In Memoriam

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Summary

Thanos has a hand around his brother’s throat until he doesn’t. His brother cannot breathe until he can. Thor knows he got lucky, that of the hundreds of ways the interaction could have played out, he was dealt possibly the best card, but he still cries as he clutches his brother while he struggles for breath through a half-crushed trachea, and holds him as the ship explodes.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
how someone could have a plan for someone like him. He was horrified when his brother had started speaking to Thanos like an old friend, he was enraged when he’d said he’d be happy if Thor died, and he was confused when Loki had turned around and asked Thanos to stop when he was torturing him with the Power Stone. When his brother had called himself Prince of Asgard, Odinson, he knew what Loki was about to do, and he didn’t like it.

His brother had whipped out a dagger, thrusting it up at Thanos. The Mad Titan stopped it easily with the Space Stone before it could even get close, freezing his brother in place, and Thor knew from the expression on his brother’s face that it had been the plan all along to be foiled by Thanos.

“‘Undying’, ” Thanos repeated, utterly unimpressed by the assault. “You should choose your words more carefully.”

They were chosen carefully.

Quite simply, he intended to die.

Thanos’ hand, the one with the Gauntlet, reached out, and Thor watched, unable to even scream, as he grabbed his brother by the throat and lifted him off the ground to eye level. He saw the muscles and tendons in his arm flexing as he squeezed, looked on as Loki kicked and struggled, more a reflex than an actual want to survive. He knew as well as Thor did that he wasn’t getting off the ship alive. Thor stared at his brother’s reddening face, and his gaze met wide, frightful eyes, the image being seared into his memories.

Finally, losing his remaining air supply rapidly, his brother’s kicks died down, even as he clutched at bulky fingers. “You...” he choked out, “you will never be...” he swallowed tightly, letting out a weak grunt, “a... god.”

Thanos looked at him like a pest, squeezed once more, then when Thor thought he was going to finish him off, released him. His brother fell to the floor in a heap of clothing, clutching at his already purpling neck, looking completely thrown off. “I’ll let you live so you can see how wrong you are,” he said, raising his gauntlet. The Space Stone began glowing blue, and he knew that Thanos was about to teleport away. “Oh,” he exclaimed, looking back a final time, “if you survive this ship’s destruction, of course.”

With that, he left in a burst of light, and Thor broke free of his bonds to crawl over to his brother, tears beading in his eyes. Loki gasped for breath, knees curled up into his chest, and he flopped over him, one arm across his shoulders and the other grabbing his head, fingers slipping through his hair as he tried to pull him as close as he possibly could.
“Brother,” he croaked, tears finally spilling, dripping across his cheek and onto the metal flooring, “why?”

“Because,” he gasped out, voice raspy and grating, one hand still clasped around his throat, “because I knew he would come for me anyways.” He took a shaky gulp of air, the simple action of breathing sounding difficult. “I thought,” he continued, “I thought if I died, then he- he would let you live.”

Thor’s heart broke, then, a sob tearing its way from him as he held Loki even closer. He buried his face into the crook of Loki’s neck, unable to say any more, and Loki wrapped a hand around his back, his palm laying flat against his shoulder blade. He tried to push all of his thoughts, his emotions, his words through the embrace, show him how much he loved him, how much he was scared, how much he would have mourned for him if he had died, and Loki returned it just as strongly.

They laid together until the ship exploded, simply holding each other, and when it did, they didn’t let go.

They passed a planet with icy rings, this one marginally more interesting than the last one, the one with the blue gas surface and fifteen moons surrounding it. The song ‘Rubberband Man’ played through the Benatar’s sound system, and Peter danced along to it, nodding his head and snapping his finger to the beat. “Sing it, Drax!” He shouted, pointing to the man.

He was answered by a particularly loud snore, but he didn’t mind. Whenever he glanced behind him, Gamora was lip-syncing along to it, and that in itself was enough to make him energized. The chorus played, he mouthed the words and played his air guitar, and Rocket yawned loudly.

“Why are we doing this again?” The raccoon asked, smacking his lips.

“It’s a distress signal, Rocket,” Gamora said, tone clearly indicating that she was irritated. She’d really opened up since they’d all met, more willing to express her opinions and thoughts. “Somebody could be dying.”

“I get that,” Rocket said, “but why are we doing it?”
“’Cause we’re nice.” Quill piped up with a shrug. His mouth twisted into a mischievous smile, then, the skin around his eyes crinkling. “And maybe,” he continued, “whoever it is will give us a little...” he rubbed his index finger and thumb together, “cheddar cheese for our help.”

Gamora wagged her finger at him. “Which isn’t the point.”

He pointed back at her, expression turning faux innocent. “Which isn’t the point,” he repeated back at her, “I mean... if he doesn’t pony up...”

Drax had woken up sometime during the argument, but Quill hadn’t noticed when his snores stopped. “We take his ship!” He finished cheerily, smile broad and stretching across his face.

“Exactly!” Rocket cheered.

“B-b-b-bingo!” Quill yelled, turning his finger from Gamora to Drax, and she rolled her eyes at their antics. She looked at him with concern, and he tried to tell her ‘don’t worry about it’ with his eyes.

“We are arriving,” Mantis pointed out, and Quill looked at his crew.

“All right, Guardians.” He said, clapping his hands together. “Don't forget, this might be dangerous,” he reminded, “so let's put on our mean faces.” Mantis snarled, and Groot rolled his eyes. The video game in his hands made a beep, screen flashing. “Groot,” he said, slightly annoyed, “put that thing away. Now. I don't wanna tell you again.” The teenager didn’t pay attention, still looking down at the game in his hands. “Groot.”

The teenager rolled his eyes again. “I am Groot,” he said mockingly, and the crew gasped.

“Woah!” Peter exclaimed.

“Language!” Rocket scolded, turning to glare at him.
Gamora was offended. “Hey!”


“You got some acorns on you, kid.” Quill said, and Rocket sighed angrily.

“Ever since you got a little sap, you're a total d-hole.” He said bitterly, crossing his arms. “Keep it up,” he continued, tone angry, “and I'm gonna smash that thing to pieces!”

Groot simply rolled his eyes a third time.

The Benatar started to decelerate, coming to a halt in open space. Everyone went quiet, and, turning to look out the window, Quill saw what the shock was about. Bodies and debris littered the area in front of them, floating in space, and he swallowed tightly. Whoever sent the distress signal out, they were more than likely dead already.

“What happened?” Mantis whispered, eyes wide with horror.

Rocket looked grim. “Looks like we’re not getting paid,” he quipped. With a thump, a pair of bodies slammed into the window. One was plastered across the front of the ship, limbs splayed, while the other was more curled up, dark hair obscuring its face. Rocket shrieked, flying to his feet. “Wipers! Wipers! Get them off!” He ordered.

The splayed one’s singular eye opened wide, a brilliant shade of blue exposed, and everybody screamed this time.

They brought them inside, and while the blonde one was completely healthy, if a little beat up, the other one wasn’t in good condition. Unlike the deep, full breaths of the other one, he struggled for breath, likely due to the nasty bruising around his throat, and while the other felt warm, his skin was cold and his hair and clothes were covered with a fine layer of frost. Skin blue, contrasting with the other’s pink, they had to be from different species, although why they were traveling together was up to anyone’s guess. They’d said on the distress call that it was a refugee ship that was destroyed, so maybe that was it.

“How the hell are these dudes still alive?” Quill asked in confused shock, looking down at their forms splayed on the examination table. They were in a pile of limbs, the squeeze onto the lone
table tight, but if they didn’t like it, they were too unconscious to care.

“He,” Drax said in awe, pointing to the blonde one, “is not a dude.” He slowly walked around the table, looking down at his prone form. “You’re a dude,” he said, and Quill squawked in indignation. “This,” he continued, “this is a man. A handsome, muscular man.”

“I’m muscular!” Quill squawked defensively.

“Who are you kidding, Quill?” Rocket asked sharply, shaking his head from his location down on the floor. “You’re one sandwich away from fat.”

“Yeah, right.” Quill scoffed, offended. He was athletic!

“It’s true.” Drax said sadly, face looking awfully sympathetic, and Quill felt betrayed. He was supposed to be on his side, not on Rocket’s! “You have gained a little weight...” He motioned to his chin and his belly, and Quill cried out as if struck.

Gamora left his side to circle around the foot of the table, looking down at the men. “Wait, Gamora,” he said, equal parts desperate and preemptively offended, “do you think I’m...?”

Mantis pressed her fingers against the blonde’s head, expression pitying and mouth turned down in a frown. She rubbed the skin gently, as if she was trying to comfort him. “He is anxious...” she said slowly, looking sort of like a kicked puppy. “Angry. He feels tremendous loss and guilt...” Turning to the black haired one, she touched his head. Hissing at the cold, she pulled her hand away sharply, then settled it instead in his hair. “He... is miserable. Terrified. His mind sings with regret and...” she paused, “and guilt, too.”

“It’s like a pirate had a baby with an angel,” Drax mused aloud.

“Wow.” Quill said, pursing his lips and shaking his head, hands moving to rest on his hips. “This is a real wake-up call for me.” Gamora rolled her eyes, still looking down at the men on the table. “Okay.” He huffed, salty. “I’m gonna’ get a Bowflex. I’m gonna commit. I’m gonna’ get some dumbbells.”

“You know you can’t eat dumbbells,” Rocket said, “right?”
Gamora picked up one arm by the tricep, examining it and stroking her hand along the muscles. He noticed how she pointedly avoided looking at the other one on the table. “It’s like his muscles are made of Cotati metal fibers,” she said in awe, squeezing the taut flesh. It didn’t budge, not even dimpling underneath her fingertips.

He slid up to her side. “Stop massaging his muscles,” he said snidely, and Rocket snickered. Gamora dropped the arm with a thud, walking away with disgust. Quill leaned into Mantis’ space. “Wake him up,” he said.

She moved forwards, placing her slim hand on his forehead and closing her eyes. “Wake,” she whispered solemnly.

The man launched off the table immediately, stumbling forwards and looking around the cabin rapidly. His single eye was wide and confused, settling on each of them in turn, and when he finally stood still at the edge of the room, he looked onto the examination table at the man laying on it. He swallowed tightly, eye fixed firmly on him. “Is he alive?” The blonde croaked weakly, having gone sheet-pale, and he looked like he was about to be sick. “Please,” he begged, hands shaking at his sides, “I need to know.”

Quill looked down at the one still on the examination table, and saw he was still faintly breathing, chest rising and falling. The ice had even started to melt. “Uh, yeah,” he answered slowly, “he’s still breathing and shit.” Gamora sent him a sharp glare, and he shrugged. It wasn’t his job to be delicate and have bedside manners or some shit like that.

The breath the blonde took was one of shaky relief, and he watched as he stepped forwards, walking around the foot of the table to where the man’s head was. He reached out a still-trembling hand and stroked the tangled mess of black hair atop his head gently, combing his fingers through it. “You’ve saved my life, and my brother’s,” he said quietly, and Quill wondered how the fuck they could be related when one of them was blue. Adoption? Yondu was posthumously dubbed his ‘dad’, and he was blue. “If I could ask,” he continued, looking up, “who the hell are you guys?”

Quill stepped forwards, puffing out his ribcage and putting the side of his closed fist against his chest. “We’re the Guardians of the Galaxy,” he introduced, trying to sound as authoritative as he could (he was the leader, after all), “and we’re happy to have helped.” The look Gamora gave him was fond and approving, and he bloomed under the attention. “And who are you, exactly?” He asked, growing slightly cautious.

“Thor,” he said, “King of Asgard.” His crew’s eyebrows shot into their hairlines, and Quill tried desperately to remember the little fragments of Norse mythology he’d learned as a kid on Earth.
Odin, Asgard, Valhalla... he couldn’t remember much, besides the big details. The man must’ve been joking. Gods didn’t exist, well, except Celestials, but even then they weren’t actually gods. He supposed it could’ve been Celestials or something similar all along, playing the role of deities to the peoples of Earth who didn’t know any better, but he didn’t want to have to think too hard about that.

“So is this guy Baldur, then?” He cracked, a broad smile splitting his face, and the rest of his group looked confused. Proud of himself for remembering that bit, the legend with the murder and the poison snake and Sigyn, he also remembered that probably no one else on the team knew the mythos.

But evidently, neither did ‘Thor’ get the reference. “Who?” He asked, confusion painting his face. They stared at each other for a long moment, and Quill blanched. Just when he thought he’d really fucked up, the man seemed to shake it off, rubbing his brother’s head again. “No,” he said, looking down at him fondly, “this is Loki.”

And yeah, Quill didn’t think they were related, but apparently they were, and it threw him for a loop. “Isn’t he, like, the God of Pranks or something?” He asked, looking down at ‘Loki’ on the bed. He seemed rather unimpressive, body frail and only just finishing the process of thawing out. “Is it actually true that he had a shit ton of kids, though?”

‘Thor’ chuckled, shaking his head. “That’s a myth of yours I remember,” he said, “although that’s all it is. A myth.” Then pausing, he glanced back up at him with a scrutinizing expression. Quill only then noticed how the man’s muscles had relaxed, posture not quite as defensive as it had been. “You are from Earth, then. Am I correct?”

“Yeah, I’m Terran,” he answered, “although I haven’t been back for a while.”

Rocket chose it as his time to interrupt, hopping up onto a chair to bring himself into the spotlight. “So what decimated your ship?” He asked, getting straight to the point. Quill noticed the way he tensed up, then, a muscle twitching in his jaw as it clenched. “We saw how shredded it got.”

“His,” he stopped, swallowing hard and restarting, “his name is Thanos.” He shuffled his feet, looking down at the ground, and Quill knew from experience that he was either trying to stop the tears from flowing, or prevent them from seeing them. “On Asgard, we kept an Infinity Stone, and when our planet was destroyed, my brother took it with us. Thanos tracked him, and, well,” he smiled wryly, “he planned to sacrifice himself so that I could live, but Thanos spared him, for reasons I can’t claim to know.”
Quill knew the name ‘Thanos’, mostly from Gamora and Nebula’s stories, plus the late night sessions of just talking to each other that he and Gamora did regularly. Their adoptive father, the brutish asshole he’d never seen but certainly had heard a lot about, seemed like he was actively up to his usual antics again.

Gamora had gone pale, arms crossed defensively over her chest as she looked down at the floor. He stepped around the bed to where she stood, putting a hand on her elbow, and she sent a weak smile of appreciation towards her. She stepped away, however, deciding to enter the spotlight. “The entire time I knew Thanos,” she started, “he only ever had one goal. To bring balance to the universe by wiping out half of all life.” Thor raised an eyebrow, sucking a lip into his mouth. “He used to kill people planet by planet, massacre by massacre...”

“Including my own,” Drax said sadly, and Quill sympathized.

“If he gets all six Infinity Stones,” she continued, “he can do it with the snap of his fingers, like this.” Snapping her fingers, it held finality.

Brows furrowing, he frowned, eyes narrowed. “You seem to know a great deal about Thanos,” he drawled, looking back down at his where his brother laid on the table.

“Gamora...” Drax said, “is the daughter of Thanos.”

Thor strode up to her then, arms folded across his chest and face hard, mouth set firmly in a frown. He came close enough that Quill could tell he stood a good inch or two taller than him. Quill swallowed tightly, looking between the two, and decided he’d defuse whatever the situation was before it was a real situation. “Oh, boy.” He whispered, knowing he was in imminent danger with the wrong move. “Stepfather,” he corrected with a squeak. “Technically, she hates him as much as you do.”

The man softened a bit, then, face relaxing. He reached out an arm, putting a hand on her shoulder, and she blushed, the traitor! “Families can be tough,” he agreed, mouth twisting into a wry grin. “Before my father died, he told me I had a half-sister,” he continued ruefully, “that he imprisoned in Hel. Then she returned home, and stabbed me in the eye, so... I had to kill her. It's life, isn't it, I guess. Goes round and round and...”

His single eye refocused. Quill hadn’t noticed when his gaze had grown distant.
“I feel your pain,” he finished lamely.

Quite a story, and he could tell by the way Gamora’s expression turned sympathetic that, whatever game he was playing at, he’d succeeded. Putting a hand on Gamora’s shoulder, he shifted her away, ignoring the brow she lifted at him. He slid between the two, indignation rising up at the humor that shone on his face. “And I,” Quill said, “feel your pain, as well. I mean,” he said, face reddening, “it’s not a competition, but I’ve been through a lot. My father killed my mother, then I had to kill my father. And that was hard. Probably even harder than having to kill a sister. Plus, I came out of it with both of my eyes—”

He realized he was rambling, but Thor completely ignored him anyways, interrupting by turning around and starting to fiddle with the closed door to the pod. “How do I open this thing?” He asked, not even bothering with acknowledging him. “Is there some sort of a four-digit code maybe, maybe a birth date or something…”

“What are you doing?” He asked, feeling simultaneously insulted and confused.

“Taking your pod,” he answered simply, and Quill blanched.

“No you’re not!” Quill squawked loudly, then realized he sounded immature, and he needed to be the mature one, here. “You’ll not,” he said, deepening his voice, “he taking our pod today, sir.”

“Quill,” Rocket said, “are you making your voice deeper?”

“No.” He said sharply.

Mantis laughed, in that surprised, breathy way of hers. “He did it again!” She said with amazement, clapping her hands together and smiling widely, and Thor sent her a fond smile, although he seemed irritated.

Quill knew he was fighting a losing battle, but, hey, no way to know if you’ve succeeded until you’ve pushed it to the breaking point. “This is my voice!” He defended, stepping back as Thor stepped forwards, now getting all up inside of his personal space.

“How do I open this thing?” Thor asked, voice low.
“Are you mocking me?” Quill shot back, immediately knowing he made a pretty huge mistake in angering the guy. Well, he decided, he’d gone in too far to back out where he was, so all he could do was keep going and see what happened.

“Stop it.” Thor ordered. “You did it again.”

Quill turned back, scoffing dramatically and pointing his left thumb behind him at the guy. “He’s trying to copy me,” he said with false indignation because he definitely was the one in the wrong, here, and he knew it.

“Would you stop doing that?” Thor snapped harshly, looking to his crew. “He’s doing it first.”

“Enough!” Gamora shouted, angry. “We need to stop Thanos, which means we need to find out where he's going next.”

“Knowhere,” Thor said.

“He must be going somewhere!” Mantis exclaimed, frowning.

He’d heard of it before. “No. Knowhere?” Thor nodded. “It’s a place. We’ve been there. It sucks.” The man started rummaging through their fridge and cupboard, ignoring the pod again, and he felt indignation rise up in his throat, offended again. “Excuse me,” he said, the man not even bothering to glance up in his direction, “that's our food.”

“Not anymore,” he retorted.

“Thor,” Gamora said, ignoring the petty conflict at hand completely, “why would he go to Knowhere?”

Thor looked back, smiling. “Because for years, the Reality Stone has been safely stored there with a man we call the Collector.”
His heart dropped into his stomach. “If it's with the Collector,” he said, slightly hysterical, “then it's not safe.” Thor’s brow furrowed scrutinizingly, lips pursing in what might have been amusement. “Only an idiot would give that man a stone,” he said, emphasizing the word.

“Or a genius,” Thor said with a shrug, and Quill thought he would have a stroke.

Gamora stayed focused on Thor. “How do you know he's not going for one of the other Stones?”

“There's six stones out there.” He finished his rummaging, stepping away from the fridge and stretching his arms above his head. Dropping them back down, he put his hands on his hips. “Thanos already has the Power Stone because he stole it last week, when he decimated Xandar. He stole the Space Stone from me and my brother when he destroyed our ship and slaughtered half of our people. The Time and Mind Stones are safe on Earth.” He smiled brightly, then, the expression almost proud. “They're with the Avengers.”

That was a name he’d never heard before. “The Avengers?” He asked, because he really had no clue what the guy was talking about. Maybe it was something like the Howling Commandos, he figured.

“They’re Earth's Mightiest Heroes,” Thor explained as if that clarified everything, even if it was the simplest response he could have given. Definitely proud, Quill thought. The grin on his face was more shit-eating than any smirk he'd ever seen, and he’d seen a lot of shit-eating grins.

“Like Kevin Bacon?” Mantis asked cheerfully.

Thor paused, considering. “He may be on the team,” he answered, and what , “I don't know. Haven't been there in a while.” He looked back to Gamora, continuing on with his explanation. “As for the Soul Stone, well,” he chuckled deeply, “no one's ever seen that. No one even knows where it is.” Gamora blanched, but Quill decided he could ask her about it later. “Therefore, Thanos can't get it. Therefore, he's going to Knowhere. Hence,” he said, gesturing with his hands, “he'll be getting the Reality Stone. You're welcome.”

“Then we have to go to Knowhere now ,” Gamora said.

“Wrong!” Thor exclaimed, and she looked at him with an unamused expression, lips pressing into a straight line. “Where we have to go, is-“
There was a gasp from the table, then a heavy thump. Everyone’s heads turned in the direction of the noise, and he found that the ‘Loki’ man had fallen off the examination table, and had his back pressed against the far wall, dagger clenched in his hand. He glared at Gamora through tousled black curls like she was the scariest damn thing he’d ever seen, and while Quill could kind of understand, he figured they must’ve met before in order to elicit that kind of reaction. Gamora looked at him with sad expression, posture non-threatening but tense, like she was ready to spring into action at any moment.

As they watched, the man’s skin transitioned from azure to a pale shade of porcelain, the color spreading up his neck through his face, and down from his hands to the tips of his fingers. He figured that if he could transform to look Terran, maybe they could be biological brothers. While his eyes remained terrified, wide and wild like a cornered animal’s, eventually, his mouth split into a manic grin. “You’re why he spared me,” he said, “just so you could torture me again!” He pressed himself farther into the wall, and Quill could see just how hard his hand was quaking, enough so that he needed all ten digits to hold his weapon. “Try to,” he said, voice breaking, “try to steal my mind from me again,” he swallowed tightly, “but it won’t work! It won’t work!”

“I split from Thanos years ago,” Gamora said, and confusion flashed across the man’s face briefly before it hardened again. Quill knew she’d broken from her old man, but she wondered how the two of them knew each other. Loki’d claimed she was there to torture him ‘again’, so maybe... he didn’t want to think too hard about it. “I hate him,” she said, “almost as much as you do.”

Evidently, he sensed some modicum of truth in her words, as the dagger lowered slightly. His eyes flashed to Thor, and his jaw clenched. “Brother,” he said, voice tremulous, “what are their intentions?”

The blonde walked slowly around the table as if he was confronting a wounded beast, which he might’ve been. He knelt down next to Loki, tugging him into an embrace, and the man all but collapsed into him, dagger clattering loudly to the metal flooring. “They’re,” he croaked, “they’re the Guardians of the Galaxy, and they’re going to try to help us try to find the Infinity Stones before Thanos does.” The black-haired man nodded into the other’s chest, eyes slipping closed, and Quill was amazed he’d managed to calm him down so easily. “I promise you that we’re safe here, brother,” he vowed, and Loki nodded again, although it seemed more likely that he was too exhausted to care anymore rather than genuinely believing in what Thor was saying.

His hand was running through thick, black locks of hair, both of their legs tangling together as they pressed close together, Thor evidently not bothered by how freezing the guy’s skin was, unless it had warmed up when he’d turned human-colored. It was touching, twisting Quill’s heart like little else was able to do, but they had business that needed taking care of, and fast. If they didn’t take care of everything soon, Thanos was liable to collect the rest of the Stones before they even left the solar system.
“Sorry to interrupt, guys,” he said, even though he actually wasn’t too apologetic about interrupting them, “but Thor,” the man looked at him, expression tired, “where do you suggest we go, first?”

His gaze flickered between Quill and his brother, before settling on Quill. “We need to head to Nidavellir,” he said softly, “so that I can forge a weapon with the dwarves that’s capable of killing him. I lost my hammer, and my home,” he continued, “so I need to get a new weapon to conduct my abilities through.”

“Wait,” Rocket said, incredulous, “that place is real?”

“Yes,” Thor answered, and Rocket cackled.

“Man,” he said, laughter spilling out with his words, “if I get my hands on anything there,” Quill did not like the direction that the conversation was heading in, nor the manic gleam in his eyes, “I’m gonna’ wreak some serious havoc on the universe! It’s a dream come true, for me! Please,” Rocket begged, tone whiny, “please let me go with you!”

“See?” Thor said, gesturing towards him. “This rabbit,” Rocket squawked, “is clearly the smartest amongst you.”

“What the hell do you mean by ‘rabbit’?” He asked indignantly, but Thor only chuckled, the noise hearty and full and deep. It reverberated in his chest, made something twist that some part of him knew shouldn’t have been able to twist.

“Take no offense, Captain,” Thor reassured, and while Quill balked, Rocket practically preened.

“He’s observant!” He jeered.

Quill scoffed. “I’m the Captain,” he corrected, but Thor only gave him a side glance that was humored, but not believing.

“Well,” he said, “then you, me, and my brother-“

“Plus Groot,” Rocket added.
“-and the *Flora Colossus*,” he consented, “will go to Nidavellir together to build a weapon capable of killing Thanos.” He smiled broadly, nuzzling into his brother’s head. “The rest of you can go after the Reality Stone.”

“I’d much rather I head to Knowhere, actually,” Loki interjected, speaking up for the first time since the discussion began, “with your,” he cracked open his eyes, squinting at them, “associates.”

“Loki,” Thor said, tone reprimanding, “I think it would be better if you stayed with me for-“

“For you to nanny me like a child?” His brother finished the sentence, and Thor looked almost embarrassed. They stared at each other for a moment, a hard expression versus a bashful one, and they exchanged a wordless conversation before Loki sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “What you saw on the ship was a fluke,” he said, hand dropping into his lap. His posture screamed irritation. “You know as well as I do that the next time I face Thanos,” his eyes sharpened, “I won’t be aiming to kill with a letter opener again.” There was a story behind those words that Quill was morbidly curious about.

“Still,” Thor said, voice strained, “I’ve lost you too many times to risk losing you again.” The black haired man’s face softened perceptibly then, hackles lowering as he considered his words. “Please,” he pleaded, “either we both go, or neither of us do, and you know as well as I do that we need a weapon.”

Loki sighed, but Quill had spent enough time with liars and scoundrels to tell that the resignation in the noise was fake. “Fine,” he agreed, and Thor’s face brightened, “I’ll head with you to Nidavellir.”

Enveloping his brother in a bone-crushing embrace, he buried his face into the junction between his throat and his shoulders, nose squishing into the flesh there. “I knew that you would come around,” he said, voice muffled, and if Quill wasn’t intent on wringing out more about their pasts, he would’ve told him to keep a close eye on the man for any subterfuge. As it was, he watched as they clambered to their feet behind the examination table, not seeming to be able to keep themselves apart, fingers clasped tightly together as they pressed their bodies close to each other’s.

“Let’s get going!” Rocket screamed, hopping down from the stool he had perched himself on top of. “We’re burning starlight, here, and I don’t wanna’ waste more time here than I have to.”
“Of course,” Thor answered, and if Quill didn’t have such a sharp eye, he would’ve missed the shimmer around his brother as he released him. Turning to the rest of the ship, he smiled broadly. “Thank you again,” he said with a wave, leaving the room as his brother followed, demeanor suddenly confident. The man had his back turned to them, but Quill didn’t think the man would ever willingly expose his back to Gamora, from what he’d seen. “Farewell!”

“Groot, c’mon,” Rocket said, tugging the tree along, “put down that game. It’ll rot your brain.”

The four of them left, and the rest of them got to their posts, settling down in their seats while a small lightweight cruiser shot into the distance. Quill sighed, emotionally exhausted from the interaction, and grabbed Gamora’s hand gingerly, pressing a kiss to the back. She seemed melancholic, lost in thought, but when he did so, she looked at him, lips tilting up.

“You okay, babe?” He asked, and she nodded.

“Just,” she said, voice quiet, “I was reminded of some things I’d rather forget, that’s all.” The confession was murmured, and no one else seemed to notice she’d said anything at all, busy as they were preparing the ship to head towards Knowhere. “He,” she said, swallowing, “he’s justified in being afraid of me, but it still hurts. Having to be reminded that I broke someone like that.”

He simply squeezed her hand, because there wasn’t much he could say, and, knowing him, he would simply screw up any words he tried to give her. But she squeezed back, and that was enough.

—

As they flew away from the ship, him having given Rocket the coordinates, Thor looked at his brother, his wonderful, wonderful brother, who he was simply grateful he still had. The bruises had disappeared, but it was likely he’d just concealed them underneath one of his illusions. His hair was in neat waves again instead of a tangled mess of curls, also probably an illusion, and his posture was stiff in his seat. He wouldn’t meet Thor’s eyes, staring out the window solemnly even as Rocket and Groot bickered.

“Brother,” he said, “I hope you understand why I’m trying to keep you as far away from Thanos as possible.” Loki didn’t respond, and he sighed, rubbing his temple in frustration. “I care about you, brother,” he said, “and I don’t think my heart could take losing anything else that I love.” He remained stubbornly silent, and, frustration and sorrow mounting, he reached out to put a hand on his brother’s knee. “Loki-“
His fingers passed straight through the flesh, and his mind went blissfully blank as he stared at the shimmer, Loki’s head finally twisting so he could look at the offending digits. They sat like that for a moment, and Thor realized abruptly that Rocket and Groot had gone quiet up in the front of the ship. “Well, in my defense,” Loki exhaled, a wry, exhausted smile twisting his lips, “you should’ve known I wouldn’t normally give in so easily to your demands.” He reached up a hand to brush his face, but it went right through him. “I love you, brother,” he murmured affectionately, the words fond, before the illusion of him disintegrated into a shimmering shower of gold and green dust.

He remained staring at the place where he’d been, mind short circuiting. “Oh, shit,” Rocket cursed, and the words snapped him back into reality, having been long gone from the other ship, the main vessel likely already being on its merry way to Knowhere.

“Loki,” he croaked, heartbroken, and with all he had, he prayed it wouldn’t be the last time he saw his brother alive.

—

Sometimes, your brain registers that something’s wrong, but you don’t really know what it is.

Quill knew there was something in the room that shouldn’t be there, outlaw instincts making the hairs raise on the back of his neck and his skin prickle, but he couldn’t tell what it was. As soothing as Gamora’s fingers furled around his were, he was still on edge, body tense and on guard for some unknown threat, and that was probably the most annoying part, to him. That he was supposed to be relaxed, that this was supposed to be the safe part, and yet he still felt like he was under threat.

His eye caught on a shadow in the corner of his vision. When he turned his head, it was the brother who was meant to have left with Thor, legs up on the console, ankles crossed. His arms were folded behind his head, expression bored, and, when Quill impulsively launched to his feet without really realizing he had, the scream he released was undignified. The others looked to where he was looking, and their reactions were similar. Gamora sat still, face stony.

A pair of green eyes swiveled towards him, and a pair of thick eyebrows were raised, his being expression critical. The ring of purple around his throat was prominent, a massive bruise in the shape of a hand, and Quill absently wondered if it had been Thanos who had done it to him. There were bags underneath both of his eyes, his body scrawnier than the illusion had been earlier, and suddenly, he realized the man had been posturing. The slight downturn of his lips and the way his large, glossy eyes were hooded showed just how exhausted the man was. “By the time we arrive,” he drawled, accent sounding strangely British, “Thanos more than likely will have already come to
the planet. If he has the Reality Stone, like I suspect,” he continued, “don’t be fooled by what you think you see.”

The warning didn’t do anything to calm his nerves, and he felt a little pissed about it. Slowly, he sat back down, and the motion made the rest of his crew do the same. “And why are you with us, huh?” He asked, and he could have sworn that the other man physically rolled his eyes. It only made him more pissed off at the guy. “I thought you were going off with your brother.”

“The oaf can handle himself,” he answered casually, and that was slightly surprising. He wasn’t expecting him to be so blasé about it, but apparently he’d misjudged their relationship.

“Loki,” Gamora started warily, and the man exhaled tightly through his nose. It was like having Drax and her meet all over again, killing his family and all of that. What a hassle. “If you’re here to keep an eye on me,” she said, and his jaw clenched, “I hope you know that while I understand if you dislike me, you need to trust me if we have want to have a chance at defeating Thanos.” He didn’t respond, and, after a beat, she continued. “We both know how dangerous he is, and that he’ll use anything against us.”

“I know,” Loki confirmed, and Quill noticed the way he ground his teeth. He seemed like a highly anxious person, one of those people that constantly have to have their shields up when interacting with others. “But you also know just as well as I do that his brainwashing can be hard to shake, and I refuse to be blindsided by you, daughter of Thanos.”

“Hey!” Quill snapped, and Gamora winced. Thor had immediately accepted her heritage, and even though it had annoyed him then that they’d accepted each other so quickly, it seemed like this Loki guy had a lot more baggage than he did, and was a lot less willing to trust her. But no matter how justified he was in hating her guts, he wasn’t about to let him disrespect her like that. “No name-calling here, greasy.”

For whatever reason, the ensuing expression on the man’s face reminded him of Groot when the kid was exasperated. He wondered just how old the guy was for his species. “Peter,” Gamora said warningly, “I appreciate it, but this is between the two of us.”

“Perhaps unsurprisingly, I concur,” Loki said. Taking his feet off the console, he stood, spine stiff. His posture was confident, even if he looked reduced. Facing towards Gamora, stance powerful, he suddenly radiated rage. “I came not for you, Daughter of Thanos,” he said viciously, teeth bared, “but because I want to kill him with my own hands.”

Silence fell over the ship before Gamora took a step forwards. Loki flinched back for a moment,
unsureness flickering over his face, but then she extended her hand, and he stared down at it. “A ceasefire, then,” she said, and after a moment, he clasped it.

“Your proposal of a truce is acknowledged and accepted,” he said.

When they landed on Knowhere, they offloaded cautiously, weapons equipped and loaded. Loki, however, was unarmed, but Quill knew that it wasn’t for lack of a weapon. The area was deserted, and it set him on edge. Usually, the skull was bustling, but with nobody there, it was unnerving.

“Loki, Quill,” Gamora said, voice low, “if Thanos captures me...”

“I may despise you,” Loki started, and Quill was suddenly very, very confused by the situation, “but none deserve that fate.”

“Wait,” he spluttered, “what?”

“Nothing,” Gamora said. He could tell that the conversation was over.

—

Arriving in the home of Taneleer Tivan, the Collector, they immediately walked in on Thanos threatening him, standing above his probe form.

“I know you have the Reality Stone, Tivan.” Placing a boot in the middle of his chest, he pressed down, the Collector releasing a nervous wheeze. Slowly, they started making their way around the scene, moving quietly and cautiously to not arouse suspicion. “Giving it to me will spare you a great deal of suffering.”

“I told you, I sold it!” He insisted, hysteric. “Why would I lie?”

“I imagine it's like breathing for you,” Thanos said, blasé. She shivered, the words sending a burst of fear through her veins.
“Like suicide,” the Collector rasped.

“So you do understand,” Thanos said. He looked smug, lips curled up cruelly, and abruptly, he stepped off. “Not even you would surrender something so precious.”

The Collector shook his head. “I didn’t know what it was,” he claimed, but Gamora knew it was a blatant lie.

She also knew that her father wouldn’t believe him. “Then you’re more of a fool than I took you for,” he said, almost disappointed. He appreciated when his enemies were clever and posed legitimate challenges, and the Collector evidently had been a let-down. “Last chance, charlatan. Where's the Stone?”

She heard rustling, and, turning, she saw Drax preparing to move forwards, weapons raised. “Today...” he said slowly, creeping forwards, and Peter tried to rush in front of him.

“Drax, Drax-“ he said, panicked.

But calmly, Loki raised a slim hand, and Drax was restrained by a green tether of magic. While he tried to fight against it, pulling harshly, it remained unbroken. “It’s an illusion,” he said simply. Once the green-skinned Warrior stilled, he allowed his bonds to dissipate. Gamora’s first inclination was not to trust the scheming man, but she knew he was speaking honestly, even if it was a harsh truth. “Unfortunately,” he continued, “I know not where he is at the--“

The illusion came crashing down around them, and they were left in the burning ruins of the Collector’s display room. Creatures milled about unimpeded by the confines they had been trapped in before, artifacts scattered carelessly on the ground. Her heart sank into her stomach, and they took up defensive positions, backing into a circle.

"I should have known,” Thanos’ disembodied voice drawled, “that the little princeling would see through my illusion, even if woven by something as powerful as the Reality Stone.”

Thanos appeared in front of them, three Stones held within the Infinity Gauntlet, and she felt sick. Three more stood between him and victory, and by taking her, he could reduce it to two. Gamora felt tears begin to gather in her eyes, and as she blinked them away, they trickled down her cheeks. “You knew that I’d come here,” she said, and he nodded.
Before he could say more, she had whipped out her sword, but he knocked it away like it was plastic before it could get near biting into him. With a large hand, he grabbed her by the neck, and, from the way his eyes widened and his jaw slackened, she knew that this was where Loki’s bruise had come from.

“Thanos!” Drax yelled, but with a wave of Thanos’ hand, he was disassembled into a pile of cubes, Mantis beside him turning into a long ribbon of flesh. Her breath quickened, slightly afraid that the effects weren’t temporary.

“Let her go!” Peter shouted, and she noticed that Loki had disappeared. Gamora didn’t blame him for running away, but she was slightly disappointed. She thought he had more fire in him than that, yet evidently he was a coward at heart.

“Ah,” Thanos sighed, “the boyfriend .”

“I like to think of myself more as a Titan-killing long-term booty call,” he corrected, and if it hadn’t been for the situation, she would’ve laughed. His blaster remained fixed on Thanos, although his hands were shaking. “Let her go,” he insisted again, determination in his voice, “or I'm gonna blow that nut sack of a chin right off your face!”

“Not him,” Gamora said, and realization crossed his face. The gun remained fixed on her father’s face, and she knew that she should have made him promise instead of relying on Loki.

Just when she thought Quill wasn’t going to do what she needed him to do, he turned the gun towards her and pulled the trigger. As the blaster went off, it dissipated into bubbles, and her stomach sank with the turn of his mouth.

But when Loki stopped between a traumatized Quill and her, face hardened and teeth clenched together, she did a disbelieving double take. She didn’t think he would ever willingly step into danger for her, but either he was about to sell his soul to her father in exchange for immunity (unlikely), or he was actually fulfilling her request. As scared as she was to die, and as reluctant as she was to leave her friends, she felt relieved that it would keep her father from the Stones for a while yet.

“You should have killed me when it was easy ,” he said airily, and she didn’t have to see her father to know his expression was one of fury. The Stones glowed, and she had a feeling her father was about to turn the man into putty, but when he raised his hand, likely intending to kill him with the Stones, the blast of power that he sent just sent the jovial quasi-deity disintegrating into a cloud of golden dust.
The hand around her throat slackened, and something moving in the corner of her vision was the only warning she got before something was jumping out from behind a broken display stand. Loki was on the Infinity Gauntlet before her father had the chance to react, striking as quickly as a snake, and then suddenly they were on their ship in a blast of azure light, Loki frantically working the flight control console. Thanos was no longer holding onto her, and she felt herself start to shake, Peter rushing to take her into his arms.

“Loki,” she said, voice shaky, “what did you do?”

The ship took off, immediately jumping into a speed that was too dangerous for all but experienced pilots. She registered the blaring of the alarms, trackers warning them of oncoming missile threats, but having each of them somehow secure and unharmed, Thanos not in sight, was making her numb to the incoming threat. Instead of responding, he simply raised his hand, and the glowing blue rock pinched between his forefinger and thumb made her release a shaky sigh of relief. They hadn’t come away empty-handed, and while Thanos had gained one stone, he’d lost another.

Later, when the others were asleep and she’d snuck away from Quill’s bedroom, she had found Loki sitting on the floor alone in the observation room, watching the stars with his back facing the door. If he noticed her enter, which she was sure he had, he didn’t show it.

“This is a good place to come and think,” she said. Walking forwards, she sat down on the ground next to him, crossing her legs underneath her. “I come here when I need time alone.”

He hummed in recognition, and he turned his head towards her, looking guileless. “I’m sure you recognize that I wish to be alone, then?” He said, a vision of innocence, but she recognized the bitter bite underneath his words.

Ignoring him, she moved on to the topic of conversation she wanted to talk about. “You could’ve left me there,” she pointed out, and the man shrugged at the provocation, gazing off into the depths of space, still refusing to look at her. He was petulant like that, always had been since the moment she met him, as broken a man as he was. “I wouldn’t have blamed you,” she pressed.

“My brother likes you,” he explained plainly. The answer threw her off guard, but it made some sense, even if it certainly wasn’t his prime directive. They seemed close, closer than they had been when he first fell into the grasp of her father. “And,” he continued, “you were willing to perish in order to prevent him from acquiring the Soul Stone.” She didn’t know how he possibly could know that Thanos needed her in order to collect it, but he knew plenty of things that others didn’t. “I still don’t trust you,” he said, “but while I’m a bad person, I’m not cruel enough to kill you.” The downturn of his lips turned into a crooked grin. “Or perhaps I’m not kind enough to kill you.”
**Insert basic ‘I Hate Infinity War’ rant here.**

The update schedule will be loosely structured, although you should get at least an update per week. It all depends on what my schedule is. The story will get farther and farther from canon as it goes on, although it’s already pretty different. Stay safe, lovelies!

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