and unexpected turn.

“J, where’s Pep?”

“Still in Germany. Shall I tell her it’s almost time?”

“Yeah, and get an exact location on the Other. We’ll take his ship first.”

“And when we have him?” Loki asked, staring at Frelser’s blade. He could already imagine the Other’s blood darkening it.

“I send him to a place he won’t be able to escape from. It’s the before and after that I’m concentrating on. We board the ship he’s on. J launches attacks on the flanks of the fleet to cause some chaos. I have a few bombs programmed to take out communication. We head to the Other’s location and take him out. Replace him with a shiny new bomb and then we get out of there.” Stark shrugged.

“Nothing’s ever that simple,” Steve said, coming closer to the digital image of the fleet.

“Naw, it is. You just haven’t seen enough battles to know that.”

“I’ve seen plenty of-” The captain cut himself off, remembering that Stark was no mortal.
“These bracelets will act as transmitters and if you twist this part it will activate, sending you back to my tower.” Stark’s voice was subdued, worrying Loki. “Ms. Cook is a very talented healer when she channels Jarvis’ magic. Injuries that you would otherwise think to be life threatening may not be, that being said don’t do anything stupid. She can’t magic you back to life.”

There was a bright pink flash of light and Pepper appeared, ten feet tall, hair swirling with grey and black locks, blue skin, a strangely designed gun on each hip, and two swords crossed on her back.

“Woah,” Steve said under his breath, taking a step away from her.

Loki had never seen her in this form before. She was so much older than her mortal appearance suggested, older than Odin, yet the way she moved made it clear that she had not lost any of her mobility with age. She had scars on her exposed midriff and forearm, showing that she was battle tested.

He was mildly proud of himself for no longer feeling that instinctual disgust that he knew he once would have, when he was ignorant and blinded.

Pepper smiled at the captain’s reaction and turned to Stark and the map. She expanded the image of the fleet and adjusting the trajectory of some of the missiles. Stark moved one of them back before Pepper gave him a look. He sighed in exasperation before returning it to where she put it.

“Ms. Potts,” Natasha greeted, with a small nod.

“Please, just call me Pepper. We’re going into battle together. Formalities will only slow us down.”

“Target’s signature has been located,” Jarvis said. The map zoomed in on a ship in the middle. A red dot near the front appeared. “Readings indicate that there are 53 other beings on the ship, 21 of which are in the same room as the target. Shall we wait until the odds are in our favor?”

“The odds are already in our favor,” Pepper said while leaning on Stark’s shoulder. He elbowed her in the hip. She chuckled silently and took her weight off him. “With Tony and me on the same side victory is assured.” Stark and Pepper simultaneously made a gun shape with their hands and shot a bolt of energy at each other. Red magic and pink magic met in the middle and canceled each other out.

Loki snorted at their blatant camaraderie born out of years of friendship. They certainly were in sync. He was just glad that he knew that there was nothing romantic between them.

“How are we doing this?” Natasha asked. Apparently she was not one for joking. “Are we going to just appear in the middle of them? Split up? What’s our plan?”

“We can’t just pop in. The Other would sense the influx of magic. We’re taking a small boarding ship.”

“Won’t they pick that up on their radar?”

“Their radar is not good enough to pick up one of my ships, besides they’ll be too distracted with the explosions.” Another ship appeared on the map. “This will be us.” The ship moved through the fleet and the ships furthest away started exploding when their ship touched the Other’s. “A super awesome laser cuts their hull, air tight suction around it. We board, split into two groups. Loki and me in one. You three in the other. Lokes and I will take the direct route to the main chamber.” The ship on screen lit up with a line almost straight down the middle. “You three will go the roundabout way.” Another line appeared. “This will take you to the back entrance of the main room and has a lower chance of encountering hostiles.”
“Pep will be the leader of your group. I want you to follow her instructions to the T. When you reach the doors to the main room Pep will let me know. On my count we’ll storm at the same time. First wave of attack I want projectiles. You three will be in a triangle formation, Cap taking point. Steve you’re to block any attacks that come their way. I augmented your shield to absorb most magical attacks. When they’re in range switch to close combat. Don’t engage the Other. His speed and strength are greater than even yours Steve. He’ll likely go after Loki when he spots him. When I give the word I want you all to get out of there. I’ll be the last one to leave. Questions?”

“What do we do if we get separated?” the captain asked.

“Don’t get separated.” Stark made a dismissive hand gesture.

“Tony,” Pepper said in a warning tone. He sighed dramatically.

“If you get separated or captured use your bracelet. Whoever you’re touching will go with you back here. The penthouse floor of the tower is armed to the teeth and Jarvis will shoot any intruders you bring with you.” Stark looked at each person in turn. “You all ready?”

“We’re good to go,” Natasha confirmed, her hand brushing against the gun on her hip, then traveling down to the knives sheathed on her thighs.

“Super, follow me.” Stark gestured to one of the weapon filled walls. Part of it shifted forward before moving to the side.

“Secret doors, really Tony?” Steve joked, once again looking around in amazement as he stepped into a room almost as big as the last one.

“It’s only secret if you’re not paying attention,” Stark explained. Loki had felt the faint inactive magic on the wall, but hadn’t known it led to another room. “Besides, I have to keep the big guns hidden away.” Stark patted an innocuous metal sphere that was almost as tall as Pepper.

All the machines that cluttered the room looked foreign to Loki. There was a thin metal disk that floated silently, yet Loki could sense no magic or energy coming from it. A tangle of thick cables slithered in a large glass case. A blocky machine with tubes on its top was emitting a faint grinding noise that set Loki on edge. On a pedestal was a pen shaped item carved from ivory.

After wading past a slew of items they stopped in front of a sleek red ship. The back opened like a maw, ready to eat them whole.

“Sorry for the lack of seating. I don’t usually do fieldtrips.” True to his word there was only the pilot’s seat in the front. The rest of the area was empty, excluding where the device Stark had made yesterday was securely bolted down. There were no windows to see through. “There are latches on the wall if you want to hold onto something, but this baby runs pretty smoothly, especially when I’m steering.”

“Then why is there a long gash on the outside like you swiped a guardrail?” Natasha asked, raising one eyebrow while walking into the ship.

“I wasn’t the one steering,” Stark clarified, zeroing in coordinates. Pepper coughed nervously and Loki could almost sense Stark’s annoyance at the damage wrought upon his ship. “J, is everything in working order?”

“All systems are tuned to your specifications. Readings are perfectly in range. Shall I power up the A-spytte?” Loki still didn’t understand where Stark had come up with that name for the teleportation device.
“Yeah.” Stark flipped a button and the back hatch closed up. Loki grabbed onto one of the notches in the wall and the others followed suit. “You all ready to travel light years in an instant?”

“Oh, stop showing off and just go already,” Pepper said indignantly.

“No fun at all,” Stark mumbled before A-spytte started humming and Loki felt a wave of Jarvis’ stale magic. “Done.” The ship hadn’t even jolted. The only reason Loki knew Stark was telling the truth was due to the digital readings that appeared. “Now we just move through the minefield.” Stark carefully maneuvered the control yolk.

“Tight fit,” Pepper commented while going to stand by Stark’s seat.

“I like tight fits.”

“Shut up, Tony.”

Stark grinned, but didn’t comment.

The atmosphere grew tense as they waited.

“Sir, shall I commence bombing of the flanks?” Jarvis asked, his voice coming from nowhere in particular.

“Hit them.”

“Why can’t I hear explosions?” the captain asked a moment later.

“No one can hear you scream in space,” Stark joked, Pepper rolled her eyes.

“There’s no air to carry the sound waves,” the giantess explained.

“Brace yourselves. We’re about to touch down.” Stark swiped at a dial. “3, 2, 1.” The ship was barely jostled. “Move to the front of the ship.” A gyroscope came out of the panel. He adjusted its alignment before twisting it around. The back of the ship morphed, becoming slightly concaved. “Activating lasers.” He flipped a switch. “J, you have control. You know what to do.”

“Yes Sir.”

Stark activated another switch before standing, unhooking his axe from his belt.

The back of the ship vibrated, then opened to the hallway of another ship. Loki tensed up as he caught the dank scent of the Chitauri. Stark patted him on the shoulder once before leading them all out of the ship.

“Good luck, ladies.” Stark winked at the other group before gesturing for Loki to follow him. The wall that opened up to their ship molded back together, as if the hole had never been there to begin with.

Loki could quickly feel his anxiety rise up at being in this place again. He could almost hear the chains scraping against the floor as he was dragged from his cell, the wobbling voices of the Chitauri as they laughed at him, his wheezing as his lungs fought against the intrusion of his own ribs-

“Lokes,” Stark whispered, “I’m right here. This will all be over sooner than you think.” Loki eased under the older god’s gentle coaxing. “This is just one more step-” Stark abruptly pulled Loki against the wall, a bolt of energy sailing past them. Dashes of red magic flew out of Stark’s hand, cutting straight through the throat of a Chitauri soldier. “We’ll talk later.”
Luckily the soldier was alone. The brief encounter had left Loki feeling more focused. He had not been able to properly enact his revenge on Thanos, Stark had taken that pleasure, but he definitely would get his revenge against the Other.

Stark and Loki moved silently down the hallways.

The older god seemed to have a sixth sense about when one of the aliens was close. Before Loki could even react Stark would already have killed the threat silently. Each attack was efficient and carried out before Loki could even consider helping. It gave Loki a small thrill knowing that once this was over he’d be sharing Stark’s bed again.

“Shit!” Stark said under his breath while pushing Loki backwards. A Chitauri fell from above, landing right where Loki had been standing. The younger god thrust his scepter between the ribs of the alien. Despite being impaled the Chitauri lunged towards Loki, skewering itself further as it tried to get its hands around Loki’s throat. Stark reached forward and broke the alien’s neck with a quick twist.

“Damn.” Loki whispered while extracting his scepter. His mind kept flashing back to the many other times the Chitauri got their hands on him, beating him within an inch of his life.

“Let’s keep moving. We’re almost to the main room.” Stark glanced up as he spoke, looking at the vent the alien had fallen out of. Loki nodded in agreement, making sure to be more aware of what was above him.

Subconsciously he wondered how the other team was doing. The mortals’ senses were substantially less aware of their surroundings than occupants of the other realms, but hopefully Pepper’s presence would make up for that shortcoming.

Stark silently motioned for Loki to pause. The God of Fortification peeked around the corner. He nodded and his stance eased. He slipped around the corner and Loki followed him on silent feet. If his memory served this was the corridor just outside of the main room.

They stopped in front of a large metal door. Loki could hear the garbling voices of the Chitauri and the Other’s deep laughter. Stark leaned against the wall.

“Now we wait for Pep and the others to take their position.” Stark pulled Loki to his side. The younger god felt an invisibility spell sweep over them. Stark’s eyes were closed and Loki would have thought he was relaxed if not for the deep furrow between his eyebrows. His hand was resting on the orb of magic in his chest.

The metal door slid open, making Loki catch his breath. A Chitauri walked by them, blind to their presence. The door closed and the sound of the Chitauri’s steps faded away. It wouldn’t find any of its fallen comrades though. Stark had made sure of that.

“Pep’s team is in position. You ready?” Stark asked. Loki took in a deep breath before nodding. The older god closed his eyes briefly. He held open his hand, palm up before closing it into a fist. The door in front of them crumbled. Stark pushed off the wall, red magic flowing from his fingertips. Loki pulled out daggers from the folds of his coat.

The air was filled with dust from the explosions Stark created. More than twenty Chitauri lined the
walls. A quick glance around made it clear that it was a war room. The Other was standing in front of a strange round dais.

Loki threw five daggers, each hitting a Chitauri. One hit wouldn’t be enough to kill them, but it would slow them down.

The Chitauri let out an ear shattering noise as Captain America led the charge on the other side of the room. With his shield he bashed in the heads of any aliens that got into his range. On his left Pepper was grinning. There was a gun in each of her hands and she was shooting them off in quick succession. Natasha was using the knives Stark had given her expertly, throwing them, then getting them to hit another target when she called them back to her.

Stark was swinging his axe, chuckling as red gashes of magic shot out, cutting straight through any flesh.

“Loki.” The Other said, his voice carrying over the clamor around them. The young god faltered for a split second before throwing a knife towards him. The Other swatted it out of the air.

Loki blocked an energy blast one of the Chitauri shot off. He quickly retaliated, hitting him with a ball of green energy.

Stark twisted to the side, splitting open the skull of a Chitauri that got too close.

Loki switched from his throwing knives to Frei sera, thrusting it through the gut of the first Chitauri that got into his range. One of the aliens swung its fist at Loki, but the god used Frei ser to redirect the movement down then slammed his knee into the alien’s face. Loki slashed down his scepter almost decapitating the alien.

The Other screamed an order that even the All-Speak couldn’t translate, making Loki flinch.

He was pushed to the side by a wave of Stark’s magic, a shot going through the area he was just standing. He gave a fleeting glance in Stark’s direction, but the other god was concentrating on the two Chitauri he was battling at once.

One of the Chitauri ran forward, shape shifting as he moved. Loki’s heart stopped- Thanos.

No! He was dead! Stark said that-

But Thanos didn’t use Chitauri weapons. He used-

Loki parried the oncoming attack from the fake Thanos.

Thanos did not fight like this. His movements were quicker, more vicious. This… this liar was too easy to block. But this being looked like Thanos, looked like the monster that had loomed over him, dissecting Loki like a frog. He couldn’t get his revenge, but perhaps this would have to do.

Loki slashed upwards, slicing the imposter shallowly from gut to neck. He knocked the imposter down to his hands and knees with the butt of Frei ser and cut him under his shoulders, maiming him. He clubbed the back of his head, forcing the alien to the ground. Loki slammed Frei ser between the shoulder blades, causing the imposter to wail. Before he could continue his revenge the alien’s brains were dashed across the ground by a bolt of red magic.

“On task, Lokes,” Stark called out while dispatching one of the Chitauri. The God of Fortification stomped down and a spiral of gold emanated from his foot, knocking over the three Chitauri that were charging in his direction.
Loki bounced up dodging an oncoming energy blast.

Across the long hall he couldn’t see the other group, but he could hear Pepper’s laughter and the clanging of the captain’s shield.

He felt the Other’s eyes on him despite the hellish alien’s eyes being constantly hidden. He darted through the crowd, moving faster than any Aesir or Jotun could. Loki only just barely dodged the Other’s attack.

Loki wacked aside the Other’s arm, creating an opening that the Other quickly corrected. The Other jutted his arm out, fingers clawed, trying to grab Loki’s throat. The god twisted out of the way, using his momentum to hit the Other on the back of his head. The alien was hardly affected. Loki shot an oncoming Chitauri while dipping down to hit the Other behind his knees. The Other didn’t even falter until a blast of red magic to the chest sent him off balance. A dagger appeared in Loki’s hand. He swiped low cutting one of the Other’s Achilles tendons.

In the distance there was a pained grunt. Through the throng of aliens he saw the captain on one knee, a Chitauri spear through his gut. A bubble of Pepper’s bright pink magic surrounded the super soldier, deflecting incoming attacks.

In his brief moment of distraction the Other grabbed Loki by his leg, pulling him to the ground. A flash of bright silver blinded Loki momentarily before the Other’s screeching pierced Loki’s ears. The grip on his leg slackened, only because the offending arm was detached from the Other, split apart by Stark’s axe.

Red and gold magic twisted around the Other, engulfing him. A moment later Loki’s torturer was gone along with Stark’s axe.

“Mission accomplished.” Stark called out from near the middle of the room. “Time to head back to earth.”

There were two flashes of golden light as the captain and assassin used their bracelets to teleport away. Loki reached for his own bracelet until he heard a faint noise of despair. He searched through the crowd while pushing back a Chitauri with his magic. In the middle of the large room was Stark. He was leaning against the dais, looking down at the round table.

“Tony…” Pepper called out to him, slashing two Chitauri down as she made her way to his side. Red magic seeped from Stark’s hands, fluctuating like a pulse.

“You two get out of here.” Stark’s voice was dead calm, and the Chitauri that was charging towards him stopped dead in its tracks, falling to its knees without any visible signs of injury. The red magic overflowed, spreading across the ground. It sizzled against the fallen Chitauri, but kept moving. The three other Chitauri soldiers it touched howled in pain, moving away from it. “Go now!” Stark shouted, angrier than Loki had ever heard him before.

Pepper jumped forward, pink magic propelling her halfway across the room in a single movement. On her second step she grabbed Loki around his waist, activating her bracelet in one movement. Gold magic flashed and they were suddenly in Stark’s living room.

“Why did you do that?!” Loki shouted while pushing himself away from Pepper. Natasha glanced up at them from the floor where she and Ms. Cook were treating the captain’s wound. Pepper stood up straighter, brushing off her bloody swords on the fabric of her long loincloth.

“His tone…” Pepper said under her breath, sheathing her swords. “His tone said everything.
Something was wrong and our presence would only have distracted him. Tony can take care of himself.”

“We have to go back! We can’t just leave him alone!” Loki shouted, panic quickly overtaking him. Pepper let out a half chuckle, half sigh as she knelt down beside Steve. She pushed aside Ms. Cook and Natasha, healing stones appearing in her hand.

“You’ve never seen Tony in real battle. That was barely a skirmish on his radar.” Pepper rubbed the healing stone dust into the wound, making the captain groan in pain. “When he’s ready he’ll be back.”

“But-”

“Loki, he’ll be fine.” Pepper smiled faintly at him. The god’s shoulders dropped and he made his breathing slow down. “Until then Natasha I need you to head back to SHEILD and make sure those who were under Thanos’ and the Other’s control take the drafts Ms. Cook made so that their minds aren’t poisoned.”

“What about Steve?” the assassin asked, taking the clean cloth Ms. Cook handed to her. She wiped away the blood on her hands, unaffected by it.

“He’s fine. He just needs to sleep. Ms. Cook will watch over him.” Gold magic swept from Ms. Cook and the super soldier began floating before drifting to the couch. Natasha swept her eyes around the room before pulling out her cell phone and leaving the room. “Until Tony comes back perhaps we should busy ourselves with the Other,” Pepper suggested while standing up. It took a moment for her words to register to Loki. He bit his lip hesitating for just a moment before nodding and following her down to the holding cell.
Pepper unlocked the metal door and Loki gingerly walked in.

The holding cell was located in an offshoot of one of Stark’s labs. The Other was already strapped down to a table, its arm reattached. Stark’s axe was neatly hung on the wall.

“Tony might have questions for him. Leave him alive,” Pepper said as she took the axe off the wall and twisted it in her hands a few times. She held it with the familiarity of someone who had used it to shed blood. “I’ll be waiting just outside of the door if you need me.”

Loki breathed in deeply, trying to center himself as the door closed behind him. He put on a composed, yet indifferent façade. The room smelled sterile and was almost blindingly bright. The whole ceiling was one large light, glaring down, leaving no room for shadows.

The Other was growling obscenities and threats that would have made Loki grow pale and want to vomit if he was still Thanos’ prisoner. But now he was in control. This time it was the Other that was helpless, not Loki.

There was a simple metal chair against the wall. Loki nonchalantly picked it up and placing beside the Other’s head. The god sat down with all the grace that his upbringing taught him. From the folds of his coat he extracted a gleaming dagger.

“Or perhaps I should use one of your tools?” Loki asked, a false rueful smile sliding into place. He easily found the series of knives hidden on the Other. A particularly small yet, broad knife caught his attention. “Do you remember the last time you used this one on me?” No matter how he turned the blade it always caught the light. “I remember.”

Loki stood up and started unclasping his armor. The heavy leather and chain mail slid away easily, revealing a dark blue torso. He turned around to show the Other his back. He brushed aside his hair revealing the base of his neck. The scar started at his hairline, curving to the left and splitting into two. The faint grey lines were nearly parallel to each other, growing further apart as they ran down his back, before stopping midway. The skin between was slightly lighter than the rest.

“That is only a sample of what is to come, pet. Once Thanos awakens-” Loki cut him off with a laugh that shook his whole body.

“You think Thanos is going to save you?!” Loki’s gut clenched painfully from the intensity of his own laughter. “Thanos will never awaken! He will never save you! His soul is dead! Stark pulled him apart piece by piece. No, you are at my mercy now and I will flay you as you flayed me.” Loki did not bother putting his shirt back on as he moved closer to the Other. He’d rather not have to wash
the blood out of his clothing anyway.

Loki tossed the broad knife up, catching it by its hilt.

A delightful glee ebbed its way inside Loki, making his eyes light up.

“I always wondered what you were hiding under this ragged cowl,” Loki mused while testing the hold the small metal cage had on the Other’s face. It came off surprisingly easily. A faint odor seeped out as Loki pulled back the fabric that covered the Other’s eyes. “And here I was looking forward to plucking out your eyes myself. Tell me who did this to you so I may thank him?” The Other’s eye sockets were empty, only decaying wet flesh in its place.

“Worry not, pet. I shall drag you into my pocket dimension and give you a matching pair,” the Other growled, showing his blackened teeth. Loki deemed it unnecessary to respond. Instead he nimbly cut away at the Other’s clothes, revealing pale flesh. No inch was untouched by scars. The Other’s laughter echoed in the small room. “There is nothing you can do to me that hasn’t been done before!”

Loki let out a fake sigh.

“Aye, but I’d be remiss not to try.” In a quick movement Loki nicked the Other’s flesh, gliding the knife between the thick muscles and skin. The Other let out a hiss of pain, but was otherwise quiet. Loki slipped his fingers into the wound, pulling the skin up to more easily slash at the sinews that connected muscle to skin. The warm blood seeped between his fingers and slicked the hilt of the blade. The Other let out a gurgled chuckle, infuriating Loki. The god quickened his pace, flaying more skin. The alien only laughed louder.

“Loki, if I may make a suggestion?” Jarvis said, startling the god. He’d almost forgotten about his constant companion.

“I yield to your superior knowledge.” Loki waved the flaying knife in a sarcastic manner, staring up at the ceiling.

“There are many tools more suited for this venture located in the war room. I’d have Ms. Cook fetch them for you, but she is currently monitoring Captain Rogers’ condition.”

Loki summoned a cloth to him, wiping his bloody hands on it.

“I will be back in but a moment,” Loki assured the Other, smiling freely.

“Make haste, pet. You know I love the look of blood on your skin- even if you are blue now!” The Other laughed loudly, blood spurting from his wound. Loki did not let his words affect him, keeping his pace even as he walked out.

“Are you alright?” Pepper asked, back in her mortal guise as she tucked a StarkPad beneath her arm.

“Any word of Stark?” Loki asked, ignoring her question.

“Jarvis is monitoring him from the boarding ship. All Chitauri on the Other’s ship are dead,” Pepper reported, falling in step with Loki’s long strides. Loki’s gut clenched, an uneasy apprehension settling there.

“Then why is he not back yet.” Loki was not surprised by how weak his voice sounded. He had grown attached to the older god surprisingly fast. The thought of him alone and on enemy territory left Loki uneasy, especially when he thought about all the terrible things that had occurred during his
“Be assured that Tony will be back when he sees fit.” Pepper patted him on the shoulder, but Loki felt little comfort from the gesture. She did not enter the war room with him, instead took a seat inside the lab and went back to working on her StarkPad.

The war room felt less powerful without Stark in it as he issued orders and loomed over maps.

“These seven tools are the most efficient at prolonging pain without inflicting life threatening wounds,” Jarvis said, gold magic illuminating various weapons hanging on the walls. Loki plucked them down, admiring the fine craftsmanship each exemplified. One curved blade looked dull and dusty. He went to check its edge when Jarvis interrupted him. “I would not recommend taking that course of action. A fungus grows on that tool and has a propensity to poison all flesh it comes in contact with.”

“I gather the poisoning is painful?”

“I wouldn’t know from personal experience, obviously,” Jarvis paused, as if waiting for Loki to chuckle, but received no reaction from the god. “But if the screams I have heard are anything to testify to then, yes, the poison is quite painful.”

“Spectacular.” Loki displaced the various weapons before giving the room another passing glance. It really did lose its charm without Stark in it.

His trip back to the holding cell was near silent. His thoughts were adrift, distant, and on the one god who saved him. He should be pleased. Every day he had spent being pulled apart in that crater was filled with dreams about giving back all that was received tenfold to both the Other and Thanos. Yet now he’d rather have Stark by his side than hear the Other scream.

Sentimentality… Loki never thought he’d be one to fall victim to such a thing. Especially not after being betrayed by both his parents and then tortured ruthlessly for what felt like ages.

He thought himself incapable of such tenderness, yet here he was, heart soft and eyes unfocused as he stood outside a cell.

Even before his blasted fall Loki had not believed himself capable of-

He could scarcely think the word, let alone acknowledge it.

Loki brushed aside his emotions, focusing instead on the task at hand. He had to trust Stark and Pepper when she said he’d come back when he saw fit to.

“I hope you didn’t miss me too terribly,” Loki said while entering the bright room.

“A pet always comes back to his master.” The Other grinned with far too many teeth.

“Well, this pet,” he spit out the word, “has come baring gifts; painful, vicious gifts.” With a touch of magic Loki transformed the lone chair into a small table. He displaced the tools Jarvis had recommended, laying them out neatly on the table. “I wonder what this one does,” Loki said idly while lifting a three pronged wooden tool, no larger than a dragonfly.

“Records state that it is a weapon carved from the roots of Yggdrasil,” Jarvis answered and Loki almost dropped the tool.

“Impossible.”
“Improbable, actually.”

Loki couldn’t even look upon the world tree. It was made of pure magic that was so thick that it was solid. Unyielding to all outside forces with the strength to hold up the nine realms on its branches.

He looked closer at the tool. It appeared to be ash wood, yet Loki could almost feel the power pulsing from it.

“It’s function?” Loki asked, his eyes wide with wonder.

“According to Sir’s mumbled rumination it pulls the magic from the target, concentrating it at the points of contact. It burns that magic, causing a draining sensation coupled with the dissecting of nerves.”

“Stark really does love his toys.” Loki brushed the tip of the tool against the Other’s shoulder, causing the creature to scream and thrash against his restraints. “Oh, so it is quite powerful then.”

“Quite,” Jarvis said, rather unnecessarily, but Loki found it comforting to have someone doing this with him.

The Other’s screams were almost painful as Loki traces his rib structure with the wooden weapon.

“Oh hush, it’s only topical after all,” Loki teased, edging the tool towards the Other’s healing wound. “You should save your breath. This is only the first of seven toys I fetched for you.” Loki dragged the weapon up the Other’s throat and face before tracing his hollow eye sockets. He pulled the tool away and the Other’s screams turned to mangled gasps. “You boasted of no form of torture being new to you. Do you still believe that to be the case?”

“Pathetic-” Before the Other could even finish his sentence he was screaming again, the wooden weapon sapping up his magic and causing explosions of pain.

“I find that I can’t remember exactly how long it took me to stop uttering threats. Was it the first day? The first week? Perhaps even the first month?” Loki mused, giving the Other a brief rest from the pain. “How long will it take you to give up?” He tapped a quick pattern on the Other’s skin, each one echoed by a howl of pain.

This was his revenge. This was him slowly balancing out all the pain they inflicted on him. This dish of revenge was served cold… long enough for the pain to fester. This was supposed to bring Loki closure, yet as he moved onto the next tool of torture all Loki could think about was how the Other’s screams made his ears ring and how he wished Stark would just come home so that he could devote the attention to this task that he would have thought would come naturally.

This was supposed to make him feel better, yet the hollow spot in his chest only seemed to grow wider.

An old twang of insanity burst to life inside of him, causing Loki to let out peels of high pitched laughter.

How long had he been slowly torturing the Other now? Three hours? Four?

And Stark still wasn’t home.

Nothing made any sense-

It couldn’t have been more than four hours. Four hours separated from the God of Fortification and
Loki was already falling apart. Perhaps his mind wasn’t as repaired as Stark had lead him to believe. Perhaps he was destined to always come back to this place in his rotting heart.

The Other’s screams became a dull buzzing in the back of his head.

“Loki, Sir has just arrived back. He is in the lab if you’d like to see him,” Jarvis said, breaking through the Other’s screams.

Loki quickly displaced all the weapons and performed a cleansing spell on himself to get rid of the copious amounts of blood on his person. He didn’t bother putting his shirt back on. Stark had seen all of him anyway.

Stark was in his hidden lab. He was seated amongst the whirling contraptions that sang with active magic and power. The crevices of his knuckles were dark with dried blood and he was leaning back in his chair, lit cigar in one hand and half empty glass of alcohol in the other. His eyes were closed and his hairline was wet with perspiration. His armor was scattered on the floor and a table was overturned.

Without hesitation Loki walked over to him, sitting on his lap. Stark immediately leaned forward, his forehead resting against Loki’s cool neck and shoulder. Slowly he ran his fingers through Stark’s much shorter hair. It was strange, being the one to comfort instead of the one being comforted.

The God of Fortification usually seemed so immovable, switching between wizened teacher and playful lover easily. He did not show weakness often, Loki could tell, but he was showing it now. Loki knew that meant Stark trusted him. That realization would have comforted him, if not for the fact that Stark seemed so distressed.

“What ails you?” Loki asked after a long silence.

“Things have… unexpectedly accelerated. Everything is going to end again. Ragnarök is coming.” The shakiness in Stark’s voice was unexpected and made Loki’s heart clench. Loki didn’t know how to respond so he just held the older god tighter.

The sharp noise of heels clicking on the hard ground broke through the thick tension.

“I laid out a plan of ac- Oh, sorry.” Pepper paused in the doorway, not having noticed Loki initially. “We can iron out the details later,” Pepper said while turning on her heels.

“No, just give me a summary.”

“Very well. The first wave of destruction should hit Midgard in two weeks. If my equations are correct it should take about an hour and half for this realm to be completely destroyed.” Pepper’s voice was completely analytical as she looked down at the StarkPad in her hand. Loki gaped at her, not understand how she could be so nonchalant. “Three weeks after that Alfheim and Svartalfheim will end. Jotunheim and Niflheim a week later.” Stark let out an almost indecipherable groan and he held Loki tighter. “Five days after that Muspelheim and Vanaheim. Three days later Asgard and then finally Helheim the day after.”

“Less than eight weeks until everything ends and begins again,” Stark said, pressing his nose into the crook of Loki’s neck.

The younger god felt like he couldn’t breathe. Ragnarök was almost upon them- Thor and Frigga were going to die. He was going to die- and he still had yet to master saving his memories. The Void would consume him all over again. He’d fall for all eternity, his mind breaking over and over again.
“Shh, Lokes. I’ve got you.” Warmth enveloped him and he sunk into Stark’s embrace.

“I don’t understand. I thought you said we had at least a year. What changed?” Loki asked weakly, breathing in Stark’s scent. Beneath him the God of Fortification tensed.

“You’re not the only one I’ve taught to keep memories. My daughter… it must have been thirty iterations ago.” He chuckled mirthlessly and from the corner of his eye Loki could see Pepper shift from foot to foot. “We were so much alike and she was so strong. I thought she could handle Ragnarök. I was selfish. I didn’t want to be alone. It changed her, though. Seeing every living being save two die can do that to a person. She… pushed away from me. I tried… I really tried, but she decided that no one should live through Ragnarök, not even us.” The words faded on his lips.

“Tony,” Pepper said, moving closer to them, “you can’t help someone if they’re not willing to cooperate.” Stark said something to her in a language the All-Speak couldn’t translate, making her back off. “Perhaps I should just start making preparations.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.” Stark shifted slightly, moving his lit cigar and drink to one hand. He ghosted his free hand up Loki’s back. “Did you get any information from the Other?”

“No, but it’s not like I was trying to do anything besides pay him back.”

“Then I guess it’s up to me to find out how exactly he met her.”
Loki followed Stark to the holding cell, still feeling morose due to the older god’s announcement. Stark looked emotionless, his eyes trained ahead. Wordlessly he opened the door and went straight towards the Other. With a hard yank he pulled the Other out of its restraints. Stark’s eyes glowed red before the Other went completely limp.

Oh, Loki had been expecting a ‘traditional’ questioning, but why bother when one could just go straight to the source?

He leaned against the wall, observing the faint twitches in the Other’s hands and the way sweat broke out on Stark’s brow. With no warning Stark dropped the alien. The Other fell back onto the table, shaking epileptically.

Stark made a humming noise, tapping on the ball of magic in his chest. When he turned to look at Loki his eyes were weary.

“Did you find the information you were looking for?” Loki asked. Stark’s chin dropped slightly and he looked at the ground with a sad smile.

“Just a glimpse. I only saw a glimpse.” Stark’s hand drifted up until he was brushing his beard. “She’s beautiful. She’s always beautiful each iteration.” Stark shook his head and chuckled. His eyes drifted back to the shivering alien on the table. “It should be conscious within the hour if you’re still interested in revenge.” Stark’s tone was perfectly conversational, not a hint of judgment. Loki stared at the alien before shaking his head.

“No, I believe I am done trying to right wrongs that can never be righted.” With a slow motion Loki broke the Other’s neck, killing it. Stark snorted.

“Wish I had learned that when I was your age,” Stark said. Loki made a sweeping motion and all of his discarded armor disappeared. “J, sanitize the room.”

“Of course, Sir.” When Stark closed the door behind them there was the loud roaring noise of fire. Stark rested his hand on Loki’s bare waist and the younger god found it rather comforting.

“What happens now?” Loki asked as they entered the elevator.

“Now Pep and I pack up shop while you keep learning.”

“And what does ‘pack up shop’ exactly mean?”

“It means tying up loose ends, gather or destroy all my creations, and collecting all my cubes.” The elevator opened to the penthouse floor. “But before all that I need to rest. It’s been quite some time since I’ve used up that much magic in one go. I need to get the smell of blood off my skin. Feel free to join me in the shower if you’d like, but I’m afraid I’m too tired to have much fun there.”
“You sound very formal when you’re tired,” Loki commented while looking closely at the other god.

“I was a king once,” Stark paused midsentence his brown eyes dulling. “I was a great king and it was very exhausting. Speaking formally when tired is one of the things that came with me unwittingly from that iteration.”

“You’ve been a king. You’ve been a pauper. You’ve been a famous prostitute. You’ve been a Jotun, a dwarf, an elf. You’ve been a father,” Loki said the last part carefully, gauging Stark’s reaction as they entered the bathroom.

“I am a father and a mother,” Stark corrected him, no bitterness in his tone. “Even if they don’t remember me and were born into another family after my own they’ll always be my children.” Stark’s hand fell away from the buckle on his armor that he’d been unfastening. Loki quickly took up the task. “I don’t talk about my kids though, Loki. I just don’t.”

“Of course. I’d never push you to speak of something you do not wish to.” Loki nimbly unbuckled the various parts of Stark’s armor, letting each heavy piece fall to the ground. The older god leaned his forehead on Loki’s shoulder, silently urging him to continue.

Loki tried to imagine what it must be like, watching everyone he loved die as he stayed strong and weathered Ragnarök. The other god’s actions only became more confusing to him. Nothing could be worth that. Loki was glad that he didn’t have any children, especially considering how short a life they would have had now that the nine realms were soon to come to an end.

Loki shifted into his Aesir form so that the hot water would feel comfortable on his skin.

He ushered the other god into the shower before stripping himself down. Stark moved slowly as he started out his routine. Loki quickly intercepted the action, depositing the dollop of soap into his own hands. Carefully he sudsed it into the other god’s hair. Stark let out a small sigh and his shoulders relaxed.

Loki grinned proudly at the small show of trust. Stark allowed himself to be maneuvered, making it easy for Loki to wash away the bubbles and going onto the next step. There was a simple washcloth hanging outside the shower. Loki quickly picked it up and warmed it with water. He used the cloth to wipe away the flecks of blood on Stark’s face.

It was so strange, having someone trust him to this degree. It had never happened before, but Loki found that it warmed him on the inside and made him want to somehow deepen their trust further. That sort of thing could only come with time though, and that was something they didn’t really have.

Loki lathered up the washcloth before he began washing Stark’s body. He glanced at the other god’s expression as he cleaned each arm. Stark looked so relaxed, like he was sleeping. Loki rubbed small circles with the cloth over Stark’s chest, but hesitated when he reached the ball of magic implanted there. He’d touched it before, during sex, and the way Stark tapped randomly made it clear that it was solid. Even so, the idea of being so close to the active magic of someone he didn’t know felt strange. Regardless, he carefully washed the glass like surface and noticed that its hum was less pronounced than usual.

Loki moved to the large expanse that was Stark’s back. There were scars, lots and lots of scars, and Loki wondered how he had not noticed them before. The raised skin and light pock marks spoke of explosions and shrapnel. Loki wondered if the scars were really there on Stark’s Aesir form, or if these were just part of his disguise.

He moved the washcloth lower. Loki was so caught up in the amount of trust Stark was giving him
that he didn’t even think of how easily the situation could be perceived as sexual if not for both of them being exhausted.

Besides, it felt nice to just touch without any expectations or urge to turn things into more.

By the time they were finished Loki felt at peace in a way he thought unimaginable before. He used a simple spell to dry them off before pulling Stark into bed with him. He stayed in his Aesir form, not wanting to make the other god uncomfortable. Somehow Stark read his mind.

“No, I like it when you’re cold,” Stark mumbled into Loki’s neck, half asleep already.

“Human bodies aren’t meant to sleep next to blocks of ice,” Loki whispered in response, wrapping his arms around Stark’s torso. He felt magic glide over the other god and in the dim light he saw Stark shape shift into his natural, Aesir form. Loki chuckled and let his glamour drop. “Better?”

“Infinitely.” Loki grinned at Stark’s groggy tone.

“Good, then rest.”

Stark made a humming noise and Loki traced his fingers over the contours of Stark’s back. So the scars were real...

“Pardon the rude awakening,” Jarvis said in a soothing tone, pulling both gods out of their slumber, “but Ms. Potts has finished creating a plan of action and is requesting both your presences.”

Stark groaned and Loki covered himself with a pillow.

“Tell her I already know her plan of action. Tell her I always know her plans, I just choose to ignore the vast majority of them,” Stark griped.

“Sir, this one is not her usual way of doing things. Ms. Potts is presently heading in your direction. Shall I lock the door?” Stark gave Loki a questioning look. Loki shrugged in response.

“No, let her in,” Stark said while pulling himself up, leaning against the headboard. Loki hid further under his pillow, not wanting to deal with reality yet. Stark snuck his hand under the pillow and began carding his fingers through Loki’s hair.

As always, the sound of Pepper’s heels preceded her. Loki cringed at the sudden influx of light as she opened the door.

“Good morning, sunshines.” Pepper sounded entirely too happy considering the hour and the circumstances. “Hey! Bad Tony! That is my coffee and you damn well know it.” Loki peeked out from under his pillow and saw that Stark had a steaming cup in his hand. The God of Mischief chuckled, he hadn’t even felt the surge of magic Stark used to steal the savory drink.

“Pep, you know there’s an entrance fee to my room. I’m sure you can sacrifice one measly cup of coffee in order to tell me this spectacular, innovate, mind boggling plan of yours.” He took a loud sip of the coffee and Pepper rolled her eyes in exasperation.

“Fine, you old cad, I will get you back for stealing my coffee one of these days, even if I have to burn it into my memories and take my revenge in the next iteration.” She glared at him playfully.
“That would be a lot less scary if I wasn’t naked right now,” Stark said and Loki snorted in an undignified manner. “What’s the plan?”

“Divide and conquer—”

“So the same plan as always?” Stark cut in, his hand pausing in Loki’s hair for just a beat.

“I’ll turn that coffee into ice if you keep interrupting me.”

“Jokes on you I like ice, in case you didn’t notice.” There was a brief pause. “Fine I’ll listen. Regale me.”

“As I was saying: divide and conquer, but instead of it just being the three of us let’s bring the other Avengers with us. Steve and Natasha proved their fighting abilities to me and I found it refreshing to fight with someone besides you by my side. If we don’t enlist them they’ll just die in a few weeks anyway and that just feels like a terrible waste.”

“Say no more, Ms. Potts. I like your idea.” Stark sounded far more chipper than just a moment ago. “Lokes, what do you think?” The younger god froze for less than a second before he pulled the pillow off his head. He hadn’t been expecting to actually be included in the planning stages considering Pepper and Stark had clearly done this together in countless iterations.

“I think that it is a wonderful idea. Though I worry that Hawkeye may not be up to the task considering he just purged two invading minds from his own.”

“A fair point. J, how is Bird Brains?”

“Unknown, Sir. All agents once under the influence of mind control are in a location without any electronic devices. If Agent Romanoff’s reaction is anything to go by then I’d say the treatment worked. Shall I call her to confirm?”

“Naw, I’d rather go see for myself. Besides how am I to make sure all evil mind gunk residue is gone without direct contact?”

“I shall cool a car for the journey. Will Ms. Potts or Loki be joining you?” Jarvis asked, clearly ignoring Stark’s rhetorical question.

“I can’t go. I still have to start enacting the doomsday protocol for Midgard,” Pepper said, quickly pulling out a cell phone and leaving the room.

“Doomsday protocol?” Loki raised a single eyebrow.

“Nothing you need to worry about, Bambi. Would you like to come with me to the scary SHIELD base? If so I recommend you disguise yourself for the sake of simplicity.”

“I wouldn’t mind scaring a few humans.”

“Then it’s settled. Let’s get changed and then we’re out of here. I know small restaurant on the way where we can grab breakfast,” Stark said, slipping out of bed. Loki followed suit, taking a split moment to admire the view before Stark got dressed. Loki summoned one of the female outfits from his room as he shape-shifted to his ‘Lola’ form. He didn’t enjoy being significantly shorter, but this form would serve its purpose.

The drive to SHIELD HQ was interrupted only by a stop at a small bistro. The food was fresh and light. Loki was rather pleased with it until Stark made an offhanded comment about how he’d have
to wait another thousands of years to find a place like this again. Thankfully the melancholy that
instilled in Loki was quickly swept away by the annoying questions the mortals with cameras
shouted out to them. Stark redirected their attention away from his ‘date’ to a new project he
promised to release in a few days.

SHIELD HQ looked unsurprisingly mundane from the outside, the only visible security being a half
asleep, overweight guard that was manning a plastic barrier that lifted out of the way of their car as
Stark drove in. After some smooth talking and name dropping they were let in, only to be surrounded
by armed agents when they went into the underground parking lot.

“Is this how you usually greet a hero?” Stark asked while taking off his sunglasses. Loki brushed a
lock of hair over his shoulder, trying to appear harmless. One of the agents touched the small device
in her ear, nodding to herself.

“We’re to escort them inside,” she announced, but none of them lowered their weapons. Stark
hopped out of his car, tossing his keys to one of the agents.

“Put her someplace safe,” Stark said before opening the door for Loki. He held out his arm for him.
“Dear?” Loki scoffed but took his offered arm, pretending to be demure.

The agents were tense as they led them through various security check points. Stark refused to be
scanned and threatened to just crash their whole system if they insisted on doing so. They tried
corralling the two gods, but Stark was insistent, glancing at his phone intermittently to get directions
from Jarvis.

Eventually they found their way into a large bunker with evenly spaced cots disbursed throughout it.

“Tony! Lola?” Clint spotted them before either god had a chance to see him. “Really? Please don’t
tell me that Lola is actually Loki, that I tried to actually flirt with Loki,” Clint said while making his
way through the crowd of mostly chatting agents.

“Yes, a wise move to announce the presence of the one that put all of you here,” Loki mocked,
feeling the room suddenly become hostile.

“Don’t worry, dear. I’ll protect you.” Stark patted him on the arm and Loki made an undignified
noise of disdain.

“Make no mistake, Stark, I am just as deadly in this form as any of my others.” Loki glared at Stark
threateningly as Hawkeye reached them.

“Oh I know, but you’re so much easier to tease in this form,” Stark explained and Loki narrowed his
eyes further.

“For someone who has been a female and a male you’re rather sexist, aren’t you?” Loki made his
voice lighter, more condescending.

“You misunderstand. You’re not easier to tease because I think woman are easier to tease. You’re
easier to mock because you think woman are easier to tease.” Stark winked at him and Loki could
only purse his lips in response, taking a moment to contemplate his analysis. “Hey Legolas. You
seem much more chipper. How are you feeling?”

“I feel clearer, like my old self. Though that stuff you gave us gave me a terrible hangover. I’m still
supremely pissed at this asshole.” He pointed at Loki with his thumb. “But Nat gave me the sitrep on
everything that happened while I was unconscious. I trust her judgment more than I trust my own
right now.”
“Your confidence will come back. I’m sure of it.” Stark patted him on the shoulder. “Lokes and I just ate, but I think a team brunch would be beneficial right about now. You in? Or do you want to stay cooped up here all day?” Clint snorted at Stark’s blatant manipulation.

“Like you even have to ask,” he said under his breath. “Let me just grab my gear.” Clint quickly ran off, darting between the various cots.

“Yes, by all means leave us to the sharks,” Stark snarked as various agents moved closer to them.

“You two can take care of yourselves,” Clint shouted over his shoulder, rummaging through a duffel bag.

“Shall I kill them?” Loki asked, eyeing the agents and unlacing his arm from Stark’s.

“What? And break what I just fixed? I think not.”

“Hey! Are you really that son of a bitch Loki?!” one agent asked, rolling his shoulders and reaching for his empty holster. He seemed surprised that his gun wasn’t there. Loki assumed it had been taken away when the news that they were slowly being controlled again came out.

“Yes, I am Loki. It may be relevant for you to know that I too was being controlled-”

“Bullshit!” The agent charged forward, arm inelegantly raised in attack. Loki sidestepped the punch, twisting around so that he was back to back with Stark.

“I bring glad tidings. The two behind all this have been killed. One by Stark the day of the final attack and I killed the Other yesterday after torturing him for a few hours.” That gave pause to some of the agents, others narrowed their eyes in suspicion- Loki’s truth only making them distrust his words more.

Three of the agents fell into formation, clearly having worked together before. The others followed suit.

“Look, I just killed upwards of fifty Chitauri by myself and at least ten times that indirectly. Do you really think it’s a good idea to mess with us?” An undertone of doubt lingered in the mob. They looked at each other for reassurance.

“Iron Man without his suit? Yeah, I think we can take him, even if he does have a ‘god’ at his back,” one scoffed.

“See Lokes, no one ever appreciates me.”

“How do you expect to be treated like a god if you are constantly pretending to be a mortal?” Loki asked, carefully watching the agents that were edging closer.

The two separate groups attacked at once. Stark used an open palmed technique to redirect the different attacks away, unbalancing his opponents and causing them to fall. Loki used a more direct method of just knocking out anyone who got into his range.

Stark made a tutting noise as more joined in on the fight.

“I don’t remember giving any of you permission to engage them!” Fury’s loud voice shouted over the intercom system. The agents backed off immediately, like the good little soldiers and spies they were.
The double doors at the front of the large room opened loudly.

“Agents, fall back,” a clear female voice called out. Loki glanced over Stark’s shoulder and saw Maria Hill enter the room, flanked by four agents. The throng of people parted under their advance. By the time they reached the two gods Clint intercepted them.

“Hill, you’ve read the reports. They’re on our side. And look, neither of them used lethal force to defend themselves and I know how fucking lethal he- err, she can be.”

“Regardless of their actions today we still need to question them.” She gave Stark an appraising look. “It’s not often that SHIELD gets fooled, let alone completely dooped.”

“Sorry, Hill, I already have a date for prom and he is smoking hot.” Stark gave her a charming smile that had no impact on the stoic agent.

“Mr. Stark, please just come with us.”

“Not going to happen. I’ll make you a compromise though. Lokes and I are going out to lunch with the super secret boy band. Clint and Tasha can report in full to you afterwards.” Stark held his arms wide. “That’s the best deal you’re going to get.” Maria glanced around the room, weighing her options. She motioned for Clint to come forward before whispering something in his ear. He nodded in response.

“Very well. Just don’t reveal Loki. We don’t need mass panic on our hands.”

“Spoiled sport.” Stark made a show of pouting before grinning at Loki. The prince raised his chin slightly in a very regal fashion. “Shall we?” Stark offered up his arm.

“We shall.” Loki responded, looping his arm with the other god’s. Clint snorted as he walked by them.

“You two are such nerds.”
Most of the other Avengers were already assembled at the restaurant, including Pepper by the time Stark and Loki got there with Clint.

“Eat and drink as much as you like. It’s on me,” Stark said in lieu of greeting.

“What’s the occasion?” Steve asked, his wound from yesterday completely healed.

“Bad news actually, but we’ll get to that once everyone’s here. Jarvis, ETA of the good doctor?”

“He has just arrived, Sir,” Jarvis announced, his voice muffled due to the cell phone being in Stark’s pocket. A moment later they saw Bruce enter the private room.

“Hey Brucie.” Stark waved while smiling at the serene looking doctor. “I guess you’ll be the last one to hop on the knowledge train.” Bruce sat down, giving Stark a subtle look of incredulousness. “Long and short of it: You know how Thor and Loki are from a castle in the sky? Well I am too, just a different castle and a different time.” Stark’s eyes drifted off for a brief moment before snapping back to the berserker. “During the initial attack on New York I captured Loki. He was being controlled the same way Clint was.”

“Tony is this another one of your tricks?” Bruce asked while opening up a menu.

“I assure you, Dr. Banner, that this is no trick,” Pepper said, cutting in. “Your other teammates can verify that.” Pepper took a sip of her red wine. “Just yesterday we went on a quick mission to capture the last leader of the Chitauri.”

“We?”

“How silly of me not to mention, I’m not a human either. I come from a different ‘castle in the sky’ than Tony does.” Pepper smiled at him, conveying her honesty. Bruce looked around the table, reading the expressions of his teammates.

“Not to be rude or anything, but why is your girlfriend here?” Bruce asked.

“That’s Loki,” Natasha said brazenly. The doctor froze and turned a shade green around his ears. “According to Tony he’s on our side. He didn’t betray us yesterday even though we were surrounded by his former allies.”

“They were never my allies.” Loki forced his wrath down, reminding himself that anger would only worsen the situation and possibly set off the green beast.

“You said something about bad news,” Natasha said, pulling everyone’s attention away from Loki.
“I did, but we’re going to need the good stuff to hear it.” Stark performed a displacement spell and
the same bottle of golden drink that Loki had gotten drunk on the first time he ate with all the
Avengers appeared. Stark poured himself a large glass before handing the bottle to Loki. The
younger god only poured half a glass, not wanting a repeat of last time. “Fair warning this stuff is
strong. If you’re 100% human I suggest you water it down.”

Loki passed it to Pepper who took none for herself. Of everyone there she looked the calmest. Bruce
took a swig of the alcohol and cringed. The assassin and archer both took Stark’s advice, watering
down theirs, even so Clint’s face immediately became flushed after his first taste. Loki was surprised
when the captain poured himself a hearty amount.

“Pep, this is your plan. Why don’t you play the bearer of bad news?” Stark said, leaning back in his
chair and draping an arm over Loki’s shoulders.

“You just hate being an adult.”

“That’s why I have you, so I don’t have to be an adult. We’ve discussed this literally thousands of
times.” Stark waved his hand flippantly in her direction. Pepper made a hmph noise, but put on her
business face none the less.

“There’s no easy way of putting this, but in three weeks’ time this realm will end.”

“What… you mean like the rapture?” Steve asked, his face a picture of disbelief. Stark burst out
laughing.

“Yeah, sure the rapture, except all the good little boys and girls die too.”

“Tony.” Pepper said sternly, cutting off his laughter. He just shook his head before taking a large
gulp from his drink. Loki leaned against him, seeing the very evident signs of stress on his
expression. “The rapture, Armageddon, Ragnarök, it’s all the same to us. Normally Tony and I
wouldn’t tell anyone this news, but we’re a bit strapped for time and need your help.”

“The world is about to end and you want us to waste our last three weeks helping you all?” Natasha
asked incredulously.

“No, we’re asking you to spend the last eight weeks with us, exploring worlds you’ve never seen
before.”

“Pep, don’t romanticize it. Pretty much we’ll be going to different realms, blowing stuff up and
taking back my cubes.” Stark grinned brightly before turning serious again. “You can spend three
weeks in a place you’ve been all your lives or you can go on an adventure with us.”

“What proof do you have that the world is really ending?” Natasha asked, the most cynical of the
humans.

“There’s no proof that would make sense to any of you. It took me thousands of years to be able to
interpret the signs. The margin of error is about twelve hours though, then kaboom, or kchss,
sometimes it’s a hhhh noise. Whatever, the sounds a dying realm can make are endless.”

“You’re so elegant with your words,” Loki said sarcastically, giving Stark a sidelong glance.

“Thank you, Mr. Silvertongue. That’s an honor coming from you.” Stark fell silent as the waiter
entered the room. Everyone seemed to tense up before Pepper effortlessly directed the waiter’s
attention to her. It was uncomfortably semi-silent as he took the orders. “You all don’t have to make
your decision right now. If you like you all can come with us to get the first cube. It’s not too much
of an adventure, but it may convince you to do more than just wait around to die.”

“What is the point of doing all this if we’re all just going to die anyway?” Clint asked, contemplating taking another swig from his drink. He was surprised by how strong it was.

“Well, not all of us are going to die,” Stark smiled grimly. “I have business to attend to post-apocalypse so I won’t be able to make my meeting with Death.”

“So we can survive,” Natasha said, her eyes narrowed and analytical.

“I mean you can try, if you’re fine with endless night, no food, no air, and no gravity.” Stark shrugged nonchalantly.

“I would not recommend it. It would likely shatter your mind, it nearly destroyed mine and I was only in the Void for just under a year. It’s no place for any sane person.” Loki plucked up a breadstick from the middle of the table, tearing off a small part of it to eat. Remembering the Void always made Loki appreciate food all the more.

“Are you sure this isn’t just another one of your tricks, Tony?” Bruce asked again.

“Scout’s honor.” Stark held his hand over his heart.

“You were never a boy scout,” Pepper countered.

“On my honor as a god.”

“There’s only one god,” The super soldier added in. “And he is definitely not sitting at this table.”

“Blasphemy,” Loki said dryly.

“Heresy.” Stark sounded scandalized.

“Idiocy,” Pepper said, ending the joke.

“Will Thor be coming with us?” Clint asked after a few moments of comfortable silence. Loki glanced at Stark, trying to read his expression.

“We’re not really on speaking terms with him,” Stark finally said pulling Loki closer to him.

“Wait, are you two…” Bruce pointed at each god in turn. “You two are acting all couply.”

“Indeed we are,” Loki said as the waiter came back, a large tray balanced on each hand. Each platter was passed out.

“You mentioned something about cubes,” Bruce said midway through his meal.

“Tesseracts, as you all called them. They’re mine and I plan to collect them before Ragnarök can destroy them.” Possessiveness edged into Stark’s tone. “And don’t even think about trying to use them to create weapons or portals. The only ones who are allowed to touch them are Pepper and me. It doesn’t matter how strong your mental defenses are, my cosmic cubes will break them down. They have accumulated too much power.”

“Pardon his enthusiasm,” Pepper said, pouring herself a glass of the alcohol Stark had brought. “He gets very protective of his things.”

“So when we were making the Tesseract tracking device and I was trying to figure out where it was
“You already knew?” Bruce asked, leaning forward in his seat. Stark had the decency to at least look bashful.

“Plus side: you got some gold and jewels from Asgard when we sold it to them.” Stark held up his glass as if to make a toast. Loki tried holding back a chuckle, making it come out as a snort. Anything that tricked the All-Father was a profitable venture in Loki’s mind.

“Because gold and jewels are things I care about, especially now that the world’s ending,” Bruce said, shaking his head in a scolding manner.

“Everyone wants to leave behind a pretty corpse,” Stark responded, not missing a beat.

“Can we stop talking about death?” the captain asked, letting out a long suffering sigh.

“Hmm, what else is there to talk about?” Loki asked, his eyes half lidded as he finished off his pasta.

“How about we discuss why you’re helping on this mission considering you’ve gotten your revenge,” Natasha, ever the spy, said.

“My reasons are my own. Just know I will not betray Stark on this venture.”

“But you have no problem with betraying us?” Clint asked, his earlier cheerfulness gone away.

“How quick, these agents, what is the saying? Ah, how quickly they change their tune.” Loki delicately set down his cutlery, dabbing the corners of his mouth with a napkin.

“It’s in their nature, dear. Don’t fault them for it.” Stark laced his fingers through his.

“You know, you only call me dear when I’m in this form.” Loki gestured to his female body.

“I am aware. I’m also aware of how each time I do so it slowly builds up your annoyance because I’m treating you differently because you look female and you think it’s a slight. It’s an endearment yet you think negatively of it because I associate it with your female form.” Everyone around the table was silent, watching anger slowly build up on Loki’s face.

“You manipulative bastard.” Loki tried to scowl at him, but it suddenly turned into a grin.

“I know how the Aesir regard women. I don’t want you to doubt yourself if in your next iteration in case you’re female,” Stark explained, squeezing his hand reassuringly.

“Do you ever do anything directly?”

“Not when it requires subtlety.” The two gods stared at each other a moment before simultaneously looking away, one grinning while the younger one blushed.
The knowledge that Loki had a very finite amount of time before Ragnarök did not help him concentrate on learning to keep his memories. He was nervous and annoyingly distressed by the eight week deadline.

He had moved onto the final step of the process, imbuing knowledge with his magic. Loki had been practicing since they got back from lunch. It was already nearing midnight and he felt like he hadn’t made any progress.

Conceptually, Loki understood how to do it. Stark had given him thorough directions and it wasn’t too different than imbuing vapors, except now he had to find the ‘vapors’ in the mist of his own thoughts and mind. Even if Stark had said Loki had an orderly mind wading through and isolating a few moments out of thousands of years... It wasn’t impossible. He had done it a few times, but whenever he tried to touch his magic to his memories they darted away like a mouse being snapped at by a snake.

His memories were at odds with this his magic.

There were only three things he needed to truly remember:

Avoid the fountain in Asgard.

Never go near the Void.

Remember Stark.

Just three things, three straightforward messages, yet they ran around his head like unruly children.

When light touched the horizon Loki decided to get some rest. Stark and Pepper had been vague about how they would get the cube that was on Midgard and where its specific location even was. They both sounded excited though when they talked about it.

Loki moved slowly towards Stark’s bedroom, suddenly feeling the burden of all the magic he had expended. The room was unoccupied, but Loki was too tired to care or wonder where the other god was. He stripped off what little he was wearing and slipped into the bed. The fabric of the sheets did not grate on his skin the way his own bedding did. Sleep was not hard to come by.

Loki, the Avengers, and Pepper all piled into the same ship that was used to infiltrate the Other’s ship. Stark was in the front with Pepper talking endlessly in a language Loki didn’t recognize, the same one Stark had used previously to whisper some warning to her. Bruce Banner kept switching his attention from watching Loki warily and staring at Pepper’s blue form in wonder. Loki was tempted to make a joke about hidden personas, but decided it was best not to aggravate the berserker. Natasha looked to be the calmest of the group, but was actually the most alert. Clint was breathing in and out slowly in a calming manner, but his shoulders were tense. Steve had his arms crossed over his chest.

Loki didn’t understand why they were all so tense. Midgard was the safest of the nine realms, the least likely to be troublesome. Besides that, Stark had made it clear that this wouldn’t even take them more than an hour. Loki would have just stayed at the tower practicing if not to sate his curiosity.
The back of the ship opened and hot air rushed in. Loki cringed and shifted to his Aesir form while sliding off his leather overcoat.

“Oh look, sand,” Clint said dryly while shielding his eyes from the glaring light.

“And sun, don’t forget about the sun,” Stark said in response, putting on a pair of overpriced sunglasses.

“How could I forget?” Clint glanced over the barren land, sand dunes and sun. “So where is this mystic cube of wonder?”

“ Practically underfoot. Pep, would you like to do the honors?” The giantess stepped forward, unperturbed by the heat. She said a few choice words of power and pink magic oozed from her fingers. The sand began swirling unnaturally. “Welcome to the White City, made by yours truly.” The glinting of the sandstorm was blinding.

“Why is it called the White City if it’s black?” Clint asked over the hissing noise of the sandstorm.

“Because it’s not.”

“But you just said it was called-”

“No, I mean it’s not black.” The sand settled back down and Loki saw what Hawkeye was already privy to. Loki took a step backwards, balking at what was in front of him. The Void- ink blackness that no light could ever escape. It seemed to move. To reach out for him. “Easy Lokes.” A familiar voice- Stark’s, but Loki couldn’t look away from the very thing that would take him every time- No escape!

Red and gold danced in front of him, weaving together easily. Loki blinked twice in quick succession before he realized it was Stark’s magic. When the magic dissipated the darkness was also gone, or more accurately it was high above them, encapsulated in a sphere of gold magic.

“Our defense system.” Pepper explained as the sphere grew smaller. “Billions of ants that attack intruders and disrupts surveying equipment.”

“Oh yeah. I only left a handful when I was last here. They live off the walls of the city. Can’t live anywhere else.” Stark said as the sphere split into two, one just a speck. It floated into Stark’s waiting hands before he displaced it. “I use them every iteration. Very effective.” The other orb caught on fire, a million little popping noises coming together to create a white noise. The captain cringed at the unnatural sound.

With the ants now gone Loki could see the nearly blinding white.

“Really Tony, a pyramid? Are we in Egypt? Please don’t tell me you had something to do with the Pyramids of Giza,” Bruce said, looking at the god.

“First off it’s an inverted pyramid. Totally different than the ones in Egypt, which we’re not in by the way. Also, I may or may not have had anywhere to take a lusty lady I met on the Nile for some afternoon delight so I took her here. If that led to pyramids being built I don’t see how that’s a problem,” Stark said flippantly while walking onto the white steps that led down to the tip of the pyramid. The others followed him.

“Something’s wrong,” Natasha observed, glancing around warily.

“It feels spooky, doesn’t it?” Stark asked, grinning mischievously. Loki gave him a questioning look.
Something did feel off and it took Loki a moment to realize what it was.

“Our footsteps aren’t making any noise,” Loki said and Stark nodded.

“The stone this place is built from absorbs vibrations and—Ah, mushrooms.” Stark plucked a handful of the bleach white fungi from the stone wall. “These are delicious. You have to try them.” Stark bit into one and moaned, holding his hand out in offering. Pepper took one and Loki did with only half a second’s hesitation. The others in the group gave more of a pause.

“When in Rome…” Bruce finally said, taking one from Stark.

Loki bit into the mushroom and was surprised by how sweet it was. The flavor spread over his tongue and there was almost an effervescent sensation as he swallowed it.

“Popping shrooms with Tony Stark. Why am I not surprised?” Clint mumbled before taking a bite.

“The stone is made of something similar to sugar, but it’s much more resilient and resistant. The ants feed off of it and the mushrooms absorb some of the flavor,” Stark explained, ignoring Clint’s comment. He performed a quick spell and most of the mushrooms disappeared. “It’s always good to have a little snack for later, especially if you all decide to join Pepper, Loki, and me on hopping around the nine realms.”

As they got closer to the bottom the last five steps rose up creating a flat surface just large enough for them all to stand on. As Stark’s foot made contact the platform lit up with gold magic.

“Is this going to be like the Cave of Wonder in Aladdin?” Steve asked as the platform started lowering. Clint pulled out a small flashlight trying to illuminate the darkness they were lowered into.

“Who have you been watching Disney movies with?” Stark asked while elbowing the super soldier.

“It was on the recommended movies list SHIELD gave me,” Steve admitted and Stark snorted.

“So, should we expect to see a genie?” Clint asked.

“Only if you’re willing to rub a few things.” Stark gave him a look and the archer looked away awkwardly causing the god to laugh loudly.

“Tony, stop teasing the humans,” Pepper scolded, taking a step closer to him on the descending platform.

“Fine.” Stark waved dismissively at her before taking a step backwards and off the platform. Loki jerked forward to try and catch him, but the darkness engulfed the older god instantly.

“Stark!” Before Loki could start properly panicking light flooded his surroundings and the platform came to a halt.

“Yup?” Stark asked, tilting his head to the side. He was standing directly in front of Loki, just outside of the platform’s range. Loki clenched his fists at his side.

“You idiot!” Loki shouted while tossing a bolt at green energy at Stark. The God of Fortification caught the blast in his palm before letting it fade. The younger god blinked in confusion. “How did you do that?” He grabbed Stark’s hand, looking for any damage, but finding none.

“Lokes, I’ve been studying magic for ages. Any magic can be manipulated. It’s just difficult because the tenors are different for each individual. I know your tenor though.” Stark shrugged while Loki
gaped at him. “How else do you think I use this?” Stark tapped his chest, the ball of magic entombed there.

“The question never arose in my mind,” Loki admitted.

“Oh well.” Stark looped his arm around Loki’s waist. “Sorry for startling you and welcome to the White City.” He gestured around him.

Now the reason for the city’s name became evident. The four walls were slopped towards the entrance, creating a pyramid. Images were engraved in the wall, depicting battles, forests, and so much more. The buildings were more works of art than functional. Each was carved directly out of the same stone that made the two pyramids. The windows were a thin web of spiraling designs and etchings. Crystals in the walkways seemed to emit light.

“Not much of a city,” Clint commented, only counting twenty buildings.

“And New York City isn’t much of a city compared to some of the places the dwarves made in Svartalfheim,” Stark said, his posture becoming defensive. “Besides, when I built this humans were still nomads.”

“Sounds like an excuse to me,” Clint mumbled. “Where’s the Tesseract?”

“You all have no appreciation for the finer things. And stop calling them Tesseracts. They’re my cosmic cubes. Just call them cubes.” Stark sighed, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a handful of black dice. “There’s only two devices I need to get here.” Stark started walking forward, tossing a die into each house he passed.

“What are you throwing?” Steve asked while following behind him.

“Bombs.” The super soldier took a big step backwards, almost running into Clint.

“And you’re just tossing them about all willy-nilly?” Steve asked as the other mortals came to a stop beside him. Pepper and Loki kept pace with Stark.

“There is nothing willy nor nilly about where I’m placing these.” Stark snorted obnoxiously and Loki gave him a look. “I’ve done this countless times. Have a little faith.”

“Next you’ll be telling us to pray to you too,” Bruce joked, moving to catch up with the other three in the group.

“Hey, you wouldn’t be the first or the last.” Stark shrugged. “You humans worshipped Lokes for a while if I remember correctly.”

“You make the word human sound derogatory, and it wasn’t us humans, it was some of our ancestors,” Natasha said while continuously surveying her surroundings.

“Our stupid ancestors,” Clint added on. “Weren’t they still sacrificing cows back then?”

“Those were the days.” Stark sighed dramatically before glancing at the taller of the two Jotuns. “Remember Pep, I used to be a shipbuilder?”

“Of course I remember! You were terrible at making deals so I had to be a fishmonger so that the other villagers wouldn’t be suspicious on how you could use so much time making ships.” Pepper scowled at him. He tossed one of the bombs at her and she swatted it aside like a pesky fly.
“In my defense, they never had anything I wanted to trade for.” Stark shrugged and Pepper sent a bolt of pink magic at him, hitting him square on his arse. “Hey! Watch it! I’m carrying volatile bombs.”

“Oh hush. You just tossed one at me so you can’t complain.” They exchanged a look.

Stark threw the rest of the dice into the air and they flew off in all different directions.

“Anywho, things to destroy, cool stuff to collect,” Stark mumbled while ducking into one of the white buildings.

Loki hummed in approval when he saw the interior. It was a sea of pillows, with random books scattered throughout. The older god started digging through a pile of pillows.

“What did you have orgies with your book club in here?” Clint asked while kicking an overstuffed pillow. Stark’s head popped up for a brief moment.

“How do you know about my book club?” The archer tossed one of the pillows at Stark, who just barely dodged it. The god continued searching through the pillows.

“Honestly, Tony, this isn’t all that interesting,” Bruce said as he took a seat on the ground. Stark paused, glancing at him. The god raised his hand towards one of the books. It flew into his palm before glowing red. He tossed it at the berserker.

“Here, read a book.” The doctor glanced at the cover, an incredulous look on his face.

“I don’t think I’d find candlestick making any more interesting than this.”

“Actually you might find that one of interest.” Pepper walked over to him, ducking as to not hit her head. “Many candles have medicinal uses. Both their smoke and light can have an effect on someone if made correctly.”

“Pep was a medicine woman back in…” Stark paused in thought.

“South America, right before the Spaniards came,” Pepper filled in. “You were at Drivvedheim.”

“Drivvedheim?” Loki asked, his interest piqued.

“A story for another time- Ha! Found what I was looking for!” Stark held up a bright red pillow before tearing it apart.

“Tony, what the hell?” Clint ran his hand down his face in exasperation while pillow fluff went everywhere. “Seriously, if you’re just fucking with us then let us know so we’re in on the joke.”

“No jokes- well, there will be jokes, but this isn’t a joke.” Stark tore at the lining of the pillow before pulling out a thin cord. “This, my bird-brained friend, is the rarest of rarest bowstrings. It will never break or weaken. And once we get back to New York I have the perfect bow that will imbue elemental aspects to your arrows. If you thought I could make great weapons when you thought I was mortal then you haven’t seen real weaponry yet.” Stark straightened up, displacing the bowstring. “Seriously you all have no faith in me.” Stark pouted while looping his arm around Loki’s waist.

“You can’t blame them,” Pepper said while walking out of the house. “They only know you as Tony Stark, playboy billionaire and as Iron Man, the reckless super hero.” Pepper looked at the group. “They’ve never really met Ásviðr The Builder and the God of Fortification.”
“Ásviðr?” Bruce asked while walking behind the group, his eyes firmly trained on the pages of the book.

“In the last iteration I was born into that was the name I was given.” Stark waved dismissively. “Names are meaningless though.”

“Ásviðr means god of the forest or god of the tree.” Loki realized, not having put any thought into it before.

“My last mother belonged to a sect that worshiped Yggdrasil. She had high hopes for me.” Stark smiled sadly and Loki leaned into his touch.

“I’m sure she was very proud of you.” Loki commented under his breath for only the older god to hear. Stark nodded silently.

“Well, I think I’m going to continue calling you Tony, or dumb ass. Whichever one fits the situation,” Clint said loudly and Stark flipped him off.

The God of Fortification led them to a beautiful white fountain. The water was flowing smoothly and in the largest basin was fish of all colors, but none of them had eyes. At the very top of the fountain was a light blue orb. Stark held out his hand and the orb floated down to him.

“I like how round your cube is,” Clint said sarcastically.

“Hey! Keep acting like that and I’ll leave you on earth as it goes boom,” Stark joked while wagging his finger at the archer. The god handed off the magical item to Pepper. “The cube is inside the Cradle,” Stark explained. “Now let’s get out of here.” More black dice appeared in Stark’s hand and he threw them out as they headed back to the platform.

Their trip back up was much quicker than their trip down. They boarded the ship and Stark took it high up, leaving the back hatch open.

“What’s the point of destroying this place if the world is just going to end?” Natasha asked, shielding her eyes from the intense rays of the sun.

“Because there’s someone out there who could use some of my toys to raise havoc before everything ends,” Stark answered, his voice grave. Loki glanced at the older god, knowing he was referring to his daughter. “Bombs away,” Stark said, sending out a wave of gold magic.

Nothing happened at first, but then a rumbling started building up. The whole structure shuddered before there was a loud explosion and blinding light.

When Loki could see again there was a large crater and all the sand around it was turned into perfectly clear glass.

“Woah,” Steve commented, leaning slightly out of the ship.

“Alright ladies and gents, let’s get out of here.” Stark flipped a switch and the hatch began closing up. “Were would you kids like to be dropped off?”

“In front of SHIELD headquarters for us,” Natasha said while standing next to Clint.

“Brooklyn please.”

“Is it alright if I stay at the tower? I want to try out some of these candles.” Bruce held up the candle
“HQ, Brooklyn, and then the tower it is then.” Stark typed in a few things before the hatch opened, revealing the nondescript building that housed SHIELD agents. “Pepper, Loki, and I are leaving for another realm in three days. Come to the tower if you’re interesting in joining us. If not, well it was interesting knowing you.” Stark waved at the two agents and they nodded in return before glancing at each other and leaving. The process was repeated when they reached Brooklyn.

Inside the tower Bruce automatically headed to the lab and Pepper walked off to put the cube in a safe place. Loki made to head upstairs in order to continue trying to master saving his memories, but a calloused hand brushed over his shoulders, giving him pause. He looked at the other god, raising an eyebrow in question.

Stark was smiling charmingly as his hand gliding down Loki’s arm, making the younger god shiver.

“Bedroom?” Stark asked, his smile growing larger.

“Bedroom,” Loki agreed before they both disappeared into the elevator.
Regeneration

Chapter Notes

Let me know if you see any errors. I'm a bit on the tired side.

Loki felt all sorts of wonderful as he laid curled up in Stark’s arms.

The older god performed a displacement spell and a thick blue blanket riddled with red runes appeared in his hands.

“Lokes, you know how Odin sometimes falls into a healing sleep?” Stark asked and Loki tilted his head up so he could see the other god.

“Of course,” Loki agreed, trying not to think about the last time the Not-Father fell into Odinsleep.

“I have to go into my own healing rest in order to build up my strength. Normally I wouldn’t have to do so more than twice a century, but since Ragnarök is in a few weeks I have to fall into a deep sleep.” Stark pulled the blue blanket around them and Loki felt a strange magic wash over him. It was like every pore of his body was suddenly open and sucking in the subtle magic that existed everywhere. “This blanket facilitated that healing sleep. Pepper will wake me up in three days before we leave, but you’ll only need to sleep for a few more hours since you’re so young.” Loki held back a snort at being called young, but he could already feel himself healing, old aches and pains he didn’t know he had easing. Stark pulled him closer and Loki sighed contentedly. “When you wake practice saving your memories.”

“Why don’t you just always sleep with this blanket?” Loki asked, his eyelids and limbs feeling heavy.

“Because-” a yawn broke through his sentence, “I’ll become too dependent on it. If I ever rely on something too much and my daughter finds out-” Stark cut himself off, letting out a pained breath. “She’s killed Pepper in three different iterations. I can’t be depended on anyone or anything. My daughter will try to take it away.” Loki held on tighter to Stark, trying to comfort him.

“What is her name?” Loki asked, suddenly feeling more awake, despite the cloying energy that soothed his whole body. Stark chuckled.

“She hates her name since I’m the one who gave it to her.” Stark turned onto his side, facing Loki. “I can’t say it out loud. Every iteration she casts a spell that alerts her when it’s said. She’s the Goddess of Unravling.” Stark chuckled again, but this time it had a sharp edge to it. “I suppose that should have been a clue.” Stark pulled the blanket over their heads. “Let’s go to sleep and hope for pleasant dreams.” Stark kissed Loki on the forehead softly.

Loki pushed aside his unpleasant thought about family and betrayal, instead focusing on their blue cocoon, the way Stark’s chest rose and fell almost imperceptibly, how the golden orb of magic in Stark’s chest thudded with life, the light slowly growing brighter…

Loki woke up gasping for breath. His whole body was buzzing with energy. He couldn’t stay still.
Green magic crackled at his fingertips and on the tip of his tongue.

The only thing that was keeping him from casting a cacophony of spells was the sleeping god beside him. Waves of gold magic pulsed over Stark, gliding over his skin. Loki did his best to stay silent as he got out of bed.

He pulled on his trousers before performing a quick spell to gather all his clothing and placing it in his room. Ms. Cook set out a rice dish and a glass of apple juice. He didn’t feel hungry, but after the first bite he was ravenous. As he ate he started concentrating on finding the exact thought he wanted to engrave into his magic. He’d start with the most important one first, the whole reason Stark had decided on teaching Loki how to keep his memories.

Never go near the Void.

Such a simple idea, yet his whole future rested on it. Countless iterations of falling.

He set aside his empty plate and glass, trying to sink into a meditative state. He had control of his active magic. Now all he had to do was combine his thoughts with his magic.

“Never go near the Void,” Loki whispered, enunciating the words with the carefulness one might use while saying a prayer.

It slowly became a mantra. Each time he chanted it, the words became more powerful, more real.

He lost track of time.

He was vaguely aware of Pepper coming in and out of the room, the sound of her heels barely scratching at his concentration.

“Uhm, excuse me, Loki?” A soft voice pulled the god out of his practice. His red eyes flashed open, anger poorly hidden. “Oh- uhh, sorry. I’m looking for Tony.” Loki’s sight came back into focus to reveal Bruce Banner standing in front of him.

“He is resting.”

“Well, do you know when he’ll be awake?” Bruce frowned. Loki glanced outside, noticing that it was night again.

“He’ll be awake tomorrow, at the time we are to leave.” Loki kept his tone civil despite being annoyed. He could have sworn that he was on the verge of capture his thought with his magic. The berserker sat down across from him. “Do you plan on waiting here the whole time?”

“No, I just… I don’t know if I want to go on this ‘adventure’ as Tony put it. If this Ragnarök is as bad as you all described it I’ll be needed here to help those that are injured. I may be an Avenger, but above that I’m a doctor. I live to help. I can’t just abandon earth.” Bruce sighed and looked down at his clasped hands.

“I assure you that your medical expertise will be useless when Ragnarök comes. All those on this rock shall parish. To stay would just be a waste of your life.” Loki waved dismissively, leaning back in his seat and feeling the fatigue from his constant use of magic. Perhaps another nap under that blanket would help. A wave of familiar magic caught his attention. “I’m sure Pepper knows more about it than I.”

“Know more about what?” Pepper asked, walking out of the kitchen in her human form and looking at her cell phone. She pressed a button and slid it into her purse.
“Ragnarök. I’m considering staying behind on earth,” Bruce said while smiling shyly.

“I wouldn’t recommend that. Tony says Midgard is probably going to bite the big one via volcano explosions, tsunamis, and tectonic upheaval before it finally falls off the world tree and implodes,” Pepper said nonchalantly while sitting beside Loki. “All of which will take about an hour and a half. There’s not going to be a lot of time to help anyone.”

“So there really is no hope for humanity…”

“Humanity had a good run and I’m sure it will have an ever better run next iteration.” Pepper waved kindly as if she wasn’t talking about the end of his whole species. “How do you want to spend the little time you have left, Bruce? You can either wait for the end with arms wide open or you can see new worlds and things that you never thought possible. I don’t think there is even much of a discussion to be had.”

“Aren’t… aren’t you afraid of dying?” Bruce asked after a long pause. Pepper leaned forward and patted Bruce on the knee.

“You lived in India for a while, right?” Bruce nodded. “Then you know all about reincarnation. You may die, but you’ll come back. Last iteration I was an elf, the time before that a dwarf, etc. This isn’t the end.” Pepper stood up, running a hand down her side to straighten out her skirt. “In the end it’s your decision how you want to die. Tony and I won’t intervene if you want to stay here.” Pepper pulled out her phone again. “If you decide to stay on Midgard feel free to enjoy Stark Industries doomsday protocol. We’ll be giving out all sorts of fun stuff all over the realm. It should be a good time, although the shareholders aren’t going to like it.” Pepper gave them a small wave before disappearing with a flash of pink magic.

“Do all you aliens have magic?”

“No, only the smart ones.” Loki gave Bruce a hard look. “Now if you wouldn’t mind… I do have things I need to do.”

“You’re not too friendly are you?” Bruce said with a small smile.

“And you’re not too smart. I have things I need to do before I die to ensure my next iteration will be better than this one. Now will you leave me be?”

“Yeah, sorry.” Loki watched as the Bruce left before he resumed his studies.

By the time the three days were up Loki was still not sure if he had a solid hold on the idea that he needed to never go near the Void in his next iteration. Pepper woke up Stark, just like he said she would. The older god was wandering around the penthouse.

“Goodbye awesome bar.”

“Goodbye couch where I had a threesome.”

“Goodbye breakfast bar.”

Stark headed to the elevator and Loki followed him out of curiosity.

“Goodbye Iron Man suits.”

“Goodbye Dum-E, U, Butterfinger.” He patted each robot in turn.
“Goodbye kick ass tower.”

“Are you usually this sentimental towards inanimate objects?” Loki asked in a bemused fascination.

“It’s a bit of a tradition.” Stark shrugged before turning to go into the hidden lab. Most of the items were missing. “Goodbye oscillating instrument.”

“Goodbye bonsai plant.”

“Goodbye chair I stole from Caesar.” The God of Fortification smiled sadly as he walked over to the younger god. “Hello Loki.” He kissed Loki and the Jotun sunk into his embrace.

“Hello Stark,” he said after the kiss ended, still holding the older god.

“Do you have everything you want to bring?” Stark asked.

“Yes.” Loki had already displaced all his armor, Frelser, and the tapestry Frigga had made him.

“Sir, Ms. Potts and your guests have arrived in the penthouse,” Jarvis announced in his dulcet voice.

“Thanks, J. Let’s go see who is joining us on this adventure.” Stark looped his arm around Loki’s waist, guiding him back to the elevator.

“Dr. Banner was undecided, last I spoke to him,” Loki said conversationally.

“Good, I want everyone to think this through thoroughly. It’s not often that people have to make life or death decisions.” Loki stole a kiss. “What was that for?”

“I assume things are going to get fast from here on out. I’m going to die soon and then I’ll have to wait thousands and thousands of years until I see you again. I’d be foolish not to properly use what little time we have left.” He kissed the older god again pushing him back against the wall. Before things could get heated the elevator door opened.

“Foolish indeed.” Stark hummed happily as they walked to the living room. Loki would never admit it, but when Stark laced his fingers through his own a strange thrill shot through him, different than all the other emotions he’d felt before.

“Nice of you to join us,” Pepper said while standing at her full Jotun height.

Loki looked around the room and was surprised to see all the Avengers were there. Black Widow and Hawkeye were both in SHIELD issued black jumpsuits. They each had a duffle bag. Captain America was sitting ramrod straight and was smiling sadly. Bruce was brushing his hair back from his eyes, pulling a knapsack into his lap.

“Hey old man, you promised me a new bow,” Clint mumbled, sinking in his seat. Stark raised his glass, his other hand lingering on Loki’s hip.

“Grow up Legolas.”
“Sorry, not all of us are a bajillion years old,” Clint retorted.

“You’re probably old enough to know that bajillion isn’t a real number or word,” Stark said and Loki swiped Stark’s drink. The God of Fortification twisted his wrist and another glass appeared in his hand.

“So talented,” Loki commented and the two gods clinked their glasses together.

“Thank you, Lokes.” Stark cleared his throat. “Game plan time: We’re going to split into two teams. Team A for awesome includes me, Lokes, Hawkeye, and Black Widow. Team B for badass is obvious Pepper, Bruce, and Captain America.” Stark stretched, in his seat, the bones in his back cracking. “Pep will be the leader for team B. You three will be traveling to the safer realms: Alfheim, Niflheim, and then Vanaheim.”

“You know, none of those names mean anything to us, right?” Clint said while rolling his eyes.

“Pepper will explain each realm to you as you head to them.” Stark waved dismissively. “Now stop interrupting. You’re such a pest.” He turned his attention to the taller Jotun. “Pep, can we trade? A Hawk for a Hulk. How’s that for a fair trade?”

“No deal. Team B is already perfect. Don’t be jealous.” Pink magic sparked from Pepper’s hands as if they were about to fight. Stark cocked an eyebrow then shrugged.

“Anywho, team A will tackle: Svartalfheim, Jotunheim, and Muspelheim. We’ll all go to Asgard and then Helheim. It should be a hell of a good time, so long as you don’t die along the way.” Stark chuckled. “Team B is getting all the easy realms so you all should be pretty safe.”

“When do we start?” Steve asked while leaning forward.

“In just a moment.” The glass in his hand changed into a golden ball. Runes lit up brightly. “Hold on to your underwear because first we’re heading to Drivvedheim.” The ball fell from his hand and they were all transported to another realm.
Drivvedheim

The sense of being part of everything was just as intense as Loki remembered it being as the lot of them traveled through the realms.

Loki’s feet met solid ground and the only thing that kept him from falling backwards was Stark hoisting him up. All the other Avengers landed on their rears since they were all still in the seated position. Pepper found her footing easily.

“Welcome to Drivvedheim,” Stark said while letting Loki go. “My little realm away from all the other realms.” With a wide sweeping motion the blackness around them receded, revealing green grass and silver skies. The horizon was rounded and dotted with trees of all different types. In the distance Loki could hear animals. He turned around and spotted a large house that was made of a stone.

“A little warning next time would be helpful,” Natasha said in a flat voice while standing up. She grabbed her duffle bag and gave the area an appraising look.

“What is this place?” Bruce asked.

“This is a realm of my own creation. It only takes fifty minutes at a slow pace to circle the whole globe. I create one each iteration so it’s pretty much perfect at this point.” Stark looked very proud of himself.

Loki wanted to contradict him, to say it’s impossible to do that. No one could create a realm, but he had seen the older god do amazing things. Why not have a tenth realm? Or was this considered the first?

Loki let go of those thoughts and followed the group to the house.

“Well, it’s perfect for me. I don’t usually have guests.” Stark hummed to himself. “We’ll be bunking here between our realm hopping.” The door opened of its own accord and the scent of freshly baked bread wafted out. “Ms. Cook takes care of this place, cooking, cleaning, and tending to the animal and crops.”

“Is she making apple pie too?” Pepper asked while entering the house. The doorway was tall enough to fit her ten foot frame.

“Ah, I forgot about that.” Stark ran a hand over his goatee. “That would probably be a good idea, although that alcohol I gave them was made from golden apples.” Stark turned slightly towards Loki. “You have no idea how difficult it is to get those apples to ferment.”

“I’m sure,” Loki said, holding back a smirk. Stark performed a spell Loki didn’t recognize.

“She’ll start cooking them now. The pies should be done by the time I finish giving these crazy kids the All-Speak and showing them where they’ll be sleeping.” Stark grinned to himself as Pepper left to go to her room by the kitchen. “There’s three places you can bunk down at. Except for you, Lokes. You can sleep in my room.”

“Thank you.” Loki nodded, pretending to be humble. The older god easily saw straight through him and chuckled.

“There’s the library, the wine cellar, and a couple hammocks outback. Don’t worry about the
weather. It’s always a perfect 23 degrees Celsius here.”

“I’ll take the hammock,” Clint announced.

“Where’s the wine cellar?” Natasha asked while glancing around. Stark pointed to the right with his thumb and she disappeared around the corner.

“Just meet back here when you’ve dropped off your stuff.”

“I guess I’ll sleep in the library,” Bruce said softly.

“Me too.” With that, the two gods were left alone.

“Bambi, my room is just up ahead if you want to keep practicing.”

“I’ve always wanted to see how the All-Speak was given. I think I can spend a few minutes on watching you perform.”

“You like watching me perform?” Stark grinned mischievously.

“Oh definitely. I look forward to seeing you perform in the bedroom, repeatedly,” Loki said, flicking out his tongue to moisten his lips. Stark pulled Loki flush against him.

“Hmm, I wish I could give you my undivided attention right now,” Stark whispered, his warm breath fanning against Loki’s cheek. The younger god’s skin was starting to tighten. “Unfortunately, the others are about to return.”

“How frustrating.” Loki did his best not to pout, yet he was sure the other god saw through him. Stark turned around in Loki’s arms until his back was pressed against Loki’s chest. Loki leaned his chin on Stark’s shoulder.

“Better?” Stark asked as Loki nuzzled against his neck.

“Much better.”

Natasha was the first one to come back.

“What’s this All-Speak you mentioned?”

“It’s pretty self-explanatory,” Stark said while grinning. “It’s just a spell that allows you to speak, understand, and read any language.”

“That would have come in handy a few times when I was undercover. So what do I have to do?” Natasha’s expression was as unreadable as usual, a quality Loki admired.

“Just relax. I’m the one who has to do all the hard work.” Stark gently placed his hand on the assassin’s forehead and Loki was surprised by her flinch. She quickly eased herself.

Loki could feel the buildup of energy in Stark. It was intoxicating and made Loki’s skin grow taut. The buzzing of magic made Loki want to hide his face against Stark’s neck, feeling light headed.

The magic concentrated in Stark’s hand, becoming finer and articulated. Loki could feel the invisible runes that were being imprinted on Natasha. He could hear the soft spoken words of power that gave the runes extra strength. There were runes from different iterations, but he was starting to grasp their meanings.
Stark pulled back his hand and Natasha blinked a few times.

“Feels like a hangover. How do I know it worked?” She brushed back her red hair, standing a bit straighter.

“Do you understand me?” Stark asked in an odd language. Natasha recoiled slightly, but nodded. “Good. Feel free to head to the kitchen. I’m sure the sweet rolls are ready and the apple pie will be done soon enough.”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll wait and make sure nothing funny happens with Clint. His head’s been fucked with enough as is.” She leaned against the wall, crossing her arm over her chest. Her eyes were keen, taking in every detail.

“What’s the point? It’s not like you’ll be able to tell what he’s doing,” Loki said, glancing up from Stark’s shoulder.

“Lokes, be nice. They’re our teammates.” Stark reached back, brushing his hand through Loki’s hair. “I’d think you were shy if not for your sharp tongue.” Loki licked the shell of Stark’s ear in retaliation, causing the other god to flinch in surprise. “You dirty bird.”

“Do you two always have to act so—” Clint waved in a ridiculous fashion.

“You have a problem with two men being together?” Loki asked, grinning maliciously.

“No, I just have a problem with you. Even if you were being controlled too I can’t just forgive you for messing with my head,” Clint snarled.

“Perhaps he shouldn’t be on our team,” Loki whispered to Stark.

“No, I’ve already balanced it out in my head. The places we’re going need people who are nimble and fast. A Hulk and a super soldier aren’t going to be very helpful when we’re sneaking around.”

“Hey, I’ve snuck across enemy lines hundreds of times,” Steve said in his own defense. “I understand why you’d want spies on your side though.”

“Me too,” Bruce added in.

“Are the realms team A and B going to really that different?” Steve asked.

“Yeah, but we can discuss that over pie. All-Speak first.” Stark gestured for Clint to step closer. The archer eyed Stark before sighing and moving forward. He made a face when Stark touched his forehead.

Loki felt the same buzzing of energy and reveled in it. The process was repeated with Captain America, but when they came to the good doctor Stark paused.

“What’s wrong?” Bruce asked, pushing the bridge of his glasses up.

“I can give the All-Speak to you, but I won’t be able to give it to your other half until he’s out.” Bruce looked extremely uncomfortable and took a step back. “Don’t worry. Pep knows how to perform the spell too. It will just take longer,” Stark said in the calm voice he had used when Loki was feeling anxious. After a moment of hesitation Bruce stepped back towards Stark.

The god imparted the spell and they all headed to the kitchen, following the scent of fresh apple pie. Pepper was already in the kitchen eating a slice when they all got there.
“That was quick,” Natasha commented, gesturing towards the two pies.

“Ms. Cook knows a lot of tricks to speed things along,” Pepper said, glancing at the six untouched plates with slices of pie. The group sat around the table.

“So what’s so special about these golden apples?” Steve asked, unfolding a napkin and placing it on his lap.

“It slows the aging process, not that, that really matters considering the circumstances. It also increases strength, resistance to harsh temperatures, and your healing rate quickens.” Stark took a bite and let out a pleased noise. “It also makes for a great pie so dig in.”

Loki carefully balancing a piece of the pie on his fork before tasting it. It was more savory than the apples he was used to. The pie was perfectly seasoned, the crust golden brown and buttery. He could feel the familiar rejuvenating power of the golden apples, yet it was stronger now, spreading from his stomach outwards.

“Wow,” Bruce whispered, his eyes wide.

“Yup,” Stark agreed, leaning back in his seat.

They ate in silence, all enjoying the delicious dessert. All the mortals had seconds, but one slice was more than enough for Loki considering he had taken a nap under Stark’s healing blanket.

Stark had pulled out the bow frame and the bowstring from the White City. Loki and Clint watched carefully as Stark enchanted the bow.

The God of Fortification used a dark ink that faded as he wrote runes on the bow.

“What exactly are you doing to it?” Clint asked while leaning forward slightly.

“Making it better,” Stark said simply before stringing the bow. “I’ll set up a target outside for you and I’ll let you figure it out as you go.”

After giving Stark’s shoulder a squeeze Loki went off to practice.

Stark’s room was not what Loki expected. There wasn’t a mattress, more of a litter of animal furs, blankets, and pillows. The windows were glazed over, filtering the light. Candles illuminated the corners. The walls were covered with etched runes, so small an ant could cover a single rune. Loki wouldn’t have even realized they were there if not for the power that pulsed from the walls.

Loki toed off his boots and slipped into the faux-bed. It was… astoundingly comfortable. Loki almost purred in satisfaction as he settled in. It was almost too relaxing for the type of magical exercise he was about to do. Regardless, he would master saving his memories.

A high creaking noise woke Loki from his nap. He sat up quickly, a tendril of fear shooting through him. He’d summoned a dagger before he’d even realized it.

“Relax Lokes. It’s just me,” Stark said, a lantern of fireflies in his hand. “Would you like to go for a late night stroll?”

“That sounds wonderful.” Loki felt himself beaming. Such a simple offer and it filled him with all sorts of joy.

“Don’t bother with putting on your boots. The grass feels good under bare feet.” Stark walked over
and helped Loki stand up from the litter of blankets and pillows. Now that he was closer he could see that Stark had changed into his Aesir form and was wearing clothing different than his usual. It was a simple tunic that was not quite in style with the current Asgard trends. Loki couldn’t identify the type of fabric Stark’s pants were made of, but they were also not quite right. He wasn’t wearing shoes and the glowing in his chest was golden instead of its false blue.

The firefly lantern cast strange shadows as they walked through the halls. All the candles were snuffed out, but Loki could still faintly smell their smoke.

“Are you hungry? We can grab something to eat if you are.” Stark offered as he paused by the kitchen.

“I’m fine.” Loki looped his arm through Stark’s, pulling him close. His Aesir form was slightly warmer than when he shape shifted as a human. Loki didn’t find it to be an unpleasant change. He liked the contrast.

Outside the air was crisp, but at a pleasant temperature. The sky was starless and had no moons, but fireflies flew in strange patterns, creating a dim glow. The sweet scent of flowers was faint.

They quickly reached the horizon and the house disappearing behind them.

The world was so small, yet had the same gravity as Midgard.

Not long after they left the house they were in front of a small pond. Fireflies danced over the water. Stark tugged lightly on Loki’s arm, drawing his attention to a stone bench.

“It rains every ten days here,” Stark said while sitting down.

“Why ten?” Loki was leaning lightly against the other god and he could feel him shrug slightly.

“Ten realms, ten days. I don’t know. I might have just done it because I have ten fingers. Not everything I do has exact logic behind it. The trees and crops get enough water, but that’s only because I did equations on how much rain should come down on the tenth day years ago. Ms. Cook can adjust the rainfall if she thinks it’s necessary,” Stark raised his hand up as if a raindrop was about to land on his palm, “but she hasn’t reported to me any change in the weather.”

“A realm of your own creation,” Loki said under his breath. “Where exactly is it on Yggdrasil?”

“South east of Helheim. Actually you can see Jotunheim from here.” Stark performed a displacement spell, a telescope appearing in his hand. He handed it to Loki before pointing to a spec in the sky. It took a bit of searching by the younger god, but he eventually found Jotunheim.

“It’s green.” He commented while adding another lens to the telescope in order to get a better view. “I expected it to be blue or white.”

“Jotunheim has a thick atmosphere that keeps out a good amount of light, but it’s been thinning since the Casket of Ancient Winters went missing.”

“Odin took it after the war and I had it for a while.” He’d almost forgotten… It was another failed suicide attempt. As he was falling through the Void he’d used the little magic he had left to summon the casket to him. He’d tried to freeze himself to death, but his Jotun form prevented any harm from befalling him. At some point he must have let it go. “It’s lost in the Void. Was it one of your creations?”

“No, the casket was too violent for my taste. I only really built weapons for Midgard.”
“I thought it was Jotunheim’s power source.” Loki collapsed the telescope and handed it to the other god.

“No, it was made in Niflheim by the Stillhet sect.” The Stillhet sect, Loki remembered them from his lessons, but the Aesir were never welcomed in their city. It was never a problem for Asgard since the rest of Niflheim was fine with partnering with Asgard. The books he read stated that it was the oldest religion, but that was all the information it gave.

“If they were capable of creating such a weapon why did they not conquer the realm?” Loki knew full well the kind of destruction the casket could create.

“They’re a peaceful people and very conservative.” Loki glanced at Stark. The older god’s eyes seemed to be distant, unfocused. “They broke apart and about a third of the members of the religion went to Jotunheim, according to Pepper. They took the casket with them and split apart again. There were those who stuck with the religion with a few changes and the other group used the casket to conquer all of Jotunheim. That realm was not always that cold.”

So he wasn’t the first to use the casket against Jotunheim. That knowledge didn’t offer him any comfort though.

“What was it like before that?” Loki asked after a few minutes. The history book of Jotunheim that Pepper had given him didn’t reach this far back.

“Rocky. A good portion of it was already frozen though. Jotuns weren’t all frost giants. Back then Jotuns were just Jotuns, but you’d call the other kinds rock giants and sand giants.”

“They all died though, didn’t they?”

“Of course. They weren’t meant for the cold and most of the food they ate couldn’t survive such harsh temperatures.” Stark’s voice was devoid of emotions. Loki wasn’t really surprised by that. It was all just history to him, even the future was history to him. “It sort of backfired on the group that split away from the Stillhet sect since only a portion of them were frost giants. All the rest either died or went back to Niflheim.”

“How did they travel between the realms?”

“They traveled on the branches. It was easier back then. The leaves were only budding so Yggdrasil was easier to navigate.” The tree was invisible, but could be sensed. The leaves just caused interference and were harder to walk on and shifted.

“My whole life the leaves have always been wilted.” He’d never stopped to consider what that meant. It was just how things always were.

“They’ll soon be gone.” Such calmness in the face of the destruction of everything.

“I suppose they will.” Loki hadn’t accepted that he was going to die. Yet it was somehow easier to accept that the nine, well ten realms were going to be destroyed, fall away just like Yggdrasil’s leaves.

“When will this realm be destroyed?”

“I planted it here specifically so Ragnarök won’t hit it until just before Helheim is destroyed.”

“Planted?”
“Well, a better word would probably be grafted. The realms are like,” Stark paused, “they’re the fruit of the tree. Like any fruit it comes from a flower that must be pollinated, but there’s only nine flowers. I had to create a flower and make it a part of the tree. From there I just had to wait for it to bear fruit, in a manner of speaking.” Stark chuckled lightly. “Yggdrasil has boundless energy. I just had to tap into it. Drivvedheim could have been three times its current size if I’d wanted it to be, but it’s easier to keep a whole realm hidden when it’s small. The wards I have on this place are pretty powerful, but once someone notices the wards they’ll know something is there. It’s easier to just be small.”

“Understandable. I traveled the branches many times, but I never stumbled upon this place. Although if it’s near Helheim I doubt anyone travels this far down the tree.” Loki looked at the other god with fresh admiration. To create one’s own realm… It would have never occurred to Loki in a million years. Of course Stark had countless years to think up such things.

They sat in silence, just enjoying each other’s presence. Loki found he rather liked that this realm had fireflies instead of stars. There was no wind to rustle the leaves, leaving only the sound of the bugs and their combined soft breathing.

It was so peaceful, so different than the rest of his life. His life had been filled with the gossip and sneers of court. When he was not in Asgard he was with Thor and his loud companions, filling the silence with war cries and the clanging of metal. The closest he ever got to peace was in the royal library or when he was alone on the branches. The branches were too quiet though and he was always interrupted when in the library.

This place though… it was damn near perfect.

“You ready to head back? We head to Svartalfheim tomorrow and that is not a place one goes without being thoroughly prepared.”

“That would be prudent.” Loki held back a sigh. “I’ve never seen you sit so still before.” He commented as they made their way around the pond.

“I don’t usually have a reason to stay still.” Stark smiled at Loki and the younger god was certain he was somehow blushing. Loki laced his fingers with Stark’s.

Such a peaceful and perfect place and night…
Fyi, I haven’t seen Thor: The Dark World yet. I already know what happens and can’t bear to watch it.

Loki woke up nestled under Stark’s arm. A faint chiming was slowly growing louder. He pinpointed the origin as the center of the ceiling. A series of silver circles were spinning, randomly hitting each other. It was a… complex instrument. The longer he stared at it the faster and louder the chimes rang. Stark groaned and turned onto his side, tucking Loki’s head under his chin.

“I believe that is our cue to wake up,” Loki whispered and Stark groaned again, pulling Loki closer to him. “We have realms that we need to travel to, cubes to collect.”

Stark freed his arm from the layers of blankets and furs only to shoot out a bolt of red magic. It hit the chiming object, but it only grew louder.

“Damn it, Pepper.” Stark kissed Loki on the top of his head before sitting up. “I’m awake, I’m awake.” Pink magic flashed over the object and it stopped ringing. “She’s so damn efficient.” Stark mumbled as he pulled the sheets off of them. Loki stretched on the soft padding, raising his arms far above his head. “And you’re too damn tempting. No one should look that good in the morning.”

“Time is not on our side.”

“Time’s a bitch.” Stark grinned sadly before standing up and offering Loki a hand.

“Very true.”

Stark and Loki were the last to arrive to the kitchen. Everyone else was in the middle of eating breakfast. Pepper was in the form of a light elf and her whole team was dressed in standard elf attire.

“Do we need to go in disguise?” Natasha asked Stark.

“Loki and I will shape shift into dark elves.” As Stark spoke Loki shifted and used a glamour to make his armor dusty grey. “Tasha you look like you could be a firewalker.”

“And what exactly is a firewalker?” One of her eyebrows was raised in a challenging manner. Stark grinned, unperturbed.

“There a type of nymph from Muspelheim. They usually have your shade of hair and have decent control over fire. They’re good folks, if not a bit stingy.” Stark shrugged. “Clint, well, there’s not a lot we can do about this,” Stark gestured to the archer’s face, “situation.”

“Don’t be jealous old man.”

“We’ll be posing as merchants, so that should help.” Magic swept through the room and team A was
suddenly dressed in different clothing. Natasha’s outfit was still skin tight but now ash grey and had an overcoat with brass accents. Clint’s outfit was similarly grey, but instead of a coat a large bag appeared at his side.

“Hey! Why am I the one who has to carry everything?” Clint complained.

“Because you don’t look like you’re from Asgard or any of the other prominent realms. As the least prestigious the dark elves will expect you to do all the heavy lifting.” Loki held back a snicker.

“Don’t worry, there’s nothing really in it.” Stark scooped up the bag. “See light as a feather.” He tossed it to the archer who caught it easily.

Stark’s posture changed minutely and Loki immediately noticed.

“What is it?” Loki asked under his breath. Despite his best efforts most of the people at the table noticed.

“My daughter.” Stark raised his hand up and a strange pocket watch appeared in his hand. He opened it and his eyes somehow became darker. Loki couldn’t see what Stark was looking at. The tarnished silver watch disappeared.

“You have a kid? Why am not surprised?” Clint asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Kids, fifty-nine to be exact.” Stark’s smile was a strange mixture of sadness and love. “She’s the only one that remembers me though.” Loki could almost feel the humans’ confusion. “She has a tendency to disrupt any of my endeavors and she’s the one that helped the Other crawl back into the agents’ minds. Now that Ragnarök is close she’ll be more active. She may attack you all if that happens you need to run.”

“What does she look like?” Natasha asked in a hushed tone. Stark shook his head slightly.

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen her in this iteration. Besides that she can shape shift.”

“Then how are we supposed to…” Steve trailed off.

“Pepper knows the tenor of her magic. If you all run into her Pepper will tell you.” Stark looked at the female Jotun and she nodded.

“If that happens I’ll hold her off.” Pepper said while looking at her teammates.

“No Pep, you run too. She’s killed you too many times already as is.” Stark reached across the table and patted her hand. The Jotun frowned.

“Okay, Tony, but if she tries to take one of the cube I will fight her.” The two exchanged a look.

“You never said what her name is.” Natasha said after a long silence.

“I can’t.” Stark scrubbed his face, old age shining in his dark eyes. “It’s magic. I have a similar spell on her.” Stark rubbed his chest, right over his heart. He was wearing that sad smile again. “If I say her name she’ll know and also know where I am. It would practically invite her to fight me.” He smiled sadly. “If you somehow have to actually talk to her either call her the God or Goddess of Unraveling, depending on whatever gender she is this iteration. Just don’t call her my daughter, or even mention me for that matter. It’s a sure way to get yourself killed.

“Other than that team B should have smooth sailing.” Stark loaded up his plate with food, his tone suddenly carefree. “Team A will have a bit more difficulty, but it should be a good time.” Stark
began digging into his meal, the matter laid to rest.

Loki filled his own plate, eating primly. He could still sense the unease of the others at the table.

At this point before a battle… before the Void… Odin or Thor would give some impassioned speech about honor and the glory of battle. This not a battle though. There would be no war cries or swords bashing against shields.

This was something entirely different. This was stealth and deceptions, things that Loki excelled at. Things they all excelled at. The two agents whose lives were steeped in deception, the captain who led troops on covert missions over enemy lines, to the doctor who found a niche in every community he lived in, constantly evading the government. Then there was Stark and Pepper, who had fooled a whole realm.

Loki grinned at all those at the table. At first they gave him a curious look, but slowly, one by one they all began grinning.

“We are the best of the best,” Loki said simply, “and we will have no problem deceiving them all.” Stark looped his arm over the back of Loki’s chair, giving him an appreciative look.

“All you need to know about Svartalfheim is that they’re very secretive peoples. Don’t offer any information about yourself. Also if you see any dark elves with silk laced in their hair or around their necks don’t look at them. In their religion it’s blasphemous to look upon others.” Stark pushed his empty plate away. “It’s a weird religion, but most are.” Steve shifted uncomfortably slightly.

Stark performed a displacement spell and the rune covered golden ball appeared. He held it close to his face before blowing on it. He breathed out golden magic and the ball split in half, condensing into two new spheres. Stark tossed one to Pepper who easily caught it.

The God of Fortification made a sweeping motion and all the dishes were sent to the sink. Ms. Cook appeared and began cleaning them.

“Let’s get this show on the road, or as the elves would say: drop the herbs so we can pick up the reins.” Stark hopped out of his seat and Loki followed suit. “Team A gather round.” The two former SHIELD agents stood beside them, Clint swiping a sweet roll off the table right before the golden ball hit the ground.

The feeling of everything and nothing.

Then they were surrounded by a hazy heat that made Loki shiver in disgust. He was just glad he wasn’t in his Jotun form. He surely would have hurled. Clint began coughing and Natasha cleared her throat.

“It taste like stale tear gas here,” Natasha said while covering her mouth. Stark performed a displacement spell and handed her a wineskin. She uncorked it and drank from it before promptly spitting it out. “What the hell is this?”

“Fire ale. Highly flammable. It will toughen you up.” Stark grinned as he spoke. Natasha glared at him before handing the wineskin to Clint. The archer took a healthy gulp before coughing again. “Lightweight.”

Clint flipped him the bird before tossing the wineskin back to the god. Tony wordlessly offered it to Loki, who turned it down. He’d had his fair share of encounters with fire ale, none of which were good.
“We have company,” Loki finally said, eying the three approaching figures. He thumbed Frelser, ready for a fight. Tony held his hand up slightly.

“They’re merchants. I’ll take care of this.” Stark said while moving forward. Loki could vaguely hear the older god bartering with them. Loki kept his eyes sweeping the area. He hadn’t been to this realm in centuries. He was tempted to go into a trance and practice keeping his memories, but knew he needed to be on alert.

Svartalfheim was renowned for its cutpurses and bands of marauders.

Stark traded a few rare stones for a large bag of medicinal herbs. The sun was already starting to set. Loki checked his pocket watch. It was indeed far later than he had originally suspected. The time change between each realm always annoyed him.

“Sure, I believe in strength in numbers. It’s saved my hide more than once.” Loki zeroed in on Stark’s conversation, disliking where it was going. He glanced over at the red headed assassin and he could tell she wasn’t pleased either. Stark laughed freely while clapping the dark elf on the shoulder. “There was an earthquake not too long ago. The Northern road is blocked by rubble. The North-East path should be fine though.”

“Good idea.” The female dark elf said while smiling charmingly at Stark. Loki couldn’t be bothered to be annoyed by it though. Even while wearing a false face Loki could still read Stark’s expressions. The God of Fortification was grinning softly, but it lacked the warmth Loki was accustomed to seeing.

The two other elves looked weary, but were silent, carrying the majority of their goods. Stark whispered a silent spell on the large bag of herbs. He handed it to Clint who was playing the part of pack mule, much to his chagrin.

Natasha let the group pass her, opting to take up the rear.

Loki fell in step with the two weary dark elves, keeping a fair distance from them, ready to strike if need be. One of them eyed his scepter and Loki mentally scolded himself for not having cast a glamour on it to appear more elfin.

Something was wrong. They hadn’t even been on this realm for five minutes and something was already wrong.

“There’s an outcropping of rocks just a few miles ahead that should make for good cover for tonight. It’s going to rain hard.” Stark said to the female elf, Brila. She sniffed the air.

“You’re right. It’s going to be an acidic rain too.” Brila moved in closer to him. There was a sick wet noise and the elf’s footsteps suddenly faltered. Loki understood what happened immediately. He twisted around, slicing open the elf to his left throat. Natasha took out the other in an instant, burying two daggers on either side of his neck.

Three dead bodies fell to the ground simultaneously with a dull thud that they all were very accustomed to.

“What did they do?” Loki asked while flicking his scepter, a line of blood splattering onto the dry earth. Stark cleaned off a small blade before displacing it.

“Nothing. They would have just slowed us down. We just woke up on Drivvedheim. We’ll travel through the night.”
“So you just killed her. I just killed him for no reason.” Loki was surprised by the indignity in the her voice. She was staring down at the corpse at her feet. The clay ground refused to soak up the dark crimson, creating a puddle.

Stark faced her straight on, his expression clinical. Loki looked at him closely, unsure on how he felt on this recent development.

“Tasha, these elves,” he gestured down to the one at his feet, “they’re already dead. This realm’s sun explodes in three weeks.” Stark looked at each of his companions in turn. There was something cold in his eyes that broke Loki’s heart. “In six weeks, you all are already dead.”

The older god turned away from them, stepping over the cooling body. The assassin and archer exchanged a look.

Loki quickly displaced Frelser and shape shifted to his natural form. He moved around the corpses, grabbing Stark by his shoulder and spinning him around. He shoved the older god against a tall cliff face. He saw surprise flit across Stark’s face as he looked him right in the eyes.

“We’re still here. All of us.” Loki whispered to him, his voice pained. “We’re all alive and we’re with you.” Stark tried to turn away from him, but Loki wouldn’t let him. “You’re alive.” He saw an unknowable emotion in Stark’s eyes falter before shattering. “And you’re not alone.”

Stark gaped at Loki for what felt like hours. Loki did his best not to show his worry that maybe he hadn’t said the right thing. Before anxiety could get the better of him Loki felt Stark twist them around, reversing their position.

“I love you, Loki. I love you so fucking much.” Stark whispered, desperation clear in his voice. Loki instantly relaxed. He wrapped his arm

“I love you too.” Loki leaned down slightly and captured his lips with his own.
Loki felt tears fog his vision as he contemplated the situation. He slowly pulled away from Stark.

Six weeks to collect all the cubes. Six weeks to commit three thoughts to his magic. Six weeks left with the man he loved.

It really wasn’t fair.

But nothing ever was.

He kissed Stark like this was their last moment, like Ragnarök was just about to pull them both apart. And it really was just about to. What was a handful of weeks to immortal beings like them?

The distinct noise of an arrow flying through the air caused both gods to pull away from each other. Loki summoned Frelser back to himself while shifting back into his disguise.

Loki spotted two other dark elves. Natasha sent one of her daggers their way, but she missed her mark by mere centimeters. Stark reached out a hand towards the two oncoming elves. With a few whispered words he clenched his hand into a fist and the two elves’ heads exploded.

“He’s keep moving,” Stark said, his face slightly flushed. He still had a hand resting on Loki’s hip. He closed his eyes for a moment and Loki felt magic sweep over all of them. “This will help you see in the dark.”

Clint shook his head while squeezing his eyes shut.

“Don’t just fucking do that,” Clint said while lowering his bow. Natasha bumped her shoulder against his. Stark gave him a sheepish smile that Loki could easily read as false.

“Sorry, I’m used to either leading troops or working alone.” Loki felt Stark’s grip on him tighten slightly, trailing down before letting him go. With a complex spell made simple Stark made the corpses decay almost instantaneously before shifting into the craggy weeds that littered the area.

Loki could see how uneasy it made the two mortals.

“Life always yields to death and death always yields to life.” It was an empty prayer the Aesir said, but it was the only thing Loki could think to say. It seemed to appease them and Loki had no doubt that that had to do with the recent revelation of Ragnarök.

When they finally made their way through the maze of cliff faces and sharp turns the sun was just starting to rise. Loki understood why Stark had landed them so far away now that they were out of the crags.

The city was made of gleaming black towers that pierced the skies. In every other direction the land was empty and dead. Had they appeared outside of the city they would have been spotted and easily seen as not the usual traders that frequented the copper lined towers.

The dark elves were suspicious enough as is. Foreign magic that was similar to the Aesir’s Bifrost would only draw attention and hostility towards them.

The group save Stark grew tense as they entered the city.

Svartalfheim was no friend of Asgard.
The few times had visited this realm it was always to trade with the dwarves underground. The dark elves had long ago made their distaste for the Aesir quite clear. It was truly foreign territory.

Stark seemed to speak their language though as they entered the city. His switch of accents was almost startling as he talked to the locals that were just starting the day.

“The city has changed a bit, but I know where my cube is,” Stark said while frowning.

“But there’s a problem.” Natasha stated, reading the god’s expression.

“The leader I entrusted my cube with was overthrown a few millenniums ago,” Stark admitted begrudgingly.

“And you didn’t notice till just now?” Clint asked mockingly.

“Well, Birdbrain, when you live forever not noticing a few millenniums isn’t that hard to do.” There was something scathing in his tone. Loki purposefully brushed against him, drawing his attention away from the archer. Green eyes met brown and Stark let out a slow breath before looking back at the mortal. “Sorry, obviously I’m a bit stressed. When I dug into the Other’s mind I caught a glimpse of my daughter. She was in the form of a dark elf.” Stark’s voice dropped low. “I just can’t help but wonder if this was the place she was born, or if her new family treated her kindly. Rebirth is a game of roulette and it hurts knowing I can’t protect her anymore, protect any of my child.” Stark moved past the group. “I can sense my cube in this direction.”

Loki wanted to run to catch up with him, to pull him into one of the side allies and just tell him everything was going to be alright, even though it wasn’t.

“We need to stay on task,” Natasha said in a smooth voice when Loki stood frozen, watching Stark slowly walk away.

They didn’t make it far though.

A group of dark elves intercepted them. Loki could tell they were all adolescents, but doubted the two humans in the group could.

“There’s a fee for trading in this city.” The head of the group said, brandishing a deadly little shiv.

Before Loki could even consider which spell he wanted to use to get rid of the upstarts Natasha was upon them. She twisted between them, knocking back the majority while isolating their leader. She kicked his legs out from under him and took his shiv, resting it on his neck.

“And there’s a blood fee for getting in our way.” Natasha’s voice was deadly as Clint kept the rest of the group at bay with his bow. “Just be glad we’re in a hurry.” She nicked the side of his face, making the young elf squirm. When she let off him he scurried to rejoin his little gang. They disappeared between the obsidian buildings.

“Quite frankly I’m surprised they’re awake this early.” Stark commented, back to his lighthearted persona.

His mood swings were starting to worry Loki.

He had been so steadfast when they first met, when Loki was just another mage and Ragnarök wasn’t around the corner.

Loki didn’t understand why he went through the pain and loneliness of Ragnarök every iteration.
He needed to know why the one he loved would submit himself to such pain, but not right now. The city was coming alive and even in his dark elf disguise he was receiving glares. He remembered what Stark said about not looking at certain elves due to their religion. He did his best to keep his eyes straight ahead.

Natasha was receiving the most looks, but her expression was perfectly impassive with just a hint of danger. Loki was impressed and suddenly glad that she had been put on their team.

Stark had them circle the largest building in the city. It was clearly a castle and fortified as such. It was surrounded by a high wall. Loki could sense old wards and was sure Stark was aware of them.

Sentries were stationed on the high wall with bored, yet vigilant expressions. Most were smoking twisted pipes that dipped low.

“If you’re some super old powerful wizard can’t you just magic us in there?” Clint asked once they were out of earshot.

Stark sighed while Loki snorted.

“Every brick in the curtain wall is warded against intrusion.” Stark explained. “That usually wouldn’t be a problem. I could easily just break down the wall, the whole castle, but,” Stark paused, “if I use that much power and my daughter is in this realm she’ll get here faster than we can get my cube.”

The group fell silent again, a grave feeling back in place.

“Are they really so valuable to you?” Natasha asked, breaking the silence. Stark glanced over at her and even Loki was a bit curious as to what the other god would say.

“They are the key to all the secrets of the universe.” Stark said while looking down. “Or more accurately they are the puzzle pieces that will… one day give me the answers I need.”

“And what questions are those?” Loki discreetly grabbed Stark’s hand under the table.

“Questions that accumulate through millenniums.” Stark gestured for a waiter to bring over more drinks. “Imagine seeing the universe repeat itself over and over again from far away, exploding beautifully, but what for?”

“Why not just… forget it all? Live like a normal person?” Clint asked and Stark’s grin had an edge of grim irony.

“Because… what if I’ve done that already and I’m just repeating myself all over again? What if I just keep doing that?” Stark downed his drink. “Come on. I have a plan on how to get my cube back.”
Chapter Summary

The last chapter.

Chapter Notes

The first part of this chapter is a summary of what I would have written had I motivation (I just don't want to leave this unfinished).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They sneak into the castle by drugging the guards with a potion and a spell. A trap captures Clint and they were surrounded by guards. In a swift move Stark kills them all. They took the cube and made it back to Drivvedheim before the other team.

The other team comes back two days later. Team A had to wait a week for Clint to heal.

Loki and Stark make love under the stars.

Pepper and Stark talk about how she is growing fond of her team. It makes her sad that they were all going to die soon enough.

The trip to retrieve the cube in Jotunheim makes Loki regretful. He thinks about the life he could have had if not for Odin’s interference.

When they get back Pepper tells them that Bruce decided to stay on Niflheim since it was so peaceful.

They mourn him when Niflheim is destroyed.

Clint and Natasha die together as Stark’s team tries to get another cube. Loki cries, feeling the end coming closer.

Pepper’s team runs into Stark’s daughter in Vanaheim. Pepper holds her off as Steve escapes with the cube. They don’t see Pepper again.

They all travel to Asgard. Loki cries with his mother. They all know death is close. Loki still hasn’t memorized everything he needed to for his next life.

With an aching heart Loki leaves Asgard with Stark to Helheim. They watch from a distance as Asgard collapses in on itself.

They barely get the last cube in time.

Wind swirls around them and Helheim rumbles.
The ground shook, the sky darkened, and in the distance Loki saw an explosion. From it rose a shockwave of rocks and dust. His eyes widen at the enormity of it.

“Look at me, Lokes,” Stark said as Loki pulled his eyes away from the quickly approaching explosion. Stark pulled him into his arms, kissing him. “This isn’t the end.” Stark tried to soothe him, but tears still fell from his eyes. He knew this was coming, had known for so long, yet… “I love you.” Stark’s voice broke and Loki’s breath caught, clinging onto him tighter.

“I love you too.” The first shockwave hit, buffering the translucent gold, red, and green shield surrounding them.

“This isn’t the end.” Stark repeated over the roar of destruction. Loki met his lips with his own, deciding to use the last of his energy to ingrain this memory into his magic. Another shockwave hit and the red and green of the shield disappeared. “It will be painless. I promise.”

Loki shook his head. It wasn’t the pain he was scared of, it was the possibility of forgetting.

“I’ll remember you! I promise!” he shouted over the chaos that surrounded them. The shield was starting to erode and Stark twisted them around, taking a direct hit where debris had slipped through. “You have to go!” Stark’s arms tightened around him and Loki wished they just had one more moment—but they’d have a thousand more moments, a thousand more lives. He had to remember that. “Go, Stark!” He pushed away from him, but not before kissing him again.

Stark took in Loki’s image one last time.

“Until we meet again.” His words were a whisper compared to the tempest outside. Loki nodded in response unable to form words. Stark disappeared with a flash of gold. Loki took in one last breath before the shield broke apart.

Stark was right. It was painless.

“I’m sorry, Kvasi, but Loki is a boy’s name,” the Vanir woman said to her daughter, brushing the girl’s long dark hair.

“No. I refuse to go by any other name.” The small child crossed her arms over her chest, wincing as the brush hit a snag in her hair.

“Stubborn child,” the woman crooned. “Perhaps if I have a son I should name him Loki since you favor that name so much?” The girl jumped up, spinning around to face her mother.

“No! I am Loki!” The woman smiled slightly at the audacity of her daughter.

“Where did you even hear that name?” the woman asked, gesturing for her daughter to sit back down so she could finish brushing her hair. The girl pouted, eventually she let out a regal huff that her mother thought was oddly dignified for someone so young. She sat back down and her mother began brushing her hair again.

“I don’t know where I heard it,” she said after relaxing again. “All I know is that it’s my name—Oh, and that I’m going to be a great mage.” The little girl grinned widely.

“Really now?” Her mother leaned over and kissed the top of her head. “Would you like me to start
teaching you the basic spells?” They were both aware that her schooling would stick to basic things such as arithmetic, history, and reading for the next two years.

Her daughter let out a thrilled shriek that only children could ever produce.

“Really?! Yes! Please I promise I’ll be good, mother! I’ll even practice my basket weaving properly!”

“You haven’t been practicing your basket weaving?” her mother asked, pausing in her brushing. The little girl bit her tongue shrugging slightly.

“It’s boring.” she explained to her mother.

“Basket weaving is essential if you want to be a great mage,” her mother said, putting down the brush and started braiding the dark locks in her hands. “It builds up dexterity so that you can properly do the motions necessary for complex spells.”

“I promise I shall never ignore my practice of it again. Please, mother, I just want to learn.” And what kind of parent could ever deny a request like that from their child?

“Very well.” She quickly finished her daughter’s hair, before turning her around so that they were facing each other. “Hold your hands up like this.” The mother demonstrated and the daughter imitated. “The first step is to find your source of magic. It will be deep in your chest, behind your heart. The best method to pull it out is to feel it, hold your breath and imagine your magic pooling in your lungs, when you breath out imagine it escaping with the air.” The woman demonstrated, cornflower blue magic falling from her lips and going to her waiting hands. ”Now you try.”

The small girl closed her eyes, concentrating. She could feel something in her swell up, her heart pushing against it with each beat. It was warm and familiar, an old friend she never knew she had. Instead of pulling it into her lungs she let it flow naturally, warming her chest before flowing into her petite shoulder, winding through her arms, before congregating in her palms.

A gasp broke her concentration. She opened her eyes just quick enough to see the green fade from her hands.

The mother had not expected her daughter to be able to call forth her magic on her first try, let alone it come from her hands instead of her mouth. It was an intermediate level of difficulty, so to do so on her first try was amazing.

“Wonderful.” Her mother smiled proudly and the girl blushed.

“I know I’m going to be a great mage,” the girl said, looking at her now empty hands.

“What else do you know, Kvasi?”

“I know that my name is not Kvasi. My name is Loki.”

“Very well, Loki.” She kissed her daughter on the forehead, entertained and amazed by her. “Is there anything else you know?” The little girl smiled in a way she’d never seen before. She covered her face with both of her tiny hands, trying to hide a blush. “Hmm?” The girl giggled, still hiding her face.

“I know that I’m loved.” She peeked at her mother from between her fingers before hiding herself again.
“Of course you’re loved, my dearest. Your father and I love you with all our hearts,” her mother said, amused by her daughter’s behavior.

“No, not like that.” The little girl bit her tongue before continuing. “It’s a different love than that. It’s like—It’s just different. When I think about it I feel so happy and protected. I just love it!”

“You love the love?” her mother joked.

“Yes! Exactly!” The girl burst into a fit of giggles. Her mother gathered the small girl into her arms, hugging her with an endearing smile.

The daughter also knew somewhere in the back of her mind that this ingrained truth would only grow stronger the older she got.

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“You’re getting fat,” Loki said to her little brother who she was giving a piggy-back ride to as they made their way through the market.

“Am not! You’re just getting weak!” He tugged on her hair.

“Do that again and I’ll drop you,” she hissed at him.

“You wouldn’t dare. Mother would flay you,” the young boy said, looping his arms around her neck for extra security. Loki laughed darkly.

“And who do you think she’ll believe? Her daughter who attends all her lessons or the little boy who skips constantly?” Loki asked slyly and felt her brother bury his face against her shoulder.

“Please don’t tell her,” he whispered. Loki scoffed.

“Of course I’m not going to tell her. Have you already forgotten that I’m the one who convinced the teacher not to tell mother you’ve been skipping again?” The younger of the two did not respond at first, and Loki really wasn’t expecting him to.

She set her attention back on those around them, watching out for any of her parents’ friends who would possibly recognize them and tell their parents that they were out of classes.

They had to duck into one of the older shops when Loki saw their aunt. She cursed under her breath, knowing how slowly she usually shopped.

“I’m going to have to set you down. Aunty is outside,” Loki said and her brother groaned in annoyance.

“I’m going to have to set you down. Aunty is outside,” Loki said and her brother groaned in annoyance.

“We’re going to be here all night then.” He automatically placed his hand in Loki’s, not liking being in an unfamiliar place. He crowded behind her long skirt.

“We might as well make the best of it.” Loki tugged him deeper into the store, looking at the wares. Nothing really stuck out to her, just a bunch of knick-knacks. She pulled out a few of the books, skimming them. She could feel the shopkeeper watching them closely since despite them being too well dressed to be the usual gangs of children that tried to pilfer things.

“I’m hungry,” her brother complained, shaking her arm.

“I’ll buy you a strudel on the way home,” Loki murmured, three pages into one of the books.
“This isn’t a library,” the shopkeeper said and Loki frowned. She weighed the coins in her pocket. As with every book this would just be another investment in her ever expanding intellect. She took it to the front of the store, but completely froze before she could hand the book to the teller. Her eyes were drawn to a small silver pendent on a thin leather necklace.

Loki ghosted her fingers over the pendent, feeling something flutter inside of her. It was the ever present love that made her life so beautiful effortlessly.

Carefully she picked up the necklace and handed it to the teller. He gave it a confused look, checking the price tag.

“Hmm, I can’t remember this piece, but that is my handwriting,” he said as Loki handed over the inscribed amount. “Would you like me to wrap this up?”

“No, I’ll wear it out.” Loki pulled off the handwritten tag and clasped the necklace around her neck. A sense of security blanketed her.

“Are you still going to buy me a strudel?” Loki’s little brother asked, tugging on her sleeve. She leaned heavily on his shoulder.

“I don’t know. You are getting a bit fat,” Loki said, drawling her voice out. He shoved her arm away while storming out. Loki chuckled before following him.

* 

“Mother… I’m not really comfortable going to Asgard.” Loki fidgeted with a lock of her hair as she watched her mother packing.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for you. You want to be a mage and it’s not often that Queen Sulmi accepts apprentices. You should just be thankful that your father mentioned your abilities to the king.”

Loki grabbed onto her pendant, glancing out the door. Two Aesir warriors in full armor were sitting with her father, exchanging battle stories. She was used to seeing warriors now that the Vanir and Aesir won the war against Muspelheim a decade ago. Her father had a large burn mark running up his left arm because of it.

“I just have a really bad feeling about this.” Loki backed up further into her room, wanting to just run away.

“Oh, is this the same ‘feeling’ that made you decline meeting with that dashing young man three years ago.” Her mother gave her a knowing look.

“I’m barely of age.”

Her mother closed the satchel, quickly draping it over Loki’s shoulder.

“You’re old enough to go to Asgard. You don’t need me holding your hand,” her mother teased her, giving her a knowing look. Loki scoffed. Her mother straightened out Loki’s dress and hair. “Do not let this opportunity go to waste. Now go give your brother a kiss and thank your father.”

“He snuck out an hour ago to crawl in the sewers,” Loki said, looking as innocent as possible. It did not fool her mother in the least.

“And why is he doing that?”
“Someone may have given him the idea that the Vanir royal family has a habit of flushing gold coins as a form of good luck.”

“And who do you expect will have to clean up his dirty britches when he comes home?”

“I expect he’ll go wash in the river then hang his britches by the bakery chimney.”

“This isn’t the first time you’ve tricked him into the sewers,” her mother stated, giving Loki a knowing look.

“Perhaps.”

“You’re a terrible influence.”

“I’m just trying to teach him to think before he acts. Better he learns it from me than some swindler,” Loki explained.

“You are a swindler. Don’t think I’ve forgotten how many candies you’ve tricked him out of.” Her mother reached into the folds of her dress and pulled out a bright red candy. Loki’s eyes widened and she quickly swiped it up before her mother could change her mind. “It’s time to go, Loki.” The joy from the sweet treat she was sucking on quickly dissipated.

Her mother guided her out of the familiar room. The two Aesir warriors stood.

“This is my daughter Kvasi, but she goes by the name Loki.”

“A boy’s name,” the taller of the two warriors said.

“My name,” Loki corrected. The warrior laughed loudly, but it was in a good natured manner.

“Very well. We have a three horses waiting. Are you ready?” The warrior directed the question to Loki’s father. The older Vanir nodded before going to his daughter, kissing her on the forehead.

“Safe travels,” her father said. Loki glanced at her mother who nodded comfortingly.

“Shall we?” Loki gestured towards the door, feigning confidence. She really didn’t want to go. The shorter warrior took Loki’s satchel from her. She fell in step behind the taller as he led the way out. He offered to help her onto her horse. Loki gave him a look and mounted the horse on her own.

Loki stared at the sewer drains as they rode out of the city, regretting not getting to properly say goodbye to her brother.

* 

Asgard was… too damn bright.

Loki instantly disliked it.

But she was going to be a great mage and that meant learning all she could, even if it meant possibly getting a sunburn.

She did find the Bifrost to be strangely fun though and she was grateful that it landed them in the middle of the city.

The palace was opulent, so different than the one she was used to on Vanaheim. King Ulfr’s palace was filled with politicians and mages. This castle was filled with noblemen and warriors.
The war was over. It was unnecessary to have so many warriors around.

One of the maids escorted Loki to a building that was an offshoot of the castle. There were thirteen other girls around her age there and she could feel the magic in them. Most of them were Vanir, but a few were Aesir. From their clothing it was clear that they were all from noble houses, whereas Loki was from a lesser house.

It confused her for a brief moment. The queen only took one apprentice—so a competition. Loki could live with that. She always did enjoy showing others up.

* 

The other girls seemed to instantly dislike her, because apparently everything about your personality can be seen in the way you do your hair.

Loki was fine with that though. If they didn’t like her it meant they were less likely to beg for her help when they saw how wonderful of a mage she was.

Weeks passed, intermittently dotted with letters from her family. She knew she should feel lonely. That would be the typical thing to do, but she wasn’t. Not when she knew there was someone waiting out there for her, even if she couldn’t exactly remember who it was.

She had still as of yet to see the queen. For the time being they were isolated to two buildings, the one they slept in and the one they took their lessons at.

The mages that taught them came from almost all the realms, save Midgard and Helheim. Loki loved learning. Near the start the other girls teased her for her total disregard of ‘society life’ and ‘court intrigue’, but after the first professor had everyone, but Loki write a paper on thistle root since she was the only one in the whole group who could answer his question.

It was clear to her and the mages that she was ahead of the other girls. That, of course, invoked their scorn. They tried to put all sorts of spells on her clothes and bedding, but she kept all her belongings securely locked up. The only way they could get to her was through her mail and food. They played childish pranks with the food and stole the letters her parents sent her before Loki could collect them.

It was frustrating beyond measure, but Loki just had to remind herself that she was learning more than any of them were during lessons, and quickly mastering all material that was put in front of her.

Two months in three of the girls were sent home. Loki didn’t let it show, but she was laughing almost maniacally as she watched the girls pack and pout. One of the pettier girls spit on Loki. Somehow the girl ended up tripping and breaking the bottles in her bag, staining all her clothing.

The day after was the first time she saw the queen. She was younger than Loki expected considering she already had three children, two sons who had died in the war and a daughter just slightly older than Loki.

Queen Sulmi was in the classroom for a fleeting moment, her eyes sweeping over the remaining girls. She left as quickly as she appeared.

A month after one of their younger teachers was dressed in outdoor clothes.

“We’re going out to the edge of Asgard for an in depth study on air spells. Grab your coats and meet me here by the stables in fifteen minutes,” the teacher announced while looking at each girl in turn.

The edge of Asgard… the Void. Loki’s heart froze. The Void. Something was telling her to run, to
hide, to never let the Void take her again.

Again?

But there was never a first time. Was there?

“Lady Atria,” Loki said, drawing the teacher’s attention as the other girls left, “may I be excused from this trip?”

“Loki, excelling in certain courses does not grant you leave to avoid others.” The teacher made a tutting noise as she gathered up her things.

“I am not going on this trip.” Loki’s hand drifted up to her necklace and felt a bit more confident.

“You are being ungrateful. It is an honor to study in the palace.”

“I am not going on this trip,” Loki said again, this time more firmly. The tall light elf moved closer, looming over Loki.

“If you are trying to be sent home you needn’t act out.” Loki tilted her chin up, rising to the challenge.

“If you are willing to send home the best student you have here then it will be more your loss than mine. I’m sure the mage college in Vanaheim would be willing to accept me.” Loki eyed her teacher, trying to read her expression.

“The queen will hear about this.” The teacher walked out at a hasty pace and Loki sighed in relief. She went to the back of the classroom to the bookcase that lined the wall. Even if she wasn’t going on the trip didn’t mean she couldn’t learn about air spells.

* 

There was no backlash for her refusing to go, to the anger of the other girls who came back from the trip looking miserable. The day after the trip two other girls were sent home. Loki did her best to ignore them, but for the next week they constantly tried to put bugs and dirt into her meals.

Loki let her work speak for herself.

She missed hearing from her parents and brother. She and the other girls weren’t allowed to visit their homes. Loki wanted to know if her brother was still skipping his lessons. She wanted to hear her mother’s idle stories about the baker. She wanted to read about her father’s most recent business dealings.

The letters she wrote them weren’t enough though. There was only so much she could tell them. Her father and brother only knew basic magic and she’d surpassed her mother years ago. She didn’t want to tell them to know about how the other girls treated her. There was nothing she could tell them about other than what she ate, and even that wasn’t possible when the other students pushed her plate off the table, sending its contents sprawling everywhere.

After she disobeyed Lady Atria the other teachers were less friendly to her, no longer giving her compliments.

Loki was so alone…

All she had was her studies.
But she also had the slight warmth in her chest that always seemed to flare up when she was her most distressed, when she was close to breaking. It was the warmth that reminded her that she was loved, that someone out there in the realms was waiting for her…

It did annoy Loki though that she didn’t know why they were waiting.

She’d be more than happy to leave behind her childish classmates. It only got worse when even more girls were dismissed, leaving only Loki and three other students. They began spitting in her food and outright shoving her. Every fiber of her being was urging her to play tricks on them. She wasn’t going to let them get to her. At the end of this she’d stand above them as the victor. That was all the motivation she needed.

Her food did become problematic, leaving her hungry and undernourished. She had to resort to sneaking out of the castle to get a proper meal. That’s how she found herself on the anniversary of her departure from Vanahiem sitting alone by a pond just after sunset. Every so often she’d send a burst of magic into the water, hitting a fish. They’d float to the top and Loki would summon them to the stone beside her. She quickly built up a fire before starting them to roast.

A noise in the distance made her freeze, extinguishing the fire as a precautionary measure. Whoever was coming was loud. Loki put on a glamour of a fat old man just before a dark elf burst through the tree line. His stomach was gouged open. His guts were only being kept in place by his bloodied hand. He fell onto the shore, splashing water onto his face before rolling onto his back with a groan. He didn’t notice Loki at all. She dropped her glamour, seeing that he was no threat.

Loki relit her campfire before ambling over to the prone elf.

“You look terrible,” Loki said while observing him. From what she could see in the dark he was wearing light armor and no weapons.

“Help—please,” the elf said before coughing up blood.

“What is a dark elf doing in Asgard?” Loki asked, kneeling down to stop the worst of the bleeding.

“Hunting party. I’m from a noble—” He took in a deep, shaky breath. “We have permission. A bilgesnipe—” Loki began one of the more complex healing spells she knew.

“Is there anyone else left?” Loki could feel the flesh knitting back together under her hands, feeling her magic seeping into the wound.

“One dead, the other got away—going to the castle.” The hunter let out a loud groan as Loki had to dig her fingers into his gut to put back in place his intestine.

“How long ago was that?”

“I don’t know,” the elf sputtered out, flecks of blood dotting his face. Loki looked over his outfit. Some of the blood was almost dry, giving her an idea of when he was attacked.

“Did he leave by horse, foot, or magic?”

“Foot.”

“They should be reaching where you were attacked any moment now. I’m sure you left a good blood trail. Twenty minutes at most.” She pulled away from him. “That should hold you until they arrive.” Loki washed her hands off in the pond. “I’ll stay with you until they’re close, but in exchange you must not tell anyone that you saw me.”
“Of course. You have my word.”

Loki extinguished the fire and grabbed the four fish she had cooked.

“Are you hungry?” Loki asked while sitting beside him again, being careful not to get any blood on her dress.

“Couldn’t eat if I tired,” he admitted. “And what name would be so fitting of such a kind savior?” Savior… Frelser. Why did that sound so familiar to Loki? “My Lady?”

“No one is from a high noble families like you.” Loki could tell by his attire that he was from nobility, even if it was doused in blood. “You need not know my name. We shan’t be meeting again.” The elf half laughed half groaned.

“I somehow feel like this has happened before,” he said and Loki glanced down at the elf as she nibbled on her meal, glad that she picked up a few herbs to season them.

“Do you often get gutted like a fish?”

“I wish I could say that this was the first time.” The elf leaned up, struggling to see Loki in the dark.

“Perhaps you need better hunting companions.” Loki tossed aside the charred stick and fish bones.

“Aye, that would probably be best. You can come with us next time. I owe you my life.” Loki did not respond to him at first, instead observing the dark purple sky. One moon was waxing while the other was waning. It would be the winter solstice soon. Far away she could hear hooves against soft earth. They were going to be here sooner than expected.

“A kind offer, but one I must decline.” Loki stood up, straightening out her dress. “It looks like our time is up.”

“I never told you my name!” The elf shouted as Loki began to walk away. She didn’t respond. “I am Synor Helbreonson! If you ever need help come find me! I live in Svartalfheim!”

Loki shook her head while chuckling before she disappeared into the shadows, using one of the hidden paths to get back to the castle.

* 

A week later two other girls were dismissed, leaving just Loki and one other. They were invited to have tea with Queen Sulmi. They were each given new dressers, more regal than anything they had before.

The green dress made Loki look like a princess, but the blue dress on the other girl made her look frumpy. They were lead to an ornate room. Loki sat with a straight back, looking composed and assured. It helped that the other girl was fidgeting.

Queen Sulmi glided into the room, her necklaces making a faint clinking as she looked over the two girls.

“Show me a spell I have never seen before,” the queen demanded, not sitting down. She gestured to Loki’s classmate. The girl shifted in her seat before she created an illusion of herself, a duplicate that bowed to the queen before disappearing. Loki held back a scoff. “And you child?”

Loki arranged two spoons so that they were laying on each other on the table. A sphere of green
magic appeared in her hand. She slowly lowered it until it brushed across the two spoons. The sphere disappeared with a popping noise. Loki picked up the two spoons that were now firmly stuck together.

“Cold welding,” Loki explained while handing the spoons to the queen. She looked at this closely before trying to pull them apart. They bent but did not come apart.

“Interesting.” She set it down on the table. “Girl,” the queen gestured to Loki’s classmate, “you are dismissed. Go home.”

“But—”

“Or shall I have the guards escort you away?” Queen Sulmi gave the girl a look that would paralyze anyone with less mettle than Loki. The girl gave a sloppy bow before scurrying out. “What is your name?” the queen asked once they were alone. Loki took in a steadying breath.

“I am Loki Simidottir of Vanaheim.”

“Loki, isn’t that a boy’s name?”

“No, it’s my name,” Loki responded before she could stop herself. The queen let out a startled laugh.

“I suppose it is.” The queen fixed herself a cup of tea with a wave of her hand. “How did you learn that spell?”

“I was reading about the different properties of metal and it occurred to me that metals of similar properties should be able to come together when in a vacuum.” Loki created another sphere. “I haven’t really found a use for it yet, but I will eventually.” Loki smiled at the queen, enjoying being able to discuss magic freely.

“I’m sure you will.” The queen smiled kindly and Loki felt herself relax. “Now drink your tea. This evening I will introduce you as my new apprentice to the court. It is a prestigious position and you will have to act the part.”

Loki took a sip of her tea and the queen began telling her all about court etiquette, all of which came very naturally to Loki.

* *

Being the queen’s apprentice gave Loki access to the royal library and the run of the castle save the royal wing. It also granted her private lessons with the queen, but more often than not she took her lessons with one of the Aesir mages.

Loki couldn’t claim to enjoy court life. The sudden influx of ‘friends’ due to her position at court was annoying. Each one that tried to befriend her seemed to have ulterior motives.

Queen Sulmi was an entertaining woman once she dropped her pretenses and talked to Loki like an equal. She was the first person Loki really felt like she could relate to. They shared a love of magic and its versatility. The queen also liked to go out hunting which Loki felt to be refreshing, even if they were flanked by guards.

The only time Loki didn’t enjoy spending time with her was when the queen got lost in thought, her eyes becoming glassy and hands clenched. When Loki tried to talk her through it the queen snapped at her, shouting at her to get out. Loki quickly ran out and one of the queen’s handmaids came to her later and explained that Queen Sulmi sometimes got lost thinking about her two dead sons.
Loki couldn’t claim to understand that sort of loss, so she made an effort not to remind her of them. Another downside of being the queen’s apprentice was having to attend feasts, loud and time wasting feasts. She had to attend despite being seated at one of the lesser tables. Luckily the Aesir had a tendency to drink fast and get distracted making it easy for Loki to sneak out after the second course.

During one of the feasts Loki saw the dark elf she had helped almost three months ago, Synor Helbrenson. For some reason she remembered his name. She quickly left the feast hall before he could take notice of her. His carefree laughter seemed to echo in her head and she couldn’t help but think he was an oaf.

She treaded through the halls silently, enjoying the brief moment of peace.

“Loki?” a male voice called out to her. The young Vanir woman turned around, looking for the source. A smile appeared on her face.

“Melfir? What brings you to Asgard?” Loki asked while walking over to the elderly Vanir merchant.

“The Aesir love their fine silks. The royal family is one of my best customers.” He laughed deeply. “You are well aware of that though.” Melfir gestured to her dress.

“The queen is too kind,” Loki explained, happy to see a familiar face in foreign lands even if she had been living here for over a year.

“Yes, I was pleased to hear that you were allowed to study in Asgard, especially after…” The elderly man frowned. “I’m sorry for your loss, Loki, I should have sent my regards earlier.”

“Pardon?” Melfir frowned.

“Your family, Loki…” he said, stepping closer to her. Loki’s heart froze then sped up.

“What about my family?” she asked while grabbing her necklace, trying to calm down.

“You don’t—Loki,” He pulled her to a side hallway, “Loki, there was a fire two months ago. Your brother and parents were trapped inside your home. None of them made it out.”

“That—no, that’s impossible.” Loki stepped away from him, running into the wall. “No, mother—she was always so good at elemental magic. She could—”

“Loki, they died. All three bodies were discovered when the blaze was finally put out. King Ulfr sent word to Queen Sulmi of their death.” Loki shook her head.

“No!” Loki shoved him aside.

“Loki!” He tried to follow her, but he couldn’t match her speed. She darted through the halls, avoiding the servants and drunken guests.

It felt like an eternity before she reached her room, slammed her door shut before falling into bed, sobs shaking her to her soul.

It was impossible, wholly impossible.

Loki couldn’t believe it—No, she refused to believe it.

She forced herself to move, to go to her closet and change into a simpler dress. She pulled on
traveling boots and cloak. Loki shot out her magic pulling herself onto Yggdrasil.

The branches… they were all so familiar to her even though she had never been directly on the world tree before. She glanced around suddenly feeling paralyzed. She couldn’t see the branches, no one could, but she could sense them.

But… she was so close to the Void.

Oh Norns… the Void.

No, she had to concentrate.

It was so difficult to think though. Beneath her leather boots she could feel magic pulsating. She had to meet it with equal strength of her own magic to not slip or be flung off. It was a constant balancing act that left her breathless.

Her family… she had to be sure.

Loki let her senses spread out. Her heart suddenly beat loudly, echoing in her own ears. Warmth emitted from her necklace and gold magic seeped out of it slowly forming words.

*To which realm do you wish to travel?*

Loki stared at the magic for a long moment before tentatively reaching out for them. They faded away before she could touch them before appearing again just outside of her reach.

“I wish to go to Vanaheim,” Loki finally answered.

Very well. Follow me.

The gold letters swirled together before forming a bird, a magpie. It flapped its wings and gold magic shot out from them. A lattice work of magic appeared on the edges of the branch she was on then meeting high above her, effectively creating a tunnel.

The magpie chirped, drawing Loki’s attention back to it. It fluttered its wings before doing a loop and flying away. The gold lattice work seemed to follow it, disappearing from behind her and appearing before her. It stopped after a moment when it noticed she wasn’t following.

She quickly went after it, suddenly feeling much more secure with every step she took.

“What are you?” Loki called after it, but it just kept flying forward. “What is your purpose?”

The bird turned suddenly flying towards a different branch. Beneath it a golden staircase appeared. Loki hesitated when she reached it. If she went up it, it would be the only thing between her and the Void.

Loki had to find out her family was alright and some part of her knew this was the only way to do so. Even so, she did not know who’s magic this was, nor if she could trust it.

The magpie landed on the railing of the staircase far above her, chirping once and it was strangely reassuring. She tested out the sturdiness of the staircase with one foot and found it easier than walking on the tree. Yggdrasil’s complex cacophonous magic pushed against her, but this magic… this warm magic seemed to readily accept her.

Her next step was far less hesitant. The handrail felt soft against her skin and made goose bumps appear on her arms. The bird chirped again and Loki quickened her pace. She had to remember that
she needed to be fast if she wanted to make it back to Asgard without notice. Thankfully her first lessons weren’t till late in the morning.

As she followed the bird time felt all wrong and the sound of her feet hitting the tree seemed to take too long to fade.

It could have been hours or mere minutes before she reached Yggdrasil’s trunk with the help of the magpie. It landed on her shoulder before chirping again. More words appeared in front of her.

A doorway... you must push to open it. From there, a long fall into darkness. At the bottom I will catch you.

Loki reached out to the trunk carefully, not being able to see it, but able to sense it. Her fingers met the tempest like magic of the tree and she almost fell backwards from the power of it.

Concentrate and push against it with all your might.

Loki focused her magic back on her hands as a counterforce. She leaned all her weight against it, using all her strength. It hardly budged at first before suddenly opening up.

Blackness... an inky death that seemed endless.

She took a step backwards and almost fell, having forgotten to balance her magic against Yggdrasil’s. The magpie quickly swept behind her, a band of magic following in its wake and catching her.

Calm down.

The magpie landed on her shoulder again. A red tear drop of magic appeared in front of her. It shifted and swirled before turning into a hand. It was held open, palm up, beckoning for her to take it.

Loki bit her lip before reaching and taking the hand.

A hug, an embrace, a kind word, soft blankets, and familiar laughter... It was a sensation unlike any other she had experienced before.

“Come now. I’ve got you,” a voice whispered into her ear. The hand pulled her to the darkness before it twisted up her arm before landing on her forehead. She felt a warmth there, reminiscent of a kiss, before it disappeared.

The magpie chirped before diving into the darkness. Loki watched as its gold hue faded away. She took a deep breath before stepping into nothing. She felt gravity take her as the blackness swallowed her.

Loki curled up into a ball clutching her necklace as she fell. She could still feel the warmth of the red magic on her hand and forehead and it was the only thing keeping her from going insane. Sooner than she would have expected gold spiraled around her, slowing her descent.

“You’re safe. Set your feet down now,” the voice whispered to her. Loki peeked her eyes open before uncurling herself. Her leather boots touched Yggdrasil and she breathed out a sigh of relief.

We’re almost to Vanaheim. Gold letters told her as the Magpie flew through a hole that was just wide enough for Loki to slip through. Once she was on the branch again the magpie fluttered forward, creating another staircase. When she reached the top of it the magpie disappeared into more
letters. Vanaheim is just above. All you have to do is reach out and pull yourself to it.

The gold magic faded away from all around her. She reached with her magic, latching onto her home realm. She shortened the tether, pulling herself to Vanaheim.

The cobbled streets and earth toned buildings looked exactly how she remembered them. The night air was damp. It must have just finished raining. Water slowly flowed into the drains… the drains she used to trick her brother into exploring.

Loki shook her head, reminding herself that her family could still be alive. She ran through the silent streets, her steps echoing eerily. She pushed herself harder, smelling smoke despite knowing that if there had been a fire it would have long ago been put out.

She passed the dress store her mother forced her to go to, ran by the blacksmith her father traded with, the home of one of her brother’s teacher, the tree she hid in when her little brother was born, the bakery that always gave them an extra cookie when Loki shopped there with her mother, and the street she used to think was so long—

Rubble, charred rubble.

Loki fell to her knees in front of it.

“No,” she whispered, tears clouding her vision. “Please no.” She fell forward and was met with cold metal. She lifted the object, trying to see in the dim light. The doorknob… the same doorknob she had used countless times.

And now it was warped by the heat, a cruel caricature of all it once represented. Loki held it to her chest, trying to catch her breath and calm down the agony and disbelief that was blooming in her soul.

Loki stood up suddenly, refusing to believe that they were dead. She ran to her neighbor’s home and started pounding on their front door. She saw one of the windows above her light up, but didn’t stop her furious knocking.

The door was flung open and Loki almost fell forward. Tokmir dropped his sword when he saw it was Loki.


“Let her in,” the woman scolded her husband, moving him aside herself before capturing Loki in a hug. “Sweet child.” Permasi whispered before giving Loki a kiss on the cheek. “Come inside, come inside.” She pulled Loki while glancing at her husband. “Tok, dear, start some tea.”

“My parents… my brother.” Loki mumbled as she was lead into the kitchen and sat down. She hadn’t realized she was still clutching the disfigured doorknob until it was being pried out of her hand. Permasi took a damp cloth to Loki’s hands, wiping away the ash.

“Oh sweet child.” The elderly woman crooned.

“No one told me,” Loki whispered, more tears falling down her face. She was pulled into another hug, so much like her mother’s hugs… “No one told me.” Her tears came out faster as she felt her world shatter.

Her mother would never scold her again for tricking her brother. She’d never hear her father’s
calming voice or the way it always got lower when he made a joke just for Loki to hear. She’d never tease her brother again. She’d never have a family dinner again where they talked about Loki’s recent lessons. She’d never come home again to the scent of her favorite soup being cooked by her mother… never hear her humming as she stirred the pot, effortlessly adding spices without having to measure them.

Oh Norns, she never got the chance to apologize to her brother for all those times she tricked him.

She never got to show her father how powerful some of her spells were or tell him about how she helped a dark elf.

“Loki, here, drink this.” Permasi whispered, handing Loki a warm mug. The young Vanir looked at the light green liquid. The same tealeaves that came from the little patch of garden between their two homes. The herb garden the two woman cultivated together…

Tear drops made her reflection break in the dark waters.

“They’re dead. I don’t understand.” Loki was surprised by how lifeless her voice sounded. She felt Permasi brush back some of her hair.

“It was a sudden blaze.” Permasi explained, continuing to stroke Loki’s hair. “Almost two months ago. Tok and I were visiting my sister in the northern part of the city. When we got back your home was already burnt down. We went to King Ulfr to ask his permission to go to Asgard so that we could tell you in person, but he did not allow it. He said we could write you a letter though. It should have arrived the day after. I’m so sorry, Loki.” Permasi pushed the mug higher, prompting Loki to take a drink of it. She hesitantly did so. The taste… Oh Norns, it was just like her mother’s tea.

“Mother was always so good with elemental magic though, especially with fire,” Loki whispered, her throat constricting.

“I know, sweet child.” Permasi took the mug out of Loki’s shaking hands. “I can’t believe the Aesir sent you back here and didn’t even tell you what happened.”

“They don’t know I’m here.” Loki mumbled, grabbing the warped doorknob off the table and tracing its contours with her numb fingers.

“Then how did you…” Permasi’s words faded, leaving the sentence unfinished.

“I traveled between the realms.” Loki explained, unable to pull her eyes away from the knob.

“You always said you were going to be a great mage when you were growing up. I’m glad to see that’s true.” Permasi’s smile fell, turning into a frown. “You need to get back to Asgard, before they think you’ve been stolen away. Are you the queen’s apprentice yet?”

“Yes.”

“It’s a prestigious position. You’ll be able to meet plenty of fine Aesir men there and you’ll be protected. A beautiful young woman like you won’t have any problem finding a husband.” Loki gave the older Vanir a startled look.

“But… my father’s business.”

“Without any male heirs there was no one to pass it onto. King Ulfr sold all your father’s contracts to various noblemen. According to law you will get the earnings once you were an adult, in a year’s time.” Loki shook her head in confusion.
“No one told me anything.”

“I’m so sorry.” Permasi hugged her again. “Wait here. I have something for you.” The Vanir woman quickly left the kitchen. Loki grabbed her mug and took a large gulp of the tea, trying to memorize its taste. Permasi appeared again a moment later, a bundle of cloth in her arms. “Your mother made me this for Tok’s and my 1000th wedding anniversary.” She started unfurling the cloth. “I haven’t been able to wear it for quite some time though, but it will fit a skinny thing like you.” She gave Loki a sad smile. It was a beautiful dark green cloak with a simplistic swirling pattern in emerald green. Loki instantly loved it.

Permasi helped the younger Vanir stand up before draping it around her shoulder, clasping it in the front with a golden clasp.

“It’s beautiful.” Loki whispered while touching the soft fabric, tears clouding her vision again.

“If memory serves she started embroidering it when you were still in her womb.” The older Vanir wiped away one of her own tears as she admired how perfectly the cloak fit Loki. “You need to leave for Asgard soon, before they can start panicking.” Loki nodded, still caught up in how the cloak encased her in warmth. It felt like an embrace…

“Thank you. Would it be too much to ask for one more thing?”

“Of course not, sweet child.”

Loki picked up her mug, taking another sip.

“The leaves for this tea. Did they come from…” She couldn’t finish the sentence, it was too painful. Permasi nodded sadly before turning to one of her cabinets and pulling out a jar.

“Take the whole thing.” She put the jar in Loki’s hands. “And please visit us. You are always welcome here. I’ve always thought of you as the rambunctious granddaughter I never had.” Permasi kissed Loki on the cheek.

“Thank you.” Loki picked up the doorknob from the table and displaced it and the jar.

“Your mother would be so proud.” Permasi said under her breath when she saw Loki’s advanced spell. “Now go.”

The cold air did not affect her as she stepped out onto the street she once knew so well. The pendant of her necklace grew warm before magic came out of it, this time red.

I’m sorry for your loss. It spelled out. To which realm do you wish to travel?

“Asgard… there’s no future for me here anymore.” Loki refrained from looking at the remains of her home, wishing to remember it as it was.

Very well. The red magic wrapped around her wrist before elongating, grasping onto the tree. She was pulled onto Yggdrasil. Red magic on the soles of her boots kept her from being repelled off. You’re too distraught to properly travel the branches.

The red shifted, moving from her wrist to palm. It almost felt like someone was holding her palm. It lead her to a thinner branch and one of Yggdrasil’s leaves. It tried to pull her onto the lush leaf, but Loki hesitated.

“I’ll fall.”
I have you.

Loki bit her lip before nodding. She couldn’t see the leaf, but she could sense it. She could sense the life in it. It did not shift as she stepped onto it.

Red magic swirled around her, beckoning for her to lay down.

Rest, I’ll take you back to Asgard.

A thin layer of red magic kept her separated from the leaf’s magic. She felt the leaf detach from the tree, but was too tired to care. She felt like she was being rocked to sleep as the leaf seemed to glide between the branches. Her eyes drooped close and exhaustion overtook her.

*Loki woke up in her bed in Asgard. For a merciful yet cruel moment she thought that everything that had occurred last night was just a dream, but the sorrow deep in her heart would not allow her to believe that.

She sat up quickly, reading the angle of the sunlight that streamed into her window. She still had time before her morning lessons with Queen Sulmi.

Loki didn’t know how to act around the queen now though. She didn’t know if it was King Ulfr’s fault that Loki hadn’t been alerted to her family’s death or if it was someone in Asgard who either didn’t want her to know or didn’t bother passing on the message.

Before Loki could contemplate it further one of the servants entered her quarters, a tray of food in hand.

“Off already, miss?” The servant asked while setting down the tray. Loki gave her a confused look until she stood up and realized she was still wearing her traveling boots and cloak.

“I was thinking of going for an early morning walk,” Loki lied flawlessly.

“Well, you won’t be needing that cloak. It’s brewing up to be a hot day.” The servant helped Loki take off the cloak, Loki brushed her aside.

“Regardless, my hunger would not allow me to take a step outside of this room presently.”

“Of course, miss.” The servant curtsied before disappearing from the direction she came.

Loki slowly let out the breath she was holding before unclasping the cloak. She felt like crying and she had to take in a steadying breath to calm down. Instead of putting it in the closet like she would with her usual clothes Loki displaced it. She didn’t want to risk losing the physical connection she had with her mother. It had to be kept in a safe place.

She slowly ate her breakfast, trying to center herself and find strength she didn’t think she had.

Last evening she had been so overwhelmed by her families death that she hadn’t had time to question how her necklace had done all those things. She took it off and immediately felt naked without it. She sent a pulse of magic through it and only the smallest amount was repelled back to her, so faint that a lesser mage wouldn’t have noticed it. So it had a drop of reactive magic in it, but that didn’t explain all that had happened last night.

She had never read or heard about a spell that could converse with someone, let alone help guide
them and give condolences.

Loki remembered when she bought it with her brother. It had been strangely cheap despite its beauty and now that Loki knew what it was capable of she was certain that the shopkeeper hadn’t a clue.

The red magic… it had felt so familiar to her. It had held her hand, embraced her, and rocked her asleep.

She kissed the pendant, thanking it for all it had done.

*

After getting cleaned up Loki was summoned to the queen’s parlor for her usual lessons. Queen Sulmi had a sad glint in her eyes that immediately eased Loki’s worries. She recognized that look. The queen always had it when she thought about her dead sons. That meant her absence last night had not been noticed.

“Your majesty.” Loki curtsied before sitting across from her. She poured them both some tea and served up teacakes. The queen seemed to only just notice Loki when her teacup clinked against the table.

“Loki, my dear Loki.” The queen smiled genuinely. “Lessons, yes, that’s why you’re here.” She flicked her wrist and a book flew to her waiting hand. “Spells of protection are key to survival in any war.” Queen Sulmi started flipping through the book.

“I don’t plan on going to war.” Loki commented, falling into an old routine.

“Let’s hope you never have to. Best to have the knowledge though. You never know what the Norns have in store for you.” The Norns were cruel, Loki knew that now. “Loki?”

“Hmm, oh yes.” Loki accepted the open book, her eyes gliding over the page. A spell that would reflect the attack of enchanted weapons. It wasn’t something overly complex, but it was new.

“After lunch you will go to the training grounds and spar with one of the warriors. The king and I will be in attendance.” Loki nodded and the queen left without another word.

Loki looked at the book, taking in the information. It wasn’t that difficult to be honest, and Loki quickly found herself in need of other entertainment, or more accurately in need of distraction.

She went to the index, looking for a spell with a bit more difficulty to it. She found one about creating illusions of landscape that changed, tricking someone in the illusion into thinking they were traveling when they were just going in circles.

It was interesting, it really was, but all Loki could think about was her family. Last night felt distant. She was pushing it all down, holding it under until it was safe to release, safe to mourn.

Loki purified her tea, making it just water. She performed a displacement spell, summoning the tealeaves Permasi had given her. She heated the water before adding in a few of the dried leaves.

Her eyes fell shut as she let the tea seep.

She couldn’t mourn, not until she found out the truth of why she wasn’t alerted to the fact her family was dead. There was something afoot. It was either incompetence on the part of the messenger or a conspiracy.
Incompetence was the most likely answer. After all, who was she to have a conspiracy bloom around her? The daughter of a merchant, barely noble. But she was also the queen’s apprentice. She won that title and because of it thirteen highborn girls lost. That was thirteen noble families, most of which were from Vanaheim. Even if her father was well liked by King Ulfr he would be more likely to listen to the noble families of Vanaheim than he was to listen to a merchant. If one of them decided to kill her family out of spite it was unlikely that the king would risk raising their ire by protesting.

Loki pulled the leaves from her tea with a simple spell her mother taught her years ago. She took a sip and let the familiar flavor take over all her senses. The fragrance that spoke of calm moments and shared secrets. It felt like silk on her tongue. Bubbles burst as they went over the brim of the tea cup, popping almost silently. The familiar shade of the tea, silver-green.

If it was on purpose than she should follow the line of communication. Tokmir and Permasi went to King Ulfr. Loki was certain of that link. After that King Ulfr would send one of his diplomats to Asgard. From there the diplomat to King Tobin then since Loki was the queen’s apprentice the information would travel to Queen Sulmi.

So many points where communication could come to a halt. Diplomats were just politicians with more than one group to pander to. They were devious by nature and could easily lose a message if it served their purpose, such as ingratiating themselves with one of the noble families Loki had angered. King Tobin was notoriously absentminded and could have simply have forgotten. Queen Sulmi could have not told her from some misplaced need to protect Loki.

Loki had a slew of theories, but without a way to test them what was the point of considering them?

Perhaps she should just try to gather information… until, until when? She had come to Asgard because her mother wanted her to become a great mage, but Loki was hardly learning anything from the queen or her tutors. Everything she learned came from the royal library and her own ingenuity.

But she didn’t want to leave Asgard. Queen Sulmi accepted her and most of the court respected her. She had a future here, one where she could learn to her heart’s content.

Continuing down this path practically guaranteed prestige, but it also required other things.

“A beautiful young woman like you won’t have any problem finding a husband.”

Permasi spoke the truth. Loki had been of age for almost five years now. Once she was introduced to court life as more than just the queen’s apprentice those who were trying to garnish the queen’s favor by courting Loki. It was all very political.

A knock on the door startled Loki out of her musings. One of the maids came in with a tray of food.

“Her majesty wishes me remind you that you must go to the training grounds after your meal.” The servant said and Loki nodded, but stilled her hand when she tried to take Loki’s now tepid tea.

Loki found the spell the queen had shown her earlier and memorized it as she ate her light meal. By the time she was finished with her pudding Loki had the spell mastered. She wiped the sides of her lips daintily before making her way to the training grounds.

There was one of the Aesir warriors there, waiting. Seated high above were Queen Sulmi and King Tobin. Loki curtsied at them at the queen waved good heartedly. There was no need to wish her good luck. Loki could see the queen’s confidence in her.

Loki gave a curt nod to the warrior she was to spar. His sword was blunted, but a hit would hurt none the less.
“Are you ready young apprentice?” the warrior asked with all the arrogance that every Aesir that could wield a sword well had.

Loki cast her spell, a shield of green magic appearing before her. She wasn’t really certain what the purpose of this exercise would be, but she did know it would serve as a good distraction.

With a wave from King Tobin the warrior moved forward quickly, swinging his sword wide and slow. Loki held back a smile and let the blow land against her shield. The shield remained intact and Loki was hardly moved.

“Don’t hold back.” Loki’s eyes lit up with excitement. She waited for his next attack in order to make her move. As steel met her shield she sent an extra energy through her protection and into the sword. The warrior was thrown backwards, his sword falling from his hands.

Loki heard the king chuckle, but she didn’t let that distract her. The warrior rolled to the side, quickly retrieving his weapon. This time he edged to the side instead of just rushing forward. He was looking for an opening and Loki would not allow him to find one. She kept her movement in sync with his.

She wanted to attack him, to take out her frustration on him, but was not certain if she was allowed to counterattack. This was a practice on defense. But wasn’t the best way to protect one’s self was through debilitating their opponent? To render their opponent useless?

Loki’s mind was made up when the warrior dashed forward. She concentrated her shield into her hand. As her palm came in contact with the sword she redirected his swing downwards and into the ground. With her other hand she shot out a blast of energy, hitting him square in the chest. The warrior was pushed backwards, halfway across the training yard.

“Enough,” King Tobin said loudly as the warrior made to charge forward again. “I have seen what I needed to.” The king turned towards his wife and whispered something to her before leaving.

“Well done, Loki.” Queen Sulmi clapped happily before teleporting herself to Loki’s side. “Spectacular, my dear Loki.” She gently patted Loki on the shoulder, smiling warmly. “Walk with me.”

Loki fell in step with the older woman, letting her praise wash over her. The queen was humming again and Loki found it to be a familiar tune. How many times had they walked together like this?

The gardens were beautiful. They were always beautiful in Asgard with its almost endless summer.

Queen Sulmi plucked a purple flower before tucking it behind Loki’s ear.

“And you happy here, Loki?” the queen asked as she sat on the edge of a fountain, gesturing for Loki to do the same. The Vanir hesitated to answer for a split second. Had queen Sulmi asked her yesterday before everything went to Hel she would have answered without hesitation.

“Yes, I believe so,” she answered without gusto. The queen brushed a lock of Loki’s hair back.

“In Asgard you can have all your heart ever desires.” Everything… everything but her family. Loki wanted to voice her sentiment, but didn’t want the queen to know she had left Asgard. “But some things are more precious than others.”

“Indeed,” Loki said halfheartedly. She kept her eyes on the garden that surrounded them, not wanting the queen to see the sadness in her eyes.

“My sons… they were the most precious thing to me in all the realms. The war with Muspelheim...
took them away from me. I was a good mother, but I was blind and did not teach them the fine arts of magic. What little magic the court mages imbued into their weaponry and armor could not stand up to the elemental magic of those fire giants.” A tear escaped the queen’s glistening eyes, but she quickly wiped it away.

Fire giants… fire. It destroyed everything. Loki’s family and the queen’s.

Loki felt her own tears escape.

“I’m sorry,” Loki whispered not just to the queen, but for not being there for her family when they needed her most.

“It’s a mistake I shan’t make again. A mistake I’m incapable of making again.” The queen brushed her hand down her dress, smoothing out the wrinkles as she sat a bit straighter. Her hands rested in her lap. “There is no joy greater than holding one’s own child, to see them grow and prosper. I want you to have that joy, Loki.”

“What?” Permasi’s comment from last night came to mind… a husband. No, Loki had—she was loved. The one that loved her… he was out there. She just knew that in time they’d be together again.

The queen laced her fingers through Loki’s.

“Peace Loki.” Queen Sulmi pulled Loki into a hug.

“I do not wish to be married.”

“That was not what I was suggesting. I want you to become a part of the royal family, a very important part.” Loki tried pulling away from the older woman, but the queen just held her tighter and Loki could feel the queen’s tears.

“I do not understand.” Loki rubbed Queen Sulmi’s back, trying to comfort her. “You still have your daughter.”

“That is true, but I want sons, but I can’t, not anymore.” The queen’s voice cracked.

“Your majesty…”

“I wish for them to be strong. To master all the spells I never taught them before, all the spells that I’m teaching you.” The queen held Loki tighter.

“I’m sure you’ll have many more sons.” Queen Sulmi’s grip on Loki was almost painful.

“I am incapable of… but now we have you. You are young, strong, and so beautiful. You are an outstanding mage.” Loki tried to get out of the queen’s clutch, but could barely move. “You belong in Asgard.”

“Your majesty, you’re starting to scare me.” Queen Sulmi finally let go of her, but still kept her hands firmly on Loki’s shoulders.

“Dear Loki, become a part of my family. Have the sons I can’t.”

“What? Your majesty, you’re not making any sense.” Loki glanced around and noticed that there were more guards in the royal garden than usual.

“Worry not. You will be an honored member of the family and all of Asgard will rejoice when you give birth to a son—”
“You’re not making any sense!” Loki yanked herself out of the queen’s grip, but Queen Sulmi quickly grabbed Loki’s wrist.

“You can have a family here.” Something in the queen’s eyes flashed.

“I have a family in Vanaheim,” Loki said, trying to read the other woman’s expression. Queen Sulmi paused. She knew, she knew that Loki’s family was dead. “Why didn’t you tell me?!” Loki finally freed herself from the queen’s grip. Loki began backing away from the queen and the fountain.

“Peace, Loki, we’re your family now. You’ll have countless sons with King Tobin and won’t even think about your old life in Vanaheim.” A deranged look slowly seeped into the queen’s eyes. “You will be happy.” Queen Sulmi moved forward to capture Loki again. The Vanir jumped out of her reach only to run into a hard chest. Heavy hands grabbed her shoulders, holding her in place. “Once you hold our son in your arms you’ll know this was the right choice. A child is the greatest gift. You will be so happy!”

“No!” A flash of gold and red rushed from Loki’s necklace, hitting all those around her. The queen was pushed backwards into the fountain and the guards fell to the ground. Warm magic tugged on her and Loki found herself on the branches of Yggdrasil.

Run.

The simple red word did not immediately make sense to Loki as she took in her new surroundings, until she felt a rush of magic behind her. Queen Sulmi appeared on the branch, her hands blazing with magic and eyes dark with fury.

“Come home, Loki!” the queen shouted, waves of magic pulsing off her.

“You killed them! They were all I had and you killed them!” Loki screamed at her, energy whipping through her making the hair on her arms stand on end and the tips of her fingers feel numb.

“They’re nothing! You will have sons, Loki!” Conviction was thick in her voice.

“You’re insane!” Loki went to step backwards, but a gust of gold magic would not let her. She glanced backwards and saw the Void. Her heart froze and she couldn’t breathe.

“It’s dangerous here! Come home!” Queen Sulmi moved closer, reaching for her.

“Get away from me!” Loki sent out a burst of green magic, but Sulmi easily batted it aside.

“Stop acting like a child and come home!” Sulmi’s magic snaked forward, reaching for Loki’s ankles.

“No!” Red magic burst from Loki’s necklace, blinding her temporarily. A shriek pierced her ears. When she could see again Loki was met with the sight of the queen clenching her middle, blood spilling out from a large gash. The queen looked at Loki in surprise, her mouth gaping open as she stumbled backwards, losing her footing. Loki lurched forward on instinct, trying to catch the other woman, but it was too late. The queen fell from the branch and into the Void. Loki held back a gasp.

The court mages are going to be here. To which realm do you wish to travel?

Loki’s mind raced. Asgard was obviously not an option. Vanaheim was Asgard’s ally and once they knew she had caused the death of Queen Sulmi they would hand her over to face Aesir justice. Where else was there for her to go?
“I am Synor Helbrenson! If you ever need help come find me! I live in Svartalfheim!”

“Take me to Svartalfheim.” She would find her way from there.

* 

All the books Loki read could not prepare her for how Svartalfheim really looked. Though the air was warm the wind was biting. Loki immediately displaced her mother’s cloak, wrapping it around her securely as she shape shifted into a dark elf and found the climate less harsh. With a simple glamour she changed the look of her Aesir royal garb into the more simplistic dress.

To where would you like to go?

“I need to find Synor Helbrenson. He offered me help.”

House Helbren... I am familiar with them. The red magic spelled out. You are close.

The red magic snaked around her wrist, forming a delicate bracelet that was nondescript. It tugged at her, leading her away from the jutting rocks that were ten times her height.

“What exactly are you?” Loki asked while brushing her hand over the pendent of her necklace.

A gift. The letters switched from red to gold.

“That’s a very vague answer.”

Yet it is the truth none the less.

Loki made a humming noise of curiosity.

Worry not. My purpose is benevolent.

“So benevolent you killed Queen Sulmi,” Loki said sarcastically.

I am here to protect you Loki.

“But why?”

Because that’s why I was created.

Loki climbed over a felled rock column deep in thought. So many questions were flying through her head and she could still not believe that Queen Sulmi was dead, that she tried to make Loki into some sort of broodmare.

“Who created you?” Loki asked after walking for a half hour. In the distance she could see a city.

Ásviðr The Builder.

“Who?”

The God of Fortification.

“I have never heard of such a god and I have combed the royal library twice over.” Loki pursed her lips, wracking her mind for any mentions of such a god.

Give it time, Loki.
“Why won’t you tell me now?” Her voice was much harsher than she meant it to be, the stress of the last day and a half making itself known.

Because you are still a girl barely out of adolescents.

“I am of age. I have been for many years now.” Loki said while frowning. She hated when information was denied to her due to her gender, age, or race.

Of age for Asgard and Vanaheim, but you are still young, barely 1,927 years old.

She was almost at the edge of the city in which every building was inky black and had brass fixtures.

“Another time then. I am not done questioning you.”

Very well.

The magical tug on her wrist led Loki through the large city, each building becoming bigger and more ornate. Eventually it led her to one of the houses near the middle of the city. Loki schooled her features before knocking on a door that had a copper design inlaid in it. A moment later the door opened, revealing an elderly dark elf. From her clothing Loki could tell that the woman was a servant.

“I am here to see Synor. We are old friends,” Loki said with confidence. The elderly elf let her in.

“Who shall I say is here to see him?” The elf eyes Loki warily and Loki chastised herself for not dropping the glamour that made her clothing look shabby.

“Tell him it’s his savior from the side of the pond is here to see him.” The maid nodded before disappearing around a corner.

Loki let out a sigh of relief. She had traveled to three realms in under 24 hours and only slept for only a few hours. Her magic was greatly depleted and her muscles were strained from running along the branches of the world tree.

The elderly dark elf appeared again.

“This way miss.” Though her voice was polite the elf still had suspicion in her eyes.

The hallways were winding and portraits of dark elves lined the walls. The whole house smelled of incense and freshly baked bread. As they entered a large hall the sound of tweeting birds became clear. In each corner of the room was a pair of caged birds, one ash grey while the other was pristinely white.

The servant knocked on a door and Loki recognized Synor’s voice as he told them to enter. He waved off the servant while giving Loki a confused look. Loki dropped her glamour and shape shifted back to her natural form.

“Savior!” Synor shouted while walking over to Loki, his arms spread wide as if to hug her. When he was only a few feet away he dropped them while smiling widely. “I thought I’d never see you again!”

“Alas, circumstances have fallen out of my favor.” Loki’s shoulders dropped and she fell into a seat. “I saved your life and I ask for temporary shelter until I can find a new place for myself.”

“Nonsense, you can stay as long as you like!”
“You do not know the circumstances I come here under.” Loki glanced around before casting a spell of silence so that no one could hear into the room if they were outside of it. “I have bared witness to Queen Sulmi’s death and I have no doubt I will be forced to be chattle if they capture me.” Loki wiped away the tears that were forming in her eyes. “They killed my whole family already and I can never go back to Asgard or Vanaheim!” Loki collapsed in on herself, the weight of all that had happened crashing down as she finally admitted everything out loud.

A warm hand touched her shoulder and she flinched.

“Worry not, my lady. You are safe here. Asgard and Svartalfheim have a strained relationship recently. Aesir warriors will not be allowed here without starting a war,” the dark elf paused, “though it may be prudent for you to remain shape shifted.” Loki shifted back into a dark elf guise and putting on a glamour to disguise her fine clothing.

“My name is Loki.” She nodded at the elf, too tired to curtsy to him. “You have my thanks.”

Loki quickly came to find that Synor was a very loud elf with a tight knit group of friends.

He favored using the hammer in the tournaments he entered. His friends didn’t accept Loki at first, but Synor was insistent. Loki felt out of place with them, but enjoyed their company.

Loki’s necklace refused to talk to her, even in the privacy of her own room. It was frustrating, but helped Loki pretend that this had always been her life, that she was a dark elf.

Synor helped by making Loki feel like family. When she told him that she saw him as an older brother he was ecstatic. He wanted to throw a large party, but Loki was against it. She was trying to draw as little attention to her as possible.

Her longing for the one that loved her grew stronger as time passed.

Then the news of Queen Sulmi’s death came.

Asgard and Vanaheim declared war on Jotunheim.

Loki was furious. The court mages had tracked her down the tree and thought she was hiding in Jotunheim. It was an easy mistake to make considering Svartalfheim neighbored Jotunheim.

But to declare war because of a single life…

It made no sense to Loki.

Synor and his friends wanted to join up with the giants, but Loki begged them not to. They had no idea what it was like to lose someone they loved.

Synor was headstrong though and his friends followed his lead to Jotunheim.

Loki couldn’t leave them to be slaughtered though. She knew all about Asgard’s forces, but she couldn’t fight them, not with her fellow Vanir on their side.

Her necklace started talking to her again, teaching her healing and defensive spells when they were alone.

She ached with every new death she saw. The war was only happening because of her. All those lives lost on Jotunheim because of her.
Loki felt like she was going crazy as two years passed steeped in war and death. Somehow she’d kept Synor and his friends alive.

Asgard and Vanaheim’s forces were too strong though.

Loki and the group she was stationed with had been pushed backwards. Loki could feel death coming for them all as the library they had boarded themselves in was surrounded.

“I’m sorry for getting you into this,” Synor said while staring at the large door as it was rammed from the other side.

Loki snorted.

“We both know this is my fault,” Loki whispered. Her necklace was vibrating. She was hoping it had one last trick to save them all.

“Asgard was bound to attack Jotunheim. The giants refused to bow to Asgard.” It was of little comfort.

The sound of a thousand stallions running gave everyone pause. It twisted around the outside of the library, mixing with screams.

There was a snap and then silence.

Loki’s necklace pulsed then stopped moving.

Everyone held their breath.

The door opened and Loki’s mind was flooded with the memories of another lifetime.

“Stop!” Loki shouted to her allies. “He means us no harm.”

“She’s right.” Stark had his hands held up in surrender, but his eyes were solely focused on Loki. “I’ve missed you.”

“You are the one who took so long… We could have been together for years now.” Loki’s vision became clouded with tears that she wiped away quickly.

“You know I’m a busy man.” Stark dropped his hands while grinning as they came face to face. Loki could see hesitation in his eyes. That wouldn’t do.

Loki pulled Stark to her and kissed him. She poured all her love and desperation into the kiss.

To be in his arms again.

To see him again.

To touch him again.

It was all Loki ever wanted.
Thank you for reading my story! I hope you enjoyed it!

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