Thor and Loki are the children of a dynasty of great actors. Their mother Frigga is a grande dame of the stage and muse of the finest European movie directors, their father Odin is going down in history as the Lawrence Olivier of his time.

Thor and Loki are following on their steps, with everything to prove, to themselves and to the world.

But as they become dragged under the public eye, so does their past, full of secrets and lies.

There are things that not even Thor can protect Loki from.
Notes

In this story, Thor and Loki have been in love all their lives, and they become lovers in their teens. Utterly and enthusiastically consensual, but still underage.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Revelations, Book 1.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has been re-written from scratch. It was bugging me. There were little things that didn't feel right, now that I know these kids better. There are no changes really, just their inner voices are more on-point. This may happen in other chapters... (squinty eyes at garden scene in ch 2) Ok back to work.

(The past)

Loki was late. Later than usual. Thor never rushed to get showered and changed after his work out session at the gym, because he knew he was going to have to wait, but this was a fucking piss-take.

Huffing and puffing, he went back into the sports centre, headed for the kids’ changing room — where he technically had not been allowed for more than a year now, since his fourteenth birthday. Loki was not there, but that kid Thor knew from Loki’s class was. (What was his name again?)

“Well, look who’s here,” said the kid, batting his eyelids, as he picked up his gear and stuffed it into a duffle bag.

Loki’s classmates knew his big brother well by now. Thor might look like any other bully, but he wasn’t one. And this kid was always flirting with him, safe in the knowledge that it wouldn’t get him a beating.

“Hey, have you seen Loki?” asked Thor.

“Mr. Fouché dared criticise his attitude derriere and he’s probably still in the ballet hall, practicing.”

Thor rolled his eyes. That sounded like Loki, alright.

“Thanks.”

“Anything else I can do for you?” said the kid, cocking his hip.

With a little grin to himself, Thor wondered what the kid would do if Thor said actually, there is. Run for the hills screaming, right? He couldn't be more than what, thirteen? Fourteen? He was
So Thor shook his head in dismay and sighed. And when he walked out, he made sure the door was well shut behind him.

He grumbled to himself all the way down the corridor towards the ballet hall, thinking about the moan he would be having later about this to his mum.

“He’s old enough to go by himself,” he would tell her.

“But darling, doesn’t it make sense that, since you’re both at the same sports centre, you take the bus home together?” she would reply, if Loki was within earshot.

If he wasn’t, she would ruffle Thor’s hair and whisper, “He’s only thirteen. I don’t want him running around town on his own.”

Yeah, god knows what kind of trouble Loki would get himself into if he was ever unleashed without supervision upon the London streets. For such a quiet, reserved kid, he could really cause a lot of mischief. He was way too pretty for his own good, and too clever and well-spoken, and had a way about him, full of arrogance and contempt, as if everyone was beneath him, which was a bully magnet the size of bloody Warwickshire. And no matter how often he was advised to “just ignore them”, Loki’s preferred method of dealing with his bullies was to humiliate them with carefully aimed, pointed jabs; if he was feeling particularly Loki that day, he would also flirt at them. And, oh, he had a mouth on him, his baby brother, and some razor-sharp wits, and a way with words. Good job he was a fast runner. Even so, when bored and unsupervised for too long, Loki could quickly become a full-time job, and full-on headache, for his big brother.

And so, big brother had to sit around the front stairs of the sports centre every bloody Thursday afternoon, and wait on his arse for his royal highness to finish drying his fucking hair. As if Thor didn’t have homework to do and World of Warcraft to catch up on before dinner.

He pushed in the door to the ballet hall, mirrors wall to wall, the incongruous grand piano in the corner, with every intention of having it all out on his brother.

And there Loki was, indeed, doing the whatever it was the kid in the changing room had said, standing on his toes on a straight leg, while lifting the other one behind him, higher than his head, his back arched, arms decoratively held front and side, hands tense, his face serious, raven black hair slicked back, his long neck showing every relief. Thor froze and stared.

Loki took his sweet time before he even acknowledged Thor’s presence. When he did, it was with his back to Thor, casting a glance through the mirror that caught Thor ogling his long, beautifully shaped legs and his tight, motherfucking perfect arse under that lick of paint they called ballet leggings, which left nothing to the imagination.

Loki put his leg down and turned; Thor's eyes flickered up, down, and away, with a fluster. (Yes, fuck, couldn’t he be curious? They used to have baths together and everything but not for, like, ages, and Loki had grown since then, ok? And you could fucking see everything through those ridiculous lycra pants. How the fuck did anyone get anything done in that class?)

Loki walked over, silent and graceful. Thor leveled him with a glower.
“Half an hour late, Loki,” he grunted.

“I’m finished now,” Loki said, in a purr.

“If you do this again, I’m fucking leaving without you,” said Thor.

“Fair enough. I’ll enjoy hearing you tell mum,” countered Loki, a towel around his shoulders. “I’m going for a shower. Why don’t you wait in the changing room? It will be empty now. And it’s warmer.”

Thor stared into Loki’s sweet green eyes. There was no malice there, at first glance. But with Loki, Thor knew better. And of course, Thor blinked first. Loki was a bloody basilisk.

Thor’s eyes kept dipping to his brother’s crotch out of their own bloody accord. He should really wait outside.

Loki strutted out of the shower with a towel around his slender hips. Thor pretended to be checking his phone.

Of course, he wasn’t really, and when Loki turned his back to him, that’s when Thor spotted it.

“What the fuck is that, Loki?” he said, rushing to his baby brother.

“What do you think?” grumbled Loki.

“Someone hit you?”

“I ran into a wall.” He sounded bored.

“Who was it?” said Thor.

“The usual suspects, Thor.”

And he was irritated. At him. How fucking dare he…?

Loki shrugged off his brother’s hand and dropped the towel to put his clothes on. Thor looked away, with the quick flash of Loki’s muscular, pale, smooth arse burned in his retinas.

*The usual suspects.* Someone at the rugby team. Or *everybody* at the rugby team. Shit.

“Was it at school?” said Thor, teeth gritted in anger.

“Why does it matter?”

“Because you have to report it! Mum and dad will have their heads on a pike if…!”

“Do *not* tell them, Thor!” cut Loki, with a shriek of panic. When he spoke next, he was calmer. “It will only make it worse. It was my fault, alright? I should just ignore them. Blame my big mouth.”

And for a horrible second, Thor did.

“I’m taking care of this,” he said, clenching his fists.
Loki raised an eyebrow, clearly unimpressed. He combed his wet hair back and put on a black knitted cap. It was chilly out there.

“IT’s nothing. Seriously,” said Loki, slinging the backpack on one shoulder. “I don’t care. They’re scum. Ignorant jerks.”

“Ignorant jerks twice your fucking size, Loki,” countered Thor, sizzling with wrath. “I’m not going to let them get away with it.”

“And what are you going to do, then?” said Loki sweetly, poison underneath. “Beat the shit out of them and fuck up your place in the rugby team? Over this?”

Thor opened his mouth to protest, then it hit. Damn. He never thought far enough ahead, did he?

His brother stared with coldness, eyed him head to toe, full of contempt. Then he turned his back and walked out. He had not looked very disappointed. He had not expected any different.

On the way home, they both had their earbuds on and walked without touching or talking, like strangers. Except when they were about to cross Edgware Road; a black cab turned up out of nowhere, and Thor stopped suddenly, a protective hand in front of Loki.

“I’m not fucking blind,” snapped Loki. “I wasn’t going to cross.”

It was the way he looked at him.

“Well, fuck you then,” snapped Thor.

“Fuck you.”

They walked the rest of the way ignoring each other.

When they got to the house, there was a unison “fine” to their mum’s “How was your day?”, as they both made for their rooms and slammed their doors.

The next week, Thor got home after rugby practice with a black eye, a split lip, bruised, bloody knuckles, and a letter of suspension from the school for two months. Dad shouted at him for half an hour and grounded him until further notice.

Dinner was tense that evening. But every now and then, Thor caught his baby brother looking at him as if he was made of pure, shining light.

That night, Loki slipped into his bed. He had not done that in years. He burrowed into the arch of his big brother’s body, and Thor held him tight. They didn’t say a word. There was lots to say, but neither had the guts.

Didn’t matter. He had him now. It was all right.
(The present)

The moment the door of the limo opened, the circus started. Thor stepped out and he was met with an explosion of shouting, screaming and whooping, a lightning storm of flashes, his name called out from every direction, everybody trying to tear a piece of him. Half blinded, he waved and smiled at the beast, a crowd amassed behind the security fences, holding up signs and photos for the stars to autograph. The noise was deafening, the buzz electrifying. Would he ever get used to it? Did he want to?

Amora's legs appeared from the car, and for a while they kept on appearing, they were that long. Thor gentlemanly helped her out and up, the girl virtually disabled by those vertigo-inducing heels she favoured. Amora shook her head and her blond, wavy hair cascaded down her back. She clasped a possessive hand around the crook of Thor’s elbow and flashed him a grin. The photographers went nuclear. She was very beautiful, not cultured but not dumb, an OK fuck, and liked to laugh. They had been together for four months. The journalists had started to ask if they were getting serious. Thor could hardly answer that he was already looking for his next.

Through the white dots in his retinas, he spied Loki climbing down out of the other side of the limo, unfolding to his full height and tugging at his suit to tidy it up, before making his way around and coming to a stop a couple of steps away from where Thor and Amora were posing for the photographers.

The publicist nudged Thor along, and he turned to his brother, to see if he was following. Loki flickered his green eyes to him, piercing and sharp, and winked. He cut quite a figure, strolling down the red carpet, hands in his pockets, as if he was having a walk in the park, without a care in the world. Such a fine actor he was. Loki hated these things. Terrified him. But nobody, and he meant nobody, would thank Thor for it if he tried to lend a hand somehow, so he turned his mind to the task at hand.

It came so easy. He inhabited this world like a second skin. His smile was made to dazzle the cameras, his swag to burn red carpets with a 6-feet-tall model by his side. So on he went, lead by Coulson’s nudges and whispers, on to charm the interviewers, sign across countless images of himself, pose for dozens of selfies that would be on Twitter within the minute, and almost, almost managed to shut down his father’s voice in his head, with that sarcastic lilt, “of course, son, you must do whatever makes you happy.”

“What are you wearing, Amora? Amora!” shouted the photographers. She disengaged to pose on her own in front of a white board covered in luxury brand logos.

“Thor! Thor!” One of the reporters stationed along the fence was waving at him, his camera turning to aim at Thor, like one of those machine-gun posts in a World War 2 movie.

“MTV” whispered Coulson in his ear, as he lead him towards the reporter. “Michael.”

“We’re here with Thor Odinson, hot rising star of The Vikings,” introduced Michael, bubbly, full of
enthusiasm, mouth full of teeth. "You’re up for Best Hero, how lucky are you feeling tonight?"  

Thor gave him his stock answer about the tough competition and the honour that blah blah blah blah, lines he knew by heart and would probably be able to repeat verbatim in fifty years time. Of course, he always managed to make it sound as if these words had never been spoken before, because that was what he excelled at. Appearing spontaneous and fresh even after a dozen takes was Chez Odinson's specialty, so he was able to breeze through the interview without a glitch. He came across as enthusiastic, self-assured, and appropriately humble, and didn't fail to drop in a few jokes and a few names. A consummate professional already.

“You’re here with your brother Loki,” said the interviewer, taking Thor by surprise. Now, that was a new line in the repertoire. “Loki, please! Can we talk to you?”

Loki turned graciously on his toes and walked over, with the elegant weightlessness of his many years of ballet. His hands were still in his pockets, his stance nonchalant, his naturally aristocratic posture relaxed into something a bit more informal, a bit more ‘Hollywood.’ It was an act, of course, designed to help him blend in, after all those run-ins at school had finally taught him that it was hard, and a hell of a lot of a bother, to live in this world without filtering and subduing somewhat his princely ways.

“Loki, you’ve just finished your run in England playing Hamlet. You’ve received rave reviews, and you’re up for an Odin Borson European Theatrical Award. It must be strange to be nominated for an award that bears your father’s name. How do you feel about that?”

Loki's big green eyes looked perfectly innocent when he deadpanned, “Incestuous.”

Thor's stomach dropped to his knees. As for MTV Michael, he was white. Could you even say that on TV? His expression was so ridiculous, if Thor wasn’t feeling an ominous ball of lead in his stomach, he might have laughed. As for Loki, he was was evidently enjoying too much tormenting the poor guy, or he'd be laughing himself.

Coulson just cleared his throat —the man was unflappable— and he subtly tapped his watch. MTV Michael finally snapped out of it.

“So, Loki, you have your own movie coming in Spring. Are you excited? How was it to work with Tim Burton?”

“Which question would you like me to answer first?” said Loki, politely, exquisitely offensive. “It was a delight,” he cut with a honeyed tone, just when the reporter was getting his voice back, “and I am very excited.”

The interviewer had lost his bearings. Thor saw the camera guy looking away from the eyepiece with a raised eyebrow. MTV Michael scrambled for something to fill the silence.

“You’ve said before that you prefer to work in the theatre, but is this the beginning of a big Hollywood adventure? Are you going to be up for Best Hero next year?”

“God forbid,” smiled Loki. “Best Villain, maybe.”

Used to longer answers, with lots of waffling, MTV Michael gaped like an idiot.

“You guys come from a family of great actors,” he said, this time addressing Thor. Much safer. “Your mother was a great muse of European cinema in the seventies, has won two Oscars for her
acting, and has been the queen of the London stage for thirty years. Your father directed the Royal
Shakespeare Company for two decades, has received Oscars for acting and directing, has run
national company theatres in Russia, Norway and Sweden, and is still one of the most respected
figures in the industry today. How do you cope with the pressure of expectations when it comes to
your own career?"

Thor stepped in before Loki could say something outrageous.

“We try to make our own way. We’re very proud of our parents, and we’re lucky and grateful to
have grown up in a very creative environment. They have always been sincere and open about both
the ups and downs of the profession, and they have always been supportive of us. We’ve always
been told that the only people we have something to prove to is ourselves.”

Good answer, thought Thor to himself. He saw Loki turn his face away and do a quick, minute eye-
roll the camera hopefully did not catch.

There were a couple more questions about Thor’s co-stars, about the other nominees, and then they
let them go. Thor would need to stop and repeat a slightly different variation of the same babble to a
dozen more interviewers before he even made it through the door, but with some luck, Loki would
find his way inside the building without further interruptions.

Because Thor was well on his way to the A-list now —and if he won tonight, he was as good as in
—, but Loki was still lurking in the shadows on this side of the Atlantic. The buzz around him was
not inconsiderable within the industry —his Hamlet was really that special—, but at the moment he
was a name only familiar to the initiated, so to speak, while the public at large still didn’t know who
he was.

Thor feared the day when Loki would have to run this treadmill of inane interviews and autographs.
If tonight was an indication of his future attitude, Thor had every reason to be concerned. While Loki
could be charming and perfectly diplomatic if he put his mind to it, he was not generous with his
time, and he had a very limited tolerance for shallowness and stupidity. And there was just so much
of it in this business. And big bro wouldn’t always be there to rescue the poor interviewers from
Loki’s playful paws, and he certainly would not be able to be there to ease their hurt prides and
protect Loki from their petty revenges. The whole thing was a disaster waiting to happen, thought
Thor with a shudder.

As he walked into the hall, he caught up with his brother and grabbed his forearm, a fake smile for
the cameras plastered over his face.

“Incestuous?” he hissed through his teeth, for Loki’s ears only.

Loki smirked, mischievous.

“Just a bit of fun.”

Once inside the hall, a throng of adorers and well-wishers crowded around Thor and the other men
of the minute. Thor patted backs with Steve Rogers, the only other real contender for the Best Hero
award, according to the bookies, and crushed Tony Stark, the big star producer, in his signature bear
hug. After that, Thor doled some more greetings, hand-shakes, kisses, one-arm hugs and hearty back
pats, warm and charming and charismatic.

Loki observed from a distance the expressions of the lucky mortals who had succeeded in securing the attention of his god-like brother for an instant, their faces brightening up, infused with elation and pride and a kind of nirvanic contentment that Loki could relate to, easily and painfully. He kept his eye on them after Thor moved on to the next person, and he recognised that expression too — a soft resignation, gratitude tinged with sadness, and always, always, that glimmer of hope that, at any time now, Thor would look at them again, single them out again, and smile for them alone, and they would be, for another second or two, the envy of the world.

If Loki wasn’t so happily married to his own misery, he’d spare a thought for those poor devils. But he had enough with his own burden. Loki had had a whole lifetime of what they were to endure for one evening. They could suck it up.

He knew, on a purely intellectual level, that there was no-one dearer than him in Thor’s heart. But Thor loved so many, and Loki so few, and so very much. The imbalance was soul-wrenching. It crushed him, it angered him, it terrified him.

Loki’s struggle to make his own way in the world was about more than just succeeding as an actor and stepping out of his family’s long shadow. He had made his resolve some time ago to cut Thor out of his life completely, fearing that, if he didn’t, he would waste his days just waiting for Thor to spare him a thought. He knew he didn’t have it within himself to bounce back indefinitely from the feeling of emptiness and loss whenever Thor pushed him away and moved on from him.

He knew well that it would not be any warmer out of Thor’s shadow but, lonesome and cold as it was, at least this new path would be Loki’s own. He would treasure it. After all, he had never really believed he would grow up to live a happy life, and had settled long ago for a busy one.

He watched his brother tend to his court, girlfriend of the week on his arm, dazzling, electric, magnificent. He schooled his face to remain blank over the seething anger, the jealousy, the longing.

A girl with an earpiece approached Thor in his seat during the ad break, to warn him that he had twenty-five minutes before he was up for presenting, and would he kindly make his way backstage to get ready.

Thor kissed Amora and followed the girl, noticing only then that Loki’s seat, in the row behind theirs, was empty. He had not even heard him leaving. Where the hell was he?

He had the drill explained to him once again, and then he was told he had time for a breather. He bumped into Tony, who had just presented an award himself.

“Hey, I’ve just seen Loki out there,” he said to him.

Thor made it to the outside by an emergency door and into an alley, flanked with fire exits and dotted with the flicker of half a dozen solitary cigarettes. Where was he.
He tugged at the neck of his tux. It was suffocating him.

“Nervous, brother?” rumbled Loki’s voice behind his back.

Thor smirked and turned to the voice. Loki was under the fire stairs, having a fag, his eyes glinting in the dim light.

“Have you ever known me to be nervous?” laughed Thor, slipping easily into their usual banter.

“Whenever you have to read in public,” said Loki, puffing smoke. “There’s nominees from Poland and from New Zealand. Did you know the Polish have accents on their consonants? Good luck with that.”

Thor threw him a dark look, but he wasn’t angry. And he was nervous, but not over any complicated surnames.

“Do you think he’s watching?”

“Of course they are watching, Thor,” said Loki, with a little grin of endearment. “They wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Thor closed his fists because his hands were trembling. The thought of their parents watching the award ceremony, that three-ringed circus their eldest son was riding and courting, that was more terrifying than any number of accents on the surnames he'd have to read out for the world to see and the internet to immortalize.

“He’s proud of you,” said Loki, a puff of smoke. “You’re his golden son and you’re going to storm Hollywood at twenty-one. He just doesn’t like to make it too easy for you. You know dad.” His cheeks hollowed around the filter of the cigarette.

“He’s proud of you too,” said Thor, looking away. “How could he not be. You were awesome in Stratford.”

Loki smiled without mirth, and said nothing.

“And this… It will be you next, you will see,” insisted Thor.

Loki still had nothing to say. He smiled sweetly, and gave his brother a quick once-over.

“Nice suit,” he said.

The change of subjects was not lost on Thor, but he played along.

“You don’t want to start this again, do you, Plastic Tie?” Loki had already commented today on his choice of outfit (hey, it's not red, it's dark rust, alright? And very fucking classy and distinctive, if you asked Thor).

“It’s patent leather,” said Loki. “And I'm being sincere.”

“You're incapable of sincerity,” laughed Thor.

“Am I.” Loki smoked quietly for a moment. Then the smile, and the mischief too, melted from his face. He stared at Thor intently, as if he meant every word he was going to say. "I’ve looked forward to this day as long as you have. You’re my brother, and my friend. Sometimes I’m envious, but never doubt that I love you.”
Thor stared back at him. The intensity of the moment had taken him by surprise. He found himself searching Loki’s expression for hints of mockery or irony. There wasn’t any. Well, that was... Well. Feeling it, he hooked a hand around his brother’s neck.

“Thank you.”

“Now give us a kiss,” said Loki.

Thor tensed up. He interrogated Loki’s expression again. It revealed nothing. His tone was light, nothing but a joke, but with Loki, one never knew.

They had never talked about it. Nobody had ever said “it’s over.” And Thor had no idea what Loki was getting at right now. So he did what he always did -pretend he hadn't noticed a thing.

“Stop it,” he said, wagging a finger playfully.

He did not miss the cold, dark metal flashing in his brother's eye.

“They’re waiting for you,” said Loki.

“Aren’t you coming in?”

“I have seen you present awards before, thanks. And you really don’t want me anywhere near a camera when you start to grapple your way with the Polish surnames. Not even I am that good an actor.”

His tone was bright, but his eyes were dull. Thor feared that look.

“But you’ll be in soon, right?” he asked, anxious. “I mean… you’re not going to run away on me, are you?”

“Of course not,” said Loki, still brightly. “I’ll be there to see you win.”

Thor beamed, with full force this time. He moved to hug his brother.

“Go on,” urged Loki, flinching away from him, avoiding his eyes. “Go.”

Loki watched him go back inside, and lit up a fag with the butt of the previous one. He checked his hand, how badly it shook. He cursed between his teeth.

He should not have come tonight. Avoid triggering situations, his therapists always said. Well, Loki could think of very few situations more triggering than this one he found himself in right now. Thor had been a selfish bastard for asking him, but Loki had been a downright imbecile for accepting. It would mean so much to me, Thor had said. Oh, the bastard. He wore his stupid heart in his fucking sleeve, which was a virtue, surely, but translated into never fucking thinking, never fucking stopping to consider what came out of his big dumb mouth. It would mean so much to you, brother? What about what it would mean to me?

Ah, his oblivious, unwittingly cruel brother, marching down glory lane and trampling and crushing everything and everyone in his path, while receiving only praise and adoration in return. How must it
It would mean so much to me... How bloody dare he. Oh, it meant a hell of a lot to Loki too, though apparently, not the same thing. It's not like Loki suspected that Thor had forgotten the last time they had attended an award ceremony together. Oh no, it was vastly, vastly worse than that. Of course Thor remembered, he just did not fucking care, did he? He was over it, thought Loki bitterly, tasting bile. On Thor sailed, ravishing and radiant, and didn't even notice that Loki was staying behind, retreating more and more into the distance. Oh, Thor had not had time for this, for Loki, for years now.

But Thor was not Loki’s only contentious issue tonight. That interviewer had not been the first, and would not be the last tonight, to mention the Odin Borson Award.

“I can’t believe an award in my name will be going to a bloody teenage Hamlet,” he had heard his father grumble in the background, while Loki was on the phone to his mum. Dad had wanted it to sound like a tease, but it fucking wasn’t. Loki was not an idiot. And nobody had laughed.

Furious tears were swelling up again. He tried to push them down with a long drag. The tears receded, but the darkness didn't go anywhere. It was a special kind of darkness, Loki had met it before. He could feel his thoughts becoming darker and more obsessive by the day, spiralling ever downwards, anxiety gnawing at him relentlessly, taking one rodent-sized bite off his sanity at a time. He should not have dropped his meds, right?

Loki wasn’t an idiot, if he may say so himself. He knew not to screw around with his meds. But he had managed to make himself believe that, since he was now a prosperous young man on his way up, with exciting professional prospects and growing recognition for his many artistic talents, he would have enough good in his life to fend off the black thoughts all by his little old self, without the chemical crutches. He did not want to be a lifer.

And for a few months, he had not missed his pills. He had fought, he had kept busy, and he thought he was staying strong. No, Loki was not stupid, but he had been on the things for five years, and he had wanted to try and make do without, so sue him. He had wanted so badly just to be normal.

Well, he sure as fuck wasn’t feeling normal now.

He chain-smoked another two fags, and tried a few breathing exercises he had learned in therapy, as he psyched himself up. No, you can’t stay out here and you can’t run away and hide under a rock. How would you explain it to Thor? You've come all this way. You can do this. Don’t think. Just walk. One foot in front of the other, chop-chop. That’s it, Loki-boy, you’re not a complete and utterly useless mess just yet, not just yet. Atta boy. (Oh, he could talk himself into whatever he had to. He had been told he ought to be kinder, though. I don't work like that, he had said.)

Thor had thanked his mum and dad, the people who had voted for him, and his brother.

“For always being there for me. I love you, man.”

Loki had smiled and nodded, as he was supposed to, but inside he was fuming. Is that all?, that voice had hissed inside him. He should have not bothered at all. He could have fucking saved it.
It would not shut up. Loki recognised that voice for what it was, and feared it. The sign that he needed to get back to his meds, is what it was, and very fucking quickly.


The party at Chez Stark’s was in full swing, and Thor should probably mind his drinking, but he was fucking celebrating, goddammit! He was in! King of the world! He intended to get massively pissed tonight, laugh, fuck, and make merry. He could regret his life and his choices tomorrow.

Loki had only just left.

“Oh, come on, brother!” Thor had said, words slurring. “Hasn’t Coulson told you that you need to work on building up your contacts?”

“I’m tired and I want to stop seeing people,” Loki had replied, sounding irritated. “Any contacts I make tonight would not be helping my career. Or yours, for that matter.”

Thor had been more disappointed than he cared to show. It showed anyway. He was on his fifth glass of champagne after all.

“I was looking forwards to spending some time with you, brother,” he said, his tongue loose. “All these months, me here, you in England… I miss you.”

That dark, cold metal glinted in Loki’s eyes again.

“You’re a slobber when you’re drunk,” he said, cutting. “I’ll see you at mum and dad’s next week.”

Thor had watched him leave, graceful and slender, his posture slowly straightening up from his artificial Hollywood slump to his true, proud aristocratic self. He was a prince among commoners, beautiful like some gems and some animals are beautiful, sharp as a razor blade. He saluted him.

Then he sighed, resigned, and let him go.

“Hey, Thor, Variety is out” shouted that mousy little guy who fancied himself his new best friend tonight (Thor could not for the life of him remember the guy’s name.) He was waving his smartphone at him. Thor took it. “You’re on the cover! Had you seen it yet?”

Thor squinted to try and read the small print. They had done an in-depth article on him, and had requested some family photos. He smiled at the old pictures. Mum, so young, as Ginny in Camelot, in man’s clothes in Victor or Victoria, on set with François Truffaut and with Ken Loach, and more recently, in a still from her latest movie with Kenneth Brannagh. There was dad, majestic as Hamlet in the Sixties, directing his celebrated Death of a Salesman, lifting his three Oscars —best actor, best director, best movie for his adaptation of Henry V. And ruddy-cheeked Thor at twelve as Jem in a theatrical version of To Kill a Mockingbird, and as a teenage heartthrob in a Channel 4 soap (yes, so
what? Where did people think the fan base that had landed him this award tonight came from?"

Then in his more serious parts for the BBC, and a few recent stills from his three Hollywood movies
(the third one still unreleased.) And look at that, Loki in *Hamlet* — those huge, crazy, bottomless
eyes of his, that had scared the shit out of his brother, both times he had attended a performance. And
Loki and him, at nine and eleven, in *The Secret Garden*. The only time they had worked together,
apart from their amateur shenanigans around the house. Their first kiss.

Over his shoulder, the guy said, “I didn’t know Loki was adopted.”

Thor tensed, and turned slowly, very slowly, to face him.

“Excuse me?”

The guy shrunk.

“He isn’t?” he said, voice weak, sensing he had screwed up with a man who was one foot taller, and
forty pounds of pure muscle heavier than him. “It says here…”

He scrolled frantically, and showed Thor the phone.

Thor snatched it. There it was. In a fucking *caption*. “*Upon returning from Moscow with his*
*adopted brother Loki*…”

What the fuck was *that*. He was used to crazy shit being printed about him, but not about…

My god. *Loki*.

Thor stood up so vigorously he toppled the chair, and dashed out, leaving it there. He had to dodge,
nudge and push to get through the crowd. He could only hope that they would have got in Loki’s
way too. If he was lucky, he could still catch him.

The front yard of Stark Mansion was full of black limos, all looking the bloody same. How to tell
them apart.

*There.* A slim figure standing by the car, pale face turned towards him.

“Loki!” he shouted.

Loki stood there, his expression difficult to make out in the dim clarity of the yellow lamplights.

Had Loki seen the article? Had he read it? Had somebody stopped him while he was making his way
through the crowd, had they showed him the screen, had anyone poked their nose over his shoulder
as he scrolled down, and casually let it drop just like that, “*I didn’t know you were adopted?*”

Thor ran. He wasn't fast enough, all those fucking limos.

Loki got inside the car. The door slammed shut. The engine started. The tail lights shrank and
disappeared into the night. Thor's heart was beating in his mouth. He tasted metal.

Shaking, he tried Loki’s phone. It was off. Shit, he didn’t have a clue where in L.A. Loki was
staying.

“Loki,” he muttered, breathless. “Baby…”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“I love you” said Thor.

Loki looked up at him, brow scrunching, lips thinning, and then he looked quickly away again as his eyes started to well up. His expression was vulnerable, confused, a little boy lost in a crowd. Thor could not endure it. He wrapped his arms around him and hugged him close. Loki’s slender frame was shaking with quiet sobs. Thor tangled his hands in Loki’s hair, pressed his lips against his forehead, and squeezed him tight.

After a long while, Loki mumbled against his neck,

“I can’t breathe, Thor.”

“How can you talk then” said Thor, still squeezing.

Chapter Notes

I'm a huge fan of Rynfinity's Out of the Mouth of Babes and The March of the Damned, and I realise, the more I write, that my Thor and Loki are heavily influenced by hers. If you don't know this author and this series, I don't know what you've been doing with your lives. Go find it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Loki scrambled up the stairs. He couldn’t breathe. He struggled for oxygen but his chest did not cooperate, and when he inhaled, it felt like breathing fire. His mind was clouding and his sight was turning black. It was a full-on panic attack, and half-way up the stairs wasn’t the place to have it. He rushed the last few steps and ran down the corridor, slamming the door to the bathroom. He retched painfully for a long time before he could finally let anything out. His poetic temperament popped up, even then, to supply the metaphor that what his body was rejecting was a whole life of lies.

He thought he had already dealt with the mandatory acute anxiety episode alone, in his hotel back in L.A. He had phoned home as soon as the time zone allowed it, to ask whether it was true. Mum had been as sweet and reassuring as she could with all that anguish and worry in her voice, and had promised to tell him the whole story when he got home.

“Come home now, darling,” she had implored him.

Loki had made up an excuse (he was full of them), promised he would be there as planned, and proceeded to have his panic attack discreetly in his room. He cried for four hours straight, flew back to London, started taking his pills again, and stayed indoors, waiting for the meds to kick in and for everything to get better, manageable, reasonable.
Meanwhile, he had scrupulously ignored each and every phone call, just sending a text now and then to prove he was alive, and thus preventing unwanted visits to check up on him. He made sure to let it be known that he wanted to be left in peace. He was hoping that, in a few days, when they were all to meet up at Asgard Hall, the worst of the crisis would be over, and that he would be able to face this like a normal human being, and not like the fucking lunatic he actually was.

Well, how wrong can you get.

They had sat in Odin's study. Thor still hadn't arrived. As his father smoked quietly and mum slowly told him his life story, Loki could feel the ground crumbling under his feet, and himself tumbling down, faster and faster, down a rabbit hole lined with fucking spikes and thorns that tore away at his flesh as he descended, layer after layer. By the time he hit the bottom, he’d be raw bone.

Who the fuck is this boy they’re talking about. Russia. Date of birth unknown. An orphanage in Moscow. Dumped there by a man who signed “Laufey” on the registry, not a whisper heard from him before or since.

And nothing else. That was all. That was all that was true about Loki Laufeyson.

His family was not his family. He was not himself.

Numberless tiny details spanning his whole life that didn’t seem to fit, and bothered him, now fitted and started to make sense. Every spite from his father, every unaccountable sorrow and pity and favour from his mother. Why his father did not love him. He had always fucking wondered what the fuck was he doing wrong. Well, now he had answers. He wished he could unhear and unsee and unknow them. He fucking wished they had kept him guessing. Because nothing he did now, no matter how hard he tried, would get him his father’s love. Because Loki was not his son.

And Thor.

*God help me.*

He was shaking when he managed to stop the nausea, his legs weak when he brought himself up to a wobbly standing.

He rinsed his mouth while sobbing, and it tasted foul. Everything tasted foul. The very air he breathed.

He listened for a long time to make sure there was nobody waiting outside, and then he darted as quick as he could to his bedroom and locked himself in, his back flat against the door, his chest heaving.

The moment his eyes set on the things of his childhood, his toys, his books, the wall paper with a design of wizard hats and wands and moons and stars, he broke down crying again. With his sight blurred, he found his way into the nook between the wardrobe and the wall, on the other side of the bed, where he used to curl up and cry not so many years ago. Back against the wall, he covered his face, and he did just that.

The drive up to the old place felt like a trip back in time. The winding road between the fields, tall
hedgerows of bramble, bright with rain, laden with berries, the crowns of the trees interweaving overhead, starting to shed their leaves -it was a different world altogether from the place of eternal summer Thor was hanging his hat in nowadays.

The old country house, isolated in a sloping meadow that a small herd of sheep and goats kept trimmed, was a handsome building of golden Cotswolds stone, spreading outwards into outhouses, a walled garden, a barn, and a stout little tower Loki and him used to hide in to play wizards and knights. Although for all intents and purposes they had grown up in London, and only came here for the holidays, half-terms and some weekends, Asgard Hall was the place they called home.

Thor thought he would find the sight of it reassuring. Instead, his stomach was churning worse and worse the closer he got, dreading what lay ahead.

He had phoned home the very next day, after finally having tracked down Loki’s hotel to find him already gone, and still impossible to reach on any phone number or by any other means Thor could think of.

“Is it true?” he had asked.

Frigga had told him she would really prefer to talk about this face to face. Thor couldn’t fly home now, he was contractually bound to do the press tour, and he sure as fuck couldn’t wait one week to know what everybody in the business seemed to know already.

“Yes, it’s true,” Frigga’s voice soft, the finality in it still cutting.

Thor had heard his own breathing, laboured and painful, on the phone.

“Why...? Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Yes, it’s true,” Frigga had said, her tone guarded, tactful. “We knew it would be difficult for him. We just never found the right moment. We made a terrible mistake.”

“Come, come,” Thor had heard Odin grumble in the background, as was his custom. “It’s as if we committed some horrible crime! All we did was rescue him from that craphole orphanage in Moscow and give him a better life. Would it have been preferable that we had left him there to die?”

“Is that where he...?” started to say Thor. He couldn’t finish the question. He didn’t even know what he was feeling. Essential things, the very basic things, things he had always taken for granted, that had felt unquestionable and unmovable and solid as planets, shattered in a million pieces at his feet. He just did not know how to fucking feel.

Worst of all, he shuddered to think what was in Loki’s head right now. Loki, who was virtually unreachable, who had already made for London before the break of dawn, Loki alone and scared and ill and lost, and so far away from Thor’s side, where he belonged, more than ever. Jesus Christ.

“Thor, darling,” said Frigga after a beat, all the warmth she could not convey with hugs and kisses glowing in her voice, “come home, we’ll tell you the whole story...”
anyway.

He rung the bell to be let in. Frigga was there in seconds, pulling him into her arms for a strong kiss and a hug. Thor hugged her back, overwhelmed by how much he had managed to miss her without realising.

Odin appeared ambling at the end of the corridor, one hand in his pocket, one of his thin cigars in the other, comfortable in his old country squire personna.

“Where’s Loki?” Thor said, the edge showing in his voice.

His parents shared a look that put Thor on high alert. He set his bag down.

“We had a chat earlier,” said Odin, approaching. “He will be fine.”

“Where’s Loki!!” repeated Thor, even shorter.

“Thor, darling…” began Frigga.

“He is upstairs, son,” cut Odin. And, stepping in front of Thor when he was dashing for the stairs, he urged, “Give him time.”

Frigga's hands were shaking. His mum, his rock, was anxious and afraid. Thor was going to be sick.

“Let me through.”

“Darling,” said Frigga.

Odin would not budge, and stood resolutely there, blocking the corridor. Thor wondered whether he would really be forced to manhandle his old father out of the fucking way.

“He will not want you to see him cry, son” said his father then, his hand a clamp of steel on Thor’s forearm. “What he needs now is time. Give him time.”

Impotent tears welled in his eyes. That's bullshit, he wanted to cry. All he wanted was to take his baby brother in his arms and cradle him and save him, as he always had. But this was not some schoolyard bully Thor could threaten to smash his face in if he didn’t leave Loki alone, and this was not his mates in the rugby team calling Loki a faggot because he took ballet. This was the other thing, the demon against which Thor had always been powerless against, always lurking in the shadows somewhere deep inside Loki’s mind, always threatening to rise and poison it all. And the one thing Thor had learned about it, after years of living next to it, was that nothing he ever did made things any better.

He looked yearningly towards the stairs, but as much as he hated it, his father was right. He walked out of the house, suffocated, and made for the fields, wiping his eyes furiously, wanting to kick things, break things, hurt himself, bleed.

It was three hours before Loki emerged from his room, red-rimmed, puffy eyes, and a face like thunder. Enough time for Thor to calm down, and worry himself sick again, waiting. From his spot on the sofa by the fire, Thor saw his brother walk by, on his way to the kitchen. Loki threw him a
glance, but avoided their parents' eyes. Ignoring his father’s pointed stare and his mother’s little concerned pout, Thor stood up and followed him.

Loki gave him a quick look over the shoulder, as he put the kettle on and rummaged in the medicine cabinet for painkillers. When he went to reach for the tea bags, next to him, Thor rushed to help.

“I’m adopted, Thor, not an invalid,” snapped Loki. His voice was hoarse.

“Sorry,” mumbled Thor, stepping out of his way.

A thin cloud rose from the mug when Loki poured the water, a waft of scalded tea leaves filled the air.

“Are you alright?” asked Thor, and he immediately wished he had bitten his tongue.

“Peachy,” answered Loki, caustic, stirring the brew.

They stood in silence for a while, Loki’s eyes looking empty, dead as a doll’s. Thor felt a cold shiver at that thought. He timidly reached for Loki. His brother flinched, and Thor's heart fell a little. Even if he should have been used to it by now, Loki recoiling away from his touch never failed to hurt. But he had meant to make a point by it, and he was going to make it.

“I love you,” he said.

Loki looked up at him, eyes big as if this came as a big surprise. His brow scrunched up, lips thinning, he looked quickly away again as tears started to well up. He looked small and confused, a little boy lost in a crowd. It was unbearable. Thor pushed through the preventions and the rust that had built between them over the years, threw his arms around his brother, and hugged him tight. Very soon, Loki’s slender frame began to shake with quiet sobs, and his body became pliant, the tension in his posture softening, melting away in his brother's arms. Such a simple thing. Why was it so hard, why did they so often manage to make it seem impossible? Loki, Loki... Thor kissed his hair and rocked him gently.

After a long while, Loki mumbled against his neck,

“I can’t breathe, Thor.”

“How can you talk then,” said Thor, still squeezing.

Tired and worn out as this exchange had got between them, it still got a small, cheerless chuckle from his brother.

“Get off me, you big oaf,” he grumbled, pushing him away.

Thor slowly let him go, but one hand delayed around his brother's neck. Loki shook him off.

The tea was still too hot to drink, so Loki cradled his mug. eyes vacant.
The table was still covered with the remains of the Sunday roast. Loki and Frigga were in the kitchen, sorting out pudding. Odin sat at the head of the table with a thin cigar, while Thor sat on one of the long sides, playing with the wine cork, for something to do with his hands.

“So this is the… Best Hero Award,” said Odin, examining with his one good eye the black and gold metal bag of popcorn in the middle of the table, that lilt in his tone that never failed to get under Thor’s skin. “Remarkable.”

Thor was now wishing very badly he had left the thing back in L.A. He had thought it would be fun to have it here. The thing was so tacky. Well, he'd been wrong; it wasn't funny.

“Now, this is one you won’t find on the mantelpiece here,” added Odin, and took a sip of wine.

“It’s a popularity thing,” said Thor. It's not that he did not know what his father thought about popularity. He had intended to have a good-humoured laugh about this, not fucking defend it. But he shouldn’t be fucking ashamed of having won it either, goddammit, they didn’t fucking give these things away! He had had to earn it! “It gets doors opened,” he added.

“Yes, but where do they open to,” said Odin, his musical, theatrically trained voice delivering the line with panache.

How Thor hated it when he did that thing, when Odin the Great Man addressed him instead of his dad.

“You know, son, Richard Burton at your age…” his father carried on relentlessly.

Thor stood up in a fury, the chair screeching on the thick oak floor, and stayed there, clenching and unclenching his fists, struggling to reign in his temper. Not this shit again. His father did not even flinch.

After a long moment, Thor sat down again. Odin's only eye was still glinting on him, smoke from his cigar snaking in the air in front of his face. He ashed it with a quick, practiced flourish.

“Is it such a terrible sin for a father to want to see his son become the best he can be?”

Thor’s nostrils flared at that, his jaw tight.

“You could be Henry V one day, and Hamlet, and all the greats, but you will never get there by squandering your time and your talent in… Dawn of the Robots and Return to Dinosaur Island or whatever the hell they’re called. This,” he gestured to the trophy, “is unworthy of you. If only you were less concerned with easy fame and easy work, how great you could be.” Odin sighed. “You’re much too talented to waste your life selling popcorn to teenagers.”

Thor counted to ten really, really slowly. With only the slightest choke in his voice, he made himself be reasonable and polite.

“That’s great for you, dad, but…”

“Yes, of course, you have to make your own choices and your own way in the world,” interrupted Odin, insincerely, and not shy about it. He had made his point, and was not really interested in hearing anyone else’s, as usual.

Thor clenched his jaw even tighter. Every single fucking time, dad.
Frigga appeared from the kitchen with a bowl of trifle. Loki was following with saucers and spoons. His eyes were still puffy and red.

Odin threw a look at them both, from his wife to his son, and back to his wife.

“You took long enough,” he said.

Of course, Frigga and Loki had been having a quiet talk, and Odin surely knew it.

Frigga ignored her husband and started dishing up. Thor and Loki took their seats on opposite sides of the table. Thor sought his eyes but his brother kept them low. He seemed very far away.

They all made some lustreless noises of appreciation, but otherwise everyone ate quietly for a few minutes.

“So it will be the Borson Award on this table next!” said Odin, turning to Loki.

Thor saw his mother cringe, and a small, forced smile on Loki’s face.

“Perhaps,” he said.

“Oh, be optimistic, son. The way the board has been veering these last few years, they obviously adore fringe productions, the wackier the better. And your Hamlet was that and a lot more.” He raised his glass to Loki.

Loki glowered at his father.

“It wasn’t wacky, dad,” he said.

“You made him a Goth teenager in chains and leather. I don’t know what company you keep, son, but it certainly counted as wacky to this foolish old man.”

“Dear,” snapped Frigga with severity, glaring at his husband in a way both brothers found both satisfying and unsettling at the same time.

“Anyway, what do I know,” grumbled Odin. He pushed himself off the table and walked out of the dining room, probably headed for his study.

Frigga sighed. She stood up and started to pile the dirty plates up. Her boys jumped up to do their share.

“Don’t pay him any mind when he is in this mood, darlings,” she said, sounding quite short of patience herself. “He’s gotten old.”

It was dark outside, the light warm and yellow in the music room. Loki and Frigga were at the piano, sitting side by side on the little bench, playing four hands and singing.

“Some day, when I’m awfully low, and the world is cold, I will feel aglow just thinking of you, and the way you look tonight...”
Thor was stood up, leaning on the piano next to Frigga, watching them. He had always thought, seeing them both together like that, that they looked so much alike. He suddenly felt like crying.

“With each word your tenderness grows, tearing my fears apart. And each laugh that wrinkles your nose touches my foolish heart…”

Loki was singing alone now, his voice a mellow, warm purr, his long, delicate hands dancing effortlessly on the keys, his eyes closed. Thor stole nearer, standing behind them, and put a hand on his mother’s shoulder. Then carefully, slowly, another hand on his brother’s head, stroking his hair. Loki sighed and nudged into it. Thor leaned close and kissed the tops of both their heads. He tried to inhale quietly, because he could feel his breathing getting shaky.

"...Just the way you look tonight."

He clapped quietly when the last note twinkled under Loki’s hand.

“How about…?” said Frigga softly, and she played a couple of chords. Both her boys smiled. “What do simple folk do to help them escape when they’re blue…?”

Frigga and Loki traded the lines of the song, chuckling when they forgot the words, helping each other to remember. Thor sat down on the couch and picked his wine glass again. Now Frigga was hugging Loki’s waist while he played, looking at him adoringly, her eyes bright and full of humour. She put a long, strong kiss on his shoulder. Loki tilted his head towards her and Frigga put a kiss there too.

Then the piano fell quiet. Loki’s shoulders slumped, his head lowered, and Thor heard his hushed sobbing. Frigga held him close through it, rocking him. She began to hum a tune Thor didn’t know.

He wanted to go there and crush Loki in his arms, but he knew it was not his time. He waited, swallowing thickly around the burning lump in his throat, trying to blink away the sting in his eyes.

After a while, Loki stood up, rubbing his face, and excused himself. Thor got up too. His mum shook her head softly to him and mouthed "no".

Frigga took Loki’s hand in hers and brushed it on her own face, and put one last kiss on his palm.

“We’ll be waiting, darling” she said.

Loki didn’t meet Thor’s eyes as he walked out.

“How are you, dear?” she asked Thor.

He took a deep, shuddering breath.

“I just…” He shook his head, teetering on the edge of a crying fit. He scrubbed his face, trying to appear exhausted rather than crumbling.

“Let’s sit here. I’ll tell you the story” she said, moving to the couch, patting the spot next to her. Thor let himself take comfort in her tone, which would not take no for an answer.

He shuffled over and sat down. What he really wanted was to curl on his side and rest his head on her lap. He settled for reclining his head on the backrest and for her soft strokes on his hair.
His mother spun a tale of a mature couple who have been rendered incapable of having more children after their first born. They are living and working in Moscow at the time, and she is stricken and horrified by the tales of Russian post-communist orphanages. She had always wanted to have lots of children. Her husband makes it happen, quickly and quietly, thanks to his contacts in high places acquired through his position as guest director with the Bolshoi. He returns one evening with a pale, dark-haired little bundle, about one and a half years old -his age uncertain by a few months-, so small, his growth stunted by malnutrition and neglect. They're not sure his brain is not impaired; he's so quiet, never even cries, doesn't know how to smile. The couple’s son, not yet three, adores him from the first minute, and wants to help take care of him. He’s so gentle and patient with him. The first time the baby smiles is for his brother. And one afternoon, soon after that, their mother stumbles upon them both, and the baby is laughing, cackling at his brother's funny faces and sounds, shrieking with delight at the tickles. He keeps saying "Thow". She breaks down crying, and before she knows it, both toddlers are confused and crying too.

And by now Thor was smiling between tears. He rested his elbows on his knees, scrubbed his face and tried to hold back the storm raging in his chest.

“The press wasn’t how it is nowadays; there was no internet, no instant news,” added Frigga, almost absentely now, lost in her memories. “We returned from Russia in time for you to start school, with another child. The time frame happened to fit, and we didn’t even have to tell anyone. Nobody questioned us, nobody suspected. We never intended to keep it a secret, we were just waiting for the right time, and of course we were not about to tell everyone before we told you. By the time you were both reaching the right age to know, your brother started to suffer. Their therapists considered that being told the truth at that point would only unsettle him and make the situation worse. We decided to keep waiting… I was going to tell him when he turned fifteen, but before that he had that… crisis, and I postponed it again…”

Thor flinched. The crisis. A flood of memories he could not share.

Her mother cast him an odd look, as if she could not make sense of all that was on Thor's expression at this minute. Or perhaps she could... Thor could swear sometimes that their mum fucking knew what had happened that summer, before Loki’s worst crash down, the one that ended up in hospital. Thor felt the need to clear his throat for no physical reason whatsoever.

“He feels old, your father” said Frigga then, idly stroking Thor's long hair. “He can see his star setting and yours rising, and he’s jealous. It’s hard for him, to lose relevance, to face the end of his career and of his life. I’m not saying that because I want you to let him get away with it. I just want you to know where he is coming from. Because he is proud of you both. And so am I.” She regarded him fondly and kissed him. “Don’t ever compare yourself to him, Thor. You’re your own person, and you have your own path to walk. And the only one who can judge how worthy this path is, it’s you.”

Thor was really struggling with his breathing now. He stood up.

“I'll go to find Loki.”

His mum gave his hand a quick squeeze and let him go. Before he shut the door behind himself, Thor heard the light twinkles of the piano.

He went into the garden. On this side of the house, there was an extensive lawn surrounded by cedars and rhododendron bushes. The yellow light from the windows of the house painted the lawn with pools of glow and seemed to render the rest darker still.
A thin tendril of smoke was curling up in the air, raising from the arbor bench under the big oak to the right.

“There you are!” said Thor, when he came to a stop in front of his brother.

“Where else would I be?” muttered Loki, and took a long drag.

Thor swallowed, closed the last few steps.

“…Are you alright?” he asked, hesitating to take a seat next to him.

“Jesus, fuck, Thor, you’re worse than a fucking junket!” snarled Loki. “How many times do I have to answer the same question tonight?”

“Alright, ok, sorry… Jesus, Loki.” He sighed deeply. “Calm down. I just…” He shifted on his feet and took yet another deep breath. “All I want to say is, this changes nothing, ok?” And because Loki was keeping his eyes low, Thor crouched in front of him, so that they could see each other's faces. “You’re still my brother,” he said. “You’ll always be my brother, blood or no blood, no matter what.”

Loki butted the cigarette, the slightest pinch in his brow.

“And here’s me, thinking you would be happy about this,” he said coolly. "Or at the very least relieved, seeing as we’ve never been very… brotherly."

Thor shifted, uncomfortable.

Loki took a second and sunk the dagger in. “Or was that the fun of it.”

“Loki, that’s not…!” Thor surged to his feet in a fury, or whatever. His heart was beating hard. “Don’t… fucking say that,” he groaned.

Loki lit up another fag.

“So what was it then.”

“Why the fuck are you bringing this up now?” Thor tried to compose himself. “You know what it was.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Fucking hell, Loki,” Thor grumbled and started to walk away.

And then stopped, willing himself to calm down. Do not fall into his fucking trap, man, he provokes you to push you away and avoid facing the things that are hard for him. Jesus, hadn’t Thor heard that enough in family therapy.

Deep breaths. Ten Mississippies.

Thor heard the rustle of Loki’s clothes as he stood up and closed the distance between them. Loki’s arms around his waist, his brother’s grip around him so familiar and so thrilling at the same time. Damn. He reached to ruffle Loki’s hair and heard him sigh. There was nothing brotherly about any of it.

Loki’s voice was small when he spoke next, almost as if he didn’t wish to be heard.
“We could now, you know. We could be together now.”

Oh, shit. The knot in Thor’s throat started to burn. He turned around within the circle of Loki’s arms and held him close, but he couldn’t look at him. Loki’s face burrowed into his neck, and Thor shivered. He pushed him away gently and kissed his forehead.

“Yes, sure. It would spice up our interviews no end,” he muttered quietly.

Loki shoved him off. “Is that all you think about?” he hissed.

“That’s not fucking fair and you know it. But we have to be real!” He was furious, because it was unfair, and because it was fair. Because it was a lie, and because it wasn’t the whole truth. Because that was not the fucking point anyway, because Loki never fucking gave him an inch to breathe.

“Of course. It would wreck your career,” said Loki, contempt in his eyes and in his tone.

That was rich.

“Oh, I’m sure it would do wonders for yours,” countered Thor.

“I would throw it all away, damn it all to hell, in a blink,” said Loki, full of defiance. There was a glitch in the delivery, and Thor hated himself for wondering whether it was an act.

As always, he opted to believe him. He’d go fucking mad if he didn't.

“I know you would,” he said softly. He hooked one hand around Loki’s neck, his thumb stroking his brother’s strong, sharp jaw. “And after three days you would miss it, and you would start to regret it, and then you would hate me for the rest of our lives.”

Loki looked so vacant, so remote.

“…Try as I might, I can’t hate you, brother,” he whispered.

Thor’s felt a claw of iron squeezing his heart. He pulled him into his arms, and wrapped him tight, with his eyes closed. And when Loki kissed him, he didn’t have it in him to reject them. It was only their lips, like when they'd been children. He heard Loki’s soft sigh -there was peace there, a quiet murmuration of joy.

No, said the voice of reason inside Thor, it fucks with his head. No.

Thor started to pull back, as gently as he could.

“Please,” whispered Loki, clinging, his voice barely louder than a breath. “I'm lost.”

Thor could not bloody deal with his brother begging him. He kissed him deeply, and god, he was home, Loki said his name so softly, his hands in Thor’s hair, his whole body awakening to it. Nobody had ever felt this good. Nobody ever would. Thor had had to make his peace with that, and learn to do without. He'd thought he'd never feel it again.

They were startled apart by the soft thump of an old wooden door that sticks, relenting suddenly to open up. Thor whipped his head to the back door, his heart beating madly, the burning prickling of adrenaline under his skin. Through the trellis and the bare branches of the climbing rose that shielded them from the house, he saw his mum standing at the door, hugging a wool cardigan around her, turning her head this way and that, searching for her sons. They were both still and quiet, tangled in
each other, afraid to even breathe. Thor's heart was beating madly fast, like a cornered animal.

After what felt like fucking years, Frigga gave up and went back inside. Thor exhaled with relief.

The moment was gone. His mind was clear. He slowly stepped away from Loki, who didn’t fight it. This was madness, and they both knew it. He fumbled with himself to accommodate the hard-on in his jeans.

He looked up to find his brother’s eyes cold and spiteful on him. He really didn’t know what to do for the best, or what to say. All he knew was that it was impossible between them, that it did bad things to Loki’s head, and that it could only end up in tears, and all forms of hell. That he should be able to love, comfort, and reassure his little brother without...

“I better go back inside,” he mumbled.

“Yes. Before you do something you regret,” said Loki, razor-sharp.

That made Thor wince, and beseech with his eyes, trying to say that... Shit. I’ve never regretted it, brother.

He had not planned for this to be their parting words tonight. All he’d wanted was to tell Loki that he loved him, and to hear the same words in return. No chance of that now. Always count on Thor Odinson to fuck it up with his baby brother.

He reached to stroke his face, an olive branch; Loki shrank away from his touch. Thor let his hand drop.

“Good night, brother,” he said softly.

Loki did not return his gaze, and he did not reply.

The next morning, Thor let out a quiet sigh of relief when he heard Loki’s steps on the stairs. He looked pale and sallow around the kitchen, and did not meet Thor’s eyes once, as he fixed the black coffee with way too much sugar that had been his morning staple for years. He sat across the table opposite Thor to drink it, but acted as if his brother wasn’t there.

Thor didn’t attempt conversation, knowing it was pointless. He was chewing his toast when he observed a little grimace on his brother’s face. Thor smirked and continued to chew, noisily, opening his mouth. And that, as he had predicted, earned him one of his brother’s epic scowls.

“You’re disgusting,” said Loki.

Thor was almost beginning to smile smugly and exclaim “hey! you talked!”, but an expression of heartbreak rose to Loki’s face then, there and gone in a blink. No matter how blank and composed his façade, the grief was just there, skin deep. Thor was not in a jesting mood anymore. He was desperate for words that could get through to Loki and make it all better, but he didn’t have them, he never had. Frigga was the one with the words. Thor was physical. He hugged, he shoved, he pulled,
he ruffled hair, he kissed, he… What good would any of that do. He cursed his impotence.

The door burst open and Odin walked in like a hurricane.

“Morning, children!” he boomed.

As he made his way around the big farm table to get to the kettle, he pinched the scruff of Thor’s neck first, then Loki’s. Thor heard his brother huff quietly, irritated. He had always been moody in the mornings, and there was nothing that got on his nerves more quickly than their dad at full blast.

They all remained quiet between the clatter of the kitchen things, the low hum of the stove. Odin took the header seat at the table, as always. He eyed both of his boys for a second.

“Anyone would say somebody has died!” he boomed then.

His kids didn't say a thing.

"Don’t you think you’re making a big deal out of nothing, son?” he told Loki. He was trying for kind and compassionate, Thor was sure, and being the fine actor he was, he had certainly got the pitch just right. But that was all he was getting right, because everything else was wrong, the line, the timing, and he was certainly fucking missing each and every one of Thor’s cues.

“Dad…”

“Think about it, son,” said Odin over him. “You’ve had it good, haven’t you? Would you have preferred we left you there? There are worse tragedies in the world, surely!” Odin reached to squeeze Loki’s hand, Loki’s scowl getting more and more bitter, nostrils flaring. “You’ve been lucky.”

Loki surged up with fury and stormed off. Odin watched him, looking mostly disappointed.

Thor rushed to follow his brother.

“Loki, wait,” said Thor, at the foot of the stairs, grabbing Loki’s arm.

Loki hissed “Leave me alone,” and shook him off. He took the steps in two's.

Every fibre of Thor's being was aching to follow, as always. His mum was forever telling him to give Loki some air and obey his wish to be left in peace, when Thor couldn’t stop chasing and prodding and urging Loki to come out of it, open up to him, listen, talk, come, stay, let Thor in.

The urgent wail of the kettle shook him back to himself.

Okay, that was fucking it. He was going to have it out with his dad this time. He went into the kitchen and stood at the other end of the table, fists clenching.

“You can’t talk to him like this, dad,” he said. He wished his voice didn't sound so weak -even his fucking knees were weak, for that matter.

Odin darted his penetrant, cold blue eye to him.

“He’s a drama queen,” he declared. "He always has been. We’ve all indulged that side of him and what a fat load of good it has done him.”

Deep breaths.

“He’s not a drama queen, dad, he has a fucking illness.”
“Don’t swear at me, boy.”

Thor brought his eyes down. This was taking every fiber of courage in his body.

“All I’m saying is,” said Thor, squaring his jaw, trying to stand his ground, “that he doesn’t feel things like other people, I mean…Things affect him differently and…” He rubbed his forehead. “Just…”

“I’ve sometimes wondered whether it would not have been better for him and for all of us if I had just picked another one,” cut Odin.

Colour drained from Thor’s face.

“…What?”

“I let my weakness get the better of me. There were others that looked healthier and stronger. I suppose I thought I could do some good and give the weaker one a chance. I guess I did what I thought your mother would want. I haven’t been sure that I did the right thing for anybody for many years now. Well, at least the world will know that, whatever is wrong with him, it’s not something that runs in the family.” Odin scrunched his brow and his face as if he had smelled something foul. “Oh, dear. Must you really cry, son.”

Tears streaming down Thor’s face. There were no words for the pain and the disappointment he was feeling at that moment. And in spite of it, through the whirlwind inside him, he realised that all he wanted, even then, was a smile and a kind word and reassurance from his dad that everything would be alright. It was ripping him apart.

The floor squeaked behind the door and they heard steps rushing away.

“Damn,” muttered Odin.

Thor’s breathing cut off. He ran after Loki.

He saw him crossing the back door, bag in his hand. He caught up with him on the drive, making for his car.

“Loki, wait! Where are you going?”

Loki didn’t stop, didn’t slow down, and didn’t answer.

“Loki!” Thor reached and grabbed his hand.

Loki stopped. He looked so cold, so poised.

“What,” he said, voice hollow.

Thor didn’t have a clue what to say. He held Loki’s hand with both of his, grappling for words.

“Please, don’t go like this,” he choked out, after some effort.

“How am I to go, then.”

“Wait for mum,” begged Thor.

Loki looked up to him, his eyes made of cold hard ice.
“She’s not my mum.”

“Oh, Loki…” muttered Thor, the choke in his voice tightening to a strangle hold.

Loki peered over Thor’s shoulder. Thor turned his head. Odin was there at the door, a thin cigar in his mouth, his only eye gleaming. He offered no apologies and he called no one back.

Loki pulled his hand away from Thor’s with a sharp tug and got into his car.

“Let him, son,” said Odin. “Just let him.”

Thor looked on impotently as the car drove away. The woods swallowed it up. His hands were still throbbing from having held his brother’s so tight.

Chapter End Notes

Several things:

On Loki’s choice of words on his own mental health: that’s Loki’s inner voice, not this author’s.

The songs are "The way you look tonight" (lyrics by Dorothy Fields, music by Jerome Kern) and "What do simple folk do" from the musical "Camelot" (lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederic Loewe.)
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“Did you find anything, sir?” asked the landlady, when he emerged from the bedroom. Thor shook his head. He didn’t trust the strength of his own voice.

“Will he be coming back?”

Thor shrugged, shook his head again. He was really close to breaking down in tears.

Chapter Notes

I’ve decided to opt for shorter chapters and more regular updates. Let’s just say chapters 1 and 2 were the long opening sequences at the beginning of Touch of Evil, or the overture of the opera. Human-size scenes from now on. It was either that, or more 15k chapters once every month and a half. Hope that’s fine with y’all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

INT. DAY. Loki’s apartment.

Thor took one step inside, then another. The landlady waited in the corridor. He felt a chill in his spine. It seemed like Loki had left everything behind. There were jackets and coats still hanging from the hooks on the hall, several pairs of shoes, handbags, scarves.

The kitchen was untouched. There was food in the fridge. His awards were still on the window sill, posters of his plays and his movies on the walls, his music and DVD collection spanning a whole wall, his books covering the other and stacked up pretty much on every flat surface.

The first place where Thor found serious signs of disturbance was the bedroom: drawers upturned, the wardrobe doors hanging open, a dozen clothes hangers askew, tangled with each other, clothes missing. Not many, a few days’ worth, Thor guessed.

What the fuck was Loki up to? What was his plan? Did he have any?

The bathroom next. Again, a small hurricane had been there. Well, Loki wouldn’t go anywhere without his toiletries. Even at his worse, he was always scrupulously clean. But what was that smell? Thor drew back the bath curtain, and saw the pile of half-burned remains on the bottom of the tub. He kneeled to examine them. From what he could tell from the fragments that had not been utterly consumed into soot and ash, it seemed a haphazard collection: a few pages of a script Thor did not recognise, a notebook scribbled with meaningless numbers, some grocery bills, old high school portraits, copies of medical prescriptions, his diary. As if he had just dumped assorted stuff there for the need to see things burn, didn’t matter what. Why it was making Thor's stomach heave, he could
Loki’s office was pretty much the usual organised chaos that only his brother was able to navigate. And may god have mercy upon your soul if you so much as breathed on a paper, Loki could always tell someone had been there, and he was never happy about it.

There was a note board taking up half the wall to the right, with all sorts pinned on it. Cast photos, negatives, lists of books, cryptic to-do lists, telephone numbers. There were two things disturbing Thor about that board. First, the painful realisation that he didn’t have a clue about Loki’s present life. These were Loki’s daily comings and goings pinned there, and he just didn’t know where to start making sense of them.

The second thing that put a coil of worry in his belly were the empty spaces on the board. Loki had taken his time to take down things that had been there and then… what? burned them? taken them away? Were they the phone numbers and addresses of the people he was going to go to now for help? Were they things he didn’t want anyone to see? Thor just could not know. Too many pieces missing, pieces Thor would have had, if he had not spent the last two years purposely pulling himself away from London, from his parents, and more than anything, from his brother.

He returned to the bedroom and sat on the bed, scrubbing his face. He looked around with a churn of nerves in his stomach. Where are you, baby. Where are you going.

He checked the drawers of the bedside table. They had been disturbed as well. There were bills and other official-looking papers there, and some knickknacks (a set of keys without markings, two old, clunky mobile phones, a handful of friendship bracelets —Loki had woven them obsessively one summer, Thor had both wrists covered in them—, bookmarks of different types —everybody was forever giving them to Loki as gifts—, three old broken watches Loki had had since he was a little boy. There was a couple of handwritten letters as well. He read them. One was from a fan raving about his Hamlet, thanking him for his “heartbreaking, honest portrayal of mental breakdown”, swearing to owe Loki her life. Another was from a second-hand book dealer, informing him that they had found a copy of the book he had asked about, didn’t say which. There was also an old letter from mum, yellowing on the edges. When was that from? Oh, must have been when mum and dad were playing Robin and Marian in New York. Loki had been ten or eleven then, he must have been missing them. Mum had left her hair gray for that play. It had scared them both, how she had seemed to age all of a sudden. Thor had found Loki crying alone one night in a corner. Thor had asked what was wrong. “Mum is going to die one day” is all he said, and carried on crying.

“Did you find anything, sir?” asked the landlady, when he emerged from the bedroom.

Thor shook his head. He didn’t trust the strength of his own voice.

“Will he be coming back?”

Thor shrugged, shook his head again. He was really close to breaking down in tears.

“Listen, Mr. Odinson…” The landlady was wringing her hands, struggling to look him in the eye. Money, then. Thor swallowed thickly.

“Whatever he owes you, I’ll cover,” said Thor.

“He left enough to pay the rest of the month.”

“The damage in the bathroom, then.”
“Hm. Well, I still have the deposit, and he left extra for that too. I suppose I owe you some money.”

“Keep it. Loki wanted you to have it.”

She cleared her throat.

“My problem, Mr. Odinson, is what do I do with his things. Are you coming for them or…”

Thor had a sinking feeling inside.

“…Can’t we keep them here…? For a while at least.”

“But Mr. Odinson, I need to rent the apartment…”

“I’ll keep paying the rent. Please. He might come back.”

She bit his lip.

“I can’t hold it indefinitely.”


She sighed softly and nodded. “If you insist.”

He gave her Coulson’s details. “He’ll handle it all,” he said. “Can I stay a bit longer?”

She shrugged. “…It’s your apartment now, I guess.”

She left Loki’s set of keys with him and left.

Thor ambled aimlessly around the sitting room first. He didn’t know why was he there for. Was he really hoping for a note, or a clue, or a bloody treasure map with a dotted line and an x? And the thing was, there must be things there he could use to try and track him down. He just didn’t know where to start.

He could regret it all as much as he wished, but the fact didn’t change that he had been drifting away and putting distance between him and Loki deliberately, hoping they would outgrow whatever it was between them. He had wanted for them to forget that madness and just be brothers. Without the drama, without the constant tension, without the hurt.

And Loki wasn’t all wrong; there was the other issue there, too. There were so many eyes on Thor all the time now, one slip and… God, he couldn’t begin to imagine the scandal. It would wreck their careers, taint their parents’ names, and everything they had worked so hard for.

Did Loki think that it was easy for Thor? Did he think he was the only one suffering, the only one ripping himself apart over this? Did he think Thor was proud of himself, of how he was handling things?

God, fuck, Loki’s eyes when he said goodnight yesterday. Would everything had changed if he had taken him to bed last night? Would it have made it all right? Would Loki be here now, carrying on with his life? Or would it have screwed everything even worse, as it always had?

Thor had been trying not to cry, because he knew that, if he started, he would never fucking stop. It
was probably a mistake, then, to grab the pillow in his hands and press it to his face, to breathe in Loki’s scent.

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“But I don’t understand why I have to kiss her if it’s not in the book,” pouted Loki, nine years old.

“Because it’s in the script,” laughed Thor, eleven.

“But in the book they don’t kiss!” countered Loki, indignant. “You would know it if you had bothered reading it.”

Thor shrugged. “Look, Loki, it doesn’t matter what’s in the book, it only matters what’s on the script, because we’re not doing the book, we’re doing the movie.”

Loki was sulking, rubbing the offending line in the paper (“Colin kisses Mary”) with his thumb, as if he could erase it from existence like that.

“But I don’t want to kiss her,” he muttered after a while, looking sorry for himself, and stubborn. And quite adorable, if you asked his brother.

“Why not?”

“Because… she’s…” Loki frowned, actually trying to work out the reason.

“Don’t you like her?” asked Thor.

“No,” said Loki instantly.

Thor scratched his hair. He was growing it longer for the movie. Dad said he had to look a bit wild, because his character was a boy who roamed the fields alone and was friends with the animals. Loki’s character was frail and sickly and never saw the light of day, until his little cousin Mary arrives to the old house where Loki lives, and at first she thinks Loki is a ghost, and becomes friends with Thor, who helps her bring to life an old garden, and then she discovers Loki, and the girl brings Loki out into the sunlight, and into the garden, and he gets better and happier and healthy, and then Loki’s dad comes back and loves them all.

Loki had said “Why can’t Thor be the one who saves the sickly boy?”

His dad had smiled. “Because that’s not how the story goes.” Sentence passed. Loki had looked at Thor imploringly. Thor had shrugged.

“She’s quite pretty,” Thor said, after a while, about the actress playing Mary.

“She thinks she’s the queen or something,” snapped Loki, with a scowl.

Thor laughed. “She does a bit.”

Loki bit his lip.
“So... do you think she’s pretty?” he asked, after a beat.

“She’s alright,” said Thor, without much thought.

Loki took a few seconds before he asked the next one.

“Do you like her?”

“I don’t know. Yes, I guess.” Again, Thor hadn’t really thought about it.

Loki’s frown turned deeper, his nose scrunching.

“You don’t have to like her though,” said Thor. “I mean, actors do it all the time, they kiss and all, but they don’t have to like each other. Like when mum kissed King Claudius on the lips. It’s not like she doesn’t like dad anymore. She’s just pretending. You’ll have to do it all the time when you’re older.”

Loki had never thought of that before. He was not sure how he felt about it. In any case, it didn’t solve his present predicament.

“But I’ve never kissed anyone before,” he said, whiny. “Isn’t your first kiss supposed to mean something?”

“Only if you’re a Disney Princess, doofus,” laughed Thor, giving his brother a light shove.

Loki looked miserable, not one bit amused.

“Have you kissed a girl before? On the lips?” he asked then.

“I kissed Juliette,” answered Thor.

Loki’s eyes widened in shock. Juliette their cousin, a bit older that Thor and an absolute nag, in Loki’s opinion.

"When?” asked Loki, in dismay. How was it possible that he did not know? Why hadn't Thor told him? He told him everything. Right?

"Christmas," said Thor, as if it was nothing.

Loki took a long time to process that. It didn't feel nice at all.

“Did you like it?” he asked eventually, a panicky edge in his tone that completely flew over Thor's head.

“I don’t know,” said Thor, with a shrug. “It was ok I guess.”

Loki bit the corner of his bottom lip then, looking down, and blushed.

“I don’t want my first kiss to be with her,” he said, voice thin. He meant with the girl who played Mary in the movie. “I want it to be someone I like.”

Thor scratched the back of his head again. That could be a problem. Loki didn’t like anyone most of the time.

"Like who,” he asked.
It took forever for Loki to answer.

"Like you," he said, at long last, a mere whisper.

Thor's eyebrows raised in perplexity.

“But Loki, we’re brothers,” he said.

“So? I like you!” countered Loki, his eyes bright now, brave, defiant. Thor liked that look on Loki’s face. “Don’t you like me?”

Thor opened his mouth, nothing came out.

“Don’t you think I’m pretty?” insisted Loki, relentless.

“…But you’re my brother,” said Thor again, as if that answered it all, which it didn’t.

“So? I like you and I think you’re very handsome,” declared Loki, his chin up proud, although his ears were flaming red.

To be fair, there was nobody in the world Thor liked more than his brother, and he had never seen anyone prettier, so he guessed Loki had a point. Of course, he couldn’t say that out loud, because boys don’t say this kind of things. (Except Loki, but Loki was Loki. He said what he wanted. Thor liked that too.)

“And then you’ll be alright and you’ll kiss her?” Thor said, as if it was a great concession, granted out of his generosity of heart.

“Yes,” said Loki, all determination.

Thor shook his head, because Loki was so little and so serious all the time. He leaned over, his heart pumping hard.

“But not…” Loki said, flinching back, scaring Thor for a second, worried that he may have changed his mind. “I mean, a proper kiss. Like mum and dad,” he muttered.

Thor smiled at his very shy, very cute, very grave baby brother. He cradled Loki’s head, tilting it up, and examined his pale, delicate face for an instant. Loki looked nervous and worried and hopeful, his mouth already pursing for the kiss. Still smiling, Thor put his lips on Loki’s, and left them there for a beat. He even closed his eyes. When he pulled apart with a soft smack, he saw that Loki’s eyes were shut tight. When he opened them again, a deep pink blush was blossoming on his cheeks and neck, and he couldn’t raise his eyes from his shoes. Thor smiled for all he was worth, because Loki looked so cute like that, and ruffled his hair.

“Happy now?” he said.

He had thought about it more than he thought he would in the days and months that followed.

When they shot the kiss with the girl that played Mary, Thor watched from a corner, and as his father shouted “action!” and Loki said his lines and leaned over to kiss the girl, Thor felt himself blush. He remembered the sensation vividly to that day, though he still didn’t know what it was.
He phoned Frigga from the apartment when he felt calmer. He did not have much to report, or much voice to report it with. He really tried to sound even and collected, because he didn’t want to add to his mum's worries, but he didn’t fool himself about how successful he was being with that. She ended up reassuring him.

“Loki is clever and resourceful,” she told him. “We need to have faith in him.”

Thor sighed, but didn’t say what was on his mind. That Loki was ill, and unstable, and when untreated, he had self-destructive tendencies, and that he had tried to kill himself once before. He felt a claw around his throat.

“Yes, mum,” he choked out, and ended the conversation as quick as he could, and barely just made it before he broke down crying once more, this time in fear.

“Listen, if you see him…” he told the landlady, just before he left. But he didn’t really know what he wanted to say.

“Would you like to leave a message, or…?”

Thor tried to think of something. That I love him. That I want him to come home. That we’ll figure it out between the two of us.

“Forget it” said Thor. “Just, please, make sure he can always come back in.”

She nodded.

Thor lifted his collar up, and stepped outside into the chilly Autumn breeze. Everywhere he looked, he saw things withering and dying.

Chapter End Notes

The movie Thor and Loki are talking about is The Secret Garden, based on a book by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Agnieszka Holland (NOT Mira Nair, thanks missdorothysnarker) directed a movie adaptation in 1993. It's obviously not Thor and Loki's. In this verse, Odin directs a mini-series produced by the BBC, for example, casting his two sons and his wife as Mrs. Medlock (that's Maggie Smith's character in
Holland's adaptation.

Just so you know, I intend to cast Thor and Loki, Odin and Frigga in dozens of imaginary productions of books and movies. I'm going to have an insane lot of fun with it.
INT. DAY. A roadside diner. Big windows facing the desert, clay-coloured hills in the distance, a stretch of road that seemed to go from nowhere to nowhere. Dull white sky. There were only a couple more patrons, truck driver type. Nobody had flinched when he had come in. Nobody recognised him. Nobody cared. One year ago that would have been a worry, and Coulson could have used it as leverage to convince him into taking on a few more talk shows, do a few more interviews, maybe even do some panel shows in the UK. Right now, Thor was just grateful he wasn’t that big a deal after all. He took a seat by the window, his back and legs cringing unhappily after so many hours on the road. He was aching for a run. Maybe later.

“Alright, hon? What can I getcha?” asked the waitress, a middle aged woman with garishly dyed red hair, sweet brown eyes, ruddy red cheeks, smiling like she was impressed with what she had before her eyes.

“Coffee, please.”

She returned a second later with the coffee pot. The brew was slightly burnt, and weak even for English standards. But it was too early for anything else, so Thor drank it down, with a grimace.

He let his eyes drift away into the horizon, scorched, bare, baked dry. Back home, it would be trees in bloom and fresh green leaves, newborn lambs skipping in the greens, the sun starting to become warm and the ground dry, for the first time in months. He was glad he wasn’t there. The desert seemed a better match for his state of mind these days, less jarring.

These were the first proper holidays he had in almost three years. He had never needed them more. He felt he had been hanging on by a thread, struggling more and more to put on a smile and the movie star act, and to be civilised, nevermind engaging, at interviews and events and related publicity fuckery. Oh, it had been a close call. He very nearly lost it several times, whenever the questions went anywhere near the revelation of Loki’s adoption. Coulson had been there to step in and defuse things, but it was obvious to those who knew him that Thor wasn’t doing well at all.

A while ago, looking forward to these precious three weeks off, he had pictured himself somewhere tropical, not necessarily with Amora -he had never thought they would make it that far, and they hadn’t-, snorkeling and scuba diving and surfing and drinking caipirinha and piña coladas, dancing and fucking on the beach. Instead, when the time had come, he had rented a car and headed south, into the desert. Life, eh?
He had been driving for a week now. He had slept in motels and, occasionally, in the car. He had eaten at diners pretty much like this one, had talked to a few interesting characters, had seen some beautiful things, and he had tried both thinking and not thinking. Still, no healing for him, and no peace.

It was six months today since Loki had run away. For the first three, Thor had kept it to himself. Not only because he didn’t want to talk about it, but because Loki had a big opening night coming and a big publicity tour leading up to it, and there were people who would start to fret if they heard he had just upped and vanished. In those early days, Thor was still hoping Loki would come back.

That was over now, the cat had been out of the bag for a few weeks, and the movie was going to open without Loki. His agency had dropped him, the studio had blacklisted him, and it was taking some serious lawyering, provided by their parents', their friends and collaborators, to avoid a lawsuit for breach of contract. His brother's career in Hollywood seemed to have finished before it even started. And there was not one single fucking thing that Thor could do.

One evening three months ago, Tony Stark had taken Thor out for drinks, to coax out of him the truth to his silent misery. He was a good guy, not a lot of people seemed to realise that, and more perceptive than Thor had given him credit for — before this, Thor had thought that the man saw nothing past his own navel. He was also, and simultaneously, a massive jerk, but he wasn’t the only highly contradictory character in Thor’s life, and Thor was used to taking people as they came.

Now, Tony wasn’t the sort to content himself with paying a sympathetic ear and sit still to offer a shoulder to cry on. The moment he had understood the nature of the problem, he had made a phone call, that same night, from the club.

"A guy called Fury is going to call you tomorrow" he said.

He had indeed, way too early for hungover Thor to process. He had put down the phone with an appointment for later in the day.

Fury didn’t tell him exactly what it was that he did. The guy looked like a pirate, and had a mouth worthy of one too. Thor deduced he was some kind of private detective. He told Thor that they would have to debrief him and see Loki’s apartment.

"I can’t make promises without more data but, from what you have said, he shouldn’t be difficult to find," he said.

"Why is that?" Thor had asked.

"Sheltered upbringing, limited money, limited experience of the world."

"Loki is resourceful," Thor had said, echoing his mother’s words.

"We’ll find him," Fury had said.

*Dead or alive*, Thor’s mind had supplied, in the husky voice of the villainous sheriff in a Western movie.

Tony pulled some strings to get him a couple of days off. Thor flew to London, showed Fury’s people the apartment, and while two guys combed the place, rummaging in every drawer and under every piece of furniture, taking photographs of absolutely everything, and scanning every piece of paper they could find (Loki would skin him alive for the intrusion if he ever found out), Thor sat down on Loki’s couch for debriefing.
They wanted to know all there was to know about his brother, to piece out his mind and have an idea about where to start looking. It was grueling. There was a woman called Hill who was particularly ruthless and insightful. She sensed Thor was hiding something straight away. Thor had felt naked and exposed under her relentless questioning, and flat-out exhausted by the time they were done, hours later. It's what comes from raking your brains, trying to supply every shred of information you think can help in finding your brother, while doing all you can to hide the biggest fucking bit of data of them all.

“Twill have to have a thorough look at all that we’ve gathered today,” said Hill, “but I’m pretty sure we’ll be starting in Russia.”

Well, fuck. Thor felt an idiot for not thinking about that straight away. It did sound like such a Loki thing to do; when mortally wounded by one of your fathers, go and see if you can get yourself rejected again by the other one, too.

A few weeks later, he got a phone call from Hill. Loki’s trail had been sniffed out in Moscow. His brother had managed to locate the orphanage where Odin had found him (clever, clever Loki), and had spoken to people there, apparently in basic, yet spotless Russian with an impeccable southern accent (now, of course Loki would manage to teach himself to speak Russian in under two months! And kill the accent too, because d’uh, fucking brilliant actor and mimic.) He had inquired about Laufey, and had met with the same wall as Hill; there was nothing to go on, nothing to narrow down the search. It was next to impossible to find a nondescript man nobody remembered, that could also have been using a fake name. Loki, Hill was sure, would not find him either.

“That doesn’t mean he won’t try. Laufey is a female name in most of Scandinavia, but male in Norway. It’s relatively rare. He might try there next.”

And off to Norway Maria Hill had gone, with photos of Loki and a bundle of Thor’s cash. He was spending a fortune on this mad quest for his brother, most of it on buttering civil servants, to get them interested in being a bit more helpful. Loki had emptied his bank account before he had left the country, but whatever he took out, it couldn’t have been that much. If Loki had had to bribe the information to track down his origins as well, and there was no reason to doubt it, he might be running out of money by now. And what would happen then, thought Thor with a shudder.

And money was only half the problem. Thor never forgot for one second that there was a time bomb in his brother’s brain, that started ticking the moment he ran out of his meds. And that must have been months ago. Loki had been known to become suicidal when not under treatment. Loki felt lost. He had told him so himself, in these very same words, just before Thor pushed him away.

And then he had let him run. He had just stood there and watched him go, heartbroken and lost and aching, and then sat on his hands like a lemon, doing nothing to get him back for months. No wonder Thor could not sleep. He didn’t fucking deserve a minute of peace after how much he had managed to fuck up with his baby brother.

He had not told his parents about Fury. First, because he wasn’t sure Frigga would approve. But more than anything, because he was afraid of what they would find and, before he was made to face some tough questions, he wanted to make sure he could deal with the answers.

He took a room in the motel, had a shower, tried to have a nap. He laid on his back in his t-shirt and boxers, tracing the cracks in the ceiling with his eyes. He prayed. To Loki. Baby, come back. Please, come back. We’ll sort it out. We’ll find a way. This can’t be the end. It was never meant to end at all.
His mind just spun and churned and found no rest. This thing with Loki, was it the root of all their present evils? Would everything had been different if... if it had not happened? Perhaps Loki would never have gone to hospital then, and mum would have been able to tell him about his origins in a way that he could handle, and he would be home today, carrying on with his life.

But had it ever really been a choice, a decision they made? At the time it had felt inevitable, the final, unavoidable flare that followed years of a slow-burn simmering permanently under both their skins. And Thor could not tell when it had started. It had been a part of them since he could remember. In the stares that got longer and longer as they grew up. In the blush on Loki’s cheeks when Thor hugged him and kissed him. In the nights they would sneak into the other’s bed, rub their feet together for warmth, spoon before they had ever heard of spooning, and giggle under the covers until they fell asleep. In the times Loki was scared or sad or happy or excited and always ran to Thor first.

And when they grew older, it was there walking to school together, not talking, earbuds on, Loki mouthing the words to whatever pretentious indie rock group with artsy fartsy lyrics he was favouring that month, and Thor stealing glimpses of his mouth and thinking how soft it looked. It was there whenever he spotted Loki in the schoolyard by himself, picking at his food with delicate, pale hands, and reading. And everytime Loki noticed him staring, and gave him the flip, and Thor smiled, and Loki rolled his eyes but smiled too. It was there watching a movie together, the light of the screen dancing on Loki’s face, and Thor realising with absolute certainty that he would never tire of looking at him.

And when the mood swings of puberty had began, and they couldn’t stop bickering and jabbing at each other, it was still there, worse than ever, under every “fuck you” and every “I hate you” and every “leave me alone.” It was there when they couldn’t say three words to each other without starting a fight, during every silent treatment, and in every short truce, and it was there all the times that Thor was aching to hug his brother and shouted and barked at him instead, out of sheer frustration and confusion. And it was there all the times Thor listened to Loki jerking off in the shower and his body reacted to it, and it was those sounds that Thor would wank to, and come with his brother's name on his lips.

Thor understood even then that this was weird, and knew by instinct not to talk about it with anyone. But it didn’t feel weird, and it didn’t feel wrong. It just was. Thor and Loki, Loki and Thor. Some things you just don't question. Some things you just know, here, in your gut.

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(The past)

Thor is not yet sixteen, Loki has just turned fourteen. It’s been a decent Saturday, civilised. Mum and dad are doing a play, and they don’t bother coming back home for lunch. Loki has spent all day shut up in his room, so there has been no interaction and so, no fighting. Thor brought him a sandwich at lunchtime and Loki even said thanks.

In the evening they order take-away.
“I’m not going to get it.”

“I’m not going either.”

In the end, they both go. Changing from scruffs into street clothes, Thor finds himself picking the new jeans that are kind of snug, and the old, fitted red t-shirt that shows off his muscles. He ruffles his hair, and takes a look in the hall mirror. He looks pretty damned good. *What the fuck are you doing man, it’s just Loki.*

Loki turns up in one of his ballet sweatshirts, which shows off his neck and collarbones (and a slice of his belly when he raises his arms, and if that isn’t the beginnings of a happy trail under his navel...), and that pair of black, skin-tight jeans that make his dancer's arse and legs look fucking incredible. Thor just can't help the once-over.

“Can you even breathe in those?” he teases.

“Why do you think the world needs to see what brand your pants are?” counters Loki.

Thor flusters, laughs it off.

“Are you checking me out?” He tells himself he is just kidding.

Loki stares straight into his eyes.

“Are you?”

On the way to the Chinese place they’re quiet. Waiting for their food, they get giggly, The woman at the till is incredibly rude, and it’s sort of a family tradition to compete over who gets the cutest response while being the most polite. Loki tends to win at that.

Walking back, they’re in a playful mood. They hopscotch on the tiles, dodge the cracks on the pavement, walk on the edge, and badger each other, laughing. It’s like being on a date, Thor thinks, a brilliant one that’s going swimmingly and makes you really think you’re getting lucky tonight. And he guesses he should be squeaked, and instead all he feels is butterflies. They’re having so much fun, and Loki looks so happy he sparkles. What could possibly be wrong about that.

They eat in Thor’s room, on the old sofa, find a Mel Brooks film to watch, laugh like they haven’t laughed in ages, throw prawn crackers at each other. They’re only having a beer between the two of them, and still Thor feels like drunk.

After dinner they play Mario Kart. Loki is lying on his back, head on the armrest, legs on Thor’s lap. Thor is creaming him. Loki kicks his arm and his side to sabotage him. It doesn’t work. He tickles Thor’s side with his toes.

“Fuck off, that’s disgusting,” grumbles Thor, but that’s not the first word that came to mind.

Anyhow, that seems to work a bit better at dulling Thor’s reflexes, and it gives Loki ideas. He starts playing footsies. Thor kicks him, but he’s not really trying to make him stop.

He can’t keep a straight face. Loki insists. The tickles go all the way up to Thor’s crotch. Now Thor is missing almost every box and his turns are anything but sharp.

Loki starts stroking his foot slowly up and down the back of Thor’s calf. Thor stays quiet and still,
eyes on the game, brain utterly elsewhere. Now Loki slithers his toes under the hem of Thor’s jeans, and rubs slowly. Thor swallows dry, shifts in his seat and falls off Rainbow Road for the third time, his heart hammering in his chest.

With a smirk, he snaps his calves around Loki’s. Loki squirms and pulls, trying to get free, cursing and laughing, but good luck with that, Thor holds back mêlées with those legs.

Loki plays dirty. He drops the controller, sits up and starts tickling Thor under his arms, on his sides, his neck, all the places he knows are Thor’s undoing. Thor laughs, writhes, curses, his cock stirring and filling. Get off me! Stop it! He struggles to grip Loki’s hands, his wrists, he wrestles to control him, but the little bitch kicks, scratches and bites. Thor throws himself on top of him, laughing. Loki shrieks and laughs too when Thor starts tickling him in turn.

Loki’s hard under him, and Thor is hard, and there is no pretending now, no hiding. They’re still, panting, staring at each other, Loki’s eyes dipping to Thor’s mouth, trembling under his weight. The blush on Loki’s cheeks, the glaze on his eyes, his chest heaving. Thor has never seen anything lovelier, he has never wanted anyone or anything more.

Thor kisses him. Loki parts his lips and closes his eyes, and stays very still for a beat, overwhelmed. Then he starts kissing back. He has no idea what he’s doing, and he’s so eager, he wants to do everything at once, what he’s seen in the movies. Thor lets go of his wrists to cradle his face and still him, and teach him what little he knows. Loki’s hands weave in his hair, his breathing quick, heartbeat fast as a rodent’s, his little whimpers under the feel of Thor’s mouth.

Loki pushes his hips up against his brother’s, with a shuddery gasp and a surprised, almost pained expression. Thor pushes back, rutting, moaning. Loki wraps his long, spindly limbs around him, squeezes tight. They grind their hips together, kissing.

Thor watches him, his face tense, a frown, his eyes hooded, his mouth a perfect O. The noises he makes, his breathing. He smells so fucking good. Thor strokes his hair, kisses his face, his neck, ruts harder between Loki’s legs, against his arse. Loki grinds frantically now, short little moans. Thor rears his head up to see him, feels his body writhing under him, Loki’s arms wrapped tight around him, like a drowning man. Then Loki goes rigid and jolts, his eyes shut, a broken moan, and Thor knows what has happened, and Loki looks so fucking beautiful like that it takes his breath away. He kisses his mouth, and Loki kisses him back, in a haze.

Thor starts grinding harder against Loki’s arse, and he thinks of fucking him, and it’s too fucking much, the bolt of lightning that hits him when he imagines Loki naked under him, of being inside him, of rutting and fucking and tearing his brother apart like that, and he comes, groaning, jaws clenched tight, panting.

The expression on Loki’s face when Thor finally opens his eyes, awe and wonder and love. He buries his face in Loki’s neck, panting against his skin, for a long time. He doesn’t want to let go, he doesn’t want to untangle. He’s afraid of what will happen next.

“I can’t breathe, Thor,” says Loki, after a while.

“How can you talk then,” says Thor.

But he pulls away and sits up, reluctantly. He’s wet, his cock throbs from the rough treatment against the ridges of two tough crotch seams.

Loki sits up too, he tidies his hair with a trembling hand. His mouth swollen, pink, his cheeks flush, his eyes bright, his beauty like a punch in Thor’s gut.
They don’t speak. Their breathing quiets down while the music from the game goes on and on in a loop. Loki grabs the controller, drives straight into Thor’s kart and pushes him off the edge.

Thor laughs, probably louder than it warrants, but his heart is pounding so hard, his hands are shaking, steam had to come out somehow.

They play. Thor keeps throwing quick glances at his brother. Loki looks thoughtful, placid, and his mouth so lovely. Thor takes a deep breath, turns to him, and kisses his lips. Loki’s long eyelashes flutter. When Thor pulls back, Loki bites his own lip. He remains quiet, and becomes especially vicious with his shell attacks. They will play until it’s not weird anymore.

After a few races, Loki gets up.

“Where are you going?” jumps Thor, with an anxious shiver.

“Bathroom,” says Loki. “I’m all… sticky.”

Thor makes to follow him.

“Where the fuck do you think you’re going?” snaps Loki, plastering snark over his nerves.

Thor shifts his weight from one foot to the other. He is terrified that, the moment he loses sight of Loki, his brother will freak out, or he will freak out, or both, and the pale illusion of comfort and complicity they are sharing will shatter into something horrible. He strokes Loki’s hair out of his face.

“Just… are you alright?”

Loki nods, his eyes low.

“Are you coming back?”

Loki nods again.

It strikes Thor all of a sudden that this might be Loki’s first time.

Loki does come back, in his pyjamas, and then it’s Thor who goes for a wash. When he returns, Loki’s stare is lost in space, the controller unused in his hands. Thor shuffles over, takes it off from him.

“Let’s go to sleep,” he says.

Loki looks up anxiously, expecting to be kicked out perhaps.

“Stay here?” says Thor.

They snuggle up on the sofa, spooning, Thor pulls a blanket over both of them, their fingers tangled under the cover, gripping tight.

Thor thinks it’s his dad poking his head to check on them at 1 a.m., hesitating at the door for a long time. Thor tries so hard to be still and pretend he is asleep that he forgets to breathe. He hears the door click shut, and takes a deep breath to try and calm his pulse.
What the fuck have they done.

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(The present.)

When the twilight fell over the desert, Thor went out for a run. He pounded furiously with his feet, seeking the prickling sensation under his skin, the taste of iron in his mouth. He wanted to punish his muscles and exhaust himself and then collapse on the bed and sleep for a whole week. He wanted to stop thinking.

He hadn’t thought of how dark the night got in the desert, even with the glow of the stars. He could see the lights of the motel far away in the distance, but he struggled to see his own feet and where he was treading on. He sighed and started to jog back, carefully. With luck, he would not step into a hole and break his ankle.

He heard the humdrum of a car getting louder at his back. He kept jogging, turning his head now and then, watching it approach him head on. It was a massive, clunky jeep, and it wasn't slowing down or altering its course. It was heading straight for him. Bloody hell, it was going to run him over! Thor jumped to one side, tripped on something he could not see, staggered. He stood there panting, pumped up on adrenaline. A dozen yards ahead, the jeep had screeched to a halt, raising a cloud of dust that shone grey in the headlights. A small figure jumped off and started to run towards him.

“Oh my god, are you ok?” It was a girl, short and slight, almost lost in clothes much too big for her.

“Oh, I’m ok,” snapped Thor, grumpy, keyed-up. “Didn’t you see me?”

“God, no, I feel so bad. I was checking my instruments. We’re in the middle of the desert, I just… Sorry. Are you sure you’re alright?”

She was so tiny, her concern so genuine. Thor loosened up, in spite of himself.

“It’s alright. I’m fine. No harm done.”

There was an awkward silence. The jeep rumbled.

“So, are you lost, or…?” she asked, tugging her hair behind her ear.

“No, I was running. I’m staying at that motel there." He pointed towards the dots of light.

“Oh my god, how long have you been running for? That’s like, miles away!” She didn’t give Thor time to answer. “You’re not from around here, are you?”

Thor took Jane Foster’s offer of a lift. She talked a lot in the car, just trying to answer Thor’s question about what she was doing in the middle of the desert at night. Half-way through her explanation, they stopped so that she could show him the instruments and the notes and, after that, the stars. Soon after, the coffee thermos popped out and they sat on fold-away chairs under the night sky, and Thor, who had been good at physics quite a while ago, but not astrophysics good, tried to
follow her words basically on faith. Whenever a silence fell, it was comfortable.

“So what are you doing in the middle of the desert, Thor?” asked Jane. “Apart from running.”

“Holidays,” said Thor.

“Holidays from what? I mean, what do you do?”

“I’m an actor.”

“Wow, really? Are you famous?”

“Not very much, since you don’t know me.”

“Oh, no, don’t pay me any mind. I’m a bit of a disaster with these things. I haven’t been to the movies in, like, years. Sorry. I mean, it’s not that I don’t like them, but I’m so busy, and movies last for ever nowadays, and frankly all you get in these parts is really idiotic stuff, transformers and superheroes and all that.”

Thor gave her half a smile and an eyebrow. Her eyes went wide with alarm.

"Oh. You don't do superhero movies, do you? Oh god, you do. Sorry, sorry, sorry. Please don’t be offended. I'll shut up now. Sorry.”

Thor laughed.

“I’m not offended,” he said. “It’s fine.”

She bit her lip, and as he kept beaming at her, her smile overflowed the catch. Her eyes were bright in the starlight. There was a comfortable silence.

“Anyway, it’s getting late,” said Thor. “I don’t want to keep you.”

“Yeah, I guess you must be getting cold, right?”

Thor was wearing shorts and a hoodie. He had already caught Jane's eyes involuntarily drawn to his thighs and butt several times.

She drove him back. They laughed on the way there, talking about the crazy wonders of New Mexico. They traded glances. They stalled at the parking lot. He could see her better now, with more light. Her brown eyes were so big and warm, her neck so long. She was lovely. And nice, and sweet, and she sounded so normal, so grounded, so uncomplicated. She was attracted too, he didn’t need anyone spelling it out for him. Her skin was smooth as a mirror, with a soft glow. He thought how nice it would feel to kiss her.

“So, Thor…” she said. And she didn’t say any more.

“I had a lovely time,” he said. “Thank you, Jane Foster.” And he had. For a couple of hours, he had forgotten.

“Thank you,” she said. She gathered some courage, and got on her tip-toes for a kiss.

Her mouth was just as soft and delicate as it looked, her kiss like the stroke of flower petals. She smelled of cold night air.
He pulled back.

“I would love to ask you to come inside,” he said, “but I lost someone very dear to me recently and I’m… I’m not ready yet.”

A kind frown darkened Jane’s sweet face.

“I’m so sorry.”

Thor nodded.

She pursed her mouth, overcoming her disappointment. Gave his arm a squeeze.

“Anyway. If you ever come around again… Anyway.”

“I’ll look for you,” he said.

“That would be nice.” The sweetest, warmest smile. “Good night, Thor.”

He nodded. “Good night, Jane.”

She waved from the cabin before driving into the darkness.

Thor walked into his room to a text from Hill, sent a couple of hours ago. She had sent blurry CCTV footage caps of someone who could be Loki in an airport in Norway, where his trace was lost again.

Thor phoned her straight away.

“I’m not even sure he was here looking for Laufey now,” she said. “Anyway, he’s getting clever.” Thor didn’t say Loki always was clever. “Any ideas where he might be headed?” She hung up to let him think about it, and linked him a map of the area.

Thor felt an ice cold shiver down his spine. He was suddenly full of foreboding. As far as he knew, Loki could very well be suicidal now. He swallowed around the knot in his throat. With a shaky hand, he texted.

Iceland.

(The past)

Things get just as weird as Thor had feared the moment they wake up. He can’t look at Loki. At breakfast, he can’t look at his parents. Loki’s expression is guarded and suspicious and, underneath, scared and hurt.

He flinches when Loki tries to kiss him in the corridor while mum and dad are in the living room. He kicks Loki off without even looking at him when his brother starts playing footsies at dinner (Is he
barking mad?). Loki’s face is pure spite. It screams in big flashy neon letters “I fucking knew it.”

When they’re home alone again that evening, and Thor knocks on Loki’s door, his brother snarls “Fuck off!” at him. His voice is thick and weak. Loki has been crying.

They stop talking except to bark at each other. It’s worse than ever. Frigga ends up asking him what’s wrong.

Thor has always been able to talk frankly to his mum about Loki, and she has always helped him to understand Loki’s point of view and see things the way Loki sees them, and Thor always feels better for it, more capable of empathy and tolerance. This time, he can’t.

“He’s being a jerk,” he shrugs.

She sighs. Oh, here we go.

“I know it’s hard and I know it’s a lot to ask, but you have to be patient, Thor. I know a lot of the time it feels that Loki is in a bad mood for no reason, but never forget how hard it is inside his head. Imagine what it would be to have a voice inside constantly telling you that you’re worthless, that nobody likes you and nobody loves you, and that you don’t deserve to be loved or to feel good. I know sometimes it doesn’t feel like it, but Loki loves you with all his heart, and he looks up to you. Be compassionate. He needs you.”

Thor cries in bed that night, out of sheer despair. He wants to talk to Loki. Problem is, he has no idea what to say. He still hasn’t got his head wrapped around what happened, to what they did. It's his baby brother, for fuck’s sake. He guesses he should put a stop to this madness. It's a mess, and it's making everybody unhappy, and Thor should not get himself into shit as serious as this without at least clearing his mind somewhat and have some idea of what the fuck he is doing. And Loki is so vulnerable, so frail. He should end it, stop it right here, before it gets even worse, and stop thinking with his cock and focus instead on looking after Loki. It’s what a good brother would do.

But it had felt so right at the time. He wasn’t overcome by guilt and remorse the moment his lust was sated and his brain had cleared. With Loki in his arms like that, all he felt was peace and warmth and content.

He understands what he feels now, what he’s felt for a long time. He is in love, that’s what it fucking is. It’s insane, and probably sick, but it just fucking is, and he can’t think of anything else but having Loki again.

He lies awake all night. When morning comes, he knows he won’t be a good brother.

Next Thursday, when his time at the gym is done, he doesn’t wait outside. He heads straight for the ballet hall. Something tells him that Loki intends to keep him waiting for the rest of the afternoon if he can.

Indeed, Loki has stayed behind after his class and is practicing a whole choreography, without music. Thor falls into a sort of trance watching him. Loki seems to float, jumping impossibly high in the air, without a sound, and falling just as silently and weightlessly as a cat, every minute movement under control, every muscle. Thor wonders if this is how his dad fell in love with his mum. They met at drama school, and she was a dancer there too -that’s why Loki first became interested in ballet, because of mum. God, it’s as if Loki was made of a different matter, so powerful yet so delicate, both swift and capable of movements unnaturally slow and flowing, like an underwater creature, pure
When Loki is done, he ignores Thor and avoids his eyes as he makes for the changing room without a word. Thor follows him there, and he watches him strip obliviously and step into the shower. He has never been able to look at him like that, directly and openly. When Loki walks back, towelling his hair, trying to seem uninterested, Thor runs his eyes all over him, head to toe, no bashfulness, no pretence. Loki is still striving for the nonchalant stance, but he is blushing.

“You’re beautiful,” Thor says.

“You’re an arsehole,” says Loki.

“I love you,” says Thor.

“Sod off,” says Loki, looking down, cheeks bright red.

When Thor knocks on Loki’s door that evening, Loki says come in.

The truce doesn’t last. Loki pulls and pulls and pulls, nothing is ever enough.

They go to the movies and Loki wants to make out there.

“Nobody fucking knows us, Thor,” he grumbles when Thor pushes him off for the third time. And he sulks the rest of the evening.

“Is it because I’m a boy?” Loki asks one day, after he has tried to hold Thor’s hand down the street and Thor has shaken him off. “You fucking coward!” snarls Loki, when Thor offers no reply. And he doesn’t let Thor near for a whole week.

“What do you fucking want from me, a diamond ring?” shouts Thor when Loki slams his bedroom door in front of Thor’s face, after the umpteenth fight that week.

“I hate you!” screams Loki at the top of his lungs.

It’s fucking impossible, a roller coaster. Thor is permanently horny, permanently hopeful, permanently unhappy.

Summer break is approaching. Mum is doing a play on Broadway. Odin will be shooting a movie in Iceland. Mum decrees that it will do the men in her life a lot of good to spend some time together and bond.

Thor dreads this trip with all his heart. Being trapped in a cabin in the middle of nowhere with his dad and Loki for six weeks, with a tiny crew of thirty, four actors, lots of dialogue, and fuck all going on. He is going to fucking die, or kill someone, or both, and he tells Frigga so, but she won’t hear a word. They're going. It's final.

Well, it’s not a cabin, but a tiny house on the edge of what in Iceland passes for a suburb, with views to a whole lot of green, flat nothing. A beautiful lot of nothing, without night, the air crisp and pure, muffled and quiet as it is after a snowfall. It’s like another planet.
Good news is, Odin has no intention of playing dad and doing any bonding this summer. He has a movie to make. He gets a few tips from one of the local crew members, gives his children money, a phone, and his blessing to do whatever they feel like. Thor pounces on the chance of trying kayaking, quad tours, river rafting. Eventually, he gets Loki out of the house. They go whale spotting, horse riding, and trekking. Thor is having the time of his life, and now all that’s missing for complete happiness is for that scowl to leave Loki’s face. Thor suggests a little adventure. Odin is engrossed in the shoot, and decides that whatever manly outdoorsy pursuits his children undertake can only do them good. He offers to cover with mum. Thor and Loki pack a tent, some supplies, rent bicycles and ride into the wilderness.

They set up camp right at the edge of a camping site, as far away from everything as legal, cook their dinner under the white twilight, and stay up for the magical hour in which the sky lights up on fire, with clouds of pink and orange and red, before drifting back into gold, white, and blue again, never once getting darker than a summer dusk in England. They lay a blanket in a gravelly recess between some volcanic rocks, and make out for ages, before Loki asks him to fuck him.

It doesn’t happen -technical glitches; it’s not as easy as it seems. In fact, it’s not easy at all-, but they still bring each other off under the sky, and walk back giddy to the tent, sleeping naked in the same sleeping bag, fucking bliss. And in the morning, before they set out on their bikes, Thor kisses his brother, slow and messy, in the sunlight, for the world to see, and Loki’s eyes are blindingly bright.

They follow the main road to the next town. Thor stays outside shifting his weight from one foot to the other while Loki goes inside the chemist, and blushes bright red when his brother returns triumphant, exhibiting two pots of lube. Well, of course he would get two. He probably has more in his pockets.

Later that day, they fuck. In the middle of nowhere, only barely camouflaged from the road, for decency, behind a slope. It’s awkward, and intense, and it’s over embarrassingly soon, and Thor is pretty sure Loki hasn’t enjoyed it, but afterwards they look at each other as if the earth had been displaced from its axis by what they’ve just done.

They persevere (try and stop them), and soon enough Thor can say with conviction that Loki is indeed enjoying it now. The weather in the daytime is mild enough that they can fuck naked in the open air, and in fact Loki insists upon it. He wants the sky to see. His skin so pale in the sunlight, ethereal. Not since they were kids has Thor seen him smile so much.

They check in with Odin a couple of times a day, and phone Frigga every evening, but otherwise they’re free, unburdened, happy. They hold hands down the street, kiss over ice cream -they even get a couple of “awwws” that set their cheeks on fire-, and there is nothing wrong, nothing to hide, nothing ugly about being together like that.

Thor understands intuitively that they will never be as happy again. The only boundaries, the only limits to their joy here are the ones they brought with them from home, and they have succeeded in blowing those out of the water. They are together, as it should be, and that is all that matters.

Promises are made, oaths even, getting more and more fervent the closer it gets to the time to go home. Thor believes them with all his heart. Always together, no matter what. Do whatever it takes. Fuck the world. Only you and me, that is all. Come to think of it, he is the one doing most of the vowing. Loki just gets quieter, and sadder, and clingier.

Six weeks go by very bloody quickly when you’re happy.
Loki’s face on the plane is at best melancholy, at worst empty, all the light gone, all the courage and the fight and the hope gone. Before all of this, Thor would have just given him a big hug and a kiss, and Loki would have moaned about it but his face would have softened. Now, Thor doesn’t dare touch him. He doesn’t even dare look at him straight. The pages of Odin’s newspaper rustle. Thor’s sigh goes unheard under the low rumble of the plane.

Everything that was right in Iceland is wrong in England. Reality reasserts itself without giving them a second to adjust. They’re back in school, back to routine, back to sneaking and bickering, with the added mess of fucking now. But it’s not the beautiful, liberating act on the primal volcanic grounds, under the eternal sunlight, that made them feel like angels or gods or both. Now it feels dirty, shameful, necessarily furtive and rushed. Flirting and joking have been banished, and they don’t laugh together, and everyday life feels petty and insignificant, inconsequential, simply not worth bothering with. And that’s just Thor. Imagine what it must be like in Loki’s head.

In November Thor gets a part in a Channel 5 high school show, playing a teenage heartthrob. Odin huff and puffs, mumbles and grumbles, but all Thor can think of is having his own money. And popularity, yes, And interviews for teenage magazines. And fan mail. And TV galas. And getting out of his own fucking head for a few hours a day. It’s a lot of work too, and being so tired dims his lust, which can only be a good thing, right? Less worries. Sometimes, whole weeks go by without them touching each other. Of course Thor fucking misses it, but he doesn’t miss the angst that came with it. And there seems to be less anger between them now, surely that’s a good sign, right? So why does he feel so guilty all the time? Why does he feel like he is abandoning Loki?

He knows Loki isn’t happy. He knows he cries a lot. At times, he sees him so blank and withdrawn it gives him the creeps. He tells himself that his brother must be just as knackered as he is, taking afterschool drama, more dancing, really pushing it with his piano and singing, and still keeping his grades excellent. He thinks they’re both just plodding on, trying to cope, getting used to this new reality. Reality being that they’re drifting apart. Thor hasn’t said so, he hasn’t said it's over, he can't. He thinks Loki knows too. Of course they would be sad. Fucking miserable, even. There's nothing he can do.

How could he not have seen it coming. How the fuck could he have missed something like that. It wasn’t resignation, it was apathy. It wasn’t quiet melancholy, it was silent despair, utter hopelessness. It all blows in his face in February, when he gets home to find his dad at the door, one heavy hand on his son's face, then on his shoulder, Odin's eyes red, telling him, “Thor, there has been an accident…”

Loki looks greenish white and so tiny in the hospital bed, only a child. Thor approaches him slowly, as if he was a wild animal that could bolt at any second. He kisses Loki’s forehead and does all he can not to start crying.

An accident, he tells himself. How the fuck do you swallow three fucking boxes of paracetamol by accident.

“They’ll keep him for a while,” says Frigga, when Thor asks when is Loki coming home. “Then he’ll stay at a clinic for a few weeks, so that they can adjust his medication and see how he is doing with it. We can come and see him everyday,” she adds when Thor starts crying like a big baby.

And like a big baby she hugs him and cradles him in her arms and hums a lullaby, and eventually Thor will stop crying, but that throbbing ache deep inside, that feels as if it will never stop hurting.
And he is right.

(The present.)

He woke up at dawn, and knew he wouldn’t get back to sleep no matter how hard he tried. His mind was already scrambling in every direction. He packed up the few things he had got out yesterday, signed off, paid and left. The red-haired waitress wasn’t there so early in the morning. Thor had his burnt coffee, some eggs on toast, and drove away.

He might stop for a nap by the roadside later, if he could find a spot in the shade, or perhaps another motel, he didn’t know. He liked not knowing. With the road stretching behind him and ahead of him, he would soon fall into a sort of trance, his thoughts melding together into one long litany without beginning or end. It was peaceful. That was how he was surviving these days.

He had not told Coulson outright, and he had not told himself outright, but he was going to let the projects he had on the line just drop. After five more weeks publicity tour with “Stargazer”, he was out of a job, and with no intentions to look for another in the immediate future. He would have to speak to Coulson about it at some point. Acting he liked, acting was fine, it was the whole Hollywood circus he couldn’t face. He had hated every minute of it for months now. It was as if Loki’s last act had been to throw a curse upon Thor’s glory, the very thing Thor had betrayed them both for. He even heard it in his head in Loki’s voice, mellifluous. Well, brother, since you like your precious celebrity so much, have it. But let it turn to ashes in your mouth and weigh like a stone yoke around your neck, and sink you.

Thor did not know what the fuck was he going to do with his life from now on. He had had one job after another since he was sixteen, each one bigger than the last, and he had not stopped to doubt himself or his future for one minute in all that time. He was simply out of fucking practice. Loki was lost, but so was he.

The next months he lived going through the motions, in a limbo, caught between yearning to find Loki and hoping they never did. As long as they didn't find him, to Thor it meant that he was alive and on the move. He had so very little hope left to cling on to by then.

Then he got a text from Maria Hill.

“He’s back in England,” she had written. “You won’t like this.”
Chapter End Notes

The Mario Kart. Yes, I know. Timewise it wouldn't work. Just bear with me, yeah?
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which we finally get a glimpse into Loki’s troubled mind.

Chapter Notes

Well, as we say in the Sherlock fandom, this just sort of happened.

Kinda worried it’s a bit much. But I can explain. LOKI MADE ME DO IT!!

Anyway, I go where the story takes me. I regret nothing (ehem.)

*shakingly hits on "post chapter"...*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Iceland. The past)

They’ve lit a fire. They’re ridiculously proud of themselves. They heat up some soup. They’re starving, and it’s getting cooler. They stuff themselves on candy bars and stare at the tiny flames.

“Stop poking it, you’ll put it out,” says Loki. Thor won’t stop prodding at the logs with a stick.

“You have to keep stoking it,” Thor says.

“Will you just leave it alone?”

Thor puts the stick down, finally. He is lying on his side, propped on one elbow, one knee up, his mighty legs parted, sprawling like a whore. He’s made of sunlight and joy and sex and Loki wants to… God, there isn’t anything Loki doesn’t want from his brother. He looks away into the hazy horizon.

“What are you looking at,” he snaps at Thor after some time, when his brother won’t stop staring.

“You,” says his golden brother, eyes intense on his. “You’re so beautiful.”

Loki glowers at him. So that’s where this is going. All he has to do is drop a couple of well-worn lines and Loki is putty in his hands, right? And Thor fucking knows it.
Loki turns his eyes back into the distance, where the midnight sun flares red between shreds of pink and orange clouds, the sky a hundred different shades of purple into blue. There are people not too far, other campers. They can hear their muffled voices. This strange hour seems to make everyone quiet, as if the sun that never sets is an odd miracle they don’t want to disturb.

Thor’s gaze is unwavering, it makes Loki’s pulse ramp up.

His brother has not been an arsehole these last few days. He has been kind and attentive and cheerful, accommodating, generous, and so bloody happy. Joy radiates through him like some sort of calm, bright fire that makes even Loki warm. He laughs easily at lots of little things, and he’s back to stroking and kissing and ruffling Loki’s hair casually, freely, just an affectionate older brother with no worries on his mind. And Loki has been burning for him, aching with love, starved, and has denied himself, punishing himself for god knows what crime. For wanting him. For needing him so badly.

"Want to make out?" says Loki then, as if it’s nothing. He knows Thor doesn’t like it when he makes it sound cheap and unimportant. To Thor, what they have is some sort of sublime communion of the souls. Loki tells himself this has nothing to do with their souls.

And still, in his brother’s insanely muscled arms, their legs tangled, their bodies pressed together, Thor’s big, strong hand raking deep in Loki’s hair, kissing each other within an inch of their lives… well, no matter what Loki tells himself, there’s nothing cheap about it, nothing.

“I want you to fuck me,” he murmurs against Thor’s mouth.

Thor’s breath glitches.

“Are you sure?”

He is and he isn’t. Thor is so big, it scares the fuck out of him. But he’s been dreaming of it for years, his brother, so beautiful and so strong, desired and wanted by all, taking him, taking everything, leaving nothing left for anyone else to claim. Yeah, he guesses he is sure after all.

They try it half a dozen times. Im-fucking-possible. The only time Thor actually breaches him, Loki squeals in pain, and after that he clenches so tight there is no way. Damn.

In the end, Thor gets off between Loki’s thighs as he jerks Loki off, which they’ve done before. But never under the sun. And that’s a big fat fucking novelty. And never while not trying to be totally quiet. And it turns out, Loki is naturally vocal and quite loud, who’d knew. But Thor, Thor’s moaning, so husky, so desperate, it makes things inside Loki crumble and burn, and it leaves him feeling raw, and somewhat purer, if that makes any sense.

Getting their breaths back, the golden white vault of the sky over their heads, Loki thinks he could get used to this very quickly. Which is a worry in an of itself.

“Have you fucked anyone before?” asks Loki after a while, back in the tent, naked together in the same sleeping bag, which might be a mistake, because Thor is a fucking furnace.

Thor takes a second too long and Loki knows the answer is yes. He tries to sound cool.

“Who?”

“Juliette,” says Thor, his breath in Loki’s hair. “Christmas time. You were out shopping with mum.”

Loki doesn’t say anything for a while. He thinks he knows which afternoon Thor is referring to.
FUCK. They were Christmas shopping for Dad and Thor. Loki bought that creamy, cosy, chunky knitted jumper with lots of cables and a big collar, thinking how gorgeous it would look with Thor’s fair hair and golden skin. He knew he was fucking right for hating it when the relatives came to stay at Asgard House for the holidays.

Thor’s bulky chest pushes against Loki’s scrawny back with his breathing.

“Was it good?” asks Loki.

Thor doesn’t answer.

“What, you kiss and tell, but only up to a point?”

“I just… I don’t know, Loki,” sighs Thor.

“Did you think about me?” asks Loki suddenly, taking even himself by surprise.

Thor is silent and tense at his back.

“Because I always think about you. Always.” And where the fuck did that come from, you needy idiot.

Thor hugs him tight. “Me too, baby,” he says, with a deep exhale. “Me too.”

Loki feels a shiver. Baby. Damn, he’s melting. He burrows against his brother’s body and is rewarded with a long kiss to the nape of his neck. Fucking putty in Thor’s hands.

Loki is on his back and Thor is completely inside him. He’s used to the sensation now, they’ve been fucking at least once a day for a week, leaving his brother panting and sweaty and undone, and Loki throbbing and frustrated, even after Thor has brought him to release with his hand. Loki doesn’t enjoy the physical sensation, but he can’t get enough of feeling Thor fall apart between his legs and knowing it’s his body doing that to him.

This time, though, for some reason, when Thor starts moving, there is a hot murmur of a sensation low in his underbelly, which is neither pain nor discomfort, nor awkward fullness, but something else, and his hard-on is not flagging at all. Thor seems encouraged by that, and therefore he doesn’t seem affected by the need to keep asking Loki constantly if he’s alright. Loki can’t blame him for saving it now, all it has got Thor before is snappy retorts to the tune of “just get on with it,” “can you fucking move already,” and “shut up, Thor.” No, this time Thor goes on empirical observation alone, and decides he can pump a bit faster. Loki’s mouth falls unhinged. His toes are curling, he’ll get a cramp. This is fucking maddening, this remote, simmering sensation somewhere deep within. But Thor is so slow and careful. This won’t do at all.

“Get off,” Loki says.

His brother pulls out carefully, and climbs off him, looking confused. And sure enough, here it comes.

“Are you alright?”

“Shut up,” says Loki, pushing Thor on his back, straddling him. He lowers himself onto Thor’s cock easily, relaxed as he is, open and well lubed, although Thor seems even bigger than usual. Thor exhales with a shaky moan as Loki’s body takes him in. And Loki starts fucking himself on him,
trying to get to what he feels is just there, barely out of reach. He whimpers, he whines. It’s not that, not that, almost, but not quite. It’s irritating, annoying. Meanwhile, Thor is arching and panting and moaning under him, his expression almost pained. Loki clenches his jaw, thighs getting tired, and still nowhere near to where he is trying to get.

Thor’s reaches for his face, pulls him down for a kiss. Loki stops bouncing and gives himself a second to breathe. He doesn’t have that much to compare it with, but he thinks Thor is a damned good kisser, sensual, demanding, with just the right balance of gentle and rough.

Hands on his hips, his brother raises him up, and fucks up into him.

Ah. Ah. Loki’s eyes shut tight and he whimpers. Thor fucks faster. Ah, there. God, right there. Fuck, this is good. This is good. The murmur becomes and itch, tangible and immediate, and Thor is scratching it so damn well. Loki hears himself moan like it was someone else, and looks down to his brother’s face, where there is a mixture of awe and hunger.

“Fuck, yes...” sighs Loki.

That drives Thor wild. He pistons frantically into him, snapping his hips, with sharp gasps, face contorted with pleasure and effort.

“Oh god,” moans Loki, the air pushed out of his lungs with Thor’s strong thrusts.

It's overwhelming. Loki arches his back, stays as still as he can for Thor to fuck him.

“Harder, harder...” he whimpers.

“Fuck Loki I...”

“God, Thor...”

Thor’s hand is on him, jerking him fast. He loses pace and coordination as he comes with jagged moans. He keeps fucking though, while Loki finishes himself, stripping frantically, biting so hard into his bottom lip he’ll leave a mark.

Sweaty and spent, he crumbles on his brother’s heaving chest, slick, skin prickly, sated. Thor’s arms wrap around him, his breath on Loki’s cheek.

Nobody says “that was awesome”, nobody says “I love you”, nobody says “are you alright”. But in each other’s arms like that, Loki still hears it, and he still feels it.

________

(Iceland. The present.)
The smoke of Loki’s fag snaked up into the twilight, in a hypnotic column that twisted and turned and twirled and curlicued. He did swear once that he would get back here one day, but this is not how he had imagined it would be. Thor should have been here, for one. And Loki should be naked on a blanket under the sky, and not sitting on the edge of this cliff, for another. Anyway, life. It is what it is.

The fact was, he was tired, bodily and mentally exhausted. He had been on the run for… (he counted in his head) six months now. Out of meds for five. He had done better than he thought. Being dead-set on a purpose, it turned out, went a long way in keeping a stumbling mind in focus. He had self-medicated now and then, with stuff that took the edge off and you bought in shady alleys rather than chemists, but apart from that, he had endured on determination alone.

He never really expected he would find Laufey, this blurry figure that had acquired a mythical aura in his romantic imagination. For all he knew, he might have never existed. For all he knew, Loki had crawled out of a hole in the earth. Whenever he thought of a faceless womb that nurtured him, perhaps a breast that fed him, and then abandoned him, he felt the ground getting soft under his feet, threatening to suck him in. He tried to stay away from it. He had just needed to run, get away, cut himself off from all that had been so reluctantly given. He wouldn’t take another second of Odin’s pity, or his money, or his name, or anything that came with it. Like Frigga. Like Thor. Because the bastard had a point. None of it belonged to Loki, he had no right to take it. He had lived on borrowed compassion far too long. He hadn’t done anything to deserve any of it. He was just as weak and sickly as Odin had said, and yes, he had gifts, but in Loki’s hands even the best things became twisted and black, from fucking Shakespeare to his brother’s love. And after running so far, and realising nobody was chasing after, he had lost all his impetus, and yes, he had come to Iceland to die. Funny thing was, he had saved himself some money for the trip back (thank goodness for low-cost airlines.) What did that mean?

So here he was, literally and metaphorically teetering on the edge. He had always hated cowardice, and that had been a deciding factor the first time he had tried to kill himself. As in “stop thinking about it so much and just fucking do it.” (He did remember as well, after he got better later on, adjusted, that he had felt gratitude for being alive. Which should be telling him something, he guessed, but right now it wasn’t coming through.)

Now, the last few days, as he approached the spot where he had decided to end it all, another thought had started nagging at him and wouldn’t leave him alone. To wit, that Loki disappearing quietly and discreetly, and more than anything, quickly, might have been exactly what Odin was wishing for.

I should have picked another one. I should have chosen a stronger one. It would have been better for all of us.

Now people will know that, whatever is wrong with him, it doesn’t run in the family.

Basically, his dad wished he had left him there to die.

Well, it might just be possible that Loki hated Odin even more than he hated himself. Or maybe not more, but certainly with a viciousness that refused to ease, and refused to let him just drift into oblivion and disappear, unheard of and unknown. How about that, apparently Loki was too full of hate to die.

So, the old bastard was ashamed of him, yeah? Because he was a nutcase. Because he was an embarrassment. Because he was girly and gay and weak. Because he was no son of his, and still bore his august name. Was that it?
Loki smirked. Oh, Odin thought he was ashamed now? Just you fucking wait, father. If there was any doubt left in that motherfucker’s mind that he should have left Loki to die, by the time Loki was finished, there would be none. Loki’s only fear is that the old goat would die of shame. Here’s hoping he would wallow in it for quite a while yet.

Loki took the last drag and chucked the cigarette into the sea. He stood up, dusted his arse and legs, put his hands in his pockets, took in the view. Even leaned over the edge, carefully, to examine for the last time the deadly drop at his feet that would have been the easy, painless way out. Then he turned on his feet and walked away.

He had never liked things that came easy anyway.

*(London. Five months later)*

Maria Hill stopped the car at the kerb and nodded towards the building across the street. It had a red marquee and a kind of Moulin Rouge feel to it, with black and white posters on the outside walls and old-fashioned lettering. The sign on the door said “The Dark World Night Club” and then the flashy signs on either side of the marquee screamed “GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!” and “BOYS! BOYS! BOYS!”

Thor was frowning deeply, trying to work out what the fuck he was seeing. He turned to Hill.

“What are we doing here?”

“Loki is inside,” she said.

Thor wasn’t getting it. It came through clear as day in his scrunched up expression.

“He works here,” explained Hill.

“Works here?” said Thor obtusely.

“Pole dancing. Stripping. Lap dancing.”

Thor mouthed silently “What?” and for a while he couldn’t do more.

Hill cleared her throat. Thor blanched out. There was more?
“What?” snapped Thor, afraid of the answer. "What else?"

“He takes clients in the alleyway.”

“Cl-clients?”

Hill nodded.

“He is using his real name. And he is the main attraction,” added Hill, who seemed to have decided that Thor needed all the facts.

Thor was struggling for breath, reeling, in shock. Which is when the other side of him usually struck and took over. He bursted out of the car.

“These guys are serious!” shouted Hill to his back. “Be careful!”

The place was shady and busy. Thor saw tits everywhere, all the staff seemed to be top-less. And bottom-less, now that he had a proper look, just thongs and nipple tassels and high heels for the girls, flat shoes for the boys, but not much else. Two girls were on a bar, putting on a mock sex act with each other around the pole. Men were crowding at their feet, waving bank notes. Thor’s stomach heaved. Loki, baby, he thought, feeling a knot in his throat. It can’t possibly be. It has to be a mistake. Not here. Not here.

A pair of eyes he knew well were staring at him from a big, black and white poster on the wall. Loki, posing naked except for a few strips of strategically positioned, metal-studded leather, one of them around his neck, daring the on-looker to hold his stare, if they could. Next to it, smaller photos of… fuck, Loki again, wrapped around a pole in fucking lingerie, in a torn-up suit, in drag. Loki on his knees in chains, while a big, muscled guy was leaning over him menacingly and yanking his head back by a handful of hair -god, his neck.

Thor was struggling to breathe through the burn in his throat. His brother was gorgeous, even like that. And he wanted to be repulsed, but he couldn’t. Oh, but he was angry, and sickened. Loki…

The place fell quiet. The sudden silence shook Thor away from his haze. He turned to the stage. His knees went weak.

A slender, white figure was standing by the pole in black, skin-tight leather trousers and braces, and nothing else, hair slicked back, heavy black mascara, black lips, his feet bare, a powerful spotlight on him. And then, as he slowly, slowly swayed his hips, he started singing, slurring the words, purring them low, gravely, whispery.

"Bye-Bye, Mein Lieber Herr.
Farewell, mein Lieber Herr.
It was a fine affair,
But now it’s over.
And though I used to care,
I need the open air.

You're better off without me,

Mein Herr.”

The men and women at his feet were stretching their hands, waving bundles of cash. Loki started a much quicker, much vigorous dance, sharp turns, mighty kicks, wrapping around the pole, so strong and flexible. He bent double, head upside down, for one of the men to slip some cash inside his trousers, just behind his fly, and kneeled for another one to grope his arse.

Thor saw red.

Loki kept singing, dancing and teasing, his crazed smile so wide, his eyes huge and fierce, almost colourless with all that kohl around them. And for all the anger and disgust Thor felt seething through his body, he couldn’t tear his eyes off Loki. He was fucking incredible. And he hated himself for it, but he was hard and blurry-eyed with lust. Wanting Loki had never felt sadder or dirtier.

Loki’s movements got faster and faster, his song quicker, with a note of anger that broke his voice.

“Auf wiedersehen Mein Herr!” Loki finished, voice rasping with fury, with a dramatic spin. He took a perfect theatrical bow, strutted vigorously along the stage, and disappeared among the enthusiastic cheers and claps of the audience.

Thor started to run for it. A huge bouncer grabbed his arm.

“Whoa, mate, where do you think you’re going,” said the bouncer, appropriately balancing menace and dissuasive politeness.

“I need to talk to him,” said Thor, stupidly.

“No, sir.”

What the fuck could Thor say. You don’t understand, he is my brother?

“What seems to be the problem?” intervened Dodgy Character #1.

“I need to talk to him,” repeated Thor.

“Sure you do, sir,” said Dodgy, nodding sympathetically. “Everybody wants to talk to Loki. It’s 100 quid.”

“What?”

“100 quid.” Dodgy took in Thor’s horrified expression and misunderstood completely. “What? What did you expect? He’s the star of the show.”

“Listen, I just want to talk to him…” mumbled Thor.

“Whatever floats your boat, mate. It’s 100.” Then Dodgy thought about it for a second. “Give me 150 and I’ll put you at the head of the queue.”
“…The queue.” muttered Thor, shaking his head.

“200 and you get first shot, no pun intended,” said Dodgy, giggling, happy to help. “Because you’re his type.”

Thor told himself to stop, breathe, and use his fucking brain. He swallowed his shock and his fury and counted some bank notes.

“Right,” said Dodgy. He lead him into a shady corridor at the back, by the stage. “In here.” He drew a curtain that opened to a booth, furnished with a chair upholstered in red velvet, pornographic images on the walls, and nothing else. “Loki will be in in a minute. And, oh, remember, he can touch you but you can’t touch him. No matter what he tells you. He likes to cause trouble and wind people up. But there’s people watching, ok? Strict adherence to the rules or you’re out. Enjoy.” And he drew the curtain, leaving Thor in the booth, speechless, his hands shaking.


Loki wiped the sweat off with a wet towel and touched up his make-up. Drank some water, popped some pills. Should he change? Nah, this was fine. He couldn’t be bothered to peel the leather off, not sweating like this. It would take him half an hour. He didn’t have half an hour. He did put on his boots though, heavy, clunky things. He felt safer in them.

“Which one?” said to Whatshisname as he walked pass the CCTV control cabin.

“Number 4 first.”

Loki had a peek. Went pale.

*Holy mother of fuck.*

“Hot, eh?” said cabin boy. “You always get the hottest ones, you lucky bitch. Hey, are you ok? … Do I need to call anyone, Loki…?”

Loki raised a hand, stilling the guy. Shut his eyes, leaned against the wall, and managed to start drawing deep, slow breaths. It took him several minutes. He accepted the water he was offered.

“This shit you keep taking will kill you one day, mate,” said Cabin Boy, when Loki got back on his feet.

He slipped quietly past the curtain. He was suddenly two feet away from Thor. His hair longer, short beard, that fucking black t-shirt. He looked as if he had seen a ghost. One that fucking owed him.

“It’s better if you sit down” said Loki, his voice admirably firm. “Easier. But whatever you prefer.”
Thor kept staring at him as if somebody was twisting a sword in his belly.

“Baby, what the fuck…” he started, before he got choked up.

“We don’t have all night,” said Loki, one leg on the chair, stretching. His arse looked remarkably tight like that, and he knew it. “We better start, or they’ll come check what the problem is. My boss doesn’t like problems and he doesn’t like weirdoes. Please, take a seat.”

Thor actually did, as if his knees couldn’t hold him anymore. Loki knew the impersonal, chirpy tone was freaking his brother out. Which was, of course, the point.

“They told me you wanted to talk?” he purred, mellow, circling him like a shark. "Or do you want me to talk, they didn’t say.”

“Loki…”

“What do you want to hear? Or did he get it all wrong and you just want the usual,” Loki sat straddling Thor’s lap. His scent. His eyes. Loki’s heart was pounding.

Thor raised his hands.

“Huh-huh...” said Loki, squirming up and away. “You can’t touch me or they’ll come. Seriously, they don’t fuck about.” He walked around Thor’s back, swaying his hips, lazily stroking one hand over Thor’s shoulders. He leaned over to whisper into Thor’s ear. “I mean, it can be arranged, but not here. Legal reasons. And it costs more, of course. If the boss likes you enough, he has a place. You can have me all weekend. It’s just for really special friends of his, but you’ll find he is very friendly. I hope the bastard is taping it. I hope he sends it to Odin. What do you think the old man would make of it? Maybe it runs in the family, maybe he’d get off on it.”

“Loki!” snarled Thor, making Loki flinch. But he had no fucking intention of stopping. He sat again on Thor’s lap, this time with his back to him, head slightly turned to watch Thor out of the corner of his eye.

“You could do anything you wanted to me in that place. Anything.” He rubbed his arse on Thor’s quickly hardening cock, heard his brother’s breath start to shudder. “And you wouldn’t even have to listen to my constant whining, isn’t that how you put it? Not a word. You just have to tell me, and I would have to do it. You can even gag me, and only take the gag off when you want to fuck my mouth.”

Thor gasped in shock, which was fucking rich. His hands were clawing at each side of Loki’s arms, struggling to refrain himself from touching.

“Loki… fuck, stop.”

Loki circled his hips, rubbing a bit harder.

“If I stop you have to go, don’t you understand? The boss doesn’t like weird shit. He likes straightforward business.”

“Loki, please. This is fucking insane.”

Loki turned around again, stroking his own hardness on Thor’s stomach as he pushed with his arse on his brother's cock. Thor’s eyes fell heavily, his brow scrunched.

“Anyway, Malekith’s prices are extortionate. If you come to me direct, I’m a lot more reasonable.
The facilities are a bit more basic, it’s just the alley, but you can save yourself some cash. As long as you don’t mind the risk of one of the bouncers coming to snap your arm as an example. The boss has forbidden it, you see? It lowers my asking price. And he says it's not hygienic. And you might ask, doesn’t Loki make enough with the dancing? Well, sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t, but it’s the principle that counts.” Jabber jabber jabber. If he shut up he would scream.

“Loki, come home,” begged Thor, his face a fucking poem of lust and agony and dismay.

Now Loki was getting pissed off.

“I don’t fucking have it,” he hissed.

“Come home, to me.”

“Now, this is a line I don’t hear very often.” Rub, rub, rub. “Usually it’s more like (he mimics) oh yes, Loki, yes, fuck yes, oh god, oh Loki, oh yes...” Although other times it’s more like,” (he mimicked a husky, dark voice) “yeah, bitch, do you like that? My big fat cock, do you like that? You greedy bitch, take it, take it all, yeah, you like that don’t you, you like my big fat cock?” Rutting, rutting.”I’m well known for my vocalics.” (He mimicked distress, fear, pain) “Oh god, please, no, stop it, it’s too big, fuck, this hurts, no, please, stop it, god, please, stop...!”

“Loki, for Christ’s sake, why are you doing this…”

“Why… the fuck… not…” he said, rubbing in time against Thor's crotch.

“Baby… god, Loki…” Thor was close. He was in pain. It was fucking glorious. “Stop this... Baby, come home…”

“As if Odin would ever let me near again after this,” muttered Loki, rubbing faster.

“Fuck Odin...!” grunted Thor.

“Now, that will cost extra.”

“Loki!” Thor screamed, horrified, shoving him off. Loki landed hard on his arse, on the floor.

“What the fuck happened to you?” snarled Thor, panting, and were those tears in his eye.

Loki was panting too, heart hammering. He knew he had dropped the poker face now. He might start to talk bollocks and embarrass himself in a second.

The curtain drew back suddenly.

“What the fuck is going on here.” Algrim stepped in, taking up half the air in the booth. Loki started to feel suffocated.

“This does not concern you,” said Thor, stupidly, standing up to him with his usual arrogance.

Algrim glared at him. Loki felt himself cower.

“Loki, out.”

Loki scrambled to his feet and made to leave. Thor grabbed his arm. Brother, no...

“You have to let go of him right now, sir. Now.”
Loki found himself begging his brother with his eyes. It seemed like a year before Thor slowly, reluctantly, began to loosen his grip. Loki scurried away. He did not let himself steal one last look at his brother.

Thor watched his brother go, in despair. The massive bouncer that managed to scare Loki shitless stepped in front of him, just in case he was having ideas of following after his brother.

"You will have to leave, sir," he said, his voice deep and husky.

Thor glared at him in hatred.

"And if I ever catch you around here again, if I so much as sniff you around him again, Odinson - yes, we know who you are-, I'm going to break your ankles, and then I'm going to break his. If you want to know if I'm serious, ask around. Now, please, leave." He stepped aside.

Thor swallowed, took a deep breath. Got walking. The big bouncer escorted him out.

Back in the street, the night was pleasant, quiet, oblivious. Hill's car was still parked there, and she had waited. She looked at him with worry and compassion. She did not say a word. Neither did he.

The bouncer waited at the door until he saw him climb in the car and drive away.

Chapter End Notes

The song is "Mein Herr" from the musical "Cabaret" (Music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb.) Do look up the rest of the lyrics, and imagine Loki singing them, and even find the scene from the movie with Liza Minelli, and then picture Loki doing something like that, with a pole. Mind the projectile nose bleed, though, the danger is very real (said she, wiping the screen. Again.)
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Many ways to say goodbye, none of them final.

Chapter Notes

Alright, next level angst, achieved. It was tough to write and, if I've done my job well, it should be tough to read. Sorry.

I can't stress enough how pathological (as in not rational, extreme and completely removed from reality) Loki's thoughts are at the end of this chapter. Pay him no fucking mind.

But after this, he's getting help. And rest and warmth. And hugs. Bear with us.

When I say this has a happy ending, I mean it, I swear on Sleipnir's shoes, all eight of them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Loki, Loki, Loki…” said Malekith, circling slowly around the chair Loki was sitting stiffly on, like a shark closing in on his prey. “You are such a bloody headache. I swear a lot of the time you’re more trouble than you’re worth.”

Loki stayed still and quiet.

“I know who that was, don’t fucking think I don’t. What was that all about?”

“Just a bit of fun,” said Loki, barely a whisper. He did not have voice for more.

“Hm,” said Malekith, sitting down on his swivel chair and boring into Loki’s head with his almost transparent eyes. “Fun.”

With the clunky, sturdy desk between them, Loki felt a bit more at ease. Not much, mind, Algrim was still behind his back.

“Yes, fun,” he said, stupid and proud enough to not want to let it go without a fight.

Malekith fixed him with cold, fixed eyes. He had a shark’s smile, with some crazy thrown in for good measure. Loki had heard that the man had lost it after his wife was killed. And while his acts were reasonable, if ruthless, his business sense flawless, Loki often found himself looking at him and seeing a dead, black void. It terrified him.

“Haven’t I told you before, Loki, that we have very, very different ideas about what constitutes fun?” said Malekith mellifluously, delighting in it. ”And didn’t we agree a while ago that the only ideas that matter in this place are mine?”
“How is it my fault that he decided to turn up like that?” he countered, because let it not be said that the house of Odin raises cowards.

“You know, with anybody else, I would grant you that. But with you I’ve learned that, one way or another, it’s always your fault.”

Loki said nothing to that. The boss had a point there.

“You’re an agent of chaos, Loki,” said Malekith. “When it’s not a riot in the street it’s the fucking in the alley. Yes, I know you’re back at it.” He changed to menace, and Loki cowered on his chair in spite of himself. “I simply don’t understand you, Loki.” Malekith extended his palms upwards on the desk, exasperated. Loki expected him to start going ‘you break my heart, Freddo’ any second now. Malekith counted on his fingers. “I don’t work you too hard. I get you clean, reliable people that answer to me. I draw them a line they can’t cross. I even turn a blind eye to your dabbles in self-medication. You’re safe and well paid. Just what do you fucking want, Loki?”

Ah, what Loki wants. He kept his big mouth shut. He wasn’t at fucking therapy.

"Are things going too well?" purred Malekith then. “Do you feel you have it too easy? Because I can make it just as difficult for you as you need.” A silence. “Well, then?”

Loki shook his head. He was not sure what he had answered no to.

“Because of you, I have the police at my door every night and twice on Sundays. And now this? Wherever there is trouble, there you are. I’m getting so, so tired.”

Loki looked up, guarded.

“What are you going to do, sack me? I’m the star in this place.”

Malekith glowered at him, but Loki could almost swear the bastard looked endeared.

“You have an inflated opinion of your own importance here, Loki. I let you do what you want with your fancy pants acts and your high-brow shit because I like you, but I was doing just fine before you came and, while I don’t want to lose you, that doesn’t mean you have a blank cheque. And I’m getting seriously sick of your crap. So, what are you going to do?”

Loki sulked silently. He was the star in that joint. He pulled in a better class of crowd, with more dough to spend. His high-brow shit, as his ignorant oaf of a boss had put it, had made the club distinctive and talked about. It was so fucking irritating not to get his bloody due.

Malekith was boring into him with his colourless eyes. If he was to be talked to like an eight year old, he was going to answer as one. So Loki just shrugged.

“Well, it’s up to you,” said Malekith. “But you need to make a decision. And if you remain hell-bent on making a career out of sucking cock in the alley rather than dancing for me, I suppose you’ll only thank me if, before I kick you out, I pull out all your teeth. Think about it. Now get out. And pack. You’re working this weekend.”

Loki smoked in his room above the club with shaky hands. He could picture Thor right now planning a mad kidnap/rescue mission. He knew his brother. He would never stop trying. He might
even get the police involved, or god knows —maybe even drag Frigga over, thought Loki with a shudder. The bloody idiot was going to get them all hurt.

He lit the next fag with the stub of the last one, puffing smoke like a furious dragon.

Thor had looked tanned and golden and ruddy and… well, distinctively not-miserable or in mourning. He looked as if he had been on holidays in Malibu, the bastard, while Loki was literally about to jump off a fucking cliff. And now he barged in like a bulldozer and it was all hail, praise the fucking saviour, all bend to my will, for I have arrived. That’s Thor for you.

Loki was metaphorically and quite literally fuming. He had no doubt the situation was far from resolved. It was not in Thor’s nature to give up on things. He never did. He never would. And as much as Loki was seething with rage against him right now, hell, he did not want him harmed. Unless it was by his own hand, maybe. He had to fucking do something.

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Dear Thor,

I need you to stop stalking me.

I know you don’t understand the choices I’ve made, and I know you feel that you have to save me from myself. But you’re wrong. You don’t live in my skin, and you can’t see inside my head. I know you always want to do the right thing, but I think you will agree with me that you have fucked up a lot of times. You don’t always know better. And you don’t get to make decisions for me. You don’t get to tell me how to live my life.

So please, stop coming to the club. Respect my wishes and leave me alone.

Loki.

---

Loki was rudely woken up from his afternoon nap by some vigorous thumping at his door. Knock knock, who’s there, it’s fucking Algrim.

“The boss wants to see you,” thundered the man. The corridor was dotted with heads popping out of doors.

As they climbed down the stairs, Loki heard the commotion, coming approximately from the back door.

“I want to see him! I want to talk to him! I want to know that these are his own words!”

Loki’s heart skipped three whole fucking beats. It was Thor.
Malekith’s office.

“Your brother is a right pain in the arse,” he said while Loki stood, hands deep in his jeans’ pockets so that the boss wouldn’t notice they were shaking.

“Let me handle it,” said Loki, chin up, avoiding those icy, transparent eyes.

“What are you going to do?” said Malekith, bringing the tips of his fingers together.

“Make him see reason,” answered Loki, hoping he sounded more confident than he felt.

Malekith took a couple of very long minutes to give that proper consideration. Extremely long.

Loki’s throat was parchment dry.

“Give me the chance to handle this,” he insisted. “Less trouble for you.”

“Yes, of course,” said Malekith, with his kindest, most terrifying shark grin. “Leave it in Loki’s hands. That is always a good idea.”

“You can always break my legs after,” said Loki, returning grin for grin.

“Sweetheart,” said Malekith, feigning shock, “I’d never do that to an artist like you. Your arms, on the other hand…”

Malekith ended up authorising an interview in the bar across the street.

“But we’ll be watching,” he warned.

Loki braced himself for whatever Thor was going to throw at him, with a shudder. No matter what, he must not let Thor get a word in edgeways. His stomach was turning.

* *

Thor found himself, for the second time in a month, standing by a chair in a strange, dingy place waiting for Loki to show up.

And there he was, crossing the street with a brief look side to side, hair wild, sunglasses, leather jacket, black jeans, white t-shirt, hands in his pockets, quick and light on his feet, sickly pale skin — did he even see the sunlight at all anymore?

The doorbell tinkled when Loki pushed the door open. Thor swallowed as Loki approached.

“Loki…” he started.

Loki didn’t sit down. He stood by Thor’s table, sunglasses still on, skittish.

“I want you to stop coming around here. I want you to leave me alone,” he said, cutting.

Thor shook his head heavily, feeling the ghost weight on his shoulders crushing him down.
"I can’t do that, Loki, you know I can’t,” he replied, voice soft.

“You have to,” said Loki, an edge of exasperation in his voice.

“I will never give up on you,” said Thor, choking now. “I don’t know how.”

Loki took his sunglasses off and sat down in front of him, jittery, his movements quick, sharp. His eyes were red and tired. Thor sat down too.

“You don’t get it, do you,” hissed Loki.

Thor must have looked puzzled.

“You fucking hurt, Thor,” said Loki then, his voice seething with slow-burning rage, his gaze anywhere on Thor’s face but his eyes. “You want me but you won’t have me. You say you love me but you’re ashamed of it. You push me away, and then reel me back, and then you fuck off again.”

A deep, furious sigh. “I can’t live like this anymore. I can’t fucking bear it. I want to forget you exist, and then maybe I can start fucking living. But this? this is not life. You’re not good for me, Thor. You make me miserable.” He looked down now, arms crossed, deflated, as if the fuel was spent. “I don’t want your help. I don’t want anything from you. I want you to forget about me and stop feeling you are responsible for me. Just… Go back to L.A.”

Thor was in shock. He wanted to be sick. He felt as if his heart had been ripped off his chest.

“Loki, baby…” he choked out.

Chair screech. Loki was leaving.

Fucking stop him.

He grabbed his arm.

“Let go of me,” hissed Loki, a note of threat in his voice.

Thor was breathing fire. He swallowed thickly. Put a hand in his pocket, got the key to Loki’s apartment, put it in his brother’s hand. Made himself speak, his voice forced.

“It will always be there for you, always.” A breath that scorched his throat. “And so will I.”

Loki’s hand closed around the key at least. His eyes wouldn’t lift up from the ground. For a second, Thor thought he was going to say something.

Loki pulled his arm away and walked out of the place. Thor watched him cross the street, hands deep in the pockets of his leather jacket, shoulders slumped, eyes low.

Thor sat himself gingerly on the chair again. He felt as if he had been ran over by a lorry, as if he would never be able to get up again. He couldn’t even cry.

*Loki was fucking right.*
When Loki, sixteen, had mentioned that he had been asked to direct the end-of-year play at drama school, Thor had congratulated him heartily. He himself had graduated from teenage soaps and to serious BBC drama, playing one of the main roles in a wartime mini-series which got him the BAFTA for best newcomer. People were excited about him, the golden heir of Asgard House, who was turning up to be just as handsome, talented, charismatic and full of promise as his dad had been in his day. They wanted to see him do well. They weren't so sure about his brother.

The two of them were not fighting these days. They weren't spending enough time together to fight. They were both so busy, they practically didn’t see each other at all. His parents told him that Loki was doing well with his therapy. Words like “stable” and “adjusted” tended to crop up in conversation a lot.

They had not fucked since before Loki’s hospital stay, seemed like a lifetime ago. They did not talk about it, or about anything much at all, really. Thor had girlfriends, and when the subject was sometimes brought up at dinner by a chirpy, mildly lewd Odin, usually in Elizabethan terms, Thor darted glances at his brother and saw him poker faced, seemingly uninterested. Thor wasn’t sure what to make of that, so he didn’t think about it at all, if he could.

They sometimes watched a movie together, or played a game —not Mario Kart— not exactly while sitting each on either end of the sofa, but practically. It was not so much awkward anymore as it was sad. Thor tried to avoid seeing it in those terms, and be glad that they could sit together and just be brothers, but he never quite managed it. The fact was, they were strangers, and saddest of all, it was probably better like that.

Loki had not told him what play he was putting on, and Thor being Thor, he had forgotten to ask. He found out through his parents. He overheard them talking about it one evening, while Loki was in capoeira class.

Thor walked passed the kitchen and his ear was caught by the note of disbelief in his father’s voice.

“It’s a what?”

Thor stopped behind the half-open door, intrigued.

“A queer version of Edward Scissorhands,” said her mum. “Remember the girl character? He’s doing it with a boy instead, and he is playing Edward.”

Odin huffed heavily. It sounded as if it was a discussion they had had before, because Frigga sighed as well, already exasperated.

“I don’t understand why he has to… To parade it around so much,” said Odin after a bit.

Frigga took a second.

“Odin, half your friends are gay,” she said at last.

“I don’t care if he’s into horses,” snapped Odin. “What worries me is that he will be narrowcast into
a very specific type of character and never get to do anything else.”

“A very specific kind of character.” Frigga’s voice sounded irked. “What about being true to himself?” she said then. “He’s obviously chosen this because it speaks to him and it’s important to him. Can you not understand that, as an artist?”

“It’s the audience he has to speak to, or he’ll have no career.”

“Don’t let me hear you say anything like that to him,” warned Frigga sternly.

“You’ve always encouraged this,” said his dad.

“I’ve just never wanted him to feel he had to be a different person for us to love him. How can you possibly not agree with that?”

“He knows I love him,” said Odin. “He has all my support, him and his talent. But I think you’re showing him the world through rose-tinted lenses, and that’s going to come back and bite him. It’s not warm and cozy out there, especially if you’re different. And whom he prefers in the bedroom, whether we like it or not, happens to be a factor that opens or shuts doors in the business we’re in. If you don’t make that clear to him, you’re not doing your son any favours.”

Frigga sighed heavily, her patience strained, sadness there too.

“Dear, the world is a hard and unkind place, but that doesn’t mean his home has to be as well.”

“Bah, you don’t listen,” huffed Odin.

Thor heard steps and walked away, trying to be silent.

He realised with stupor he had never thought about that, about Loki being gay, or whatever he was. Or about himself, for that matter.

Thor slipped into the stalls while the rehearsal was on. Loki hadn’t noticed him. Nobody was in costume. Loki was standing by, rubbing mindlessly at his lip, assessing, while a handsome, slim young boy and a hot, busty blonde girl had it out. The girl was throwing a jealous fit, the boy hesitated between fight and guilt. Loki intervened a couple of times, his long hands conveying his meaning just as much as his words, which Thor couldn’t make out; they just sounded to him like a warm, purring mumble. The boy and girl were attentive, listening and nodding, and turning to Loki for approval when they tried the new angle, a bit truer than the one before. Loki was patient, encouraging and easygoing. Thor witnessed this version of his brother with astonishment.

And Loki was smiling a lot more than Thor had seen in years. It was not the bright, full smile he was capable of, but he seemed quietly content. When the session ended, both the girl and the boy gave him a kiss, the complicity between them evident, the boy’s easy arm around Loki’s shoulders like an ice cold cut in Thor’s flesh.

Thor made up to leave as he saw Loki talking to someone who seemed to be a technician, if all the pointing at seemingly random spots on the ceiling was anything to go by.
If he had ever doubted whether they had become complete strangers, there it was, final proof. He had never met this boy before. He did not know him at all.

He sat by his mum on opening night. He caught sight of Odin’s profile beside her, his attention fixed on the stage, his professional hat obviously on, judging by that frown. Thor knew by experience that Odin was never a harsher critic than when he assessed himself or his family. Thor was already cringing in solidarity with Loki, because he could be putting on *Citizen Kane* and his dad would still find flaw with his work.

The curtain rose to a set with a handcrafted feel Thor liked very much. It had to be done on the cheap of course, with a less is more approach, but it was effortlessly classy. Just like his brother. Loki had rewritten the movie script for the stage, and Thor enjoyed this version, which didn’t shy away from everything that worked in the movie, and seamlessly and cleverly translated the rest, without making a big artistic fuss or trying to make a statement of empty originality. Emphasis was on the characters, on the story. It felt as if it had been written by a mature author with a long experience.

At Edward’s first appearance, there was a general gasp. The look was amazing, even if his costume was necessarily simpler and plainer than the one in the movie. Loki’s face had none of young Johnny Depp’s softness or childishness, his appearance a lot more extreme and alien. Loki’s Edward was more of a machine, his movements sudden, bird-like, his eyes wide and glassy, like a doll’s. He inspired real menace, and an otherness that wasn’t sweet at all, acting with his whole body, from his feet to his eyes. His performance stood head and shoulders above everyone else's. He was in a different league.

When Kim, the young blond boy appeared, what in Edward had been perplexity at his new surroundings became quiet fascination, his connection with a human being finally connecting him with the world. And little by little, almost imperceptibly, Edward/Loki’s whole demeanour softened up, and whereas he remained a machine until the end, alien, and other, by virtue of the scissors he had instead of hands, Loki managed to convey without a word the point in which Edward had grown a heart and started to feel it beating, and how it would never stop beating, even after the curtain went down.

Thor was crying like a child by that point. He had seen everything Loki had done there, everything. He had seen the lonely outsider, isolated from the common, “healthy” people, misunderstood and less than human, with his scissorhands as the permanent mark of his inhumanity, but also the source of his uniqueness and his talent. He bore his scars from them, but he also created beauty with them. Because of the scissors, some people feared and despised him, others fawned over him, but nobody seemed to be able to see past them. For better and for worse, in the eyes of the world, Edward was his scissorhands. Thor thought of Loki at ten, sat on the psychiatrist’s chair, legs dangling because he was so small his feet didn’t touch the floor. Of Loki at twelve, kicked around in school for doing ballet. Of the things Loki had been called, both behind his back and to his face, when he returned to high school after his suicide attempt. Of Loki always by himself in the school yard, with his book and his earbuds, since he was little.

Even when Edward was welcomed into a family of “normal” people, he couldn’t fit in. They were all golden and healthy, a negative copy of him. It wasn’t a place made for him, no matter how hard the mother tried, no matter how kind and warm and generous. He didn’t start to belong until Kim, the older son, eventually got to see beyond the otherness and learned to love him, not in spite of his scissorhands and not because of them, but because of Edward’s heart. And Thor’s own heart had all but stopped when Kim and Edward kissed, a kiss so sweet and warm, Loki’s acting so fucking compelling, he had felt a surge of jealousy that had put a knot in his throat. *Because Loki was not*
supposed to kiss anyone like that, eyes closed, breath held, but him. But the most shattering thing of all was that, even if Kim refused to see it, Edward knew that this first kiss was also the last. There was no future for them, no place where they would be accepted.

Thor’s tears were streaming down silently and freely by the end, when Edward retreated back into solitude. He loved now, he was as human as he could possibly be, but he was doomed to not be able to live among normal people, his love for Kim impossible, frozen in time, and ever-lasting. He retreated and pushed Kim away, so that he could have a full, normal life, instead of tying himself up to a freak everybody feared and despised, and be forced to live as an outcast too.

Frigga stopped clapping for a second to ruffle her unconsolable son’s hair. Thor sniffed and tried to wipe his tears away and clap strongly at the same time. He needed his sleeve for that.

Backstage, make-up on, though the prop hands were off, Loki still looked alien and otherworldly. His eyes brightened up when he saw his family. He smiled at whatever it was that his mum had whispered in his ear while he hugged him, and Thor saw Loki’s eyes widen in wonder when it was Odin’s mighty embrace he was trapped in. “I’m so proud, son,” Odin had mumbled, for his younger child alone.

When it was Thor’s turn, he couldn’t even speak. Loki worried at his lip, and threw his arms around him.

And still, Thor could not speak.

“It’s alright,” he heard Loki say, and gasped when Thor crushed him with all his might.

Thor had taken for granted they would all go for a meal to celebrate after the play, but his brother told them timidly that he already had other plans with his mates. Their parents were delighted to hear that. They said goodbye at the stage door, and Thor watched his brother walk away with the rest of the company, giggling and chanting and playfully pushing and shoving each other down the street. And he wanted to be happier for Loki, he wanted it so much, and he was sure he would be, in time, as soon as he could piece his heart back together again. He felt that he had lost him, completely and irretrievably, and that it was actually the best for Loki, to drift away and leave Thor behind. He was just so fucking sad. And he feared that, when the sadness went, nothing would come to replace it.

Weeks later, Thor found out that he had got the part in the big Hollywood adventure flick he had been auditioning for, and spent all summer shooting in the US. Soon there would be two more projects on the line. Just after his eighteenth birthday in the autumn, Thor moved to L.A.

Whenever he called home, he asked for Loki to get on the phone. The conversations were stilted at first, a bit easier eventually. Never too personal, but friendly enough. Loki was always taking the mickey out of him, Hollywood big shot. They bantered and joked and they laughed. It was good, really, even if it didn't quite feel like themselves.

Thor worked hard that year, knocked on lots of doors, met Tony Stark. His first movie opened in
December and it was a blockbuster. Suddenly, Thor was hot property. He was on his way.

When he was told that he was going to be presenting an award at the Golden Globes, and that he could bring a plus one, there was only one person Thor wanted by his side. He didn’t think twice. Ramifications be damned, he just went for it.

Loki took a few minutes before he replied.

“Don’t you have a girlfriend or something you’d like to take instead?” he asked, without any particular inflexion in his voice, as far as Thor could tell.

“This is big,” said Thor. And he let it drop, while bracing himself for what Loki would have to say to the outburst of sentiment. “I want my brother with me.”

Another silence at the other end of the line.

“Loki?” urged Thor, when he couldn’t bloody stand it anymore.

“Yes, alright,” said Loki. “I’ll come.”

___________

(The present.)

Loki ran some water in the sink to wash the hair clippings away. He checked himself in the mirror: he looked so... not himself with short hair. Which was the whole point, of course. He zipped up the small duffle bag, and put on the extra big hoodie he liked to lounge in. (Yes, it had been Thor’s a long time ago, and he had lent it to Loki in Iceland, and never got it back. But Loki did not remember that at all when he wore it, not one fucking bit.)

He made his way out as if he was going to the gym, hood up so that nobody remarked on his new look. He was leaving everything behind except what he could fit in the small bag and in his pockets, a key dangling from a piece of string around his neck —not that he had any intention of using it. He nodded to the bouncer like he did every Tuesday and every Thursday, and made his way down the street, never to return.

Thor had not stopped coming. Loki could see him from his window every now and then, usually sitting at the bar across the street, purposely making himself conspicuous. It must have been his way to show Loki that he would always be there for him, or some such sappy sentiment of the sort. Which meant fuck all, because Thor had not been there for Loki for fucking years, and what was more, it was a stance that did not come from a meditated position, Loki was sure, but from Thor’s boorish instinct to never give up, no matter what.

And because Thor had most assuredly not run this by his fucking head, it would not fucking mean a change of life for anyone involved. Not for long anyway. That was Thor acting with his gut, not his
brain, and if Loki took him up on his offer, Thor would fucking come to and realise that, fuck, perhaps he could not make good on his promises after all, sorry Loki, baby.

So fuck you, Thor. Fuck you, fuck me, fuck every-fucking-thing.

For the second time in his life, Loki was on the run. This time he stayed in London. He just moved to the other end of the city. He didn’t expect Malekith would come after him, but still he called himself Jack or John or Pete when someone asked, and entertained himself changing his accent.

He tried very briefly to find work. But his depression was solidly set in by then, and his self-medicating habit showed in his face and his actions, and he got nowhere fast. He begged in a corner, dragged himself to a shelter every now and then, and topped it up with the other work sometimes. It didn’t get him much though, he was not a class act after all, not anymore, and frankly, less and less every day. He had no plans, no ideas, no will. He was bored out of his mind. He was hungry. He was tired. He did not know why he was carrying on, what was he clinging on to.

He sometimes wondered if Thor still stalked the club, or whether somebody had let him know. Wouldn’t it be funny if his brother was still sitting at that crappy bar, stubbornly determined, that cute frown on his forehead that had not changed since he was a kid.

He burrowed into his stolen hoodie, with a shiver.

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The queue had started to move, making its sluggish way into the building. Loki had been to a shelter to get himself cleaned up and dressed to pass for a normal person, or thereabouts. He had been in the street for about a year, but tonight he was going to the theatre.

Thor had not returned to Hollywood after all. Instead, his brother had enrolled in a drama school, and he was on a play, and there was a free performance tonight, open to the public. Loki had purposefully missed the opening night, fearing stumbling into Frigga and Odin.

He took his seat around the back of the house, shutting his eyes for some time, willing his body to breath itself out of the rising anxiety. So many people around gave him shaky hands. He had decided to keep the self-prescribed, back-alley bought anxiolytics to a minimal dose, so as not to appear high. Bad call perhaps. Too late.

He checked his program, crudely printed, but still showing a good photo of Thor as Brick, the lead in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

He felt his heart thump hard in his chest as the lights started to dim.
Loki squinted as he stepped into the bright sunlight. It had been so gloomy and chilly back home, just a few hours ago, the plane breaking through lead-grey, heavy clouds, and landing into this place of permanent summer. Oh, give him grey and dim any day. Everything in L.A. hurt his eyes.

And that golden, tanned, ripped hunk waiting by the barrier at arrivals hurt his eyes most of all. They hadn't seen each other in almost a year.

His brother crushed him in his arms and patted his back hard enough to make Loki wince.

And that was as far as they got. From that point on, awkwardness set in. Loki stood rigid, eyes low, not knowing what to say or where to look. His brother looked just as skittish. Thor being Thor, he opted for the flashy, expansive approach. He took Loki’s bag and the zippered cover Loki’s tux had traveled in, and drove them along the broad, sunburnt, straight streets of L.A., talking, talking, talking. He was so excited, and so nervous. He had much to tell, if only Loki was listening. He was thinking Thor looked very sexy driving that huge American car.

“We’ll drop your bags, go grab some lunch and see the sights. Then back for a shower, put on our tux, and to the Globes, yeah?” Thor was saying.

Loki nodded, kept looking out.

Awkwardness reared its ugly head again with a vengeance when Thor let them both into his apartment.

“It’s nice,” said Loki, taking in the single-space, messy shoebox of a living area.

“It’s a craphole,” said Thor, with a laugh. “But it’s my craphole.” He beamed his extraordinarily beautiful, radiant smile.

“It’s not so bad,” said Loki, wondering just how had he managed to forget how much more handsome Thor was in the flesh.

“And here’s the bathroom, and this is the-the bedroom.” And was he actually blushing? “This is a sofa-bed,” he hastened to add, gesturing to the couch in the living area.

Loki gave him a faint smile. He had several scenarios in his mind of how this might pan out. He had allowed for every eventuality. Whatever happened, it was not going to change the end result. He was determined upon that, and he was fine with it.

Getting dressed for the evening. Loki had had a shower and was searching through his bag with a
towel slung around his hips. Thor was going into the shower just then. Loki thought his brother must be modifying his custom for him, because he looked a bit at a loss, with false starts and double-takes. He probably just walked around the apartment naked a lot of the time, if he knew his brother a bit.

The looks Thor tried no to throw at him, his expression. He looked so nervous it was cute.

“It’s the exact same butt, Thor,” said Loki as he stepped into his pants. “Nothing you haven’t seen before.” Perhaps he was trying to defuse the tension, or perhaps he was flirting. He would decide what he was doing when he found out where it lead.

Thor blushed bright red. Loki enjoyed that.

When Thor came out of the shower, Loki’s first instinct was to pretend he wasn't ogling. Which was fucking ridiculous. He faced Thor fully as his brother dried himself up.

“You’ve bulked up,” commented Loki casually. Nothing you haven't seen before didn't apply this time. His brother looked positively rip.

“They make me work out for the part,” said Thor, slipping into the tux trousers.

“Just how fucking big is big enough for Hollywood?” quipped Loki.

Thor towelled his long hair with a smile. Now Loki did avert his eyes. Those fucking arms.

Before they left the apartment, Thor ran a check-out on Loki’s suit, sorting out the neck of his shirt, even though Loki was quite sure it was already flawless, then his tie, and dusted some inexistent fluff from Loki’s shoulder.

“Perfect,” Thor said.

Loki’s turn. He straightened Thor’s tie, which had surely needed it, shaking his head in quiet exasperation.

“I like the bun,” he said afterwards, pointing at Thor’s hair. “Classy.”

Thor smiled. Quickly, with a light tremble, he pulled the hair out of Loki’s face, tugging it behind his ear. It felt incredibly intimate. It looked like Thor wanted to say something, but he didn’t. He accompanied Loki out with a hand hovering around his back.

Walking the red carpet together was a high. Even though Loki would never admit to it out loud, sharing space with the celebrities was quite the sensation. The shouting and screaming and the flashes, although not aimed at them, was a mighty electric buzz. And Thor looked so fucking gorgeous it was out of this world. The people who saw him pass tonight, whether or not they knew his name yet, would not forget him.

And Thor kept turning to him to share the excitement, with complicit smiles, bright stares, a hand constantly on Loki, on the small of his back, on his shoulder, so radiantly happy. Loki wondered if Thor realised they could easily be mistaken for a couple. If he did, he wasn’t bothered. He threw him several stares that were nothing less than flirtatious, wagging his eyebrows, small tight-lipped smile,
eyes dazzling.

The second-hand embarrassment from watching Thor present the award, on his best behaviour, and kind of stiff, was soon forgotten amid the bustle of the gala dinner. That big time producer Thor talked so much about, Tony Stark, could surely fill up a room.

“So, Hamlet! Wow! You’re only, what, seventeen?” His words quick, like darts.

Loki relished the chance to talk about that unbelievable opportunity his *Edward Scissorhands* had led to, when a woman looking to put on a teenage Hamlet up in Stratford-upon-Avon had been made aware of Loki’s existence. She wanted to address the issues of mental illness in the play and abound on this side of the character. Loki was on board with that, and pushing the boat away from the dock, before she had even finished exposing her vision. He talked about the project animatedly, under Mr. Stark's very big, very bright, soul-searching eyes. This man's full attention was quite an intense experience. Even with that trim, manicured beard and the wrinkles in his face that told his age, there was something childish about him which Loki found, hm, rather attractive. His enthusiasm, his curiosity, the small teeth in his easy smile. And the guy went so camp when he laughed. He was magnetic. No wonder Thor never shut up about him.

“You know, I have to talk about you with Tim. Tim Burton,” said Tony. “He’s casting for his next thing, and I swear you could be Johnny Depp’s kid brother. It’s a small part, but it’s eye-catching. It would get you lots of attention, probably a foot in the door.”

Loki bit a nail.

“I’m not sure I want to make movies,” he said. “I don’t think I’m cut for it. I would hate the publicity tours. And I’m not very politically correct when I’m annoyed or bored.”

Tony narrowed his eyes into a mischievous squint.

“Neither am I.” A smirk. “You and your brother, you’re like the sun and the moon. It would be brilliant to have you both in something. Have you ever worked together before?”

“Yes. When we were kids.”

“Was he as stubborn and air-headed already then? It’s obvious that you got all the brains in the family. And the… Well, he has looks, but you, my dear, you have the *je-ne-sais-quoi*…”

Loki returned the stare with unblinking eyes.

“…Are you making a pass on me, Mr. Stark?”

“God forbid,” he smiled, still eyefucking Loki silly, “that would be illegal. And something tells me big brother there would see my head on a pole if I did.”

Loki let his eyes droop, knowing how long his lashes looked when he did that.

“It’s not like he has a say,” he said.

Tony pulled back, broke eye contact, had a sip of his drink.

“…Maybe when you’re older.”

“I am of age in England,” said Loki. He was having fun with this.
Tony bit his lip, as if trying to hold temptation at bay. Loki thought he looked pretty sexy like that.

“All right then, maybe when you look older,” said Tony, with another sip.

“I may not be interested then,” countered Loki.

Tony chuckled. “Oh, I can be very, very interesting, not to mention charming,” he purred.

“Charm is not what I’m looking for,” said Loki.

Oh, Tony’s smile. He was adoring him. Loki had him on the palm of his hand.

“And what is it that you look for, then?” mumbled Tony.

(Enters Thor.) “What is going on here?”

“Mr. Stark was offering me a job,” said Loki, gaze locked on Tony, mischief shamelessly in his eyes.

Thor frowned at Stark’s angelic smile. Tony had a drink with a look that seemed to say he had a joke he was keeping to himself.

As the evening wore on, there were a few more and more lingering stares across the room. Thor made the rounds, talking to people and laughing and being his gorgeous, sunshiny self, but turned every few minutes to smile at Loki, raise his glass to him, throw him a wink.

Loki watched with interest as Thor turned down several girls who were obviously flirting with him, taking especial delight in the one that tried to drag him to dance. The way Thor had cast a quick look at Loki and extricated himself from her paws had been blooming priceless.

Well, well, well.

* *

For a while now, Loki had been looking more and more bored and tired. Thor sat down with him with a concerned frown.

“Not enjoying yourself, brother?”

“Had enough I think,” said Loki, stretching his long arms into full wingspan. “If you can get me a cab and lend me the keys…”

Thor got up on his feet.

“Nah, I’ll come with,” said Thor. “Mum would fucking kill me if I let you walk around L.A. on your own.”
“You sure?” said Loki.

“You sure?” said Loki. “And I've had enough too.”

They drove back in silence.

“Not one single solitary star here,” said Loki then, looking out the open window.

He looked thoughtful, placid. Thor had not seen him like this since… Well, a long long time ago. He looked content.

“You hate this,” said Thor, no heat in his tone.

“With the strength of a million suns,” said Loki, with a smile. And after a beat, "Do you like it here?"


“I like the rain,” muttered Loki after a spell, staring into space. “I like storms.”

Thor stole a glimpse of him, his profile so sharp.

“I know,” said Thor.

The thrum of the car was relaxing. Thor considered turning on the radio and playing some music. He didn’t. They stayed in silence a bit longer.

“I don’t remember the last time we were together this long without fighting,” mused Thor.

“I do,” said Loki, eyes front, and was that the shadow of a smile.

“Do you?” asked Thor.

“Iceland,” said Loki. And he turned his face to the window.

Thor’s stomach was churning.

The apartment. Thor was nervous, bumping into furniture, clumsily fondling for light switches, spilling milk when he poured him and Loki a glass. Loki looked so cool Thor almost wanted to shake him. They were standing up in the galley kitchen, not exactly close, but well within each other’s air space, Thor’s hip leaning on the worktop, Loki resting his arse on the edge. His brother’s eyes were unfocused, lost in space.

The moment was stretching and it was starting to feel awkward. They were not moving but neither were they still. There was a strange energy buzzing between them. Somebody needed to do or say something.

“I should… I should go set up the sofa bed,” said Thor.

Loki looked up at him, sharp as a razor. Thor felt his throat dry out. He could not read Loki’s expression, he had no idea what was on his brother’s mind.
Loki put his glass down calmly on the counter. Thor watched in a daydream as his brother closed the distance between them, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. How gentle it was, Loki’s mouth on his, how sensual. His brother had no rush. Thor knew those lips, his own remembered. He could feel himself melting. He wrapped around Loki’s slight body, starved for him, and crowded him against the counter, as their kiss became greedier and more fierce. Loki wrapped one leg around his, pressed against him. Thor grabbed Loki’s arse and lifted him onto the worktop. Loki tightened his thighs around Thor’s hips, his breath shuddering. They peeled the suit jackets off each other, and Thor heard himself whimpering as Loki unbuttoned the top of his shirt and started to kiss his neck. He pressed his crotch against Loki’s, finding his brother was hard too.

He watched with hooded eyes as Loki unbuttoned his own shirt. Now it was Thor who was nuzzling and kissing Loki’s long, white throat, stroking his stubble on the sensitive skin. Loki exhaled heavily, his thighs clenching around his waist.

Thor closed his arms around him and crushed him tight for a long, long time, years worth, eyes shut.

“I can’t breathe, Thor” muttered Loki after a while.

Thor laughed. And laughed and laughed, husky, tiny chuckles against the crook of his brother’s neck.

“How can you talk then” said Thor.

And now it was Loki who laughed, a low, warm purr of a sound that trickled down Thor’s spine. He was so fucking relieved. He pulled back to look at his brother, flushed, beautiful, eyes glazed and dark.

“God, Loki, you’re so…”

“Shut up Thor” Loki silenced him with a kiss. "Bed."

Thor carried him there, Loki wrapped around his body like a koala, kissing and eyefucking all the way.

“Ouch!” Loki cuffed him when Thor smashed them both against the door frame.

He laid Loki down on the bed and watched without breath as he undid his button and fly. He helped him out of the rest of his clothes, too eager even to stop to touch and kiss whatever bit of flesh was revealed under him, and undressed himself without ceremony.

Loki’s eyes on him like that never failed to make him tremble like a leaf. The want in his stare was tangible, Thor could almost taste it, and he could most certainly feel it, a coil of heat in his underbelly. He laid on top of Loki, kissing, stroking his face, his hair. Loki arched his neck when he kissed him there, clenched his thighs around the one Thor was nudging against Loki’s crotch.

“Condom” said Loki, breathless, after a while of Thor sucking him and fingering him open, his hisses and moans making Thor’s crotch clamp and his cock tug.

Condom. Right. Thor sobered up at that. Yes, of course. Things have changed.

He fucked Loki slowly at first, watching his face. Loki’s eyes were closed, his mouth parted, pushing up to meet his thrusts. Thor thought this had to be way too tame for Loki, and he expected at any time to be commanded to fuck harder in that snappy, bratty, demanding tone that wrecked him to pieces. There wasn’t anything sexier in this world, as far as Thor was concerned, than his brother bossing him around when they were fucking. The mere thought made him thrust faster.
Loki opened his eyes and met him with his body. Thor started snapping his hips. His brother’s face was pure sin. The slap of their bodies.

“Ah, fuck” whimpered Loki.

Thor sat up, Loki’s ankles around his neck, and fucked him like a man possessed, almost folding him in half. Loki was as flexible as always.

“Oh my god…” moaned Loki, his tone almost angered.

Thor wouldn’t last much longer, not like this. Not with Loki arching his neck like that, digging his nails into the back of Thor’s thighs like that.

“Ah, baby, I’m…” he groaned, starting to fall apart.

“No, don’t” gasped Loki. “Don’t. …Fuck, Thor… Don’t you fucking dare…”

Thor willed himself to wait while his brother jerked himself fast. He didn’t make it. But he stayed inside until Loki came, feeling him clench around him, overwhelmed from looking at his brother’s face as it tensed with climax. He had thought he would never see him like this again. How the fuck had he expected to make it through life without it, he didn’t have a clue.

They laid awake side by side, not a word yet exchanged between them since they washed. After some time, Thor turned on his side, propped himself on his elbow, and stared at his beautiful brother.

“What are you looking at” snapped Loki, keeping his eyes low.

Thor pulled an almost smile and leaned over to kiss him. Loki was still for his lips, eyes shut, but soon enough he had latched onto Thor with arms and legs and was giving as good as he got. And not long after that, they were hard and hungry again. There was a distinct feeling of finality in the air, as if the world was going to end tomorrow. Thor was determined not to waste their time.

* It was just before dawn, the night sky starting to fade at the edges into dull white. Thor slept. He must be exhausted, Loki thought, looking at his brother’s broad chest rise and fall.

They had fucked again twice. Loki was tender. He had ridden his brother while sitting on his lap, bouncing frenetically on his cock, Thor keeping him close to his chest, his expression almost pained, and later Thor had fucked him on his hands and knees, really, really listening when Loki had asked him to go harder. He would be reminded of it every step he took and every time he sat down for a couple of days. Not that he was complaining.

Both Thor and Loki had picked up a few new tricks since they had last been together. He had surprised Thor with a few bold moves, and he had even made him blush and gasp in shock-he was his baby brother after all. Thor had surprised him in turn with his stamina, as well as with some newly acquired sensuality. He didn’t just rut against him like a dog, he had hip game now, and he had discovered, with a smugness that would be annoying if it wasn’t so fucking sexy, that slow
fucking could tear Loki to pieces just as much as the other kind. As Loki came for the third time, almost exclusively on his brother’s cock, except for the last touch, Loki thought just how fucking good they were at this, if he was allowed to say so, and his artistic side mourned the loss of such a remarkable double act.

Smoking by the bathroom window, Loki allowed himself a minute of fantasising about moving to L.A. to live here with his brother, together, and make a life. It would still have to be a secret of course, but less suffocating, perhaps, right?

Yeah, no. If Thor started to become popular, (and if Stark was as reliable as he liked to make himself sound, he would,) such a young hunk, no girlfriends, just his brother? Weird. They would have to get beards and shit like that. And then it would be just like after Iceland again, the tension, the furtiveness, the feeling of being a dirty secret that was so fucking good for Loki’s (and Thor’s, possibly) self-esteem, the petty arguments over absolutely everything, the bitter reproaches, the sad angry fucks that made nobody feel better, and the lies.

No, it was never going to work. Definitely not if they both insisted on wanting to be movie stars for a living.

Loki took a few deep breaths and had a glass of water before he returned to bed. His brother threw a heavy arm around him and nuzzled into his shoulder. Loki sighed.

He had Hamlet coming. It was an opportunity to do something he cared about. It was going to be important, for his career and for him. And he had friends now, or people he hung out with sometimes that respected him and liked him. He was alright. You can’t have it all, can you?

He burrowed against his brother, holding in a sob.

“Sleepy head,” said Loki’s voice, at an arm’s distance.

Thor tried to open his eyes, his mouth dry, limbs heavy, knackered.

He reached for his watch. 11 a.m. Then a sip of water. Loki waited patiently, sat on the bed.

Thor finally managed to focus his eyes. Loki was smiling faintly at him. A slight frown crossed his face, there and not there in a blink.

“I’m going now,” Loki said.

Thor blinked, scrubbed his eyes, sat up. He looked at his brother’s delicate face. Loki’s eyes were low, his mouth ever so slightly pursed.
What could Thor do? What could he say? No, Loki, stay, let’s play house?

He exhaled heavily, just on the verge of tears.

“I’ll drive you,” he said then.

“No,” said Loki. “I don’t want to do this in a parked car at the airport, do you?”

Thor’s mouth twisted with the urge to cry.

They said goodbye at the door, a taxi waiting downstairs.

“I’ll see you soon,” said Loki, and started to make his way down the corridor.

Thor almost called him back but, then again, what could he say?

_________

(The present)

Loki joined the ovation when the cast popped up again for the second round of bows, their expressions endearingly surprised.

The stalls stood up for Thor. He had been magnificent. His presence was undeniable, his emotions so raw. He was a natural, always was, but he was evidently acquiring technique and polish now. He was going to be as great as Odin had wished, and then some.

The girl who played Maggy was feisty and bossy and beautiful. She was probably miscast as Maggy (not sexual enough, a sort of inherent uprightness that turned her character into a moral pole, rather than the desperate cat in heat Tennessee Williams wrote), but there was a strength and a kind of honesty to her that made her stand out. In the curtain calls, she looked at Thor adoringly, and Thor looked warmly back. Loki checked his program. Her name was Sif. From the remote distance of his terminal apathy, Loki wondered. Is she the one, then, Thor. Is it her hands I am entrusting you to.

The best thing to do a few years ago in L.A., was to let Thor go.

The best thing to do now, for everybody, was to go himself.
It’s winter. He’s hungry. He’s had enough. All he has to do is get a stiff drink or something to knock himself out, go to sleep, and die of cold. Clean, unfussy, romantic even. Maybe too good for him, but hey, he did not have that many options left.

He had found a place earlier that week where he thought he would not be disturbed, an old abandoned warehouse near the river. He swallowed as he sat down, back against the wall, limbs heavy with exhaustion and sheer lack of will to live. The concrete under his arse and against his back was freezing cold.

He touched the key in his neck, warm from the contact with his skin. With a shiver, he thought that it would not be warm for much longer. How was it possible, when he was so far gone, that he was still feeling afraid? He eyed the cardboard boxes he'd been sleeping in and the blankets, discarded just there, at the other end of the room. He shut his eyes tight. He clutched the key in his hand.

*It will always be there for you, and so will I.*

If he could drag himself there to the old flat, would he? What was the point? Why get better, why get help? What was going to change? He had done the therapy thing before, and look at him now. This shit within was not going anywhere, there was no cutting it out, there was no curing it. This shit within was himself. He sucked at living in this world, and he would never learn how. He did not fucking know how to be happy, how to be at peace. He ruined everything he touched, he hurt everyone who reached out for him. All his gifts and all his talents, all the chances he had been given, and he still had not been able to make anything out of himself -and we're not even talking about outstanding or worthy, here, we're just talking functional. With what had happened at the club, he had killed every hope he might still have had for some sort of happy ending, any kind of happy ending, for him and Thor. Even as brothers there was no patching that up. Loki had simply gone too far. And even worse than all of that, he just could not ask Frigga to put up with what he had done, with what a miserable disappointment he had become, all the public shame and the embarrassment. Not again. Of course she would take him back, her love was boundless and unshakeable, and precisely because of that, Loki did not deserve it, and he should not have it. He needed to stop being a shame and stop hurting people. He had no right.

Night comes on, sleep weighs heavy on his eyes. Small mercy.

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So, what do you know, heaven looks remarkably like hospital.

*Loki, you idiot, in what fucking universe would you ever be allowed in heaven.*

Oh, right.

*Fuck.*
Many references here. Tim Burton's Edward Scissorhands you probably know or have heard of, beautiful, heartbreaking movie, go watch. The more I looked into it with Loki in mind, the more I saw, so I had to stop myself at some point. Me and Discontentmadeglorious had a few headcanon sessions on the subject. Her brilliant insights illuminate this fic in so many ways, and definitely when we look at movies from a Thunderfrosty perspective.

The 'Freddo' thing is from The Godfather. Just a bit of fun.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, a play by Tennessee Williams and a movie by Richard Brooks from 1958, with an extremely hunky Paul Newman and a sexy-as-ever-living-hell Elizabeth Taylor. Talks about lies and lying, repressed homosexuality, secrets, greed, extreme sexual frustration... The play doesn't end happily, by the way. My Thor would make a great Brick, but no, Sif would not make a good Maggie.

And yes, Malekith is OOC. Sorry not sorry, I wanted some dialogue going on, and movie! Malekith is a man of few words and no smiles, so I just went for a rotten version of Eccleston's own demented, sunshiny version of the Doctor. Shoot me.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Loki’s long, hard road back to the land of the living.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Right, are you ready?” said Sam, one hand on the door handle.

Loki fixed the huge fur collar of his full-length coat, fluffed his hair, still wet from the shower, and put on his sunglasses—even though it was night time, he really hated the flashes in his eyes. If it made him look like a puffed-up diva, so be it.

The bustle outside in the street was a constant rumble, with occasional spikes of hysteria when one of the other cast members went out. This kind of thing still made him anxious. Even after three months, he was not used to it. Well, of course he wouldn’t be, since this stage door mania had seemed to grow bigger and wilder every fucking week. He had learned to manage it, but he didn’t enjoy it.

Anyway, it had to be done. There were people out there who had crossed an ocean to see him. Surely he could get out there and print his fucking name on a few photos, right?

One last look in the mirror. He nodded to himself.

“Ready.”

Sam opened the door. The roar escalated several decibels. The flashes exploded all over the place. Even with the barriers, it always appeared as if the people were closing in on them.

Routine, Loki, focus. There is a fence. Security just there. Sam right here. Look at the faces. It’s not a mob, it’s people, young boys and girls, nothing more. Wink and they’ll faint. Just print your name on the things, say thank you. That’s it. Good boy. See? It’s not so hard. They’re nice, they like you. They’re just over excited. Breathe. You’re fine.

“Loki! Loki! Oh my god! Loki! Loki please here! Please Loki!”

Loki nodded and said thank you to the pledges of devotion and the raving comments on his performance, scribbled his name again and again, and kept his breathing in check.

Finally, the fucking car, yes. Sam was holding the door for him, bless him.

God knows why, that darkish figure across the street caught his eye.

Thor.
Just there, standing with his hands joined in front of him, like a kid at church or brought to stand in front of the school master, a black knit cap on to hide his golden mane.

Loki took his sunglasses off, slowly, hand shaking, wanting to be sure he was seeing what he was seeing.

Thor held his stare. He was just there. Five steps away, ten at best. Just there. Thor him-fucking-self, in the golden, plentiful flesh.

“Are you alright, Loki?” said Sam, one gentle hand on his shoulder.

Loki was very much not alright. He put his sunglasses on and slipped inside the car, his heart beating madly.

“Go go go,” said Loki, feeling sick. “Take me home.”

On the way to the flat, they drove past at least three movie theatres with full façades of Thor Odinson’s last movie, an uncompromising adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s brutal, gritty Blood Meridian, a kind of Heart of Darkness / Apocalypse Now set in the Mexican desert. There was talk of Oscars with his name on already. Thor looked haggard, soul-wrenched and desperate in the huge portraits plastered on buses and massive billboards. Loki had had to get used to seeing his face around like that, larger than life, and he wouldn’t have thought he would be so affected by the real thing.

Thor had looked as shaken up as Loki himself, as if he had seen a ghost.

Well, he was not wrong there.

(3 years ago, give or take a few months)

He doesn’t remember much from his week in the E.R. After he is revived from the severe hypothermia, he starts talking. He’s too tired, confused and yes, fuck, depressed, to watch his mouth. That gets him a pen in his hand and a paper to sign; you are suicidal, the doctor tells him; either you commit yourself or you will be sectioned. If we section you, you’re looking at 6 months minimum commitment in a mental hospital. Please, do sign. —Loki signs. Edward Boggs he writes, after a good minute thought, because his brain is slooooooow.

Suicide watch lasts fourteen days, in a little room with a porthole on the door, furniture drilled to the floor, and metal bars on the window, until they consider the meds have kicked in and he’s stable. They won’t let him out of the ward though, and if he goes for a walk up and down the aisle, there is always a nurse a few steps behind him.

He is bored out of his mind, perhaps literally. Even if the reading material was not dismal, he finds it
impossible to concentrate anyway. The words dance on the page and in his head and make no fucking sense. He still tries, because there is nothing else to do.

Or nothing else that he can bear doing. He knows because he has tried. Crosswords, sudokus, spot the 7 fucking differences. Too much. Drawing, scribbling — too artistic, it hurts, his mind cringes if he tries to do anything minimally individual or pleasurable. Out of spiritual coherence. No, Loki, you wanted to die a few weeks ago, you had your reasons, you had given it some thought. You’re not going to change your mind so quickly, just because you’re taking some tablets now, are you? What are you, a man or a mouse? Stick by your guns. If you’re not dead, you suffer. You definitely don’t draw shit for doctors and nurses to comment on how good it is. That’s how it works. Stuff it.

He hates the common room. He has to drop by a few times a day for his nicotine fix, but he keeps it to the bare minimum, smoking fast and deep (it makes his head light, bonus.) It’s rowdy and people act funny, and you never know what the fuck they’re going to start screaming at you. Anyway, even if it was all as quiet and civilised as a meeting at the Women’s Institute, he’d stay the hell away, because the telly is constantly on in there, and it’s that time of the year where Odin is on, non fucking stop, all over the goddamn place. The man directed and acted in one of the most beloved Christmassy miniseries of all times, and then, just for fun, voiced the fucking snowman in the other. God fucking dammit. Loki hated them even as a child. Now they twist his guts. No thank you.

They haven’t started asking him about his thoughts and feelings yet. “Not until you’re more yourself” said the doctor when he was fourteen. “We won’t discuss your therapy options until you’re more stable” was the wording this time.

Stable. Himself. Loki huffs. Good luck with that. If he ever turns his eyes to himself, he sees a ravaged, barren land, a city that’s been pillaged and burned to the ground, an abandoned ruin. He is not in pain. He is empty, deserted, a shell. Loki doesn’t live here anymore. Don’t bother leaving a note.

The first time he talks to Frigga, it’s over the false name thing. Loki has settled to sleep, the ward is mainly quiet. There’ll be screaming and sobbing later on, and nurses talking too loud, he is sure, but right now the place rests.

He waits for his sleeping aids to kick in. He still has hours to go. Frigga sits next to him. She looks younger than she must be — and isn’t that a strange thought. Her face is blurry. Her eyes stand out, her mouth, but he can’t tell the shape of her nose, or whether her jaw is rounder or sharper. He does get a clear vision of her hair colour, with the greying at the temples. Last time they talked about it, she was going to stop dyeing it altogether. “You’ll look even better than Helen Mirren” he had said. She had laughed. “Nobody looks better than Helen Mirren”, and she murmured under her breath, “that bitch” with that evil grin Thor always used to say Loki had inherited. (Is that irony or the other thing?)

“Did you hear what they were saying before? About your medical history and your meds?” says Frigga.

They’re not in the room anymore. Loki has taken them both for a walk in the meadow at Asgard House, under a purple twilight. It’s fitting. Frigga runs her hand on the cowslip and the queen anne’s lace that sways within reach under her outstretched palm.

“They don’t know who you are. They could treat you so much more efficiently if they could see your
medical records. Why don’t you tell them your real name?”

“I can’t tell them my name, mum. I don’t want you to find me.”

“Why not?”

“Because you will come. And Thor will come. And even Odin, I’m sure. Just, no.”

“We’re your family, my darling, we want to be here to help you.”

“You’re not my family.”

“We love you. I love you. I’m suffering. I want to know you are alive and look after you.”

“Mum, you tried to help once. And look at me now. I can’t do this. I can’t see you again leaving the room and come back with red eyes and a smile and trying to be strong for me. It’s not worth it, mum. I’m going to disappoint you again. I’m going to cause you more pain. You have mourned me now. Leave it at that.”

“But don’t you know how happy I would be, if I could sit with you at this very minute. How can you be so selfish, my darling.”

“Because I’m a monument of virtue, mum. I have them all. I’m a selfish, self-centred, self-pitying brat that’s always going to hurt you and disappoint you. You love me because that’s what you do, because you’re good and kind, not because I deserve it. I wish dad would have picked a better son for you.”

He has won the argument. Frigga is gone.

When the psychiatrist asks him when was the last time he cried, and for how long, Loki usually has to answer “last night before I went to sleep. For hours.”

*

Each hour lasts a century, but days flow by in a blink. Six weeks, gone where? How? Doing what? He can't tell. His time is a white room without windows. His only break is when Frigga comes, in that strange hour between wake and sleep. She won't come when he calls her. She only comes when she wants.

“Let them help you,” Frigga says another night. Loki has summoned a colonnade for them, walking in circles around a cloistered garden. He has put a fountain there, and some aromatic herbs. Frigga rubs a sprig of sage between the tips of her fingers as she talks. Loki tries to conjure up the scent. He quickly adds some slanted sun rays to warm her face.

“You don’t have to keep feeling like this. This feeling is not real, these black thoughts are not rational. If they find the right medication regime for you, and you talk through your mental process with them, you’ll defeat this, you’ll be able to control this, the chemistry of your brain will become normal, and you will be yourself again. Don’t you want to be yourself again?

“Why would I want to do that? I fucking hate myself.”

“Language, Loki.”
“Sorry mum.”

These conversations of theirs always go round and round in circles, and Loki always wins. There is nothing she can tell him he hasn’t thought about and demolished a hundred times already. Sometimes not even Frigga can put any faith in her arguments. Those nights Loki cries most of all.

It’s been eight weeks, and Loki’s progress is stalled. The voice that screams and shouts that he needs to end it all (Loki calls it His Inner Bastard) is still there, and very bloody loud at that, but its line of communication with Loki’s will is severed. It has no power over his actions. It’s like having a cricket in a box he carries everywhere with him. It’s a headache, and a nuisance, but no matter how hard it tells Loki to throw himself down the stairs, and gives its carefully delineated reasons, Loki just ambles on, heedless, untempted.

So the miracle of modern medicine has cured the death-wish out of his poor sick soul, but as of today, it has nothing to replace it with. The end result is apathy, an apathy of such immaculate purity it puts catatonia to shame. Or almost. Loki can spend hours sat on the bed doing absolutely nothing. Hours. Not even feeling sorry for himself. Not even following the black spiral of thoughts down where it leads him—obsessive, negative, circular thinking has been medicated away as well. But there is nothing left behind it. He doesn’t even have the fucking oomph to pretend that he is better so that they will lay off his back. Boo motherfucking hoo.

It’s not been a bad week when the gangly, unassuming, childish-looking evening nurse comes in, even though Loki doesn’t need anything, and it’s not time for any bed changing or snacking or whatever he can think of. He lifts his eyes from the “My husband has three wives” and “My boyfriend is also the father of my mother’s other children” type of magazine he is sort of reading. The girl is standing by the door she has just pushed to, and she’s wringing her hands and looking somewhere imprecise around the general area of Loki’s chest. Lap. Chest again. Lap again. Floor.

“Sorry to come like this. I’m… I’m probably out of line but…” Wringing hands, wringing hands, they’re reddening. “I… I know who you are, Mr. Odinson,” she says, managing one quick flicker to Loki’s face.

Loki tenses up, without moving a muscle.

“Sorry to come like this. I’m… I’m probably out of line but…” Wringing hands, wringing hands, they’re reddening. “I… I know who you are, Mr. Odinson,” she says, managing one quick flicker to Loki’s face.

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“I won’t tell anybody,” she claims, begging. “I swear. I have thought a lot about whether to talk to you or not. But you see, I… I never thought I’d have the chance to meet you, and I…” She takes a sonorous breath, seemingly trying to draw some courage out of the extra oxygen. “I saw your Hamlet,” she declares. “I wasn’t doing well at the time. The way you, er, played him, like a poor broken soul, overwhelmed by the world, so lonely inside his head that tormented him, it just meant a lot to me, because I felt so much for him. I felt compassion and love, and I wished somebody, someone, could have helped him. And I realised that, that it was me, that Hamlet was me, that if I could step outside of myself and see me, I would see someone like him. And I did not hate him or despise him for his illness, I did not think he was weak or worthless. It wasn’t his fault he was ill, it wasn’t his fault he suffered so much he could not act. And I loved him more for his fragility, not less. And I did not want him to die, it angered me that his illness defeated him.”
She lets out a little breath. Loki still has not moved a muscle.

“So I went and got help. I mean, I had had it before, because I did not want to be a worry for my family, but my heart wasn’t in it, do you know what I mean? But after I saw your Hamlet, I did put my heart in it. And whenever I struggled and I was tempted to let go, I reminded myself of what I had felt watching your Hamlet, and how much I had loved him and wanted to help him. And I got better. And now I’m doing this mental health nurse training program, and I’m so proud, because… I know it sounds cheesy, but if I can help one person, just one person, like you helped me, well, then my life is good, and necessary, and important. And I do. I help people. A little everyday. And I remember you everyday. And I… I sent you a letter. I don’t know if you got it. I just needed you to know. I just… I think I am alive and well today because of you. Well, that, and a lot of other people’s support, but without you holding up that mirror for me to see me for what I was, instead of what my head was telling me I was, I… It changed everything for me, what you did. It changed my life. Thank you. And I’m leaving you now t-to rest.”

Loki watches her pull her hair behind her ears like a little girl and fumble for the doorknob.

During her long speech a glimmer of a thought has circulated in his mind. Just before she leaves, Loki calls her back.

“Is your name Sigyn?” he asks, voice hoarse—he hasn’t used it since his therapy session yesterday afternoon.

The girl slowly turns around, stunned, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining with unmitigated happiness.

“I kept your letter,” he says.

She stumbles with her own feet on her way out. Loki suspects she might have gone to suffer an attack of some sort. It’s cute.

It is a while until her words start to soak in, the enormity of what he has heard.

Inner Bastard rears its ugly head immediately. “Fangirl,” it says, “airheads all of them. What does she know. You know better. Right?” And Loki hears Inner Bastard but does not rush to agree for once. Is that progress?

“Well then,” says Frigga that night. Loki has taken them both for a stroll on an imaginary pier. The waves break with a shrieking sound, as if something is ripping, the sound swelling from a distant rumble to a loud roar. He takes a minute to fashion the smell. Rotten seaweed, strong, bitter, you can feel it in the back of your throat. Too much perhaps. Oh, it’s good.

“Don’t even start,” says Loki. Little pebbles, probably river ones, materialise in his pockets for him to chuck into the water. All he sees is a small burst of white in an endless extension of black. “She did it all herself. It’s cute that she wants to give me credit, but I did nothing.”

“Do you think she is stupid?”

“No.”
“Do you think you’re better than her?”

“God, no. She is strong and good and brave and she does useful things and helps people.”

“So do you, apparently. You don’t always know better, Loki. Listen to what she tried to tell you.”

Loki doesn’t reply to the shadow of his mother straight away. Which is a new development, because usually he has all the answers even before Frigga has finished her sentence.

“…Even if it was true, which I doubt, it doesn’t matter now. My career is ruined, I blew it up to smithereens. I’ll never work again. I mean, I’d struggle to get a job at MacDonald’s. I’m a whore and a crackpot and a druggie. I’m finished.”

“That’s not reasonable, Loki. That’s your black thoughts talking. You’re young and talented and have all your life before you. People have come back from worse, and done well.”

“Yes, but they are stronger and better than me. Look at me, I’m a fucking wreck. I’m good for nothing. All I’m good for is hurting the people who love me, disappoint everyone and fuck up.”

He keeps throwing his pebbles, his pockets restocking themselves.

“And even if I get better now, even if I did, this is always going to be inside me. And I’m going to get sick again. And I’m going to have to do this all over again. And for what. For what. At the end of it all, I am still me. It’s exhausting and it hurts. I don’t want to do this anymore. I want to fucking sleep and be gone and that’s all. Like I had never existed.”

“Listen to what Sigyn said,” insists Frigga. For once, she won’t give up the argument. What the fuck. “Listen to her story. She was like you, she was you. Don’t you think she wanted to die at some point? And do you think she wishes now she had died? Did you not see the light in her eyes? Do you think she believed she would ever feel this good again when she was at her worst? Do you think she loved herself any more than you love yourself now? Do you think her efforts were worthless? Do you think her worthless?”

Loki is crying now. No, no, no, no, and never.

“You’re wrong,” says Frigga. “She is right. She is the sane one. You’re not rational. Listen to her.”

Loki looks into his mother’s face, only her eyes emerging from the blur tonight. The ghost of his imagination is rebelling, it wants the last word. What the fuck is going on here.

They stroll along the pier. It’s either miles and miles long, or they’re not even moving. Loki looks up, lights some stars in the black sky, more or less in the shape of the constellations he remembers. Frigga smiles, squeezes his arm.

“Can you make it rain on the sea?”

He takes the most time recreating the sound.
“I brought you some books,” says Sigyn from the door, awaiting permission to enter.

Loki does nothing to shoo her away, and she takes a few steps in, ready to leave if Loki asks her. She takes her treasure out of a heavy duty grocery bag and spreads it on the bed, by Loki’s legs.

Loki picks a heavy, hardback ex-library copy, plain, faded marine blue cardboard cover, golden lettering. He smiles very faintly.

“Moby Dick,” he says.

“I read in an interview that it was one of your favourites.”

Loki lifts his eyes to her, assesses her. She is biting her lip nervously, bless her. He thumbs through the yellowing pages. It’s an old book, not old enough to be venerable, not too well-read. It smells dusty. There are small engravings of generic whaling scenes at the start of each chapter. Loki thinks it’s a sad edition, unloved.

“Have you read it?” he asks.

She bites her lip, dimples appear on her cheeks as she smiles.

“I tried,” she confesses. “Lots of whales.”

Loki chuckles. He hasn’t laughed in months. He sounds rusty. Sigyn purses her mouth, probably to reign in a broader smile.

“Yes, lots of whales,” he says. He leafs through it some more. “At school they taught us it was about fanaticism. About the fight against evil turning into evil itself, dragging sane people after it, and destroying all that is good in the process. Or something like that.” Loki licks his lips. They’re dry. He has not spoken so much for ages. “To me, it was about insanity. Was it Shakespeare who said that madness has its own orbit, like the sun.”

Sigyn has listened quietly and intently.

“Perhaps not the best choice then.” She grins. Loki actually smiles back, a bit. Well, well, the mousy little girl has a cheeky streak, who’d knew. I like her, he thinks to himself.

“No, it’s fine,” he says. “I don’t think I can manage it though. Not right now.”

She picks up a thin, white paperback and hands it to him. *The Little Prince, with illustrations by the author,* reads Loki.

“I guess you know this one,” she says. “I picked it because… when I was really low, in the white room, as I call it, this was the only book I could read. The only thing I could do, really, apart from crying and thinking. And it made me cry too, but it was good crying, you know? Not the one when you stop just because you’ve run out of tears, and you’re feeling raw and left hurting, and ready to start again, but the other one, when you’re just sad, and after crying you feel a bit better. I have thought about the reason why. Maybe because you’re crying over something that’s not yourself? It made me feel good, to come out of myself and suffer for the pain of another, and wanting to console that other person who was suffering, or just cry for them, if you couldn’t help them.”

Loki frowns deeply.
“I haven’t read it in a long time,” he says. And he reads out loud.

“If you could fly to France in one minute, you could go straight into the sunset, right from noon. Unfortunately, France is too far away for that. But on your tiny planet, my little prince, all you need do is move your chair a few steps. You can see the day end and the twilight falling whenever you like...

"One day," you said to me, "I saw the sunset forty-four times!"

And a little later you added:

"You know -- one loves the sunset, when one is so sad...

"Were you so sad, then?" I asked, "on the day of the forty-four sunsets?"

But the little prince made no reply."

“You have such a beautiful voice,” Sigyn says.

Loki doesn’t like that. It doesn’t feel good to hear anything good about himself. He snarls inside that she should know that. Whoa, bitch, calm down. Don’t be an arsehole about it. She means well.

“Thanks,” he says.

Then there is poetry. She’s done her homework. Yeats, Whitman, Rimbaud, cummings.

“Because you struggle with your concentration,” says Sigyn. “They’re short.”

He doesn’t say that, to appreciate them, it takes not only concentration but a whole lot of spirit he does not have.

“You’re very thoughtful,” says Loki instead.

She shrugs, cheeks rosy.

“Is no bother. Is there anything in particular you would like me to get for you next time?” she asks.

He ponders, nothing comes to mind.

But as she is going away, folding the grocery bag smaller and smaller on itself, Loki stops her.

“Gyn,” he says. He meant to pronounce the “Si”, his dry throat has not cooperated. But she turns around with dazzling eyes, delighted with the nickname. Fair enough. “Do you think you could get me a book called The Secret Garden,” he asks.

“I’ll see what I can do,” she says, with an expression that says that she’s got him. And she goes her merry way, happy with her little mission.

“May my heart always be open to little birds who are the secrets of living...” reads Loki inside his head, in Frigga’s voice. He takes a deep breath that breaks into a sob. He burrows in his bed and closes his eyes. He cries.
“My name is Banner.”

It’s a stout, big-eyed, round-faced little man he has seen often around the ward. Sensual lips, a greying stubble, wild, wavy hair, an air of the scatterbrained mad professor about him.

“Are you my new shrink?” asks Loki. He’s been told he’ll have to be reassigned to someone who will be able to see him when he is not an in-patient anymore.

“No, I’m a social worker,” says Banner. His words come slow, with an American slur. “Do you mind if I sit down?”

Loki thinks he must be getting better if he’s already at social worker stage. And how are we feeling about that?

Banner sits down with his elbows on his knees, shoulders slumped, looking up to Loki on the stupidly tall, altar of sacrifice-like metal bed. He says he works with a few charities for young people in crisis. They know he was homeless when they found him. Banner has options for him. A room all to himself in a refuge to begin with, then a half-way house for as long as he needs, until he finds his feet. Training courses, to get a job or to go back to school. How does any of that sound, apart from terrifying, he smiles. He talks as if there's no rush, weighing his words cautiously before he speaks them out. Loki finds it calming.

“They call you Doctor Banner” asks Loki instead or replying.

Banner smiles, looking down.

“I used to be a doctor.”

“Used to be?”

“Lost my license. Forfeited it.”

Loki rests his head back.

“I sense there is an inspiring story of rebirth and redemption there you’re dying to tell me,” he says.

“If you want to, sure, why not,” volleys back Banner.

Oh, I see, thinks Loki.

“Please, do tell,” he pulls the full, 32-piece crocodile smile. Wow, he had not done that in ages.

“I was a very good doctor, very ambitious,” begins Banner. "In the US this job is a big deal, and at my level, it can be a dog-eat-dog profession. I was under a lot of pressure. I started to suffer bouts of psychosis. I did not want to seek help. Because I didn’t want people to know, and my research post to be jeopardised, and because I thought I was such a damn fine doctor, I could treat myself just right.” Banner smiles a sad smile. “It turns out, I was not such a good doctor after all. I harmed people while under an episode. I was put in a mental hospital. I lost my job at the university. I could have gone back to treating patients, but I had lost all confidence in myself, and I was simply not able to ask people to put their trust in me. I forfeited my license and I moved to the UK, trying to find some fresh air, and a new career. And here I am.”
Loki thinks about that for some time.

“I’m surrounded by uplifting tales of successful recovery and rehabilitation. Is it like a requirement to work here or something.” He walks a strange path between snark and genuine astonishment.

Banner smiles some more. He has a sweet, gentle face.

“People want to give back,” he says. “They can understand the suffering, the hopelessness, but they’ve seen the light at the end of the tunnel, if you don’t mind my falling back on tired old expressions. They know it’s there, and they want to show it to those who are struggling.” A smile. “Is this the first time you’re in a mental hospital, Edward?”

Loki assesses him carefully before he replies.

“No.”

“So you have your own story of recovery, then.”

“Not a very good one, since I’m back here.”

“Yes, it’s a constant struggle. With depression in particular, I find with some people it’s like giving up smoking. They relapse a couple of times, before they learn how to identify the first symptoms, and also learn some… humility, shall we call it. That they won’t make it simply out of sheer force of will, but with some help. Hopefully, they have also learned from before that it does get better. They learn to see the illness for what it is, not as a part of their character they have to put up with. Because the thing with depression is, it’s so devious. Other mental illnesses can be perceived more as a loss of control or a foreign body, but depression manages to change someone’s pattern of thought in such a way, the patient never suspects certain thoughts and behaviours are not a development of their own character or their own self, but symptoms. Nobody would consider a backache derived from a hernia a part of one’s personality, would they?”

Loki listens quietly, keeping all his buts to himself. He should be patting himself on the back, because this one nut, he has cracked -some humility. You don’t know it all, Loki-boy. You’re not the expert here, not even when it comes to yourself.

Listening is one thing, believing is another. It's alright. He has time and nothing better to do at the moment.

About Banner’s question on rehousing, his only thought is what did the E.R. people do with his key pendant. When he gets out of here, he's going home.

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He is angry. Inner Bastard is angry. “You have betrayed us, you coward. You were going to off yourself, not buy into this hippy holistic aura let’s all be friends shit! You have no guts! We had made a decision! Have you no fucking pride?”

I
The main reason Inner Bastard is angry is because he has been thinking more and more about phoning home. He’s willing to risk even fucking Odin visiting to see his mum. He’s terrified. He wants reasons not to do it.

When Frigga comes that night, Loki doesn’t conjure anything for her, not even her face. She’s just a blur.

"You can come home, darling. Pick up the phone. Come home."

“I will hurt you. I will always hurt you.”

“You hurt me now, not being here with me, not letting me know where you are, that you’re safe and well. Pick up the phone.”

Loki cries.

“I can’t. I can’t.”

“And Thor, you hurt Thor. He will never stop looking. All you have to do is let him know you’re alright to put his mind at ease.”

Loki snarls.

“Thor hates me.”

“Never.”

“He hates me. After what I did, and the things I told him.

“No, Thor loves you, it’s the way he is. He can’t help it. We love you. And no matter what you think, your father...”

“He is not my father!” screams Loki.

Frigga’s face sharpens up for a beat, becomes clear. “And I am not your mother?”

Loki’s heart is breaking, Inner Bastard is smirking meanly.

“You’re not,” Loki says.

That argument he wins too, and he is alone. Except for Inner Bastard, who is always there, of course, patting his back. “That’ll do, boy,” he says, disgustingly smug, his touch repulsive. “That’ll do.”

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All Loki remembers from that day is Sigyn kneeling next to him on the floor, tears in her eyes, pulling him to her chest.

“Oh sweetie, I’m so sorry,” she is saying. “I’m so sorry about your mum.”

They tell him later that he thrashed his room and managed to open his head and dislodge a shoulder
when they were manhandling him to inject the sedative, which is why he is carrying his arm on a sling. He looks at the bite marks on his arms, serrated crescent shapes that have broken through the skin and have to be monitored for infection, and the scratches on his face and neck sting when he has a wash with hot water. His throat is raw, presumably from screaming himself voiceless.

For the next week or two, he is either apathetic or crying his eyes out, there is no in-between. They allow Sigyn to be with him a lot of the time. Clever, clever Sigyn, she knows when to give him some space and when to stay.

Banner also comes to sit down with him every now and then. Eventually, he tells him that he’s put two and two together and he knows who he is. He also promises to keep it to himself as long as Loki wants him to.

Sigyn sometimes sits down by his bed and reads The Little Prince to him. She tries to read well.

“On one star, one planet, my planet, the Earth, there was a little prince to be comforted. I took him in my arms, and rocked him. I said to him:

"The flower that you love is not in danger. I will draw you a muzzle for your sheep. I will draw you a railing to put around your flower. I will --"

I did not know what to say to him. I felt awkward and blundering. I did not know how I could reach him, where I could overtake him and go on hand in hand with him once more.

It is such a secret place, the land of tears."

When Loki cries for his grief, he does not cry for himself. He can be consoled then, he can be reached and cuddled. He senses the pleasure and the joy Sigyn gets from feeling she is helping. It’s comforting to know he is doing something for someone.

For weeks he is little more than a zombie, unseeing the world around him, his brain swamped by a lifetime of memories.

Loki is little. His mum is learning her lines. Loki learns them as well, just from hearing her. When Frigga goes to rehearsal, she takes him with her. He mouths the words along with his mum and imitates her gestures.

“You clever boy!” says Frigga, impressed, when she spots him at the side of the stage. “Now, if I take even longer, faster steps away, what do you see? Am I happier or angrier?”
“Angrier,” little Loki says.

“That’s right. Now say the line again as you take longer steps, and be angry!”

Loki tries.

“My darling, you’re better than your dad at your age. Clever Loki!” and covers his face with kisses.

Loki is eight. Ballet is a lot harder than he thought.

“This hand a bit more... That’s it.” Frigga corrects his shoulders then. “That’s it. Beautiful, Loki. Now do the croisé again. Perfect! See? You’ve got it. I told you you would.”

Loki is eleven. He is practicing the concerto his professor told him was too big for him. Frigga comes through the door. “Will you play it for me now? It’s just so lovely.”

She sits with him every afternoon, before she has to make for the theatre, listening to him.

“Thank you my darling. It sounds more beautiful every day.”

Frigga takes fifteen year old Loki out for dinner with her friends. It’s a bit too late for him, but she said it was fine. They address him like he is one of them, they don’t dumb it or tone it down for him. They are lewd and cultivated and they like a boy who reads, what a fucking breath of fresh air. They actually listen to him when he says he likes Yeats more than Keats, and why.

Almost all the men are gay. They flirt jokingly between them, mourn lost relationships and broken hearts, curse the whole fickle race of men, gossip and pass comment on shapely new talents rising up in the business.

When Loki goes to sleep that night, he feels like a weight has been lifted off his shoulders. The next day at high school, he hovers three feet over the fucking jerks that call him names.

Loki is sixteen. Frigga asks him if he is dating Matt, Matt from drama school. Loki shrugs. He wouldn’t call it dating. She still takes them both for virgin cocktails one evening. Matt will forever say your mum is the absolute fucking best. Loki wonders where he is now.
Loki is fourteen. He is in hospital. Frigga cuddles him in her arms and hums.

“My beautiful baby,” she says, kissing his forehead again and again. “My beautiful, beautiful baby.”

He goes back to *The Little Prince* whenever he’s overwhelmed and can’t bare to do anything else, but needs to get out of his mind. The book always opens up for him, lets him in, and takes him away for a stroll. And whenever he finishes, tears have been streaming down his face for a while, but as he shuts the book he doesn’t feel like a charred, smoking city, but one that was burned long ago, with edges softened by centuries of wind and dust, with grass on the unpaved streets and clumps of moss and ivy starting to reclaim the ruins. There is more quiet than pain to be found there, like in an old graveyard.

“All men have stars, but they are not the same things for different people. For some, who are travelers, the stars are guides. For others they are no more than little lights in the sky. For others, who are scholars, they are problems... But all these stars are silent. You alone will have stars as no one else has them... In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars will be laughing when you look at the sky at night. You, only you, will have stars that can laugh! And when your sorrow is comforted (time soothes all sorrows) you will be content that you have known me... You will always be my friend. You will want to laugh with me. And you will sometimes open your window, so, for that pleasure... It will be as if, in place of the stars, I had given you a great number of little bells that knew how to laugh.”

He’s been discussing his discharge with Banner and he’s edgy and feeling mightily sorry for himself.

That night, Frigga’s shadow is there even if Loki hasn’t called her. He goes to bring up the miserable “woe is me” babble, *unworthy, taking the spot of someone who deserves it more*, but she starts pulling faces and making noises and sticking her tongue out.

“Whining, Loki! Whining! Baa! Baa! Gbl gbl gbl.”

“Mum, stop.”
“Whining! Boring! Baa! Baa! Baa!”

“Mum.”

She is smiling, her hair is a mess, she looks like a frenzied Bacchae.

“Dancing, Loki, singing! Acting! Rain! The sea! Ice cream! Foreign places! Bookshops! New clothes! Old movies! Cats! Fucking!”

“Mum!”

She won’t stop dancing. Loki conjures up some rain for her. She turns her face to the sky, her eyes shut. Loki cries, but it's the good kind of crying.

* *

Time soothes all sorrows.

“Sigyn, I think I’m getting better.”

“Why?”

“I’m having wet dreams.”

“Loki!” she gasps, and she giggles. “What did you dream?”

Loki winks and keeps it to himself.

He had been aware that it was a dream even as it happened. They were in the corridor, mum and dad were in the living room. Thor was fucking him against the wall. He looked so young, just started shaving. Loki could hear the panting and feel Thor’s push, but he couldn’t feel him inside, and he couldn’t find his mouth when he wanted to kiss him.

He had woken up, hard and horny and a bit shocked. He had even considered tossing himself in the shower. Now, that was progress.

*
“I’m not sure living by yourself is the best for you Loki, not straight away,” says Banner, when Loki announces he is going home, to his flat.

Loki sees Banner’s point. They will never authorise that. And yes, he can come and go at will, he can leave the place tomorrow and jump off a bridge if he wants to. He is not committed. He is free to do what he wants. But the fact is, he doesn’t want to do that. He wants to stick with his therapy, listen to the advice of the people who are treating him, and do what’s best for his health.

And isn’t that a punch in the nose. He does not think too much about it. Inner Bastard still insists he doesn’t get to have nice things. But now there’s Little Loki there too, who doesn’t understand the reasons of Inner Bastard, no matter how much he insists, or how elaborate his reasoning. Little Loki just listens with wide, uncomprehending eyes, Inner Bastard’s words gobbledygook to him, and awfully boring too. He suddenly goes “hey, look, a dragonfly!” and runs after it, leaving Inner Bastard feeling stupid and ridiculous, defeated, and his carefully constructed reasons useless and powerless at Loki’s feet.

The solution to the housing conundrum is there under his nose, and has been for a while, if only he could find the bloody courage to ask. It’s only when he thinks it’s hard time he vacates his bed for the next patient that he pushes himself and does something about it.

With Banner's blessing, she takes Sigyn to the flat and shows her around. She loves it, she goes a bit fangirly about it even—all the posters from the things he’s been in are still there. She is excited to have been let into Loki’s world for the afternoon.

Loki also has a look around. Everything is still there. They’ve emptied the fridge and got rid of the remains of his little ritual bonfire in the bathtub, and everything is just slightly out of place, but apart from that. The layer of dust can’t be a lot more than a few weeks old. Loki doesn’t know what kind of arrangement Thor has going on here, but this flat has been maintained and regularly cleaned for about three years now. A mausoleum. When he moves in again, he’ll have to let Thor know, of course, and that’s a thought that gives him pause, but he’ll cross that bridge when he gets to it.

Sigyn is often a bit late because her commute is hell. Sigyn doesn’t get along with her mum. Sigyn has been wanting to find her own place for a while now, but has not dared yet. Not enough money, too much vertigo. He listens when she talks, see?

Once he is sure she likes it there, Loki takes a deep breath, and asks.

“Want to move in with me?”

If, in his early days in hospital you had told him that, in a bit over two years time, he would be meeting up with his flatmate for a quick dinner, before heading to rehearsal with the amateur theatre
company he had somehow managed to put together, without ever fucking planning to, to prepare for the opening of their third production that year, for which they have already been invited to two festivals because of the reputation of the previous two… well, let’s put it mildly, Loki would not have laughed, because he was in the throes of depression after all, and not much for humour, but his scowl of disbelief would have probably knocked you on your back.

It’s not the only thing Loki would have never believed about his future in a million years. As he often tells Sigyn, while holding up the mound of clothes she intends to try, but only consider buying if he gives it his seal of approval, because “you have much better taste for clothes than I”, he would never for once have anticipated that he would end up being somebody’s fucking gay best friend.

He didn’t exactly see himself spending his Friday nights on the couch with his flatmate, watching Jonathan Ross or Q.I., or catching up on Dr. Who (because Gyn works Sundays and misses it), and while the idea in writing would probably not have sounded so great to little-more-than-two-years-ago Loki, present day Loki is quite content and looks forward to it. Go figure. While we’re talking about it, he had never pictured himself with a standing invitation to laugh his arse off with a group of friends (!) eating pizza and watching horror films one every four Saturday nights.

Not last by a long mile, and certainly not fucking least, he would have never thought he would ever let a fucking dog in the flat, and much less that he would do so simply because Sigyn begged him. Loki? Not a dog person. But try and tell the dog that. Minnie, her name is Minnie. The ageing, furry, rescued little shit probably thinks of them as mummy and daddy. Which sort of makes sense to the fur-expending-machine after all, since Loki actually fucking walks her.

Anyway. Rehearsal. The troupe disperses, clearly with a feeling of a job well done. They’re certainly getting there. Sigyn had joined the poor excuse for a company first, and cunningly dragged him there one day to see them eviscerate the Pirates of Penzance. Loki knew what she was up to, and just because of that, he had intended to resist with all his might, but he just could not fucking stay back and allow them to carry on and perpetrate that. It was a abysmal. He had to step in. What they were doing to Gilbert and Sullivan would have made the population of the Gaza strip feel sorry for whatever audience of suffering relatives and loyal friends they could drag in to opening night.

First things first, no fucking singing. They would pull a Rex Harrison and declaim the bloody lyrics, and then a few less angels would weep. Second, the set, are you fucking kidding me? If you really, absolutely must go for the nautical theme, by all means do, but for the love of god, use some irony. And last, did they even know what the play was about? I mean, we’re not talking Chekhov here, but surely a bit of context couldn’t hurt, and hey, it does not go amiss if you remember it’s a fucking comedy.

So yes, Loki had had his arms full for a few months now, because if there was one thing his lovely minions did not get, it was the notion of hubris. They would undertake anything. He had absolutely had to stop them at Macbeth, but they had embraced My Fair Lady and The bloody Crucible even, without shame. And since fortune favours the utterly insane and those who have no idea of their limitations, they had done… not that bad at all. Loki was proud.

Class dismissed, it’s Thai take-away tonight, or what in that place passes for Thai, but Sigyn likes it, and he tolerates it, so that’s fine.

Loki is packing the annotated script in his rucksack, when he spots the redhead at the back of the stalls. Hm.

“You again,” he says. “Rehearsals are for company members only.” He jumps off the stage, with the weightless, cat-like landing he still has from his ballet days. It impresses people.
She gets up and approaches with a strut that has Loki wondering if she’s interested in amateur theatre. She has presence.

“My name is Natasha Romanov,” she announces, slight frown in her beautiful face, as if she is dealing with important stuff here. “I saw your *Hamlet*. I’ve followed your whole career.”

Loki’s back tenses immediately, his guard is up. He seriously wishes Sigyn was here now.

“What do you want, an autograph?” he says, squaring his shoulders.

“I want to run you,” she says, serious as cancer. “There is a big part coming up that you’d be perfect for. I’ll prepare you and you will get it.”

Loki stares and remains pretty much speechless for a while. Then he laughs bitterly.

“I’m awfully flattered,” he says, “but I believe that, if you’ve done your research, you will find that I’m unsellable. I’m a walking PR liability. You won’t get anyone to invest one penny on me.”

Romanov smirks and her lips thin up somewhat.

“You do your job and let me do mine,” she says.

Loki shakes his head in disbelief.

“You’re delusional.”

She smirks again. Her mouth is made for either pouting or smirking. Her eyes, to bring people into submission and fucking love her for it.

“I only take on things I have full confidence in,” she says. “I know I can help you get a career that matches your talent. Try me.” She leaves a calling card on the chair by her side. “But don’t sit on it forever. Try-outs start in a week.”

Sigyn is enthusiastic, but of course she would be.

“Did she tell you what the part was?”

No, actually, she hadn’t. It’s the kind of thing you might want to ask next time around, you knucklehead.

Banner doesn’t jump into it with both feet like Sigyn has. He has coffee with Loki and listens to his fears —putting himself under the spotlight again, exposing himself to rejection, his past being dug up and thrown to his face, and what if he is not as good as they remember, what if he has lost it, what if he can’t cope with the stage.

Banner looks at him sweetly, his warm dark eyes going from Loki’s face to his drink.
“It’s always hard to start again. When I tried to go back to work, well, there were so many things wrong with everything, that there was not one day I did not want to go ‘forget it’ and go hide under a rock. To help people, I had to have them trusting that I could actually help them, and you know how long it was before I actually believed that myself? I thought they all looked at me and saw the lunatic who had suddenly lost it and attacked those two students in a lab. It’s how I saw myself. But anyway, I had to get myself up and try every day, because I owed it to those two kids, and to the people who had given me their trust when not even I trusted myself. And I owed it to people who were not around anymore, who had once believed in me, who would not have wanted for me to hide all my life, with my talent unused, but to step into the sunlight and make them proud again, just by picking myself up and trying.”

Loki gives the stirring speech a good two minutes wide berth, in case it's catching.

“That’s about as subtle as a brick, Banner,” he says, grinning to his cappuccino.

“You know, Loki, for such an intelligent man, you can be remarkably tough-headed. It sometimes takes a hammer to get through to you.” Banner smiles sweetly back. “But every word I said is true.”

Loki has a sip.

“I'll think about it.”

Banner grins, raises his mug in a mock toast.

“To the people who would be proud of us if they saw us today.”

Loki clinks his mug to the good doctor’s. Talk about hammering it in. Fair enough. He is a stubborn, hard-headed idiot a lot of the time. He can take it.

Chapter End Notes

Gawd, I'm knackered! When I started an Actors AU I did not realise I was signing up for this scouring of the soul!

Briefly. I just wanted to make Loki's journey justice. For the people touched by the issues of mental health in this story, I had to try the best I could.

About The Little Prince, Sigyn speaks my heart and mind. How a little thing can be so powerful is beyond me. Let me specific about it: reading this little book was the only thing that felt good that I allowed myself to do when I was at my worst. I mean, my Inner Bastard wouldn't even let me pet my cat, because I didn't deserve it. But this little book got through, I don't know how. And for the worst three days of my life, it was the
only respite I had. That's what I mean by power.

I'm probably forgetting references, right? I'm just flat out exhausted. I should have really waited to publish until after one last read with fresh eyes tomorrow. Anyway.

I realise many questions are yet to be answered. I hope they will be resolved in chapter 8.

Right, UPDATE. Because there's a couple of notes I owe you (or I owe me.)

1. Edward Boggs, the false name Loki chooses. The family that takes in Edward Scissorhands when he leaves the inventor's mansion are the Boggses.

2. 'Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in The West', the movie Thor is starring in, is a book by Cormac McCarthy (same author of The Road and No Country For Old Men), set in the mid-to-end 1800 in the territories in contention in the borders of Mexico and the US. It's about a young boy (younger than Thor in this story at the time) who joins in with a band of Native American hunters. It's terrible. I found it an even harder read than The Road, which is a lot to say, since I can't think right now of a harder read than The Road. There were talks about turning it into a movie a while ago, and there always will be I guess, but an adaptation that truly did it justice would be probably unpalatable for broad audiences. It had the right feel for Thor's new career though, epic, difficult, a tough role that should win lots of awards. And the shoot would be mostly set in the desert, which was handy, for reasons to come.


4. "May my heart always be open to little birds who are the secrets of living", the line Loki reads from the poetry books Sigyn has brought him, is from a poem by e.e.cummings (he did not use capital letters in his writing) which follows like this.

"may my heart always be open to little/ birds who are the secrets of living/ whatever they sing is better than to know / and if men should not hear them men are old/ may my mind stroll about hungry/ and fearless and thirsty and supple / and even if it's sunday may i be wrong/ for whenever men are right they are not young/ and may myself do nothing usefully/ and love yourself so more than truly/ there's never been quite such a fool who could fail/ pulling all the sky over him with one smile"

I feel it's something Frigga would approve of, something she would like Loki to read.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Thor had his own journey, but it never ends far from Loki’s side.

Chapter Notes

YAY! We're back in Thorkifeelsland! That's the kind of angst I came here for!

Warning for het relationships! Shall I put it in the tags? Not explicit, teen and up at best. You'll be alright. It will pass soon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(The present)

The atmosphere around the theatre was more that of a rock concert than a play. The queue was a bustling, rowdy affair, full of teenagers and young kids in costume, among which the “other” people—such as Thor himself—stuck out as a sore thumb. Good news was, nobody had recognised him yet. Nobody was paying him any mind at all. That had not happened for a while now.

Snippets of conversation kept floating around his ears, nuzzling at him for attention.

“…Yes, it’s my third time! Man, it’s incredible!”

“…and it came out that he was adopted and he, like, had a break-down…”

“…Is it true that he used to be a prostitute?…”

“…He was in a mental hospital…”

“…Yeah, he was a stripper too. He can fucking pole dance!”

“…No, he’s gay. He’s with the bloke that plays Brad.”

“…He was homeless for a whole year. Actually homeless, like, living in the streets. Just imagine, I mean, he used to be posh…”

“…You know he played Hamlet when he was like, I don’t know, eighteen or something?”

“…He’s been through so much, man…”

“You’ll see, he’s abso-friggin-lutely awesome.”
Thor kept his face still, his mouth shut and his ears open. There was no judgement in the tone of those comments, but awe and wonder. It was as if they were talking about a mythical figure, surrounded by legends, the patron saint of queers, lost kids, and all the young souls who struggled. These kids worshipped Loki because he was the real thing, a gritty character who had suffered and did not shy away from it. While many seemed to expect from a rehabilitated Mary Magdalen like him to put away his party ways and his lipstick, and go around modestly and quietly, perhaps turning to Veganism and converting to Buddhism, Loki was outspoken, unapologetic about his life and his choices, and proud. In interviews and public appearances, he made the right people uncomfortable, did not hesitate to call things by their name, had no fucks to give and not one second to spare for ignorance, hypocrisy and political correctness.

From what Thor knew, Loki did not lead a “party” lifestyle at all, and never claimed that he did, but he certainly gave that impression. He seemed just too fucking fabulous to do anything but.

He had heard about that Brad guy too.

When the queue turned the corner, Thor was faced with a 20 foot high, full-body image of his brother looking over his shoulder, in platforms, a corset, fishnets and suspenders, staring at the viewer with a smouldering look and a wicked smirk, under the massive, bright red, dripping letters spelling THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW.

Something stirred in Thor that he recognised and didn't like. That image. It was too close for comfort to the last memories he had of his brother. And sure, this was a costume, a character, and it was a completely different situation, and a completely different Loki, and Thor was aware of all that, but he still averted his eyes, and wondered once again if he would be able to go through with this after all. Was he ever going to be able to handle this. What had been nerves in his stomach for a moment bordered on nausea.

He found his seat, surrounded by Magenta and Riff-raff on one side, and Columbia and Eddie at the other. There were Franks, Rockys, Eddies and Transylvanians all over the place (not many Brads and Janets.) The air was thrumming with electricity, the excitement of the audience buzzing in the air like static, making Thor's hair stand on end.

As the big moment of curtain rise approached, the rock concert vibe only intensified. The lights were lowered, to a chorus of choked squeals and screams. They were severely repressed with the exercise of crowd self-control that was the communal hushing and shushing Thor always found endearing. All these people coming together for a couple of hours to join in a collective experience, becoming one single living entity for the duration, with its own distinct personality, different from the creature that was yesterday and the creature that would be tomorrow. He bloody loved it, how alive it felt, how extraordinary, never to be repeated again. Loki used to love it, too.

The curtain rose to a black screen all over the back of the stage, a disembodied blood-red mouth projected on it.

The whole fucking audience started declaiming some sort of speech in unison.

"A long time ago! In a galaxy far far away! God said, let there be lips! And they were good lips! Sing to us, lips!"

What the hell...

Then the voice.

“Michael Rennie was ill the day the Earth stood still…”
The audience erupted into hysteria, an uncontrollable burst of excitement, for about three seconds. Then sunk into an intense, focused, worshipful silence. A few groups here and there kept giving the replica to the song. It made it hard to follow the words, but nobody was complaining. Thor didn't know what they were saying, and didn't care.

*It was Loki's mouth. It was Loki's voice.* His brother sounded like David fucking Bowie.

His fucking lips, that thin, extremely pretty mouth Thor knew so well, painted blood-red. His brother's lips, but somebody else's too, someone Thor had never met. They would stretch in a taunting smirk now and again. The fucking *teeth* Thor had no idea he remembered so clearly, biting at choice moments in the song. A playful tongue suggesting double-entendres when it chose, either licking or poking out or touching the teeth.

Thor started smiling at that point, a disarmed, awed smile of pure delight, and never quite stopped. He was just so bloody fucking proud.

*Even Loki Laufeyson's fucking tongue can act.*

There and then, Thor fused with the audience and became another worshipful fan.

Enter Brad and Janet.

Was this the guy they said Loki was dating? He was muscular and handsome, black, and he looked appropriately square and harmless in his 50s-style attire. Thor didn’t know what to make of him. Not that he was impartial. Very fucking far from it.

And the audience kept chanting in response to the actors' lines, lewd, rude callbacks, and nobody batted an eyelid. It was a ritual, and everybody around him seemed familiar with it, everybody in the know. Thor could only look around, perplex, left out.

Frank/Loki’s entrance was approaching. You could feel it in the air, the anticipation. Heads were turning towards the back of the theatre, even as the actors were still saying their lines on the stage.

Thor turned as well, his heart thumping.

The song began. Rock and roll, fierce and aggressive, a *krrang* of electric guitars, and a metronome beat of drums.

Oh, there it was. A platform resembling an industrial lift was descending from the ceiling, dry ice mist pouring from it.

There were muffled, barely reigned in screams from the audience.

The lift touched the ground. The song came from behind the mist, rich, feline and sassy. *Loki's voice.*

*"How'd ya doin', see you've met my faithful handyman..."*

*Krrang!*

A figure draped head-to-toe in a shiny black cape emerged dramatically from the lift. His song was now a roar. He strutted down the centre of the aisle among the stalls, royally ignoring the hands stretched towards him.

When it whooshed past Thor's row, everything on his pale face was a blur, except for his blood-red
He climbed to the stage, singing, swinging hips. He got to *that* point in the song (“by night I’m one hell of a love-eh-heeeeeeer”) and the cape came off with a flourish, with the audience going completely fucking insane for three seconds.

And Thor just... gawked, and gaped.

He was close enough to the stage to appreciate the details. And he had seen the movie, and he had seen the posters, and he thought he was ready for what he would see. He had tried to prepare.

But he was not ready, he was absolutely not ready for his brother in the flesh, let alone prancing around in a corset, panties, garter belt, fishnet stockings, fucking luscious in black, purple and glitter, velvet and satin, and those platform high-heeled shoes nobody should be able to walk on, let alone do a catwalk strut, and dance. He had a face full of make up that made him look neither male nor female. His hair was wild. His legs were fucking never-ending, his movements were pure grace and sex. How could something so outrageous, over-the-top, almost grotesque, garish even, be so fucking ravishing.

Nothing could have prepared him for Loki the fucking rock star, the centre of the known universe. His command of the hearts and eyes of the audience was absolute. Thor remembered the film, and he remembered Tim Curry. Tim Curry was adorable. Loki's performance was fucking scary at turns, predatory, and also sensual, smooth, sassy, unbearably sexy, and so bloody funny.

And Loki himself was having fun, anyone could tell. Thor had never seen him like that, ever, not even in private. It seemed as if there had always been a cloud hovering above Loki’s head, for as long as he could remember, and it was always there in the parts he had played before. Frank’n’furter, however, was sheer joy and lust unleashed, and so was Loki.

He had the whole theatre under his spell, hundreds of eyes following his every move. Not even the seriously hunky Rocky they'd found in his tight, shiny, golden shorts could distract them. No wonder the play was already an international phenomenon, attracting people from all over the world, with every performance sold out for the remaining of its run, even after it had been extended twice already.

And the thing between Loki and the Brad guy was common knowledge, obviously. Their every interaction on stage was received with a thrum of excitement, suggestive whoops and lewd chants. And how much fun Loki had with that too. He flirted, he teased, he fucking pinched and licked and taunt. Every now and again, the Brad guy couldn't help himself from breaking character. Disarmed, he turned away to laugh, or bite his fucking fist in a show of frustration when Loki was being just too fucking sexy. And how everybody loved it. They only had to look at each other, and the audience went fucking mad.

Thor himself was intensely intrigued seeing them together, though he was not loving it so much as everyone else.

By the end of the play, Thor was exhausted. He joined the tumultuous standing ovation.

Loki kept on the sass to the last, as he took the stage alone for his applause. Mock curtsies, flourished bows, blowing kisses, standing there then with his arms crossed and his hip cocked as the
clapping and screaming went on and on, with the haughty, smug gesture of one who absolutely deserves it, reaching peak charm.

When the cast joined him again, he broke character. He held hands with Brad and Janet for another round of bows, exchanging looks, grins and words with everyone around him. He looked just plain happy.

What a fucking sight, his brother receiving a crowd's worship, and surrounded by people who clearly loved him. Thor didn't know if he was happier for Loki, or more in pain for himself. In Loki's circle of friends and lovers, Thor was now a stranger.

“No fucking encores!” shouted Loki to a brave soul on the mezzanine who kept asking loudly. “You come over here and sing it yourself, I’m bloody knackered!”

One last curtain call by himself. No Frank now, but Loki. Looking around at the devoted crowd, taking it in with an air of serenity. Peace inside, for a moment, in a place of so much turmoil.

A deep theatrical bow, hand on his heart, just like mum had taught them.

The audience was roaring for yet another round of salutes.

“Oh, will you fuck off already,” said Loki finally.

(“How shall we fuck off, O Lord? ” seemed the only possible reply at this point.)

Loki blew one last kiss, and shooed everyone out with gestures of playful impatience.

Then he got strutting on his heels, and he was out.

The lights came on, people around Thor started to pick themselves up. The spell had lifted, Loki was gone, and he was not coming back this evening.

Thor blinked, and needed a moment to find his bearings.

Once he was out, Thor ambled to the stage door in a haze. He kept his distance from the boisterous crowd that held up photos and signs, with their mobile phones in hand, ready to snap. For once, in the middle of an excited throng of fans, he was invisible. It was a completely different experience from this side of the fence.

He found his place across the street, leaning on the wall. He was still lost in himself.

They hadn’t exchanged a word for almost four years now. There had been that letter about the apartment over two years ago, the first sign of life since The Dark World. Only a few words, succinct, formal, but they had turned Thor's world on its head. Loki was alive. He was alive, he had returned from wherever hell he had inhabited for so long. He was grateful to Thor for keeping his apartment, he was taking over now, and he didn't want Thor to come visit. And nothing else.

Loki had asked him to stay away and not get in touch, and Thor had respected his wishes.

Four fucking years. How the fuck did that ever come to happen.

But their relationship had gone to shit long before that. So so long since they had spent proper time
together, since they'd trusted each other, since they'd spoken in confidence. So fucking long since Thor had felt that he knew his brother.

This boy enchanting the crowds this evening, who was he. What must he talk about, what things did he like to do, what made him laugh. Was he still a snarky little shit.

Would Thor like him now. Would new Loki like *him*.

Did this Loki still love him.

Thor waited, for what exactly he could not say. He could not just go there and say "Hi," could he? With all that mess, Loki would never even know he was there. He could not just appear like a fucking spook out of nowhere.

So what the fuck was he waiting for. Hoping for.

He should leave. But he just didn’t fucking want to go yet.

Every time a member of the cast popped out, he was notified by the sudden storm of flashes and the screaming.

But this burst of hysteria was several degrees of magnitude above the rest. Thor's hair stood on end. He could feel it.

There, between the heads and the hands and the flashes, there he was; in a vintage, full-length black and green leather coat with details of gold, and a massive fur collar, hair still wild, big sunglasses, dark red lipstick, like a rock star from the seventies, Loki, his long-lost brother.

The star of the show was not smiling now. His mouth was tense, thin. He shrunk away from extended hands and selfies. He did nod, and mouth ‘thank yous’, and scribbled his name onto whatever flat surface was thrusted in his direction, from a safe distance. The hurricane he had been on stage had dispelled, and someone smaller and wary was left instead.

An overwhelming need to wrap him up and pack him away somewhere still and quiet was urging Thor, almost pushing him forwards

But Brad was there. He too had autographs to sign, but he was keeping a close eye on Loki. Loki would turn his face to Brad every now and then, like he needed the support. Brad projected calm and self-assurance, the comfort Loki needed was found there, solid and dependable. What a petty, petty man Thor was. The whole fucking interaction tasted like bile in his mouth.

Eventually, Brad held Loki’s hand to lead him to a car waiting by the kerb. The crowd went fucking crazy with that. The flashes were going off like a summer storm.

Loki had one foot already in the car, he was already ducking to get in, when he froze up.

He was facing straight at him.
Oh god, had seen him. He had seen Thor.

Loki took his sunglasses off. His naked eyes, made more intense with a thick line of black eyeliner, speared Thor, pinning him to the spot.

Thor too had seized up. Loki’s eyes were seeing him, and it was like they had suddenly made Thor real.

He could not read Loki’s expression beyond the shock. Good shock, bad shock, he had no idea.

Brad spotted Thor then. He looked at Loki, then back at Thor, whispered something to Loki’s ear.

Loki shook his head, put the sunglasses back on, and climbed inside the car. Brad jumped in right after.

Loki’s white face turned away from him as they drove past.

(The past, 3 years ago)

“You’re so quiet, mate,” said Fandral, with a hand on Thor’s shoulder.

“I’m knackered,” said Thor, rubbing his face.

“Home, then?” said Sif, with a kind look.

“Yeah, home.”

They picked up their things from the table and seats. Thor gentlemanly helped Sif with her coat, and even though she wasn’t one to suffer the mademoiselle treatment easily, for Thor she made an exception and allowed it, without giving into the urge of thrusting an elbow into his gut. Thor had already noticed, some weeks ago, that Sif kept making all sorts of exceptions for him.

It had been a crazy week. Thor had forgotten just how much it took out of him to be in a play, even a semi-professional one as this. He hadn’t done it in such a long time. And Tennessee Williams was so bloody intense.

Opening night last Saturday had been a thrill. Acting in front of a living, breathing audience was like nothing else in the world. He had felt on fire. Receiving praise from his dad had been a sweet treat for once, even if Odin couldn’t help to be specially “I told you so” about it. As for his mum, after a strong hug, they had stared at each other for a long time, and when both Thor’s and Frigga’s eyes had welled up, nobody had needed telling why.
It was only one week of performances, so roll on Saturday. Thor had enjoyed himself immensely, but he obviously needed to build more mental stamina if he was to try to get on to professional theatre at some point. And that was a thought. His physical energy was barely tapped, but his mind… He just could not stop thinking about Loki. This was his brother's realm. Every step Thor took into it, he did it with the example and the memory of his brother on his back. It could become too much at times, and that week, it often had.

They made down the streets, steam puffing from their mouths. Fandral and the girl he had picked up at the pub walked ahead of them, Thor and Sif closed the march. Thor mindlessly realised that he still did a double-take of every pale face with dark hair he encountered on the street.

“You were very strong tonight, Siffy,” said Thor, one arm casually thrown over her shoulder for a quick squeeze, before he stuffed his hands back in his pockets.

“Hm, I don’t know,” said Sif. “I felt all… clunky, rigid.”

“You’re a good actress, Sif. Maybe Maggie and you are not made for each other, but that doesn’t mean you’re not talented.”

“Yes but… I still don’t think I enjoy it that much, you know?”

They had talked about this before, even during rehearsals. Sif really struggled with opening up and making herself vulnerable in front of other people. That easily made for stuffy acting. She had very good control of her body and voice, and she could manage to express emotion when she was building on those strengths, but it didn’t come natural to her, and she said it felt uncomfortable, and quite tiresome.

“So you think the stuntwoman thing Hogun suggested is a better path for you?” asked Thor. Hogun taught stunt performance for the theatre. His class was where Sif, Fandral and Thor had met. Hogun was enthusiastic about Sif, he said she was the most gifted of his students.

“I do enjoy that side, the physicality of it,” said Sif. “It takes acting, but it’s a completely different set-up. Yes, I’m seriously thinking about it,” she added, thoughtful.

“Hey, you’d make the fiercest, bravest, coolest stuntwoman ever,” said Thor, nudging an elbow to her side. “Not to mention movie-star beautiful. You’d steal the show.”

Sif grinned, her cheeks flushed up a little. She was extraordinarily beautiful, and her lanky, athletic body was just the kind of thing that got Thor's juices flowing. But for all the wrong reasons. He cast his eyes back down to the pavement, his mind drifted.

Thor was grateful for his friends. It had not been easy for him at drama school. He had been snubbed and ignored and put down at every available opportunity by snobby classmates, and even some teachers, for his ancestry first of all (nobody would forgive him who his parents were, and made a point of letting him know to what extent it would not gain him any favouritism, some would say going a bit too far in the other direction.) But more than anything, he was being made to pay for his stint as a movie star. He had had to hear every possible variation of “that’s so Hollywood”, he had been overlooked for exercises and plays because “the others also deserved a chance”, and he had had to grin and bear it while paying for the privilege of having excerpts of his previous work used as a negative example to his fellow classmates. “You don’t mind, do you? Since we have you here…” Yes, Hollywood boy, you don’t belong here. Stick to your action flicks and your aliens and superheroes, and get your filthy paws off Shakespeare, Miller and Reza.

Of course it was nothing like what Loki must have had to go through in his day, not by miles. Not by
fucking parsecs even, because Thor was there because he wanted to, and because he was older than Loki had been, and a lot stronger about himself in his own mind (yes, Thor would be the first to admit that self-esteem was not an issue for him), and because it had nothing to do with who Thor was, not really. But still, it was piling up on top of the very, very fucked up year Thor had had, and between one thing and the other, the first few months of the summer course in that place had almost become too much for him. A few times, he had even contemplated dropping out, a thing he just did not do. He never gave things up when they were hard, he always followed through to the bitter end. That’s how overwhelmed and miserable he had felt.

When the winter courses had begun, and he had joined Hogun’s class, Thor unexpectedly found his crowd. Fandral was too fabulous himself to feel threatened, or indeed to give a shit that Thor had won an MTV Award, except for bragging purposes when he had a need of them in, say, trying to impress a young lady with his very cool, very famous friends. Sif judged people only on the basis of who they were, on principle, and she had liked Thor’s straightforwardness from the start. Hogun himself cared only for how seriously people took his classes, and Thor was very serious about his job.

Then there was Volstagg, who liked everyone, who declared himself a huge, long-time fan of Thor’s, who radiated joy of living and was an unstoppable force — when he wasn’t prone on his back recovering from this or that other set of festivities, that is. Volstagg taught a seminar on “character” acting (or how to create performances in supporting roles that compelled and stood out) but his real love was directing, and independently from the school, though with its blessing and support, he put on a play every four months. He had cast Sif and Thor for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and a more happy company of friends was never seen. It was only a matter of time before Sif and Thor moved into Fandral’s oversized apartment to split the costs (the bloke was fabulous beyond his means.)

Thor’s drunken fuck with Fandral had also been only a matter of time. They were as bad as each other. It had changed nothing between them, except cranking up the tone of their jokes and adding detail and colour to their constant flirting and innuendo.

Sif, however…

In the flat, Fandral and his catch locked themselves up in his room. Giggles and chuckles came through clearly.

“Do you want to watch a movie?” asked Sif. “Really loud?”

Thor laughed. It was a lot better than go their separate ways and wonder what Sif was thinking Thor was doing. Less awkward. They chose Star Wars because it was a common favourite, and a noisy one, and they shared a beer and some nuts. One beer became two became four, drinking from the same bottle.

Alas, the movie was not always as noisy as they would have needed it to be.

“Fuck,” grunted Thor, his cock twitching whether he liked it or not in response to the sounds coming from Fandral’s bedroom.

As for Sif, she had a tinge of red high on her cheeks. Which looked lovely on her, by the way. And she had been wearing her hair down a lot lately, for the part, because Maggie was a sexual creature. And her neck was so long. Her collarbones. Thor made himself look away before the downwards tour got near those small breasts with an extremely pert nipple he had noticed, in spite of himself,
many times before.

A particularly loud string of moans, peppered with feminine “gods” and “yesses”, pierced his crotch.

“Fuck,” grunted Thor.

Sif was biting her lips in, blushing. She kept her eyes fixed resolutely on Fandral’s ginormous screen.

After the credits rolled, they heard quiet conversation coming from Fandral’s bedroom, muffled giggles.

Thor was not hard now, but he was still feeling the strain. He needed a cold shower. Except it wasn’t a cold shower he wanted.

Sif leaned on the backrest facing Thor, staring at him. He knew what he would see if he looked back. Just as he knew this was a terrible idea.

He turned to meet her stare.

Oh boy, that longing, lustful stare. She adored him.

(Thor, you bastard. Don’t do this.)

When he kept looking back, she got brave, and stroked his hair (he kept it short these days, because otherwise it attracted too much commentary and was the go-to excuse to deny him parts.) He didn’t move away and he didn’t reject her. His heartbeat was ramping up. His whole body was clamoring. Touch. Sensation. Sex.

She kissed him. He kissed her back.

She had yearned for it. She had anticipated it. She was taking it now with reverence. This was a first kiss she wanted to remember in the future.

(Thor, you son of a bitch, she’s your friend.)

Her hands slipped under his shirt. They were cold, and searching, and, fuck, how he needed this.

He put his hand on the back of her head, crushing their mouths together more firmly. She moaned ever so softly, and now Thor was fully hard. He raked his fingers on her scalp, to make her moan again. Her breath was getting short and heavy.

She retreated, panting. Thor removed his hand. Before it left her completely, she clasped it and held it against her face. Damn.

“Is this a good idea?” she said.

Thor shook his head no, with a sad half-smile.

She bit his lip, and thought about that. When she looked up again, boldness and defiance brightened her eyes. She straddled on his lap, and held his head to kiss him like she wanted. Thor gave into it, all too happy to let go.

She pressed herself close, riding his straining crotch. He palmed him as she ravished his neck. Thor threw his head back, groaning, and gripped her hips to bear down on him. Her lips on his neck grew
teeth. *Fuck.*

He grabbed her arse. Her small, tight arse. Her long, strong legs. Soft, flowing dark hair, lean, muscular arms. She too was fierce and demanding, just like...

Even with his eyes closed, Thor could not have fooled himself. Didn't smell how it should, didn't quite feel how it should. The mere fact that he wanted to make-belief, even if only for a while, made it all decidedly wrong.

But nobody wanted to stop. They were both tumbling downhill now, and there was no stopping this.

He rolled them over and got on top of her.

And all of a sudden, he was remembering. In Loki's bed, rutting like dogs. They were cutting it really close, mum and dad about to come home. There was no time for anything much; their clothes were still on. Shirt up, jeans pushed just under their butt. He remembered holding Loki down like this. Oh, how Loki loved when Thor manhandled him to position him just the way he needed him, selfish, like he had every right to it, like Loki was just a toy for Thor to play with. He was cross-eyed with lust. He never stayed put for long, though. He too had demands from Thor's body, and Thor should better satisfy them if he knew what was good for him.

What was good for him.

He remembered Loki's skinny arms around his back, clinging with all their might, their ankles hooked together. Groaning and grunting, eager, frustrated; no art to it, no proper fucking build up, just need.

That need was everything. His own, and Loki's too, feeding off each other, fire and gasoline. Loki would sink in his nails. Thor would sink in his teeth. It was savage. It was ridiculous. It was awesome. The mightiest fucking thrill of Thor's life.

They always had to try to be quiet. When Loki tried to be quiet, his orgasm sounded like sobbing, breathy, plaintive. Like he was weeping.

Soon enough, he would come weeping for real.

(Soon enough? Was it a specific time Thor was remembering? Was it a blend of dozens of non-specific times?)

Loki's hug still didn't loosen up, and his legs were firmly wrapped around Thor, like he never wanted to let go.

But he had to, and for all of Loki's strength, he was no match for Thor's sudden rush to get the hell out of there, out of danger.

He would always be the first to break it up. He'd shake his brother off, get up and away from the bed, tidy his clothes up in a hurry, tugging and pulling, doing a terrible job of it, clumsy, frantic. *Fuck, look at the time, they're almost here.*

He remembered Loki still in his bed, exactly as Thor had left him, still a mess, quiet, his eyes hard. Thor dodged them.

He finished sorting himself out, snarled at his brother, *fucking clean up already, you want mum to find you like this?* He wouldn't wait to see what Loki would do. He'd run out of there and lock
himself up in his room, shaking.

And as careful as he'd been not to look at Loki's eyes, they were seared in his brain to this fucking day. If you only had a quick look, they'd just seem hard and cold, but Loki was always so expressive. A second look, and you'd see it there, in spite of it all, his hopeless, wretched love.

They fucked in Sif's room. It was great. He was so horny, and she was so athletic, and so crazy about him. She wanted it all. She knew what she was doing, too, and she did it with self-assurance and expertise. A far cry from a frantic romp in a teenager's bed, but hardly like a slow fuck with the love of your life on black volcanic earth under the sun that never sets. Either way, the real need Thor brought into it, came out the other way just as desperate as it arrived.

Pillow talk consisted of Sif grilling him about his sex life.

"You're a bit of a slut, Odinson," she said, once she had a better idea of whom she was dealing with.

"Not a bit," Thor laughed. "I'm the genuine article."

"You don't have girlfriends though. Or boyfriends." Because he had confirmed that Fandral had not been a drunk exception, and that he did swing both ways.

"Nah. I'm not relationship material," he said.

"Oh," said Sif, after a beat.

"Sorry," he said, with a sad little smile. Wasn't he full of them. She put herself together very quickly, but not quickly enough.

"I already knew that, you idiot," she said.

She rolled on her back, stared at the ceiling in silence.

Thor sighed.

"So what do we do now?" she asked.

Thor shrugged. "I don't know."

On Sunday, before he had to head for the station to take a train to Asgard Hall for the Christmas holidays, he found himself at the seedy bar in front of The Dark World, Loki's old club. They'd told
him months ago, that Loki wasn't there anymore, that he'd up and left one day, and they'd never seen him again, but Thor kept coming back. As bad as his memories of that place were, it was here he had last seen his brother.

He would sit at their table if it was free (usually was), and stare at the vacant chair, and feel like a pathetic, miserable idiot, trying in his head all the words he never said, and all the things he never did, that would have made everything different. The more time went by, the less he believed in them. Maybe mum was right, and there was nothing he could have done.

But if that was so, if Thor had been completely powerless the one time Loki had needed him the most, then what was the fucking point of him at all.

He had just time to stop by Loki’s apartment and have a quick tidy up. The landlady did the dusting every month or so, aired the rooms, and checked everything was in place. Thor let some fresh air in, had a look around. Nothing had been disturbed. Damn. He kept hoping he’d get there and find Loki’s favourite leather jacket gone missing, or some shirts, or perhaps a photo. Anything. Any clue that he was out there and that he was alive.

Fury’s people had a permanent alert out for Loki, but they were not actively seeking anymore. Hill had been reassigned to another job. Last time they spoke, she said she believed Loki had not left London, but he might have changed his appearance, wasn’t using his real name, and was keeping away from the system. What a strange way of saying that he was living in the street, or stashed in some whorehouse without ever seeing the light of day, or dead in a gutter somewhere.

No, Loki lived. Thor couldn’t bare to think he didn’t, and he clung ferociously onto his deeply held faith that, if something bad like that was ever to happen to his brother, he would feel it somehow, that he would know.

No, Loki lived. He lived, and they would meet again, and perhaps Thor would be able to make amends.

Frigga died in the Spring.

It had been so sudden. One day she was there, the next day he was on the phone to his dad and they were both crying. Her heart had stopped, just like that, how was that even possible?

Thor’s life had suddenly entered the realm of the surreal. He walked around as if he had just been hit by a football in the schoolyard, shocked and dazed and thinking “that’s not fair”.

Everything had been taken care of in advance, and many other things fell in the hands of friends and relatives, except the worst parts —what dress she would wear, what jewellery. How was Thor
supposed to know that. Loki would have known.

Her ashes were scattered at Asgard Hall just like she had asked for.

Odin had asked for all the flowers to be moved to the main hall. He wanted none in his studio.

The mourners had all left by now. Thor had had to insist, and be firm, when Odin’s sister and her family had wanted to stay so that they could look after them. Odin had been bristly all day, irritable and short-tempered, forced to maintain his stiff upper-lip while shaking hands and acknowledging condolences from colleagues, politicians and aristocracy. Now that it was all over, he didn’t want anyone around. Thor didn’t blame him.

The help they had hired for the day had also left. They were alone in the house. It was quiet.

Thor knocked on the door of the studio.

“Come in.”

He found Odin slumped in his leather armchair by the hearth. There was no fire of course, not in Spring.

“I was going to bed. Just checking to see if you’re… if you have all you need,” said Thor.

He had been doing this every night for the last two weeks, and he still felt clumsy and hesitant. That was not who they were. Thor was not the dutiful, helpful son, and Odin was not one to be looked after like an old spinster aunt. The roles didn’t suit them. But somebody had to make sure the man ate something at least once a day, and did not subsist solely on pickings from his wine cellar. What would happen when Thor had to go back to school. Ah, Thor couldn’t think that far ahead right now. He could not think beyond the next few hours. He could not bear it.

“Sit down, son,” said his dad. He had an empty tumbler in his hand, and the redness in his cheeks and his glassy eye told Thor it wasn’t the first one. “Have a drink.”

Thor walked to the liquor cabinet and poured himself two fingers worth. He was going to need it, if his father wanted to talk. Or not talk. Thor wasn’t looking forwards to neither.

He sat down on the armchair opposite his dad’s. Ideally, Thor thought, for the scene to really come together, there should be a fire there. But the weather had been obscenely pleasant, warm and bright, no worse than crisp in the evenings, and fragrant. Frigga would have approved. Thor hated it. That the world could remain so lovely even after she’d gone. But what would she have said?

“What would have been a good time for me to leave?”

(“Oh no! Not in spring-time! Summer, winter or fall! No, never could I leave you at all!”*)

He sat with his father in silence, only the grandfather’s clock ticking solemnly in the corner, muffled somewhat by the books covering almost every available bit of wall. The crackling of a few burning logs and the breathing of the flames wouldn’t have gone amiss. Even though the studio had always been to Thor a pleasantly cluttered, welcoming place, that stillness felt so empty, so wrong, so off.

“How are you, son,” asked Odin, after some time.
Thor had a solid draught, so that the burn in his throat came from the scotch and not from the need to cry.

“I’m fine.”

Odin studied him with his one eye, then he looked away to the fire that should have been there.

“You’ve done well,” said his father. “How you managed things. I know I have been useless.”

Thor nodded. What could he say.

“You’ve been trying to find your brother,” asserted Odin, no doubt in his voice.

Thor stared in surprise. He’d had Fury’s people on crazy shifts, combing entire neighbourhoods in a mad attempt to smoke him out. He had not said one word about it to anyone.

What was his father was getting at. Thor waited in silence. He was terrified this would become yet another horrible sermon that would anger him and chip away some more at the love and respect he still could not help but feel for his father. He didn’t think he could handle it tonight, not tonight.

“Your mother believed he is still out there,” said Odin. “That he had a journey of his own to make, but that he would return when it was done.”

Thor swallowed. He needed a sip for that. He nodded. Yeah, she'd told him that too.

“And you? What do you believe?” Odin asked.

Thor stared at his dad for a long moment.

“I don’t know anymore.”

“What do you mean.”

“That he… he would have come,” his voice faltered. He tried. ”If he was out there, he would have come. Nothing in the world would have kept him.”

Odin regarded him fondly. He was a man who appreciated loyalty.

“Your mother thought your brother was practically indestructible. She said he was the strongest of us all. I did not understand what she meant, I suppose I don’t need to tell you that. I’m aware that, when it comes to your brother, I understand very little. But she knew him well, better than you and me, and if she believed he is still out there, well, why don’t you trust her judgement?” His old dad leaned forwards to pat his knee, hard enough to make him wince, and then squeezed it better. “Don’t cry, son.”

Thor scrubbed his face to clear the tears away. Looking out the window, unable to face his dad, he took another draught. He couldn’t help the sniffing.

“Your mother would know what to tell you,” said Odin. “She should have been the one consoling you, not me. I should be the one getting the flowers. Damn!” he suddenly cried, and smashed his fist on the arm of his chair.

Thor startled.

Odin took strong, huffing breaths, trying to hold tears at bay.
“She was a better parent than I ever was. She always knew what to say, when to be stern, when to be forgiving. She never ran out of patience. She loved your brother as fully and freely as she loved you. I… I never did.”

Thor really, really didn’t want to talk about Loki tonight. He couldn’t fucking handle any more. He felt as if running on air as it was. But Odin was not finished. With his eye lost in space, or another time, he proceeded with a confession nobody had asked for.

“I never understood him. He never felt completely mine. I wanted to love him unconditionally and make no differences, but… I’m just not a very good man, I suppose.” A crooked half a smile, all the more scathing for all the bitterness in Odin's eyes. “I never loved him enough. When he was a little boy, it was easier. He was cute, enthusiastic, he looked up to me like I could do no wrong. It was easier, but still, the more Loki followed me around trying to please me, the more I would push him away. When he reached puberty, with all his problems and his moods, I guess I didn’t like him very much, and he didn’t like me. Which I understand of course, with how I treated him. And the more Loki perceived how I felt, the more contrary and difficult he became.”

The pause here was absolutely fucking terrifying. What did his dad need to take stock for, after what he’d already said. The only reason Thor didn't beg him not to go on was that he had no voice.

“I chased him away that day,” Odin said. "I was feeling guilty because of the way he had had to find out about himself. He was absolutely right, his anger was entirely justified, and there was no mending that up, nothing we could really say to make it better, to make it right. There was nowhere to hide. We had fucked up. We had failed him. I had failed him. I had failed him in every single way, every day of his life. And I knew it, I had always known it. I allowed it to happen. I didn't try hard enough, and now it had come to bite me in the arse. We had failed him. We had failed him. We had failed him. I left the rest there, and I took him, but even that was not enough. What else did he need from me, what more could I..." Odin choked. "Deep inside, I guess I had hoped he would just have a little cry, and then turn to us with gratitude in his eyes, and thank us for taking him in. We had saved him from an almost certain death, from misery and abandonment, and brought him up in a comfortable, warm, loving household. He would have died for sure. I had saved him. I had chosen him.” He gesticulated vehemently, pointing at himself, then at nothing. “Not the one on his right, not the one on his left, him. I left the rest there, and I took him, but even that was not enough. What else did he need from me, what more could I..." Odin choked again. Then smiled the bitterest smile Thor had ever seen outside of the fucking movies.

"After all we'd done for him," scoffed Odin, sarcastic, loathing himself. "He hated me, and he was angry at me. And all that time, I had looked down on that hatred, like he had no reason for it, like it was a brat's mindless tantrum he'd grow out of one day or another. But it wasn't, and I always knew it wasn't. And now I had to face it. He had every right to hate me, because I had fucking failed him and hurt him every single bloody day of his life, and I simply did not know how to bloody handle that.”

Odin rubbed the scar under his eyepatch. He looked exhausted.

“I resented him. I wanted to punish him. I was irrational. And awful. And unforgivably insensitive. I
just did not realise I would never get the chance to get over it, and tell him that he was right to hate me, and how much I regretted how badly I had failed him.”

“Why are you telling me this now?” asked Thor, his voice husky from the strange hold in his throat.

“Because…” Odin sighed, pulled on a sad smile that broke his son's heart. “Because if I die without seeing him again, I want you to tell him...” The smile fell. Odin shut his one eye, a tear glinting there. His voice was weak and raspy now. "It wasn't his fault. It was never his fault. Fault lay with me all along. I'm the one who's broken, not him. He deserved better. I should have tried harder. And I'm so, so sorry for his pain.”

After a moment, he emptied his glass and chuckled, scathing, mocking himself cruelly for being an old, sentimental fool, suddenly forced to look at his own mortality in the face, wanting to atone for his sins, when it was far too late to make any difference.

Thor spent some time in Loki’s room. Many times since Loki had gone, he had slept in his bed. But there was a strange atmosphere tonight. It was so lonely there, not even the ghosts of their games and their summer afternoons left behind to warm the air. The place was cold and empty as a grave.

Because Loki had to have known about Frigga’s death. It had been first page of every newspaper, in the UK and in many countries abroad. The BBC had covered the funeral live, bloody royals had attended. The pile of flowers at the gates of Asgard Hall, the London flat, and the National Theatre would take an entire brigade each to clear, when somebody got round to it. So why in the world had Loki missed his mum’s funeral, what would it have taken for him to not be here today?

He could not possibly be so resentful, he could not possibly put his spat with Thor and Odin above the love he surely must still feel for their mother.

Or could he. Thor didn’t fucking know anymore. The Loki he had talked to at the club, the horrible things he had told him, the sick enjoyment he had taken in tormenting him… who the fuck was that man. What did that man feel, what did that man think. Was his brother still in there somewhere.

Was it possible that he'd seen the news and didn't give a damn?

...No, fuck, Thor’s insides twisted if he allowed himself to even entertain that thought.

*Just where the fuck was he.*

He had to be dead. Death was surely the only thing that could have kept Loki from coming to his mum’s funeral.

And Thor was in between a really fucking pointy rock and a really fucking hard place here, unable to decide if he preferred that his brother was dead, rather than think that he lived, and that he had not come because he did not fucking want to. Because he did not care, or because he cared more about his own issues than he did about his own goddamn mother. If this was what Loki had become, shit, perhaps he was better off dead.

*(How can you even think that.)*

And here come the fucking waterworks again. Everything fucking hurt. Thor was drowning in it, strangled by it, crushed under a massive pile of it. At times he felt as if he could not move for the
weight of it. He could not see a way beyond this pain. That night he thought he would surely die from it.

He cried in his own bedroom for a long time.

After a long time, when he had nothing more to give, he re-read his friends’ messages on his phone. He thought about going back to school, going back to rehearsals for the professional production of *Thelma and Louise* he had been cast in, going back to work.

And started to drag himself out of his own little private slice of Tartarus once again.

He had to keep a very narrow, very tight focus. The moment he strayed one step away from it, the absence of his mum and his brother crashed down on him like a whole ocean’s worth of a wave. How the fuck was he supposed to carry on like this.

He was irrational. Grief was overwhelming him, that’s what it was, right? And it would ease in time, and he’d start to see a way forward. *This too shall pass*, as his mum would have said. Eventually, he wouldn’t see a fucking desert of black rock and ash whenever he thought about the future. People lose loved ones every day, and they pull through. *And so will you*.

But how was it even possible, when he struggled to so much as keep breathing the moment he remembered that mum was gone, that he would never see her again, that he would forever miss her, with not a minute of consolation or respite, not a day of holiday. Never-fucking-more. And that the only other person who would have felt exactly the same as he did, the only other person in whose arms he could have found true comfort, was as lost to him as she was.

*@

He stopped going to the club. He stopped going to Loki’s place. He kept his head down and worked his arse off to get his sorry self through it.

He had not cried so much since he was a goddamn babe. Sometimes he didn’t have the strength to get himself out of bed. Sometimes all he could do was cower up in a corner and weep.

But his friends had his back. They surrounded him quietly, or cushioned him with conversations he wasn’t required to participate in; they put plates of food in front of him, and a glass of beer; after a while, when he allowed it, they took him out to the movies every now and again, or forced X-Box controls into his hands. When he was able, they kept him busy with all sorts of things. They had never had a cleaner house or an emptier to-do list.

Sif threw him long looks, but it was Fandral’s bed he took to every now and then. Much easier, much cleaner, harmless. He thought Sif understood. For once, he was trying to do what was decent.
It was a long, tough few months, but eventually, whole weeks went by without him needing to shut himself away somewhere to cry. When he woke up in the middle of the night, he was managing to go back to sleep before dawn. Days were passing without him having to push with all his might.

Much, much later, he stopped feeling guilty whenever he laughed. And one day, he was able to remember her without crying.

He had been right, however, that he missed her every day, his thoughts went back to her every day. Like a child on camp, he supposed, he was able to distract himself from it, but sooner or later, in a moment of quiet, he remembered that mum and dad weren't there, and he sunk.

She wasn't there, and she was never coming back.

Tony Stark called late in the summer.

“IT's the prequel to Master and Commander, when Aubrey gets his first post and meets Maturin. If it works, there will be one more, maybe two. In the second and third book they meet their women… You were born for this, Thor. You are Jack Aubrey. Say yes.”

To Thor's surprise, he was ready, and able, and willing. He wanted a change of scenery like air. He was looking forward to an adventure.

* 

And that's when he got the letter, on the set of Master and Commander, about five months later, reposted from his London address. Such a plain little thing it was, or so it seemed.

“Dear Thor,

I have taken up the apartment again. Thank you for maintaining it for me. It will not be necessary for you to keep paying the rent anymore. And I will pay you back.

I hope you can forgive all the things I said that day, and how I acted with you when you came to the club. I could say I wasn’t myself, but that would hardly excuse it. Just know that I’ve regretted it for a long time now.
Please don’t come see me. That is, if you even want to see me ever again. Maybe some day.

I hope you are well.

Love,

Loki.”

Loki lives.

Thor sat in his room, shell-shocked, paralysed.

Loki lives.

“Please don’t come see me.”


Puente Antiguo, New Mexico, four months later. Thor stood on his mark while Lori gave the finishing touches to the fake wound on his brow.

“Damn flies…” she cursed, looking but not looking at Thor’s face, focused on the make-up.

She sprinkled the wound with the dust-spray. Thor’s whole face was caked in that fake blood, fake ooze and dust gunk. With its sugary base, Thor was very popular with every flying insect in the desert. The flies were the most dedicated extras. They never asked for time off. In a fair world, they’d get a special thanks in the end credits.

It was baking hot. Thor’s costume, a ragged, tatty, dirtied uniform, unfitting, haphazardly pieced together, was thick, woollen and scratchy, and the prosthetic wounds and scars all over his torso and leg, latex-based, stunk when the sun hit them. Let me tell you something, thought Thor while he waited for Lori to finish, see the look of complete and utter misery in my face? I’m not even acting.

Nevertheless, he did enjoy the mental place his character put him in, as devastating as it was. It was
cathartic. Not to mention the fact that he modestly believed he was fucking killing it. He felt good, at his best, what he had been working on in drama school coming through, and though he went to bed every night flat-out exhausted, he was always looking forwards to tomorrow’s scenes, eager to sink his teeth in them.

They spent the rest of the afternoon on that scene. Thor repeated his single line and crumbled to the ground in utter despair half a dozen times, while Ray Winstone as Judge Holden hovered and delivered his lines, twisted, callous arguments that ruthlessly did away with Thor’s character last shreds of morality and hope for redemption. Thor’s contribution was mostly in the shape of grunts, and everything else had to happen on his face, and nothing else.

Ray gave him a bear hug when they packed it in. “Man, you’re good,” he told him. Mr. Winstone was doing an outstanding job as Judge Holden. There were already conversations about whether to pit them against each other as best actor, since the Judge could only be considered a supporting role by the skin of his teeth.

Thor thought his father would have made a great Judge Holden twenty years ago, and he sometimes acted his scenes as if it was Odin he was facing. The wealth of undertones that surfaced then delighted everyone but him.

God, he was tired and raw down to his bloody bones.

Peeling the latex off took three very long quarters of an hour. Thor submitted, mind on the ice cold shower that awaited him at the end. He would make it, barely.

Clean hair, clean body, clean clothes. Pure bliss.

He put on his sunglasses and that Indiana Jones hat they had let him keep from *Jurassic Island* (it was weathering so nicely), climbed onto the pickup truck he had been provided with, and drove to a stop at the gate of the fenced perimeter of the studio lands to sign a few autographs.

There were never more than a dozen people there, so he was able to look at them in the face, ask their names, pose for selfies; he even had time to talk on the phone to people who had not made it there. It was civilised, human and heart-warming. If only all of his interactions with fans were like this.

He often remembered Jane Foster, if the sun was down especially, and a couple of hours of peace under the stars when he had most needed it. Those memories filled him with gratitude, and a gentle melancholy that seemed to soothe and dispel other, harsher thoughts he associated with that time. He toyed constantly with the idea of looking for her. He did not know where to begin. He could hardly put Nick Fury on her tail... Whatever would she think of that?

He did check carefully the small crowd every day, and he hoped.

And then, one day, there she was, among the rest of the fans. Still small, still precious, her eyes so warm, her face every bit as beautiful as he remembered, her own smile just as radiant as his had become taking her in.

When he hugged her, it felt right.

They laughed over dinner, falling easily into step with each other as if they had spoken only
yesterday. They had fun with tiny things, like their British and her American slang. She had been catching up on Thor’s career, and apparently her opinion on superhero movies had improved somewhat. She also had some kind words about his mother.

“It was a year last week since she died,” said Thor.

She held his hand for a beat. Thor held it back.

They made love in his hotel room, after kissing for, what, an hour? He hadn’t made out like that since… Damn. …Damn.

It was sweet. She was sweet. And clever, and genuine. She put it all out there. She felt strongly about things. She was brave and spoke her mind. She had no duplicity, she didn’t play games. She didn’t remind him of anyone.

The sex was good. She loved his body one hell of a lot. It was good to be looked after like that, and worshipped. She was very responsive, very sensual, and so light; the possibilities… And she was blooming gorgeous. Thor couldn’t get enough of that mirror-smooth skin of hers.

When the location shoot ended, Jane said she understood that it was too complicated, and she was ready to say goodbye as good friends. Thor wasn’t. He asked her whether she believed that they could try to make it work out somehow. He had a play in London, and the publicity tour for Master and Commander straight after that, but if they were both patient, perhaps… Her eyes when she heard that. She jumped to his neck, delighted to be lifted with one arm, just like that, and she said “we can try.”

The first time they said I love you was on the phone.

Beginnings are always great, or they should be. Honeymoons. Yes, it was a long flight, but Thor was always looking forwards to it. They didn’t have that much time together, but it was so bloody nice. They would go out for groceries, cook dinner, make love, spend the weekend in bed, or sometimes play cards or boardgames with her friends. They would sometimes meet somewhere nice for a short holiday.

It was a nomadic lifestyle, with more than one base, which suited him. He found it hard to spend too long in any one place, like he was on the run.

Even when he was with Jane. When he had more than a week or ten days in New Mexico with her, eventually he was bored out of his mind. He appreciated short periods of domesticity, but he suffocated if they lasted too long. This troubled him, of course, and kept him from looking too far into the future. He tried to ignore it as hard as he could. One day at a time.

She didn't want to do red carpets. When he took her to premieres, she went round the back. She didn't want the spotlight. When paparazzi attacked them in London and L.A., she hid her face.

He introduced her to his father, who was on his most gentlemanly behaviour, but cold. When in London, they would go out to the pub with Fandral, Sif, Hogun sometimes, Volstagg if he could sort out the kids. Sif did have something to say about it the first time. “I thought you were not relationship material.” He did not know what to say.

She was luminous, a beacon of peace and normality in a fairly chaotic life. And he wanted so much
to… to want it all with her. A house with a picket fence, a baby, a dog, the whole shebang. He wished he wanted that, but he didn’t. He wished he loved her more, he wished he felt closer to her. In his heart of hearts, he was still a loner.

Jane sometimes told him that he didn’t talk, that he looked sad for no apparent reason, and why wouldn’t he tell her what the problem was, why was he holding things back from her, did he not trust her? Thor admitted that there were things he would never talk about. Jane could not understand that. She had no secrets for him, why should he?

“Relationships are based on trust,” she argued sternly. "We should be able to talk about everything. And you should feel you can tell me everything."

“Maybe I should, or maybe I shouldn’t, but I don’t intend to,” Thor answered, speaking slowly, that it would not come out too harsh. "The stuff I don’t talk about… it’s not just mine to share.”

He didn't mean to be mysterious. He wanted the subject to drop out of her mind, not intrigue her even more. But he had no idea what to tell her that would put her at ease. It was one thing to keep stuff to himself, and lying outright was another.

This had been one of the first big arguments. Nobody lifted their voice, and they had kissed and made up straight away, but long after, you could still feel the scar. The phrase 'irreconcilable differences' came to mind.

Thor did not deceive himself that it was only because he traveled so much that it was lasting for as long as it was. He didn’t want to break up, that wasn’t it, but there were many aspects of the relationship that were only bearable, for both of them, because they had regular holidays from each other.

Thor half trusted that time would take care of that. That he would settle into it eventually. What they had was good, more than good. He was just young and building a career and still wary of feeling too caught up. He didn't want a grown up life yet, but he would some day soon, for sure, and he couldn't do much better than Jane.

But he was plagued by the memories. He compared what he felt with Jane with what he had felt with Loki and… fuck, let’s be realistic here, nobody would ever stand a chance, nobody would ever come close. Loki was his ideal partner, in spite of it all. Loki was never ordinary, he couldn’t stand mediocrity or blandness. Loki grabbed you by the throat and made you feel alive. The fun they had together, the passion, the unquenchable thirst for each other, the electrified connection.

Even fighting with Loki had nothing to do with fighting with Jane. There was nothing civilised or reasonable about it. They would shout and bicker and call each other names, and scream "I hate you!" at the top of their lungs, and nothing was broken afterwards; they didn't even have to apologise. They were indestructible; if anything, they fucked harder, they came out stronger.

And how Loki wanted him. He loved Thor even when it wasn’t good for him. They just couldn't help themselves. Everything was extreme and absolute and black and white and so, so fucking thrilling. How could this suburban, polite, moderate understanding he was living in ever begin to compare with that.

But they'd been teenagers then, and now they were grown ups. Thor missed being a teenager in love, that’s what it was, and it would never come back, not with Loki or with anyone else. And was Thor really sure this would make him happy nowadays? Don't be a child.
But there were also those times when they had been at peace together, Loki and him, and damn. Would Thor ever feel as much tenderness towards another living soul? As fucking weird as the thought was, after everything that had happened, the fact was that he had fucking fed Loki his goddamn bottle. He'd held his hands when he was learning to walk. He'd lullabied him to sleep. He taught him to ride a bike and how to tie his shoes. He calmed him when the windows of big, scary Asgard Hall shook with thunder. He'd zipped his coat up every morning on the way to school for fucking years. He had loved him since before he could remember. Loki had loved him absolutely every day of his life, safe for those untold months when he'd been a Russian orphan.

And that love and the other kind existed together and fed each other, and there was simply nothing that could compare.

While Loki had been lost, Thor had mourned him. Now he knew Loki was alive, and where he was living, the ache for his brother was like a goddamn physical punch. It wasn't getting any easier either. His absence was as disrupting as having a limb torn in the morning, and forgetting in the evening, and waking up with the lack as fresh and poignant as the day before. It had been years, and he still wasn't used to it.

And Jane and him had good times, very good times of true companionship together. It was domestic in a good way. Thor could be in his life in peace and calm, and not feel suffocated by it.

But the thought of Loki just across the pond (sometimes even just on the other side of town, because Thor visited his father) had sunk a spike in Thor's flesh, and it only took trying to breath for him to feel it.

He fantasised about going to him. About turning up at his door, and throw himself at Loki's feet, and beg him to take him back. He kept thinking about flying to London and damn it all to hell.

But Loki's letter stopped him cold. The things Loki said the last time they spoke.

What kind of a bastard would go and ask Loki even the fucking time of day, after all the harm Thor had already caused him? He blamed himself for his breakdown at fourteen, and for his runner at nineteen —at least, he thought he could have stopped him. And Loki had left the relative safety of the club where he had been working in for god knows what alternative, only because Thor had tracked him down there, and had not stopped pestering even when he had been asked, out of god knows what sense of entitlement or fucked up saviour complex. You selfish son-of-a-bitch.

You fucking hurt, Thor.

Loki was fucking right. Thor was bad news. He was bad for him. He always would be. Loki needed someone who could love him openly, not a coward and a scumbag like him.

Would Thor drop everything if Loki asked him, his career, his life in the States? At this point in life, the way he was feeling about him…? Probably. Fuck, yes. But then, after three days, he would start to miss it, and then he would resent him for the rest of their lives. Right? It went both ways.

And even if he didn’t, then what? He could not fucking marry his own brother, adopted or not. In what fucking planet was that even an option for the sons of Odin Borson.

No, he would never be good for Loki, ever. There was no dream scenario in which it could happen. It was impossible between them. So Thor would never beg him to take him back, for Loki's sake.

He went to sleep at night wishing he could just be grateful for what he had with Jane, and embrace it fully. He woke up every morning knowing he would not.
The heart wants what it fucking wants, Odinson. Life is hard. Suck it up.

The first time Thor really spoke about his brother with Jane, he was about to leave for London to see his play. She wanted to know why he wished to go by himself, and he more or less offered her a heavily purged version of their common history, Loki’s and his. He admitted he had hopes of talking to him, but that he didn’t really know how, or if Loki would even want to see him at all. He admitted Loki had been on his mind for a long time. He confessed it was Loki he was often struggling with when he wouldn’t tell her what was wrong.

“Why wouldn’t you tell me that?” She had been puzzled.

He could not answer.

Overall, she had reacted as if she had been given the key to the kingdom, in the shape of a piece of his true mind. She encouraged him to do all he could to get to him and “straighten things out with Loki.”

“I just want to see him do well,” Thor had said.

How the fuck was he managing to feel more like a liar now than every time he had answered “nothing” when she had asked “what’s wrong”, Thor didn’t have a clue. It seemed, when it came to Loki, that all Thor could do was fuck up.

She said goodbye at the airport and wished him good luck. She looked a bit desperate. Desperate for Thor to sort himself out, he guessed, and come home having achieved closure and balance and peace, and let himself have a life with her, once and for all.

(The present. The day after The Rocky Horror Show.)

“Mr. Laufeyson to see you, sir,” said the disembodied voice on the phone.

Thor blanked out.

The voice of the concierge repeated the announcement, a bit louder this time.
“Let him up,” answered Thor, mouth dry.

His room was on the third floor. The lift was parsimoniously slow. Thor paced like a caged panther while he waited.

A knock at the door. Thor's heart jumped. His hands were shaking when he opened.

There he was, Loki Laufeyson, the fucking rock star, in his furs and make-up, his hair up in a messy bun, nails obsidian black. He was outrageously beautiful.

“May I come in?” he said.

Thor's insides turned upside down. It was the sound of Loki’s voice, so familiar, not projected from the stomach to fill an entire theatre, but soft, quiet even, intimate.

Thor had no words. He pushed the door open for his brother, and moved aside. Loki walked in slowly, cautiously.

“Do you want anything to drink?” Thor had found his words. His voice came out darker than usual with nerves.

“What have you got up here? I don’t want to have to call room service.” Loki sounded subdued, muffled.

“The works,” said Thor.

“Fizzy water,” said Loki. “Please.”

Thor got him a bottle and a glass from the minibar. Out of the corner of his eye, he spied Loki unbuttoning his coat, but keeping it on, like armour, long arms wrapped around himself. He wore black jeans and motorist boots underneath, and a black, chunky knit jumper with a cosy collar he seemed to be trying to hide in, skittish as a cat in a new place.

Thor checked his own hand. It was still shaking. He got himself a beer.

“Here,” he said, leaving Loki’s drink on the coffee table rather than handing it over. He did it gently, as if he was afraid Loki would be startled by the noise. “Don’t you want to sit down?”

Loki took a quick look around and he chose the armchair. Thor took the couch. He couldn't get his eyes off Loki's pale, angular features. There were new marks on his skin, around his eyes, across his forehead, faint but there. His face was sharper. He'd been on the cusp of reaching adulthood when they'd last seen each other. Now he was an adult. No baby fat left. Still young of course, but with the suppleness of young skin just starting to show signs of weariness.

There was a silence, uncomfortable as all fuck. Both were trying to think of what to say, or how to say it, or trying to find the voice to say it with.

(They'd been almost telepathic with each other, once.)

“Did you enjoy the show?” said Loki at last.

“Very much,” said Thor, with expansive relief. “I don’t remember the last time I enjoyed myself so much. You were… you were incredible. Really. Amazing. I’m… I’m lost for words.”

“Eloquence was never your strong suit,” jabbed Loki, no hardness to it. His eyes fixed on his hands, clenched on his lap.
A moment later, with a tiny, tight grin, and what sounded like plain sincerity, "I'm flattered. Thank you."

Thor nodded; try as he might, he couldn't think of what else to say.

"I never thanked you in person for preserving the apartment and all my things," said Loki. "It didn’t then, but it means a lot now. Thank you."

Thor nodded, dumb again, emotion clawing at his throat. Every reply that came to mind was soaked in sentiment, in a way he was not sure Loki would appreciate. He opted for keeping it simple and to the point.

"You're welcome."

Loki had still to look him in the eye.

"I hear you're living with an astrophysicist these days," he said, his tone even and unaffected. If anything, a bit shy.

Thor nodded, but the subject seemed to him so utterly poisoned and hazardous, he couldn't think of anything to say that could not blow everything up.

"What do you two actually talk about?" mocked Loki. With no real malice. "Or is it not your conversation she is into."

Thor laughed. It was a big chuckle, bursting with nervousness.

Hearing it, Loki's eyes had brightened up. Oh, baby, Thor sighed, crumbling inside. God help me.

Thor harrumphed, sipping at his beer. He finally had something.

"I hear you're living with a girl," he said.

For the first time, Loki looked up, and met his eyes. Thor felt as if he was being calibrated, the cogs and wheels of Loki’s brain whirring, pondering what answer to give.

"It’s not like that," was what Loki settled on at last. "She’s a good friend. She keeps me right." His voice so soft, so light. No snark, no hurt, no horrible sadness simmering underneath it. His speech was subdued, but his stare was as piercing as ever.

Thor nodded. And it was really none of his business, but…

"What about this Brad bloke," he asked.

"What about him."

"I hear rumours."

"All true, I’m sure," smiled Loki, demure. "You know me. Believe everything you hear."

Thor nodded again. He'd take that non-answer. He really had no right to ask.

"It’s good to see you doing so well," Thor said, catching himself just before he called him ‘brother’. He had no idea how that would go down, what with Loki's change of surname and everything. He realised once more, with a sinking feeling, that he really didn’t know him that well at all, not anymore.
“How is... Odin,” asked Loki.

“How is... Odin,” asked Loki.

“Keeping busy, I’m sure you’ve heard. When he is working, he is fine. At home... struggling. Without mum... I managed to make him accept some help around the house but... Anyway. You know dad.”

Loki nodded, his eyes low, his eyelashes long.

“He... he talks about you, sometimes” added Thor.

Loki raised his eyes for a flick, pulling that little crooked grin that had always made Thor’s pulse speed up.

“I suppose I don't want to know,” Loki said.

“No, I think you would like to hear this, actually,” he said, and he hoped the warmth in his eyes spoke his meaning.

But he wouldn’t speak of it now. Only if Loki ever asked.

A silence.

“How was... the funeral,” asked Loki, a painful wince in his brow.

Thor took a deep breath.

“It was beautiful. There were so many people. I mean, from the business, and royals, and politicians, and the works, but lots of normal people too. She was loved by so many. I still have people come to me on the street to tell me how much she meant to them, and that she touched their lives. She would have liked it.”

Thor had not asked out loud, but the question must have been blatant enough on his face that Loki answered it just the same.

“I was in hospital,” said Loki, his voice thinning by the second. “They did not know my real name. I was disconnected in there. Nobody told me. When I heard I...” Loki's eyes pinched shut for a moment, with a sudden ache. “I couldn't handle it. I wasn't fit to go to the funeral. I wanted to go. I... I'm sorry.” His back and shoulders were slumped, as if he was trying to become smaller.

Thor shook his head, but he couldn't talk at first. He was desperate to crush him in his arms and wipe that guilt away somehow. He could not, he had been uninvited a long time ago.

“I know, Loki,” he tried. "She knew it too.”

Loki’s face tensed, about to break out in tears. He stood up and rushed to the bathroom. Thor heard the water running.

After a few minutes, Loki came back, face rubbed clean, his pale skin flushed where he had scrubbed it. There you are, thought Thor.

Loki kept his eyes low. He started to button up his coat.

“I have to go,” he said, producing a pair of sunglasses from the depths of those huge patch pockets.

No...
Thor nodded. He didn’t get up. He fucking couldn’t. *Don’t go.* In his head, he was begging on his knees.

Loki strode purposely to the door, but as he walked passed him, he slowed down and stopped. Suddenly, his hand was on Thor's chest, a desperate touch, a stroke so full of need, it had claws in it. Thor stopped breathing. He latched onto his brother's hand, and clung on tight. Neither was looking at the other. Thor closed his eyes, and for a second the whole world was reduced to Loki’s hand in his.

Loki started to pull away. For a second, Thor refused to let go.

*No!*

Loki insisted, Thor released him.

Loki stopped by the door. Thor, with his back to him, could see his brother's ghostly reflection in the windows. He was putting on his sunglasses.

“Tell your astrophysicist I said hi,” said Loki.

The door clicked shut behind him.

“Did you get closure?” Jane said. Her kind, hazel eyes, so compassionate, now had an edge of impatience that had not been there before.

“Closure?” said Thor.

“Yes. Did you manage to sort things out between the two of you?”

Thor was exhausted, and irritated, and full of a terrible, cruel contempt.

It wasn’t fair on her of course. She did not know. How could she know? He had never told her. He never told her anything. How could she ever begin to understand?

“I don’t know,” he said, tiredly. “I don’t know.”
Right, notes. Lots of notes. Because I love to talk to a captive audience about the things I love.

1. The Rocky Horror Show, and the movie, The Rocky Horror Picture Show. What do you mean you don't know it. GO FIND IT. In the movie theatres, and in the theatrical productions, the audience participates with stock phrases and chanted replies to the dialogues on stage and/or in the screen. And dance to things in the corridor, most famously The Time Warp. (It's just a jump to the left...)

I had the huge privilege of attending a few fucking awesome cinema nights in Barcelona ages ago, after me and my sis discovered the movie all on our own in our home, and became addicted for months. We thought there was something a little bit wrong with us, but apparently it's a very common occurrence. It's that awesome.

Now, if somebody would art me Loki as Frank'n'Furter, Thor as Brad and Jane as Janet, I could die in peace. I would even pay moneys to see that.

Anyway, go refresh your memories on youtube if you must, for reference purposes.

2. Thor attends an imaginary drama school I made up. He would never go to RADA, because that's where Odin went, and thanks, but no thanks. It's such an outlandish place, you can start your school year in the summer term if you like, how's that? Convenient, you say? I say brilliant.

3. The (*). Right, that line is from the song "If ever should I leave you" from the musical Camelot. Lance sings it to Ginny (I kid you not with the pet names), when they know they have to break up their adulterous romance, but of course they're so in love there is no time, Spring, Summer, Winter or Fall, when Lance could bring himself to leave her. It's very romantic. I like that song.

4. Master and Commander. From the novel of the same name, by Patrick O'Brian. It's a historical series of twenty marvellous, beautiful books that delight the soul and make one believe in the essential good of humankind as a species, one of which was adapted (lacking the humour and the little moments of intimacy that are really what stands out in the books) by... Hmmm I'm going to say Peter Weir (Right?) with another glorious Australian (oh, no, sorry, New Zealander), Mr. Russell Crowe as the heroic, ingenious captain, Jack Aubrey, and the much-too-pretty-for-the-part-but-yes-ok-we'll-take-it Paul Bettany as his doctor best friend, Stephen Maturin (of Catalan ascendency, and a fighter for the Catalan cause. RELEVANT TO MY INTERESTS!) Thor would make an extremely yummy and really great young Aubrey. One lives in hope. I love to see these old boats in action.

5. Blood Meridian, we've talked about. Ray Winstone is a real actor. I agonised over who to cast for Judge Holden, because all I see is Marlon Brando in Apocalypse Now, albino version, but I like Ray. He has the brutality and the intelligence. Anyway, you're welcome to disagree with my casting decision.

And I'm quite sure that's about it. Unless anyone wants clarifying on Star Wars or Thelma and Louise (let's imagine a production contained in one single motel room where the crux of the drama unfolds, with spoken references to past events leading up to that point, and Thor as J.D, the young hunk once played by Brad Pitt, giving Thelma the fuck of her life.) (Yes, let's imagine that for a bit longer...)

Oh! And one more! "How shall we fuck off, O Lord" is what the people of Israel chant
as one to Brian, on the occasion of the Sermon of His Mother's Balcony, when he is trying to convince them to think for themselves as individuals and eventually tells them to fuck off. It's from Monty Python's The Life of Brian.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

"Loki shut the hotel room door behind his back and leaned against it, with a long sigh. The hand Thor had held, he was clutching tight. If you smell it, or kiss it, or do any such sappy, pathetic thing, Loki told himself, I’m disowning you. Pull your fucking self together."

Chapter Notes

UPDATE (May 25th 2015)

As some of you may know, I am slowly ploughing through the whole fic to tweak, edit, and re-write things that bug me. In many cases the alterations are minor, or simply taking a paragraph that wasn't great and try to improve it. In this case, however, I have added a lot of new stuff.

Sam. We skimmed so quickly over Sam. I didn't give him a lot of entity as a character, and at the time it felt like it was enough, since the main concern of this story was the Thunderfrost, but the more the fic has progressed, the more I realised just how important he would have been for Loki, and that it needed to be given its due.

So I tried to dig just a bit deeper into their relationship and give it a little bit more room to breathe. There will be more on Sam in the chapters currently in preparation (at the time of writing this, it's Ch 27) so I thought I'd go back and start here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(The present.)

Loki shut the hotel room door behind his back and leaned against it, with a long sigh. The hand Thor had held, he was clutching tight. If you smell it, or kiss it, or do any such sappy, pathetic thing, Loki told himself, I’m disowning you. Pull your fucking self together.

With his fists deep inside his coat pockets, Loki made for the lift. His heart was pounding while he waited.

He saw himself in the mirror on the way down, clean face (ish), tear-stricken, but what was that in his eyes. That glint there, it was not all from crying, now, was it?

Damn the butterflies. Damn everything.

Thor. Thor had been happy to see him. Thor had been sad that he was leaving. Thor did not hate him. And perhaps he was reading too much into it, or just wishing so hard for it that he was seeing
things that were not there, perhaps it was just a brother thing, but he could swear that Thor…

And how do we feel about that, Odins— Laufeyson?

(The past)

“You’re beautiful,” his brother said to him. His eyes had not left Loki for one second since he had stepped inside the changing room, after ballet class.

“You’re an arsehole,” said Loki, getting dressed. His hands were shaking, his heart fluttering, his brother’s eyes on him like a branding iron.

“I love you,” said Thor, this time seeking Loki’s eyes with his.

“Sod off,” snapped Loki, with only his snark to protect himself from the bloody interplanetary force-field that was his brother.

As they walked home back from the sports centre, Thor’s protective hand was forever hovering close, as if Loki was still five years old. He would usually give Thor a piece of his mind about it (he was not a fucking kid anymore) but today being coddled, for some reason, did not annoy him.

An early dinner, because mum and dad needed to dash for the theatre straight after. Thor didn’t look at him in any particular way while they were all sat at the table. He had become a fucking pro at pretending everything was normal.

When absolutely nothing was normal. Since their… let’s call it romp, a few weeks ago, Loki was a fucking mess, his heart in turmoil, and good job his mind dissociated so well between his schoolwork and his emotional state, otherwise Loki would be at counselling right now. And wouldn’t that be awkward.

As the time for their parents to leave for the evening approached, Loki’s pulse kept getting quicker and quicker. He sometimes caught Thor’s eye, his brother smiling sweetly at him, as if… as if nothing had happened. What did that even mean. That they were brothers again and all was forgotten, and get over it and get on with their lives? Because that was so not what it felt like today in the changing room. Yes, Loki had deliberately pranced around naked, making a point or something, looking for a reaction, and he had had his reaction. Thor’s intensely blue eyes on him, boring into his flesh as if he was edible.

And did Loki want to be eaten by the big bad wolf? That was the question tonight.

Damn. He just wished he had more experience, or experience, full stop, because… Fuck, he was just so fucking nervous, he didn’t even know if it was the sex part or the— the incest part that was twisting and turning his stomach like that. Because that’s what it’s called, right? Incest. Fuck. Now that’s a thinking point for you. And how does that make you feel. Loki screamed inside, I don’t bloody know.
Loki had shut himself up in his room. Mum had gone in to give him a kiss before she left. He had told her to break a leg. What they always did. Loki had been terrified that she would feel it on him, the nerves, the anticipation, the horniness. He felt as if he was giving it off in waves.

The kids were home alone now.

Knock knock. Loki’s heart revved up to the max.

Thor had not knocked on his door since the evening after they… that evening. He had spent the following day shoving Loki off, giving him “are you insane?” looks, flinching whenever Loki got anywhere near him, dodging him and avoiding Loki’s eyes. Loki had needed a fucking cuddle and a hug like air. He had been so fucking scared.

And after a whole day treating Loki as if he had the plague, he dared come knocking on Loki’s door that very same evening. Loki had told him to fuck off, of course. Apparently, he did have some self-respect left in his spirit somewhere. And by then he had been crying for an hour. Not a good look.

It had been a few weeks since that day. Thor had not been looking very happy. He threw him puppy looks whenever they weren’t barking names at each other, over absolutely everything and nothing. For the last few days, Thor had done all that was humanely possible not to fight, to the point of forfeiting arguments, and going as far as to say “yes, you’re right.” Which could only mean that Loki was dying of terminal something and nobody had told him, or… And now this thing today at the changing room. What did Thor fucking want from him?

Knock knock.

Loki sighed. What did he want.

Ah, what Loki wanted. Well, he didn’t know about Thor, but Loki? Loki had been dreaming about this for fucking ever. The day it had happened, Loki had been flirting and tempting and chasing and he hadn’t thought about where it would lead to and what would happen afterwards. He had just been so fucking hungry, he had not been able to look past the big, blonde hunk his heart was set upon, so damn near, so impossibly far.

Of course he had not thought about the consequences. He had never believed it would happen. Seriously, how could he ever? In what universe does the poor little kid actually get his heart’s desire? That particular desire, anyway?

And to finally get it. Him. Thor’s weight on top of him, his scent all over, his breathing on Loki’s skin, his hardness against his body, his lust, and that look on his face when he had stopped everything he was doing to watch Loki come. It had been better than anything he had ever dreamed of, which was relying on stuff he had read and whatever his PG-13 innocent eyes had managed to get a hold of. (Because the time he had sought for porn he had been fucking horrified and had decided that perhaps that stuff wasn’t for him after all.)

But Thor, he had not been scary. He had kissed him, and he had been so gentle, and he had asked “are you ok?” And he had cradled him with his body after, and covered them both with his quilt, and tangled their fingers together, and kissed the back of Loki’s neck again, and again, and again. God, it had been fucking perfect.

Knock knock.

“Loki?”

Loki got up and sat at his desk. He did not want Thor to find him in bed like… Like he was waiting
for him there.

“Come in.”

Thor walked in and shut the door behind him, taking up half the oxygen in the room with his mere existence. Loki threw him a disinterested look. How could he be so handsome, it was not even fair. He seemed older than other boys his age. He was not sixteen yet but he already looked like a man.

Loki pretended to be reading the book he had just quickly opened to make it seem like he was busy. He didn’t think he was managing it very well, though, his hands were trembling badly. So much for the nonchalant stance.

Thor walked towards him and stood behind his back. Loki was tenser than a violin string. His brother’s big hands on his shoulders, a quick squeeze. Loki felt his stomach plunge. Thor stroked his hair, his scalp. It felt so good, goosebumps all over his skin, blooming under Thor’s hand, trickling down all over Loki’s body. His cock was twitching and filling just from that. Fuck, he had started getting hard the moment Thor had knocked on the bloody door.

Thor kept petting him for a bit. Loki did not send him away, so Thor interpreted that as a ‘go ahead, what else you got’, and he bent down, put his mouth on Loki’s neck, just under his jaw, to kiss him there.

“Ah…” gasped Loki, jolting, very much against his will, which was to remain cool and not fucking faint like a… like a fourteen-year-old schoolboy being touched like that for the very first fucking time by the man of his fucking dreams. Ok, the second time. But the first time there had been not much occasion to think or to decide.

This time though. This time everything was so slow, so deliberate. This time every bloody step forwards was planned, reviewed and approved, before going on to the next. It was an exercise in consent, yes after yes after yes. It was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to him.

Thor’s lips kneaded his neck and Loki tilted his head, eyes hooded, to allow better access. He was panting now, his lips dry. He was so fucking hard he thought he might come at any second. Thor’s kisses climbed up his neck. Suddenly, his tongue in Loki’s ear, like a live wire.

“Ah!” He had startled. He was dizzy, overexcited.

Thor moved away.

“Are you ok?” he asked, his voice so husky Loki could fucking melt. “Do you want me to go?”

Loki very much did not want him to go. He did not want him to stop. He shook his head no, his chest heaving.

After a second or two, Thor spun him around on his swivel chair, knelt in front of him, gripped Loki’s chin to make him look up. Loki met his eyes. It wasn’t easy.

“I can stop” said Thor, a kind, impossibly beautiful smile on his face.. “It’s fine. You don’t have to do it. I won’t get mad. I… I love you. I mean, I love you anyway. No matter what” said Thor, earnest. He was looking shy, but facing it head front, as he always did, with everything.

Looking back, Loki guessed this was the time. This was the moment that could have changed it all. It did exist. It wasn’t inevitable. And whenever Thor spoke as if everything had been his fault, or his responsibility, call it what you want, he forgot about this moment. He had given Loki every bloody chance. He would give it to him again and again in the days and weeks that followed. Loki had not
been a helpless princess waiting for this or that other dragon to kidnap him. His mind had not been fogged up by brainless lust, he wasn’t drunk, he wasn’t pressured into it for fear he’d lose Thor’s love or anything like that. At least, he thinks he wasn’t. That's not what had happened. What happened was that the thing Loki wanted most in the world served itself to him on a platter, gave him the sweetest kisses, looked at him with reverence and love, and asked him what he wanted. Loki wanted this. He wanted Thor.

It had been Loki’s choice. If anyone was to blame in all of this, it was him.

Tripping on his own feet, Loki lead them both to his bed. When his brother took his shirt off, Loki almost fucking squealed, because he had never been able to look at Thor without having to pretend he wasn’t interested, and for every touch he had stolen (from a nudge, or a hug) he had got only a taste of what it could really feel like, and now he had fucking handfuls of it. He lifted his hands to touch him. Thor stood still, offering himself, watching him. Loki ran his hands over his brother’s body and saw what it did to him, to his expression, to his breathing. It made him feel powerful. Thor completely naked took his breath away. He was like something out of an artist’s studio. And fuck, he knew Thor was big, but he had never seen him hard and, fuck. I mean, fuck.

He felt shy again when Thor was undressing him. Loki was so hard, he almost felt embarrassed. Thor had never seen him like this. It was weird. Thor’s hands were so close to Loki’s cock as he slid his jeans down, but he didn’t touch him. When they hugged, skin to skin, their cocks pressed together, Loki shivered. Like, shivered-shivered, like he was cold. Which he wasn’t, he very much wasn’t.

“What do you want to do?” said Thor, his mouth pink and swollen from all the kissing.

“Jesus fuck, I don’t know” snapped Loki, heart in his throat, finally losing his cool. “You’re the expert.”

Thor laughed, and Loki had smirked, and damn, what a relief. They had needed it. Yes, it was all wild and new and insane and thrilling and strange, but underneath all the madness, they were still Thor and Loki, still themselves. Loki trusted his brother. His brother had him. Loki watched Thor’s big hand sliding down his body, stroking gently, getting closer and closer to Loki’s hard-on. Loki was panting as if he’d been on the run. Thor’s first touch on the bare skin of his cock made him spring up. Thor had checked on him again, silently asking once more for Loki’s permission.

He got it. It was enthusiastically given, with an emphatic nod and possibly a debauched, wanton expression that would put porn actors to shame. Thor closed his wetted fist around him and started jerking him veeeerey slowly. He teased, kept it really light at first, stopping when Loki was getting too close, and jerking again after more kissing, twisting his hand, flicking his thumb on the head. And eyefucking him all the time, with Loki struggling to keep his eyes open and not miss a blink of Thor’s stare. It would remain one of the sexiest moments of his life, pretty much forever more. He came with Thor’s mouth on his, breathing Loki’s moans in.

When it was his turn, he had been so shy, and Thor had asked him again if he wanted to stop. Fuck, no, Loki did not want to stop. With Thor’s hand around Loki’s own fist, leading the stroke, the speed, the pressure, he had made his brother come, the feel of his hard flesh in his hand, similar to his own but not the same. Loki had felt him shake as he spurted come on his stomach, had heard his sharp gasps, had watched him bite his lip and lick it, and his expression of satisfaction afterwards, and he had wanted to cry again, he couldn’t say why. Thor had pulled him to his chest, one big, strong arm around Loki’s neck, and had kissed his forehead, his breathing still agitated from his
orgasm.

Their parents usually got home around midnight. He stayed as long as he could, kissing and giggling in each other’s arms like a pair of idiots, but Thor could not sleep in Loki’s room. It wasn’t even mentioned. His dad had already caught them once. So Thor had said goodnight at Loki’s door like… like a visiting boyfriend, with a long, long kiss they struggled to end. It had been fantastically ridiculous to watch him walk down the corridor to his bedroom door, turn his head, give him the eyebrow, and both stay there like dummies, looking at each other across the hall, refusing to shut themselves up in their rooms.

The sound of keys at the door a few minutes later sobered them up. Loki had sprinted to bed and covered himself up, and had this stupid notion that he hoped nobody would check his sheets tonight, as if anybody ever did, not while he was on them.

God, what a vaudeville, what a salacious farce they were trapped in.

Loki did not manage to get to sleep for ages that night. Everything smelled of Thor. Even his fucking brain smelled of Thor, his heart. It was insane, everything was. And yet he could just walk on the ceiling, he was so happy. I could have danced all night… How the fuck did that happen. How had he got so lucky. Why did he get to have his dreams come true.

And should he remind himself about that saying on answered prayers.

Hell, no, not tonight.

____________

(The present.)

“Honey, I’m home!” said Loki.

Minnie ran to him on her stubby little paws, wagging her long-haired tail frantically, standing on her hinds, reaching as far as she could on Loki’s leg. Which was not a lot. Loki picked her up and let her lick his face.

“Allright, sweetheart, enough. You’re not a spring chicken anymore, you’ll sprain something” he mumbled, putting her down. Minnie followed him into the kitchen, and made sure she was right in his way while he made some tea.

Plopped on the settee with the ball of fluff snoring luxuriantly on his lap, and a stack of fanmail he would try to answer at some point today, before having to make for the theatre, he found his mind wandering again. Thor. He still had a killer smile, and it still took Loki’s breath away. His voice still resonated deep inside Loki’s ribcage. The wrinkles around his eyes were deeper, and did not faint completely now in repose. He looked more handsome than ever, as if his face had been a promise maturity was slowly fulfilling. Thor!

Loki had seen him in talk shows and red carpets and junkets and magazine front pages for years now. How sunny and relaxed and charming he was. The questions in his interviews were more serious than they used to be, because Thor was a proper dramatic actor now. Odin must be so
proud. And how do we feel about that.

It had been on the telly he had first heard of his brother’s new ‘domestic arrangement’, with the recurring jokes about the big, dumb, hunky actor, and his brainiac girlfriend. Loki had not missed his own opportunity earlier, though he knew well that Thor did not have so much as one single dumb hair in his whole body. When Thor had laughed, his face illuminated with his smile, it had taken everything Loki had not to fucking sigh like a fifteen-year-old fangirl.

While on the subject of fangirls. Sigyn was in love with Thor. She fawned over him on Tumblr. She knew Thor was Loki’s brother, of course, but she did not need telling there was something fishy going on between them, since they never saw each other, or talked. She had never asked. Loki was tempted at times to make up a story for her alone, to set her mind at ease, but he had decided a while ago that he would not lie to her. When he told her about Thor, it would be the truth. And he wasn’t ready for that yet. To be completely frank, he wanted to make sure he could live without her before he told her. What if she turned her back in disgust. Yes, no, definitely not ready yet. Being realistic, probably never.

Thor. Loki was trying to tell himself to curb his hopes, but he just couldn’t. There was definitely something there. That flicker in Thor’s eye. His grip so strong on Loki’s hand. Damn, his brother was practically just around the corner, in London, right now, in his hotel room, just a few bloody tube stops away. Loki could just go back and…

Oh, Loki. What have you been trying to get inside this thick skull of yours all these past few years. Keep away from triggering situations and people who unsettle you. Do not keep trying the same thing again and again and expect a different result. Things don’t magically change just because you wish it really, really hard.

Ah, damn. Nothing was different, was it? They were older, but still a mess. More popular, if anything. And there were other people in it now as well. Triple and quadruple mess.

Speaking of which.

Loki needed to have a good think, didn’t he? This thing with Sam. It had started as nothing but fun. Sam had flirted with him, that cute American slur to his words, asked him how was it even fair that someone so beautiful was always so sad. Loki said who says I’m sad. Sam said what you need is a good man who can take care of you and make you laugh. Loki said what I need is a good seeing to. Sam had said, you’re in luck, then, with me you can have it all.

Loki talked a long game, but underneath he was petrified. Most of his experience in the sex department had been a business transaction. He had not dated in years, and he had not dated much at all before that. He felt he had already burned his heart many years ago, a short-lived, blindingly bright flare that had left nothing in his chest but ashes. His time in the streets and in hospital had torn something else from him, a sense of normality, something he had taken for granted once, and left him feeling other, and alien, and off, more than ever before. He felt constantly like he was faking it, bluffing his way through everyday life as an ordinary member of society, which inside he would never, ever be able to feel like again. He wasn’t sure he could bluff his way through a romantic relationship as well. Basically, he just did not know what the fuck he was doing.

As a black kid growing in a dodgy neighbourhood, who later managed to put himself through an Ivy League college, Sam had his own experience of feeling like a castaway of civilised society, and need not telling what it was, faking to belong. He joked about this taking the child out of the ghetto thing but not being able to take the ghetto out of the child. His accent changed when he talked about his childhood. Ever since he was a little boy, Sam had seen things and been around things that made him virtually unflappable to Loki’s own experiences. He was not the first sex worker he met, formerly or
in active, he had had direct contact in his immediate circle with mental illnesses much more fucked up than Loki's (if nothing else, because there was no treatment available for uninsured people back where he came from), and he simply did not see Loki as any of these things, he did not define him by them, and he did not confuse what Loki had done or what he had suffered with who he was.

Soon enough, Loki realised that he was never ashamed or tense or guarded about any of it in Sam's presence, that he enjoyed being around him more than he enjoyed anybody else's company (except for Sigyn's, perhaps, but it was different), and that he missed him when he had not seen him or talked to him for a while. They had been friends before they had taken any more steps in any other direction.

Sam had taken him out, and just as he had promised, he made him laugh. He held his hand down the street on the very first date, danced with him, and was about to kiss him goodnight and go home like a proper gentleman. He had made it so fun, so relaxed and so sweet, that by the end of it Loki had clung onto his neck. “Where’s my good seeing to?”

It had not been an instant hit, for a multitude of reasons (all of them in Loki's head), but once they managed to work their way through them, sex with Sam was fucking great. He was fit and strong, just like Loki liked them. He was caring too, and he had quickly decided that everything about Loki was his business. And so, he had been right there next to Natasha and Sigyn during that interview for The Stage, where Loki had agreed to discuss the shit in his past and his family, and he had been there backstage for the Jonathan Ross interview, which had been even more fucking terrifying, with Loki sitting between fucking Bono and Miranda Hart, waiting for his turn to perform 'I can make you a man' at the piano, never knowing what the fuck they would pull out on him (though the questions about his past had been previously discussed and vetted —Natasha was ruthless—, Mr. Ross was a loose cannon, and Loki had not enjoyed himself.)

Yes, Sam was decent and solid and fun, the kind of person one can build a whole life around and rely on it. In spite of that, Loki had felt compelled to tell him from the first day that he did not think he could put his whole heart into it. That he was still not over some persons in his past. Sam said he was alright with that. Loki sometimes thought that Sam believed he could win him around. And often, Loki wished that he did. He still felt the need to remind Sam when things were going too well that he was trying, but he did not believe that he could pull off _forever_, that he was a bit broken like that. Sam never told him 'you're not broken', he knew Loki didn't like to hear it. That was how he saw himself, and he wanted to make sure that Sam saw it as well, that he wasn't fooling himself, and was taking him as he was. Sam listened to him and held him, if he thought Loki was up for it, and he just said, babe, that's fine, I'm fine with that.

Well, apparently, Loki wasn't. Not anymore. Right now, it felt much too much like cheating.

How fucked up was that, that Loki had the best fucking man he could dream of, and because his brother had had a flicker in his eye, he was going to let this thing go. Are you sure about this, Loki-boy? Don't you need to think about this some more?

The moment he saw Sam, the knot in his throat started to burn, and even as he felt like it was tearing him apart, all his fucking insides were screaming was _I want Thor._

Loki did not mean to do it that same day, but to find ‘the right moment’, preferably not right before a show. But when Sam came to him, that bright, oblivious smile on his face, Loki realised he could not let another hour go by, that he would never be able to carry on with business as usual and pretend everything was fine. That he simply could not put up a front and play the happy boyfriend while in his mind he had already broken up. He was not going to lie to Sam for one second, he wasn't going to give him even one single fake smile. Not to Sam.
He asked him to come and talk with him about an hour before the show, in the upstairs sitting rooms of the theatre.

Loki was gloomy. He knew he looked gloomy. He hoped Sam didn’t think he was putting on an act.

“Hey, what’s wrong, babe?” said Sam, squeezing his shoulder.

Loki wondered if he would be able to do it. Sam frowned. Loki was scaring him. He wished he could have told him there was nothing to be scared of. Damn. He took a deep breath.

“We need to talk,” he said, staring down.

Sam shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

“Do I need to sit down?” he said.

“You’re a big strong guy…” said Loki.

“I’ll sit down,” said Sam.

A long, pregnant silence.

“Remember what I told you the first day?” said Loki.

“Yes. And i told you I wanted to give it a try anyway.”

“Yes. Well.” Loki gulped.

“Right,” said Sam, wringing his hands. “Right.” He took a couple of minutes. Then another couple of minutes. “May I ask, what has changed?”

Loki took a deep breath. What could he honestly say. He shrugged, struggling for words.

Sam nodded. Loki guessed Sam knew enough about him by now to realise that whole friggin’ continents could shift within Loki’s mind for no external reason whatsoever. Not that this was one of those times.

After another couple of minutes, Sam put on a brighter face.

“Well, we’ve had a good run, haven’t we?” he said. “Some would even say great.”

“Would you?” said Loki. He was feeling a bit sick.

“Yes, I would,” said Sam, with a broad smile. “You’re wonderful, Loki. It’s been so much fun.”

Loki’s brow scrunched up. That was not what… Yes, fuck, of course he should have expected that. This was Sam, for god’s sake. Sam leaned over to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Loki leaned into it. He realised all of a sudden that that was it. He would not get to seek comfort in his arms again. What the fuck have you done, Laufeyson. And why have you fucking done it...

He swallowed around the lump in his throat.

“Thank you. So are you. Wonderful I mean.” That was the fucking understatement of the century. He felt clumsy. If dating was hard, breaking up was fucking Quantum mechanics. “So what now?
I’ve never done this before.”

Sam smiled, endeared. “Now we go to the flat and we have crazy passionate break up sex.”

Loki put on a smirk, and gave him a sly sideways glance.

“You would, wouldn’t you,” said Sam, as if was a surprise to him, which it could not possibly be by now.

Loki’s smirk turned sad, the knot in his throat tightened.

“Seriously now,” said Sam. “Now is when we say we’ll always be good friends, and I tell you you can always count on me for anything, and to drop me a call every now and then, if you’re sad or lonely, or just to talk. And, plot twist, you actually go and do it.”

Loki bit his lip, wiped the tears that were swelling in his eyes.

“And you absolutely don’t say shit like ‘I don’t deserve you’ or anything like that, unless you want a face full of applause,” warned Sam.

“I was going for you don’t deserve me,” said Loki, his voice thick, putting on the best smile he could, which wasn't much.

“I agree. Very few people do.” His voice was so warm.

“Shut up, I’m not that bad,” quipped Loki, poking Sam on the side.

Sam laughed.

“Will it be awkward?” asked Loki. “At work.”

“Maybe a bit. Doesn’t have to be,” smiled Sam.

“I don’t deserve you,” muttered Loki.

Sam mock-glared at him.

“What?” said Loki, turning on the sass. “You know I’m a hoe for applause.”

It was awkward. Sam was ever so sweet, but there were a hundred times a day when the natural thing to do would have been to touch, hug or kiss, simply as friends even, and Loki had to remind himself that he was not allowed anymore.

Sigyn did not understand what had happened, but she did understand that there were reasons inside Loki’s head, which were real and sound to him, and had to be respected. They shared a silent breakfast the next day (Loki missed their Friday nights catching up on Dr.Who) and she told him with nothing but her warmth and her kindness that she was there for him, if he wanted to talk. One day, Gyn, I promise.
Must have been a month or two later when Loki got home from the Saturday matinée and heard her giggling on the phone.

“Who are you talking to?” he mouthed, thinking she had got herself a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend, Loki did not make assumptions on these regards.

“It’s your brother,” mouthed Sigyn silently, flushed and jumpy with excitement. And she carried on chatting, apparently about the weather in London this last week, and about Minnie, while Loki’s eyebrow reached new heights with every passing minute, as his bewilderment kept escalating, and his stomach churned like it was a fucking ice cream machine.

Eventually, she passed him the phone.

Loki shooed her, heart pounding.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hey,” said Thor after clearing his throat, his deep, husky voice muffled on the phone.

A silence.

Eventually, a huff at the other end of the line. “How are you?”

Loki took a breath. “Fine. And you?”

“Fine.”

“…”

“…”

“How is…” Loki pretended to stumble with the name. Although he knew it fucking perfectly. He had a sharp memory, and he would never forget something like that.

“…Jane” completed Thor, ignorant of it all, or so Loki believed. Apparently he had forgotten Loki was a crafty little shit. “She’s alright” he answered.

“Great. We’re all alright then.” He tried for light and carefree.

“How is…Brad?” said Thor after a beat. And he had probably forgotten for real, because that was Thor for you.

“Sam,” corrected Loki, stalling.

“Yeah, Sam.”

“…He’s alright,” Loki said. “Just not in the picture anymore.”

“…Right.” A long pause. “Sorry to hear that.”

“It’s fine. I broke it up.”

Another silence.
“Jesus, this is awkward,” Loki snorted.

Thor laughed. “It is.” A huff. “I just… I just wanted to know how you’re doing.”

Loki grabbed onto the phone tight. He swallowed on dry.

“I’m good. I’m…” Damn, this was hard. “It’s good to hear you,” he managed at last.

A short pause.

“…Same here,” said Thor.

“…”

“…”

“Well, this was lovely. Let’s do this again some time, yeah?” said Loki, hoping the tone was humorous enough.

Thor chuckled. Loki felt himself melting.

“Yes,” said Thor.

“…”

“…”

“Bye, then.”


Click.

Loki put down the phone with a shaky hand.

Sigyn stared at him expectantly.

“So?” she said.

“So?” repeated Loki.

“What did he want?”

Loki shrugged. Who bloody knew.

Chapter End Notes

The Stage is a long-standing UK theatrical magazine.

Jonathan Ross is a top talk-show presenter in the UK, who has sometimes got himself into trouble because of, er, not knowing when to stop I suppose, but mostly because of that notion the BBC has these days that the people who work for them must never cause offence or ruffle any feathers, which is why now Ross doesn’t work for the BBC
anymore. Anyway.

'I could have danced all night', from the musical My Fair Lady, music by Frederick Lowe, lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner. We have encountered this before, haven't we?

Bono is Bono. If you don't know him, may an angel preserve your innocence.

Miranda Hart is a brilliant British comedian (comedienne?) with a penchant for slapstick and silly jokes. I really love her. Her stuff makes me warm and fuzzy inside.
(The present. A few months later.)

Thor should have guessed from their last phone conversation that his brother was up to something.

“She insists,” Thor had said.

Loki sighed. “I don’t know, Thor. I’m so busy. I mean, preparing for the part is taking a lot out of me and…”

“It would only be dinner. We won’t keep you up late or anything.”

“I’m really tired all the time. I don’t feel much like socialising.”

“Please, Loki, Jane insists. I mean, she’s doing my head in. She’s desperate to meet you.”

“Tell her I’d love to, but…”

“I would like you two to meet,” tried Thor. “It would be nice to have the two people I love most in the whole world under the same roof.” He regretted it the second it left his mouth.

A long, ominous silence at the other end of the line.

“Fine, ok,” said Loki then, his tone light, suspiciously cheerful. Full of foreboding, actually, looking back on it.

“Really?” said Thor. Wow, that had been easy. He wasn’t expecting it.

“Yes, sure. Next Friday around seven?” asked Loki.

“Er… Yes, alright,” said Thor.

“I’ll message you the address to the flat.”
“Right. Great! Jane will be very happy. And me, too.”

“Brilliant. Everybody happy. See you Friday,” said Loki, brightly. And he hung up.

Yes, Thor should have seen it coming the moment he put down the phone.

Since that first call a few weeks after The Rocky Horror, they had talked a number of times, with increasing frequency and regularity. Conversation was still stilted, full of things they did not touch upon, but hung in the air in every silence and every pause. To say they were communicating again would be exaggerating, and he often felt he was getting more from talking to Sigyn than from his brother. At least they were now current enough with each other’s lives that they could always find everyday little nothings to fill the air.

It was frustrating, but Thor would take whatever he could get. A bit of Loki in his life was better than no Loki at all. It felt good to know that his friends looked after him, that he was busy with things that interested him, that his daily life was satisfying, that he had things to look forward to. Hell, it was not good, it was a fucking godsend miracle, and Thor praised the heavens for it every time. He had lost him once, in so many ways, and Loki had lost himself, and now he was found. That's what was really important, wasn't it? Not whether Thor got more or less of Loki's time and his trust and his-... his love. Thor had to remind himself not to be greedy, but grateful. That neither Loki nor the universe owed him a thing.

Whenever Jane came up in their conversations, Loki never had much to say. “Hm” or “Right” usually covered it. Thor wasn’t sure what to make of that. He definitely knew what he wanted to make of that. He had to be careful what he wished for, didn't he?

When Jane had found out about the phone calls, she had been really, really happy, with that added anxious edge Thor had already learned to spot and fear. And when Thor reported that Loki was coming to the US to do a play in New York, she got it in her head that they had to meet up. It just didn’t bode well. Thor made up excuses until he ran out. Then he transferred the pickle to Loki, and he was the one making excuses, until he too had exhausted them.

And now here they were, at Loki’s door in one of those terraced houses near Washington Square. They buzzed and waited at the bottom of the five steps leading to the door. Thor was holding a bottle of wine. Jane grabbed hold of his free hand with both of hers and smiled at him sweetly. He returned the tiny smile, more than a bit tense.

The door opened to a quietly surprised Tony Stark in not many clothes.

“You don’t happen to bring pizza with you by any chance,” he said.

Thor was actually confused for a second.

From the back of the house came a very clear “oh, fuck”, then a rustle of clothes, and then barefooted Loki padded down the stairs, from what had to be the bedroom, hair a bird’s nest, lounge pants and a baggy t-shirt with the logo of Stark Productions, worn inside out.

“Damn, is it Saturday already?” he said, as he ran his fingers through his hair, trying to tame it.

“It’s Friday,” said Thor, glaring, clenching his fist around the neck of the bottle.

“Oh, right,” said Loki, still sounding disconcerted. “Right. Friday.” He turned his eye to Jane, as if he had just noticed she was there. “Oh, you are Jane?” He sounded genuinely puzzled. “You’re
different from what I expected.”

“What did you expect?” said Jane coolly, uncomfortable by the very strong sense of interruption the scene transpired.

“Someone different,” said Loki, after a second scraping for words. Change of subjects. “Please, come on in. I’m awfully sorry. I was in London early this week. I just flew in yesterday evening. I don’t even know what day it is, I still haven’t got over the jet lag.”

“You don’t get jet lag traveling west,” said Tony, helpfully.

Loki gave him a pointed, murderous glare.

“I had a reservation for all of us,” Loki said then, to Thor and Jane. “For tomorrow.” An angelic grin, with some lip biting Thor read as coy. “But how about we just stay in? I’ll cook.”

“What about the pizza?” said Tony.

“Sod the pizza,” Loki hissed at him between gritted teeth. “Tony, why don’t you do something useful. I’m going for a shower.”

“Can I come with?” asked Tony, smiling brightly.

Loki rolled his eyes and strutted away. Tony checked his arse with no attempts whatsoever at dissimulation.

Thor reminded himself he had a glass bottle in his hands. He had to put it down as soon as he had the chance. He didn’t trust himself with it.

Freshly showered, decently (if rather tightly) attired, wet headed (hair falling down to half his back at the moment), glowing, fucking gorgeous in black Loki showed Jane the apartment, including the little back yard and the antique wall piano Tony had bought for him. Jane looked stiff, and Loki had the reptilian charm on full blast. Thor hoped it was only the awkwardness of first acquaintances. He just could not see them ever getting along.

“Am I going to get the ‘hurt my baby brother and I’ll kill you’ chat any time soon?” said Tony, uncorking and pouring the wine.

Thor stared at him, knowing he looked like thunder.

“Hurt my baby brother and I’ll kill you,” he said, toneless.

Tony clicked his tongue. “You know, Thor, I expected …more. You don’t sound very menacing.”

Thor threw him a glower, letting how he really felt about the whole situation show in his eyes for an instant.

“Righty,” said Tony, raising his glass and downing a respectable measure in one sip. “I consider myself menaced.”

Loki cooked.
“Carbonara alright?”

He moved around the kitchen with ease. Thor watched him dance between pots and pans, so… normal, healthy, drama-free. He could not remember the last time he had seen him do something as normal as cooking without a dark, thunderous cloud above his head. Damn, it had been so fucking long. All that wasted time. He didn’t even realise he had fallen into a haze until he found Loki’s eyes on his, quizzical.

Thor had a quick sip of wine and looked away. There was a knot of confused emotions inside him. On the one hand, it was good to see Loki again. Very, very good, even, he had been looking forwards to it. On the other hand, he had no idea where they stood, and that was disquieting. Last but not least, he had no doubt in his mind that his baby brother was playing them all up. He had planned this. He was making a fucking point. And Thor was sure he was not finished making it. Thor was tense, on his guard, ready to pounce. Not the best state of mind to mend bridges with anyone, let alone with Loki, ever the mind-reader.

“Can I help,” said Thor, opting for civility out of all the options available to him, ready to play happy, not-at-all-dysfunctional families for the evening. Do not fall into his trap, he was telling himself. This was just Loki being Loki, and the way to beat him at his game was to not let him get to you.

“If you could keep an eye on this,” Loki signalled with his head to the pancetta browning in the pan, and he kept shaving parmigian for the salad.

Tony and Jane were by the bay window at the front of the house. He was showing her something on his phone. Could be a swanky new app or footage from his last flick.

Thor and Loki were standing side by side by the kitchen worktop, not talking.

“She’s lovely,” said Loki, after some time, eyes focused on what he was doing.

“I know,” snapped Thor. Jesus, Odinson, could you sound any more hostile without actually biting? “Tony is not lovely,” he said after a while, aiming for humour, and failing.


“Too much information,” cut Thor, abrupt.

Loki tossed the salad quietly.

“I know what you mean by uncomplicated,” said Thor then.

“… Oh,” answered Loki.

“What,” snapped Thor.

“Just, oh,” said Loki.

Another crackling pause —crackling with the food in the pan and their own strained lack of conversation.

“So, you’re staying the whole weekend in the city?” said Loki.

“Yes.”

“See the sights?”
“I guess.”

Thor fucking hated this, the fucking small talk. It was not like his Loki at all. But then again, what the fuck had he expected? *Fuck.* He shook the pan a bit too vigorously and a few pieces of pancetta flew off.

“How is… the desert?” asked Loki, as if he had not noticed.

“Hot and dry,” grunted Thor, sarcastic.

“Fuck off,” said Loki, quite softly, smiling out of the corner of his mouth. “I’m only trying to make conversation.”

Thor almost smiled then.

“It’s peaceful,” he said after a moment.

“You mean boring,” said Loki, sounding a bit more like himself, at least.

“No, that’s not what I mean. I mean peaceful,” said Thor. He tried to keep his tone convivial.

Another silence.

“Peace is good,” said Loki then, sounding distracted. “Peace is nice.”

“But isn’t *Madame Butterfly* an opera?” said Jane, browsing the leaflet, a forkful of tagliatelle waiting uneaten on her plate. Thor had never understood how she did it -if it was on the fork, it went in his mouth, no fucking about. She ate like a bird.

“Not *Madame Butterfly*, *M.Butterfly*,” said Loki. “It’s a different story. It plays with audience preconceptions and assumptions exactly as you just did,” he said.

“Have I? In what way?” said Jane, squinting, probably not taking very kindly to being condescended on.

“By letting pre-formed opinions distort the truth before one’s very eyes.” Loki seemed to be going for didactic, but he was coming across as prissy. With Loki, Thor would bet his right arm it was intended. He was deliberately aiming for unlikeable.

“So what’s it about?” said Thor, thinking perhaps he should be cutting in, to help Jane share the role of the unenlightened peasant.

“A French diplomat falls in love with a Beijing Opera singer,” started Loki, “ignoring, wilfully or not, the fact that all Beijing Opera performers are male, even the *dan*, the ones who play females. They have a very long affair, in which he never discovers his lover’s true sex, happy to live the lie of the submissive Oriental woman willing to be dominated by the powerful Western male. After twenty years, in which his lover has been spying for China all along, the diplomat betrays his country, is discovered and judged, and when confronted with his mistress’ naked body, he kills himself in the Japanese ritual manner in front of his lover’s cool, unfeeling eyes. Based on a true story.” Loki grinned and raised his glass in a quiet toast for one.

“And you’re going to play an Asian woman?” said Thor, disbelieving. It explained the very, very long hair (bloody luscious, he could almost feel his fingers running through it.)
Loki grinned some more for an answer.

“Oh, he does,” said Tony. “I’ve seen the costume tests. You don’t act, pet, you transform.”

“No, I act,” cut Loki. But Thor saw that glance Loki threw Tony, and it wasn’t half as pissy as his tone.

“And what about the Beijing Opera training you’re undergoing?” said Tony.

“What about it,” said Loki, pushing his plate away.

“Loki has been doing this intensive tutoring about how to perform…”

“…passably mimic in a way that could fool a Western audience, more like…” amended Loki.

“…in the Beijing Opera manner. It’s a class act. It involves every part of the body, from feet to head to eyelids and eyebrows, and every finger. It’s amazing.”

“Fucking exhausting.” Loki was worrying at the tablecloth with his fingers, with a very slight grin responding to his lover’s admiration. Thor wanted to growl.

“Does the… does the singer love his diplomat?” asked Thor, god knows why.

Loki looked up.

“Song, his name is Song,” says Loki. “It’s not clear. The way we’re angling this is that he does, in spite of it all, but that he knows Gallimard, the diplomat, doesn’t love him, but the lie, and he resents it. It explains his cruelty, his delight in hurting Gallimard at the end. And indeed, when the truth is revealed, it becomes obvious that Song was right, that it’s not him that Gallimard loves or wants, and that he hasn’t understood or learned one thing about the East in all the time they’ve been together. It was the fantasy Gallimard wanted, and he can’t bear to lose it, even though his lover is still there. That’s got to hurt. I mean, Song is Chinese but Gallimard kills himself in the Japanese manner… While dressed and made up as the fantasy Oriental woman Gallimard thought he had loved. I thought it was a lot more poignant that Song did love Gallimard. The ultimate unrequited love story.”

“Wow,” said Thor, putting his serviette down. “It’s going to hurt.”

“If we do it right.” Loki gave him a sweet, baby-crocodile grin, all big, fixed eyes and lots of teeth. “I heard you’re going to be doing a James Ellroy” he said.

“Hm, yes.” said Thor, with a sip of wine.

“The cold six thousand” said Loki.

Thor smiled, in spite of himself. He nodded. He couldn't wait to sink his teeth into that one.

“It’s going to be a mini-series, the thing is massive. Have you read them?”

“I think I’ve read them all, yes. You must be… I forget the names. Junior something.”

“Wayne Tedrow Junior, yes.”

“You will be great,” said Loki, eyes on his brother's. “I can’t wait to see it.”

“Thank you,” said Thor, struggling to hold his gaze. It bore into his soul. It saw everything. It always had.
“Have you been learning to smoke yet?” said Loki, still staring.

“Smoke?”

“It’s the Sixties, they’re not cutting out the smoking, are they?”

Thor arched an eyebrow.

“No I haven’t been learning how to smoke,” said Thor. “I can always trouble you for some classes.”

It was a joke. He had not calibrated where Loki would take it.

“Sure,” said Loki, eyes fixed on his. “You treat your fag like it’s your lover. You make love to it, quickly or slowly, furiously or gently, seductively or distractedly. The you toss it away without a second thought when you’re finished with it, and crush it under your heel, like it’s nothing, and go for the next.”

Tony shook his head, rolling his eyes. Thor swallowed, breaking eye contact, and then swallowed again. He saw Jane frown out of the corner of his eye. She didn’t like Loki, it was blatantly written all over her scrunched forehead. And she probably didn’t like that Thor had forgotten for the last ten minutes that she even existed. He would be hearing of it later. Oh, great.

“I have to have you two together in something,” said Tony suddenly. “The electricity between you is insane. If the right script came along, what do you think?”

Thor and Loki looked at each other, then away. Nobody answered.

“Seriously. Loki, what do you think, pet?”

“I don’t know,” said Loki, biting one of his nails. He didn’t wear polish, probably for the play.

“Thor?” Tony turned to him, genial.

Thor shrugged.

“Oh, come on, guys.”

Thor sighed. He threw a quick look at his baby brother, whose eyes were low, his shoulders slumped. He knew that expression. He had seen it a hundred thousand times when they were little.

“If the right script came along,” said Thor then, “I would love to, sure.” Big brother to the rescue, taking the first step, risking rejection, so that Loki did not have to.

Loki looked up at him. And grunted something that sounded a little bit like “why not.”

The door bell buzzed. Tony and Loki looked at each other.

“Oh,” said Tony, eyebrows raised.

“Oh,” said Loki. He stood up and went to get the door.

So, Thor had been right. There was more coming, and it had arrived just when he was starting to relax. It was 10 o’clock, party time. Loki opened the door and people started pouring in. He was introduced to his agent, Natasha Romanov, and her… whatever he was (it was never made clear) Clint Barton, aka Hawkeye for some salacious reason nobody shared with him. Steve Rogers, the
man himself, had brought a pack of beer, the girlfriend (Thor already knew Peggy) and a mate everyone called Bucky, who followed him around with puppy eyes. Doctor Banner, Loki’s former social worker, visiting in town, had also been invited. Thor shook hands with him with extra strength, surprised at how intensely he felt for the guy. He hoped there would be a moment to, well, thank him. Perhaps it showed in his eyes. Bruce gave him a fond look.

Thor struggled to remember the names of the people who turned up later, members of the ensemble of M. Butterfly. He exchanged a quick salute with Kevin, who played Gallimard. He had met him before, briefly, in other Hollywood do’s. He seemed right at home among all those youngsters. He was a lot more fun in this kind of setting.

Thor was neither ready, nor looking forwards to a fucking soirée. He gave Jane a pointed stare, which they had long had as code for “please, get me out of here.” But Jane wasn’t in a cooperating mood tonight. She knew Steve and Peggy, she was a bit starstruck with Kevin, and although she had been in a number of parties before and after award ceremonies, this was a different kind of affair altogether. And Thor had to admit it looked like fun. People had already taken over the piano and there was a bit of chorus singing, others were dancing, and the atmosphere was welcoming, and special.

Thor relented, gloomy in spite of it all. He just had that gut feeling, he couldn’t put his finger on it, that he needed to get himself away from that place as soon as he could. He got himself a beer and a comfy spot, and watched the thing unfold around him, trying to get ready for the inevitable.

On a positive note, he thought that was it, that was all Loki had prepared for them this evening. If his intention had been to sabotage the big bonding occasion Thor has suggested when he had arranged this, well, mission accomplished.

Steve sat by him on the couch to observe, toasted with his beer with him. Always a ray of sunshine, this one was. Jane was talking with Peggy. They did get on like a house on fire, clever both, never taking shit from anybody. Bruce and Clint joined Thor and Steve on the couch and armchairs soon after, then Tony. Bucky stood to one side, quiet and still. They all sipped their drinks and watched the theatre people sing songs from musicals and tap dance merrily along.

They also watched them push and drag Loki over to the piano, where he sat himself all cosy next to Kevin. They played and sang along. Then Loki did a solo, taking a “beloved classic” and turning it into raunchy burlesque, by virtue of where he put his emphases alone.

“I could have... danced all night, I could have danced aaaall night
And still have begged for more
I could have spread my... wings and done a thousand things
I've never done before

(Tony shouted “There can’t possibly be that many left!” Lots of laughter.)

I'll never know what made it so... exciting
Why all at once my... heart took flight
I only know when he began to... dance with me
I could have danced, danced, danced all night...!”

The way he slurred his words, the low purr, the knowing tone, it all put a shiver in Thor’s spine.
How easy it was to take him back to that fucking club, to the many days he had spent punishing himself with thoughts of what Loki did there, besides singing and dancing.

And with that jolly thought in his head, Thor had to watch Tony pinch his brother’s bum as he walked by him. And Loki tilting his head back for a kiss. He clenched his jaw and turned his eye back to Steve, who was enthusiastically praising the work his mate Bucky was doing in an Off-Broadway production of the *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Bucky did not talk much, but Thor welcomed the chance to distract himself by taking part in the conversation.

Loki, meanwhile, was not finished with the piano. He had a few more classic songs to give a fresh spin to. He went from Disney to Metro Goldwyn Mayer to Broadway with grace and humour. Thor remembered him sitting at the piano with their mum, with mixed emotions. His little, select audience sang along. The he turned to pop.

“With your long blonde hair and your eyes of blue
the only thing I ever got from you was sorrow, sorrow…

I tried to find him ’cause I can't resist him
I'd never knew just how much I'd miss him.
Sorrow, sorrow…"

Thor frowned, nursed his beer.

“Sometimes I feel so happy, sometimes I feel so sad.
Sometimes I feel so happy, but mostly you just make me mad,
Baby you just make me mad.

Linger on your pale blue eyes.

Thought of you as my mountain top, thought of you as my peak
I thought of you as everything I had but couldn't keep, I had but could not keep.

Linger on your pale blue eyes."

Was Thor going mad? Was he being paranoid? A long sip of his beer. Eyes front to Steve sharing an anecdote of his and Bucky’s childhood in Brooklyn.

“Maybe I’m still hurting, I can’t turn the other cheek
But you know that I still love you, it's just that I can't speak
I've looked for you in everyone. They called me on that too
And all the senses rise against this coming back to you.”

Right.

Nice fucking piano arrangements. Had Loki been fucking *composing* in preparation for tonight, or did he just amuse himself in general creating bloody versions of this stuff, just in case he ever had the chance to butcher his brother with them.

There are many in your life and many still to be
Since you are a shining light there's many that you'll see
But I have to deal with envy when you choose the precious few
Who've left their pride on the other side of coming back to you...

Even in your arms I know I'll never get it right,
Even when you bend to give me comfort in the night.
And I've got to have your word on this, or none of it is true,
And all I've said was just instead of coming back to you."

Thor downed the rest of his beer and went to fetch himself another. And then he went to the bathroom, washed his hands, splashed his face with cool water.

He faced himself in the mirror, met his own stare.

What the fuck. *What the fuck.*

Odinson, you're fucking *smiling*.

When he returned, another member of the ensemble had taken charge of the piano. Natasha was dancing with Peggy, tango-style, Clint was enjoying the view. Steve was cracking up with Tony and Bruce, Bucky was browsing Loki’s books (he had brought along half his library, apparently, and raided Manhattan’s bookshops as well), Jane was listening to whatever Kevin was telling her in raptures, and as for Loki, he was nowhere in sight. The room felt so full all of a sudden. Thor joined Steve for a second, until he managed to ask.

“Where’s my brother?”

Tony gestured to the front door. Thor gave himself two minutes (and perhaps waited until Jane was
distracted) and made a bee line for the door.

He found Loki sat on the front steps, having a fag. Loki turned his head only slightly. He probably recognised Thor by his sheer bulk, or perhaps he just knew. Didn't Thor feel at times that he could always tell Loki was there, or that he wasn't, even when he wasn't looking. He didn't say a thing or give any other signal acknowledging Thor's presence.

There was no traffic, nobody on the street. It was quiet except for the muffled music coming from the house. It wasn't cold, but the air was crisp. There were goosebumps on Loki's arms.

He sat down next to him, and Loki shifted to one side to make some room on the narrow steps. They were close. Loki wasn't looking at him. He just kept on making love to his fag, as he had said. It was a slow and deep one this time. When he had smoked it down to the filter, he discarded it and killed it with a quick turn of his heel. They both stared at the night.

After a beat, Loki turned to face him. Thor kept his eyes on his hands. Loki leaned over, very, very slowly, and kissed his temple, a long, firm kiss. Thor shut his eyes and pushed against it, with a deep exhale. It felt so fucking good, after all they had been through.

Loki pulled back. Thor turned to face him. Loki was the one not looking now, his eyes lost in the darkened street. Thor could not read his expression if his life depended on it. He didn't know what he wanted or did not want to find there. He just wanted to crush him in his arms. And possibly rip his clothes off right there in the middle of downtown Manhattan. Just kissing would be nice. He did nothing, just stared, frozen by the mess in his head.

After a spell, Loki stood up, dusted his arse. Thor shut his eyes heavily, scrubbed them deep. The moment was gone.

Loki’s hand entered his field of vision. Thor took it and let Loki pull him up to his feet. But once he was stood up, Thor did not return Loki’s hand. He clung onto it as he had done in that hotel in London. He was so fucking done with letting Loki go.

Loki tilted his head, gave him a stare, part interrogation, part knowing, full of challenge. Thor closed his eyes tight, ready to pull him towards him. With what purpose, he wasn't sure.

The door clicked and opened. Thor dropped Loki’s hand as if it burned. The light from inside the house fell on them, Jane’s voice came too loud and stark, startling him.

“There you two are!”

Thor was shaken. Loki’s leer was burning with spite now, a smirk full of derision.

“Nice to see some things don’t change,” he said, mellifluous. “Excuse me,” he said coolly, as he squeezed by Jane.

Jane frowned.

“What was that about?”

Thor sighed and shrugged.

“Loki,” he said.

The twinkling of the piano made them both look up. Then Loki’s voice, soft, aching.
“Oh my baby baby I love you more than I can tell
I don't think I can live without you
And I know that I never will
Oh my baby baby I want you so it scares me to death
I can't say any more than ‘I love you’
Everything else is a waste of breath”

Thor stood at the door and listened, horrified. The song went on, getting angrier and angrier, Loki’s voice into rags.

“I’m not ashamed to say I cried for you
I want you
I want to know the things you did that we do too
I want you
I want to hear she pleases you more than I do
I want you
I might as well be useless for all it means to you
I want you
Did you call her name out as she held you down
I want you
Oh no, my darling, not with that clown
I want you”

Now the song was quieter, Loki’s voice softer.

“I want you
You’ve had your fun you don't get well no more
I want you
No-one who wants you could want you more”

The song ended with a threadbare whisper of a voice, a note of the piano here and there, haunting.

“I want you
Every night when I go off to bed and when I wake up
I want you
I want you
I’m going to say it once again ’til I instil it
I know I’m going to feel this way until you kill it
I want you
I want you
I want you”

The whole party was silent as it had not been all night, transfixed, enthralled. That had not been a cabaret rendition of a light standard, that had come from the gut, somewhere dark, and deep, and terrible.

Tony broke the ice.

“Sweetheart, you can have me any time. In fact, have me now.” He sounded completely besotted.

Thor made himself look on as Tony kissed Loki, with more warmth than heat, and Loki kissed him back, eyes closed, taking comfort in it in a way Thor had not fucking seen coming from their previous interactions. The ugly thing that shifted and stabbed his insides then must have shown in his face. He was suddenly aware of Jane’s eyes on him, and her deep frown. Thor’s heart was pounding so hard he feared everyone in the room would be able to hear it.

“Awesome!” said Steve, clapping. Everybody joined in, and at least the tense, bristled atmosphere dissolved somewhat. Thor noticed Natasha observing Loki with a pointed squint, and for the first time in his life, Thor wondered who else knew.

He walked to the kitchen, consciously pacing himself not to run. He poured himself a glass of water and downed it in one gulp. He tried to slow down his breathing. He was feeling sick.

After that, Jane followed him down the corridor to the bathroom. Thor very nearly shut the door in her face. He didn’t. He splashed his neck.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

Thor towelled himself a lot longer than it took to get dry.
“Can we go?” he said, after some time.

Jane bit her lip.

“Sure.” She put her hand on his arm, stroked hesitantly. “Are you alright?”

“Loki, Thor and Jane are leaving!” shouted Tony in the general direction of the door to the backyard, where Loki had exiled himself after his musical interlude.

Loki came in through the kitchen. Natasha walked in right after and perched on a corner to observe.

“Jane, it’s been a pleasure,” said Loki, not sounding strained or weird. Well, he was a damned fine actor after all. He was possibly transferring the joy he felt at seeing the back of them into his goodbye. He kissed her cheek, which Jane accepted stiffly, and offered a polite little smile she returned.

Now Thor. Loki offered his hand, his fucking hand, for a shake. Thor stood there like an idiot, staring at it. A fucking handshake. After that fucking show. After ripping Thor to fucking shreds and leaving him bleeding.

Damn it all to hell. He went to give him the hug he owed them both. Loki flinched away and stared at him with reproach.

Thor clenched his jaw, wanting to roar. That fucking hurt. He had fucking metal in his throat from the anger, from the pain. He wanted to fucking smash Loki’s head against the wall, is what he wanted.

Fuck. He had wanted a hug.

He hooked one hand around Loki’s neck and pulled him close for a kiss. On the cheek. Perfectly innocent, if a bit more forceful than usual, up until the point when he couldn’t fucking let go. When he did manage, he couldn’t look at his brother.

That was all. That was all he had. No goodbyes, no see you’s, nothing. He turned around and climbed down the steps, with Jane in tow. He knew she struggled to keep up with his longer strides, but it took a while to make himself calm the fuck down and wait for her to catch up with him. She didn’t look too chuffed with him when she did.

“What was that all about,” she would say a bit later, on the taxi.

Thor shook his head, rubbed his eyes tiredly. He had lost all his steam by then. He felt vacant, exhausted.

“Do we have to talk now?” he replied.

“We don’t have to talk at all,” she muttered, bitterly.

For the umpteenth time that night, Thor felt like smashing his fists against a wall and roaring.
“Are you alright, pet?” said Tony after they had all left. It wasn’t too late.

Loki sighed, slumped on the couch, nursing the dregs of his last drink. Tony sat beside him.

“Do you think you could fuck me through the mattress all night until I don’t know what my name is?” asked Loki, eyes on his drink.

“Do you have to ask?” said Tony, pulling the hair off Loki’s face.

“Do your worst,” said Loki putting down his glass.

Chapter End Notes

Phew, notes.

1. 'M. Butterfly'. Loki pretty much tells you what you need to know. A play by David Henry Hwang. I confess I have not seen the play, only the movie David Cronenberg directed, with more emphasis on the romance and not so much on the politics, which apparently is a lot heavier in the play. Will have to try and find it. I'm intrigued now.

I guess there would be an uproar on Tumblr that a white guy has been cast for the part of an Asian, but let's just say I know the director, who is totally Asian, and he did lots and lots of auditions, and was killed dead by Loki, who is a bit of a shapeshifter anyway. Just roll with it.

2. 'The cold six thousand', by James Ellroy, part of his American Trilogy. Don't get me started, I worship the floor he treads on. Gritty, hardboiled crime/political novel, with epic range, involving the mob, the political killings of the Sixties in America, Cuba, the corrupt US security agencies, god and all his angels. Powerful. Amid all that, Ellroy writes some of the sweetest, most human, most loveable mobsters/contract killers/lost souls in the world ever, and some of the most touching love stories. You may have heard of Bud White. Russell Crowe played him in L.A. Confidential. Well, you ain't seen nothing until you get to Pete Bondurant. There should be a fandom for Ellroy's verse. Anyway.

3. That cigarette as a lover thing... My friend Discontentmadeglorious wrote it.

4. Hey, more Avengers! Come on in, the water's fine. We'll meet again I'm sure.


'I could have danced all night', from the musical My fair Lady. We've covered this. Next.

'Sorrow' (Bob Feldman, Jerry Goldstein, Richard Gottehrer), I first heard it in David Bowie's version. That line is pretty much all that's applicable to our situation.

'Thinking About You', by Radiohead. Bit more flesh in this one if one is looking for Thorki.

'Coming back to you', by Leonard Cohen. (I'm partial to Martin Gore's cover.) A LOT more flesh in this one. Quite gentle though.

'I want you', by Elvis Costello. It's a lot longer than the excerpt I've quoted here. It's heart-wrenching and absolutely beautiful, and I'm so bloody privileged that I've seen him perform it live. It tears me to pieces. I find it extremely Thunderfrosty in its intensity and hunger and desperation. It will forever sing of these two for me from now on. Oh god it hurts make it stop...

Must confess I'm not musical enough to imagine a piano version of these heavily guitar based pop songs. But why not, eh? Loki is a bit of a genius.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Yeah, ok, but let's hear both sides first.

Chapter Notes

Right, so apparently being poorly and having a poorly baby girl who won't let you move far from the couch is an aid to productivity. I wasn't expecting this one to happen so soon. Anyway, hey ho. It's not like people ever complain about quick updates, right?

Must warn you, here be Frostiron nocturnal funtimes.

Let me make this clear: I don't ship my babies with ANYONE ELSE IN THE WHOLE BLOODY MULTIVERSE, but it's the story, what can I say. There are always things happening between the sheets in the things I write, apart from an exchange of bodily fluids (otherwise I don't put it in the story) so there. IT'S THE ART, ART MADE ME DO IT.

And toys. Blame Rynfinity. She'll know why. (You're to blame for the most outré searches in my google history, I'll have you know!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(London, the previous weekend.)

Loki wiped one fingertip over the touch screen of his smartphone to end the call, wishing it was a button he could smash instead. Better still, and old-school receiver he could angrily slam on its sodding cradle.

Sigyn observed with a frown as he hurled the damn thing to the floor. Good job the rug was thick. Loki, of course, had counted on that. He was furious, not stupid.

“What is it?” asked Sigyn, a mug of steaming hot tea in each hand.

“Apparently,” said Loki between gritted teeth, “I just got myself a fucking dinner date with my brother and his girlfriend.”

“I see,” said Sigyn.

No, you bloody don’t, thought Loki, with a tightly clenched jaw.

She sat down on the couch, pushing Minnie to one side first to make some room for her lovely, generous, plump derrière. As for Minnie, the poor old thing shifted an ear, but in half a minute she was snoring again.
“Don’t you like her girlfriend?” attempted Sigyn, softly softly. When trying to pry open a Loki-fruit, mind the thorns. Tease them gently apart...

“I don’t know her,” snarled Loki.

“Then,” said Sigyn, impervious to Loki’s tone, “how do you know you won’t like her?”

“I don’t fucking want to like her,” groaned Loki.

Anxiety and bubbling rage make people talk too much. He knew it well. He should shut himself up in his room right now. Why didn’t he.

“… You sound as if you were jealous,” said Sigyn.

“No shit, Sherlock,” muttered Loki to himself, though audibly enough, fists clenched tight. He was trembling with it. The two people I love most in the whole world... Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you!

Sigyn was observing him quietly, teasing out his body language. She was fluent in Loki by now. She knew how to find her way through the maze he kept around himself. He had a picture of her in his mind, bobbin in hand, starting to make her way in, unwinding the skein of thread as she went.

Loki paced up and down. Just go to your room already, before you...

"Loki, you can’t be jealous of your brother’s girlfriend,” she said, the voice of reason.

“Can’t I? Watch me.” Teeth gritted.

"It’s not like your brother loves you less or something because he is with someone. I mean, I know you used to be very close, but his relationship with you and his relationship with her are two different... What?” She was frowning now. Not one of her nice, worried frowns, the other kind. The ‘Loki-boy, you’re in trouble now’ kind of frown.

“What,” snapped Loki, on the defensive. All claws on deck.

“That face,” she said, her index finger doing a little pointy dance in the air, aimed at him.

“What face,” countered Loki, stalling.

“I hate that face,” she said. “The ‘Loki knows everything and Sigyn knows nothing but let’s let Sigyn talk and talk and make herself sound ridiculous’ face”

Loki looked away. Did he do that? Damn.

"That’s one hell of a face. I must be a bloody good actor,” he mumbled, feeling the sting, and started pacing up and down again. He really, really hated to upset her. Or how it felt to be called out on it, to be precise.

“Loki, I’m fucking serious,” she said. “Either tell me, or don’t tell me, but don’t treat me like I’m an idiot.”

Loki stopped pacing. Whip had been cracked. Too far, young man. She knew when to say when.

"Sorry,” he said. “Sorry.”

She was still staring and frowning, but it wasn’t the bad frowning anymore. The worry was there instead. She never gave Loki a bad time for his moods, as long as he stopped and mended his ways.
Which he found easier to do with her than with anyone else. They should get married. But they both liked blondes, and she was a ginger. Peroxide, perchance? (Sounded like a pop band from the eighties.)

He huffed with irritation and plopped down on the couch. He made himself pick up the mug, but put it down again immediately, untouched. Fidgety. Do try not to keep boiling hot liquids hovering over your family jewels’ area when fidgety. He tapped his fingers on the arms of the armchair instead. Damn, why didn’t he go for leather? This fabric cover made no sound. Oh yes, those handout days, don’t look at a gift horse in the…

Fucking hell, his thoughts kept scampering around like a bloody… thing that scampers around in all directions. Mice?

Throughout his little meltdown, Sigyn kept petting Minnie with one hand, mug in the other, an eye on him at all times, Loki’s face to Loki’s hands, and back again, and back again. She knew better than to stare a cat in the eyes for too long. They take it as a challenge and jump at you.

Fucking focus, Loki.

“I can’t tell you, Sigyn,” said Loki then.

“Fine, so don’t tell me,” she answered, with a sip of tea. Lead-lined tongue and throat she had, good old British stock.

Petting, petting, Minnie’s breathing regular and contented. Calming moves.

After a minute, Loki tried ”You’re not an idiot.”

“I know I’m not,” said Sigyn.

“…It’s just…” said Loki.

What the hell are you doing.

Are you really going to do this.

“Yes, Loki?” said Sigyn.

I can’t believe you’re doing this.

“If I tell you…” Loki huffed, scrubbed his face and hair, shook his head. He was full of ants. “You have to promise that, no matter how you feel about me afterwards, no matter what you think, or whether you still… whether you still want to be my friend or not, you’re never going to tell. Anyone. Ever. I need you to swear it.” His voice had started to shake. Badly.

"Loki, you’re scaring me,” said Sigyn, looking into his eyes now. She really did have the most perfectly curved eyebrows to convey compassion.


“Darling, whatever it is, you can tell me. I love you. I’ll always be your friend.” She meant it, of course, with her whole heart. She had no idea, did she?

“Wait until you’ve heard me before you say things like that,” countered Loki.

“I don’t have to,” she said, earnest. She reached for his hand, rested hers on top of it.
Loki took a deep breath. He did not hold her hand. If she wanted to let go in repulse, he was not going to stop her.

How does one even begin to put this.

Ok, wait.

“You know when I… when we were talking about meeting the love of our lives and…” Deep breath, “and I told you I…”

“You said you already knew him,” she completed, helpfully, tracing small circles with her fingertips on the back of his hand.

“Yes,” said Loki.

A long, long, looooong pause.

“Yes, Loki?” she urged, with a hand squeeze.

“…I was… I was talking about…” He cleared his throat noisily, but his voice came out squeaky small. “I was talking about my brother.”

Long silence. Loki was going to fucking puke.

”Say something.”

“Loki, that happens to a lot of people,” said Sigyn.

“Does it?” he said, more puzzled than he had ever been in his whole life.

“Yes, with older siblings, the hero complex... We search in other people what we love in our family. I don’t know if it’s because our family makes us feel safe and… what?”

He almost, almost started laughing. If only it was bloody funny.

”Damn. No. That’s not it,” he said.

She raised an inquisitive eyebrow. She did not have a single solitary clue. Fucking hell. He would have to spell it out, wouldn’t he?

”Sigyn,” he said. Again, he almost laughed. She would get to hear it before Thor himself, how’s that. “I really, really am… er…” Cough. “I really love my brother.”

That eyebrow wasn’t going anywhere yet.

Loki huffed, in despair. Try again.

“My brother and I…” How do I fucking put this, goddammit. “We… er, we used to be t-together.”

Damn the fucking eyebrow.

“Bloody hell, Gyn, you’re going to make me say it.” He got his hand back and raked it deep in his scalp, scratching hard. Ouch. ”As in… we used to…” Don’t say go to bed, don’t say make love, she obviously will refuse to get it unless you… “We used to f-fuck, ok? Each other. This kind of together.”
Hey ho, the eyebrow has gone down! All the way down, actually, and now we have… a completely new type of frown! What does it fucking mean?!

Loki’s chest was heaving, his eyes searching Sigyn’s face. He was expecting the dawning of the disgusted, ‘I’m going to be sick, get away from me you revolting perv’ expression anytime soon. Instead, all he was getting was a deeply set, serious frown and a parted, gaping mouth. And a fucking never-ending silence.

“You’re not joking, are you?” said Sigyn, eventually. Very very eventually.

“I honestly think when I’m joking I’m funnier than this,” he said, croaky voice.

“No, I’m not joking,” said Loki, his voice now softer. He felt… spent, even the fear gone. It was done, out of his hands. There was no taking that back.

Sigyn remained quietly frowning, quietly staring into space, quietly gaping, quietly… what, processing? He was not going to rush her. He himself could use a break. Only Minnie’s soft snores to be heard.

“How…? When…?” she said, about two and a half Ice Ages later.

“Teenagers.” Another croak.

Another silence, long enough for Africa to eat a foot and a half of the Mediterranean. To be filed under ‘Times when Loki would have wished he was not an atheist’.

“And you still…?” she asked.

Loki’s turn to be quiet. A long, deep sigh of tiredness and resignation.

“I’m still in love with him. Never s-stopped,” he confessed. To his friend, to the world, to himself.

But soft, what new expression through yonder scrunched-up forehead breaks?

“That’s why you left Sam, right after you went to see your brother,” she said.

It was realisation, that’s what it was. The satisfaction of a mystery resolved. And Sigyn is the sun.

“…Yes,” said Loki.

She nodded slowly.

“And Thor?” she asked after a beat.

Well, well, well, isn’t that the million dollar question. Yes, no, I hope so, I sometimes think so, I don’t bloody know.

“With Thor is… is hard to tell,” he said. A chuckle. At himself. It’s not like Loki would ever be able to make a cool, fair assessment of the situation, right? His very fucking soul was invested in this. Nah, he would never be able to deduce it, he would need it in writing. In blood. On Thor’s skin. Or his own. And even then.

“But he has a girlfriend,” said Sigyn, with a blessed tone that said ’Now I understand it all’. At bloody last.
Only then did Loki become fully conscious that she had still not run for the bathroom to be sick. And he exhaled.

“Yes,” he said. And he exhaled again. Because… fucking hell, it was out. It was out and life as we know it had not ended. And his best friend was having a chat with him about it. As if it was… fuck, as if it was Sam they were talking about. Sweet friggin’ baby Jesus, how…?

“And you don’t want to meet her,” said Sigyn, nudging him out of his reverie.

“I don’t fucking want to be third wheel with my brother and his girlfriend, no,” he snapped.

Sigyn took a sip of tea, scratched Minnie’s belly. Minnie groaned contentedly.

“I see,” she said.

“…You’re not… you’re not going to be sick?” he said, a note of hysteria creeping in his voice.

To which she pulled a face — ducky, complete with frown and head tilt. To which he responded with a continued expression of preoccupied hope.

“Of course not, you idiot,” she said. *Sweet mother of god, thank you…* “I mean, it was cons…”

“Consensual. Yes. Very, very consensual.” He blushed, actually blushed; he felt his face and neck heating up with it. Get a grip, Odins—… Whatever.

“…And was he… was he good to you?” she asked.

Shit. This ‘letting it out’ thing came with unexpected caveats.

“He ruined me for the rest of the race of men,” he quipped, way too quickly.

“That’s not what I was asking” said Sigyn.

See? I told you, way too quickly. Sigh.

“…It was complicated. For obvious reasons,” tried Loki. And then… *Let it out*. Exhale. “He always tried to do the best he could,” he said, taking himself, Satan and a choir of angels by surprise. “He always does. He was only a kid himself. It was all so fucked up…” Ah, the memories. Loki threw his head back. “Yes, I would say he was good to me. Not sure *it* was good for me.” Umteenth sigh. "But I wouldn't change one day of it for the world. ...Well, perhaps one day or two, I would."

Sigyn was looking at him like the perfect model for a mourning Saint Mary she would make. She shuffled closer and stroked his face. She was going to make him cry. He didn’t shake her off exactly, but tilted his face away just so, in a way she would understand. She lowered her hand.

“…So where are you now?” she said, and spun Loki’s cup of tea on itself on the coffee table, so that the handle was aligned the right way for him to pick up. They were good like that. She did this minute, almost invisible things, and he always noticed them.

“I don’t know,” he said, picking the mug up and taking a sip, to show his appreciation. The way to thank Sigyn and make her feel good was to let her help, he had learned this very early on.

His hands were a bit shaky. She noticed, of course.

“Oh my darling,” she said. She got up and held his head close against her, between her arms. He put the mug down blindly and hugged back, wrapping his arms around her thighs, his face pressed
against her stomach, for a long time. Long enough for Loki’s breathing to turn shuddery and wet, and then slowly return to steady and dry. She put a firm kiss on top of his head. It felt good. It felt like mum’s. She cradled his face and made him look up. She wanted him to see her warm, loving, smiling expression. She kissed his forehead. And then she let go, because she usually knew when it was enough for Loki, and took her place back on the couch. Minnie was awake now, head reared up, staring at them both with that permanent expression of puzzlement.

“You’re really not disgusted?” asked Loki after a while, tempting fate.

She actually gave it some thought.

“No,” she answered. “It’s… well, it’s a weird thought but… Hey, you’re not blood brothers though.”

Ah, that.

“We didn’t know it then,” A crooked smirk. He had been aiming for a smile. Overambitious, as it turned out. “It’s not like it matters. Consanguinity I mean. We’re not planning on having children.”

She pulled a little, tight-lipped smile.

“Had you ever…? Had you ever told anyone about this?” she asked.

“No.”

“Darling, it must have been so hard for you…”

He tried to shrug it off, but it didn't work either. His eyes shut heavily for a long moment. Yes, fuck. So bloody hard. But no more, no fucking more. If he wasn’t feeling so very raw and exhausted, he would scream out of sheer relief.

“I can totally understand,” she said, interrupting his train of thought, her tone light.

“Can you? Is your brother really hot too?” A shit-eating grin, not as bright as his usual, because exhausted.

“No, but yours is.” She was beaming.

Loki laughed. And laughed and laughed and laughed. His belly ached. His bones ached. His soul sang songs, but ached. And he was not out of his fucking predicament.

“What about Tony?” she said then.

Loki looked up, shaken from his daze.

“What about him?”

“Why not Sam but…”

“Oh,” said Loki. “Tony…” Start again. “Sam was… he was more… It was serious. Tony fucks anything that has a pulse.” Er, actually…

“He’s mad about you.”

Loki gave that an eyebrow and a half.

“Yeah, well, he’s not looking to settle and adopt. We’re not… nobody said exclusive. We have fun,
that’s all. It’s just… It’s different.”

And then it hit him. The way out of his predicament. Of fucking course. Well, maybe not out-out, but still…

“Loki?” said Sigyn, with one of her many frowns, this one from her puzzled range. “What…?”

He grinned. His full-on, ear-to-ear, crocodile grin.

“You’re a genius,” he said. Sprung up, kissed her head, picked up his phone from its resting place on the rug, and scuttled to his room to make phone calls. Lots and lots of phone calls.

The two people I love most in the whole world, my tight, scrawny arse.

(New York. Friday night. Early morning, actually.)

Tony’s worst was really, really not bad at all. It was damn fine, to be fair.

That gorgeous, impeccably restored 1930’s piano had not been his only housewarming gift. Loki had admired and coveted his collection of adult toys from the very first time he had visited the bedroom at Tony’s penthouse, a number of weeks ago, and he had received a whole hamper of them soon after, when he got his own place, with a nice bow to tie it up. Loki had surveyed his new treasure-hoard with a connoisseur’s delight. Many of them were really best enjoyed with a friend.

The ones with dials, for example. Loki moaned and his back arched dramatically when Tony cranked it up another notch. He fucking loved the ones you can ride. He continued to fuck himself hard and fast, aware of Tony’s eyes on him. And since he had an audience, he made a good show of it.

“God, you’re so beautiful like that…” drooled Tony.

“Turn it up,” gasped Loki, hands raking in his hair like a central-pages pin-up. Tony upped the thing. Loki shook all over and moaned louder. He snaked his hips, to give his thighs a rest. The thing fucked and vibrated and twirled by itself, it was fucking wild, he really didn’t need to do anything if he didn’t feel like it. He was biting his lip hard, the sweet spot inside him being pleasured raw, his cock painfully neglected. He whimpered in desperate need, one hand clawing down the side of his throat.

“Ah, baby…” sighed Tony, hearts in his eyes.
Loki locked eyes with him for a second, then closed them.

“Yes, call me baby,” he said, starting to move again. “Crank it up.”

He would fuck himself on that thing until he came untouched or he wouldn’t fucking come at all.

“Are you alright, baby?” said Tony handing him the wipes, after he had dismounted, shuffled to the bed on shaky knees, and crumbled onto the mattress, boneless.

“Don’t call me baby,” grunted Loki. He cleaned himself up and turned onto his stomach, face in the pillows, panting.

“Right,” said Tony’s voice somewhere. “So who were you fucking just then?”

Loki showed teeth. To the pillow, which arguably made it less effective. He hated it when people got perceptive on him.

“Your toy, I should think,” he said, now facing away.

“The toy gets to call you baby but I don’t?”

“And only during sex.” Change subjects. “Do you want that taken care of?” He signalled to Tony’s straining hard-on.

“If you can move.” A sweet grin.

Loki got himself up, a slight wince. Well, it had been a bit of a marathon, this one. He had a rummage in the drawer, contemplated the collection of butt plugs.

“Red or green?” He held the glassy things in two different funny shapes up in the air.

“Green. Goes with your eyes.”

“You’re very sweet, but where it’s going colours tend not to matter.” Heh, Buttopia. “Are you going to lie down or…?”

“Kiss first?”

“Lie the fuck down, don’t get all sappy on me.”

It was just possible that Tony had the biggest, saddest, most compelling puppy eyes Loki had ever seen in his whole life.

“Fucking hell” grumbled Loki, and kissed him. Which was nice, actually. Tony’s hand around his head, crushing him tight. He liked Tony. He felt right.

“Aaaahhh pet… I fucking worship you…” said Tony, eyes droopy, buried in the mattress, looking fucked down to his soul. Loki wagged an eyebrow and plopped right next to him, with a couple of exercises to relax his jaw. Haven’t lost your touch, Loki-boy.

“You’re a fucking artist at this. A fucking pro…” sighed Tony. Then he snapped to attention, eyes wide in horror, aware of what he had just said.
“Retired,” said Loki, hoarse, going for a joke before Tony started with the apologies. “More like a hobby these days.”

“Oh, fuck…” said Tony, obviously not getting the hint to just let it go.

“It’s fine,” said Loki. Please, not now… “You know those retired train drivers that fill their houses with models of cities and train tracks? Well, I’m nothing like that.”

Tony laughed. Rubbed his face with both hands, laughed some more.

“Jesus, I love you.”

Loki smirked, helped himself to a sip of champagne. He wasn’t really supposed to drink with his meds, but he had been told that half a glass of something around that gradation every now and then could do no harm. Since he had never been a great drinker, that was just fine with him. It was the aesthete in him. Champagne in bed, so fucking decadent.

“Don’t panic,” said Tony, after being very quiet for a spell.

What. Loki sprung up in bed. Ouch. Wince.

“What, you meant it?!”

Tony grinned.

“Holy fuck, Tony!” he groaned.

“I said don’t panic. I’m not proposing or anything. You’re just… what can I say, I’m smitten, alright? You’re the complete package…”

“No I’m very much not the complete anything,” snarled Loki, still sitting up, still frowning. “Half my fucking pieces are missing, and the rest are broken. I’m not your soul mate, ok? And you’re fun and all, but that’s all there fucking is. Understand?”

“I know, Lokes. I’m human, it just happens some times. Chill.”

Loki’s chest was heaving.

“Right,” he said. He tried to settle down. He was antsy. Tony started stroking his hair, long strokes. Loki frowned, suspicious. It felt nice, though.

“I like your hair like this, that’s all,” said Tony. “Calm the fuck down, Loki. I’m not getting you a ring, ok? …Oh, you will not let me get on my knees ever again, right?”

Now Loki laughed. And Tony liked that. Which earned Loki a kiss.

“Had enough? Do you want to go to sleep now?” asked Tony.

“…Not if you’re going to creepy-lovey-stare at me all night or something.”

“I’m not, I swear. Can’t keep my eyes open.”

Loki curled on his side, facing Tony, who was indeed drowsy and sleepy and still looked fucked to complete satisfaction, and then some. It was a good look on people. Tony pinched his cheek and closed his eyes.
Loki burrowed into the mattress, but his hopes for a nice, restoring few hours of slumber looked slim at best.


Jeebus, the flat was on a battlefield level of disarray. He was so not going to clean this shit up. He’d pay someone to do it, like the proper rich guy’s mistress he was.

He made himself another coffee, and climbed back upstairs. He liked to have his phone chats from bed.

Sigyn picked up at the start of the second tone. They made quick work of the pleasantries.

“How did it go?” she asked soon, all eager.

“Great. I’m limping a bit. Not looking forwards to Monday.”

“Loki…”

“Tony proposed. Sort of.”

“Oi. How did it go?” insisted Sigyn. She was not in a dancing-around-Loki mood then.

He took a sip of coffee and gave it some thought.

“According to plan, I suppose.”

“You and your plans. Is Tony still there?”

“No, he left a while ago. Limping too.” Shame she missed his shit-eating grin, because it was one of the good ones.

Another pause. Loki looked out the window. All he saw was more windows on a red brick façade. Empty windows. Frame it and sign ‘Edward Hopper’.

“What is she like?” asked Sigyn.

A gulp of coffee.

“She’s…” A grimace he was glad Sigyn could not see. “She’s beautiful.” Sigh. “I don’t know what else I expected. I mean, he can have the pick of the crop, can’t he? Of bloody course she was going to be a show-stopper.”

Sigyn hm-hm’d.

“She’s not… She’s not a supermodel, she doesn’t have big tits, she’s just…” He sighed deeply. “If
she doesn’t have big tits it’s… more real somehow. Thor used to like them curvy and flashy and they never used to last and… Fuck.” Clenched jaw. Fuck. “That’s obviously not why he’s with her. She’s clever and classy and… The kind of girl guys marry, you know what I mean?” The kind of girl his parents would love to see Thor marry, he did not say.

Sigyn said nothing, very loudly.

“But there was this moment,” added Loki. “We sat outside the steps at some point, just me and him, and I… I helped him up and he held my hand and…” Loki rubbed his face, hard. He did not want to get to the part when his brother had jumped three feet away from him. He didn’t want to make Thor look bad in front of his friend, how’s that?

Sigyn was waiting for him to complete at least one thought. If at all possible.

“I may have sung some songs,” he said.

“Songs?”

“Yes, kind of… Love songs. Sad love songs. I don’t know what I was fucking thinking. I pissed him off. He’ll be panicking now that the whole of fucking Manhattan knows that his baby brother… Fuck.”

“Don’t make assumptions.”

“What?”

“About what’s on Thor’s head. Sure way to make everything more complicated and fucked up.”

“If you find the off-switch for that, be sure to let me know.” Deep exhale. Tired. Sore. Bath? Please.

“How was he?” asked Sigyn then.

Loki smiled to himself.

“He’s cut his hair for his next part. He was clean shaved. He looked… Grown up, I don’t know.”

“Handsome?”

Loki smiled a lot more. It struck him then that he was on the phone with his best friend talking about his crush, like a blessed fifteen-year-old. It was fun.

“Out of this fucking world.” Sigh. “He wore a shirt, they’re always either baggy or too tight on him unless he has them custom-made. So it was sort of strained at the chest and arms.” Double sigh. “I kissed him. His hair. He wears a different cologne or aftershave or whatever, but he still… I remembered the smell underneath. Made me weak at the knees, I swear.”

“Awww...” said Sigyn. “You’re a puddle of goo, aren’t you?”

He laughed frankly.

“It’s so romantic,” she said. “You’ve been in love all your lives… And you look so hot together. Darn, I ship you!”

Loki rubbed his eyes tiredly.

“Please, don’t, whatever that is.”
“It means I want you two to end up together.”

He chuckled mirthlessly.

“Yeah, well, get ready for disappointment.”

“Why?”

“…Because…” he sighed, exhausted down to the bottom of his soul for an instant. “Gynny, even if…” Deep breath. Jane, her name is Jane. He didn’t even try. Let’s just point the bleeding obvious, shall we. “We’re brothers!” he said, exasperated.

“So? We can spin it” she replied without a thought.

“Spin it?” He didn’t usually guffaw, but he might just do this once. “You don’t fucking spin this, you sweep it under the rug, you bury it, you kill it with fire.”

“I don’t know Loki, why don’t you run it by Natasha? She’s a wizard…”

This was getting ridiculous now.

“Gynny, seriously. This is fucking incest. Ok? Gay incest, for extra kick.”

“Egyptian Pharaohs did it…"

“Oh, yes, that’s absolutely the line we should take. That we come from such extraordinary stock, our blood is so fucking pure, our bodily fluids so divine, we can’t mix with common mortals!”

“See? It sells itself.”

“Very funny.”

“Anyway, you’re not blood brothers.”

“Gyn, are you doing this on purpose?”

“I just… I don’t know, Loki, I think you’re making it a bigger deal than it is. I wasn’t horrified at all, was I?”

“Yes, but you’re a bloody angel, Gyn. You’re the most generous, least judgemental, kindest, most understanding person on this earth. You’re not a good representation for your average human being in any way.”

“Aw. That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“…I tell you nicer things in my head all the time.”

“I know. I can see it in your eyes. Just let it out a bit more” she said.

“Yes miss.”

“Grumpy.”

“Dopey.”

A silence.
“Gotta go. Want to wash. I smell of Tony.”

She laughed.

“Call me later.”

“Dog ok?”

“As usual. I’ll give her a kiss from you.”

“Great. I’m sneezing already.”

She laughed.

“I love you, darling.”

“You too. Later.”

He hung up.

A cat had perched on a window sill across the street, licking its white-socked front paw. Loki found himself smiling. Sigh no more, you idiot, you’ll hyperventilate.

And be you blithe and bonny...

It felt so bloody good to talk, so bloody good, he had had no idea. He sighed again, but it was a good sigh. Hey nonny nonny.

Chapter End Notes

1. Edward Hopper, painter, Early- to Mid- 20th century, American. Look him up if you don’t know him. I love him. He paints solitude like no-one, and his houses and his walls are as evocative as portraits of people.

2.

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh nor more;
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never;
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into. Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no mo,
Or dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into. Hey, nonny, nonny."

From Much Ado About Nothing.
Kenneth Brannagh's movie had me memorise the first verse.

Loki would know this one too. He's a Shakespeare man after all. It's not a sly reference
to anyone's behaviour, just the bit about don't sigh and be blithe that applies this time,
honest.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Jesus, this is hard.

Chapter Notes

(As always in all my longer-running works, there comes a point in the story when this author must remove herself to a safe, undisclosed location and weather the storm. I’ll have you know, it be a remote bunker which may or may not be surrounded by a moat filled with crocodiles, sharks with lasers on their heads, and if it’s Wednesday, a swarm of zombies. Seems like I’m spending Christmas there.)

UPDATE: I’m taking Thor with me.

Now, let this here be my oath that one day, this fic will smother you in a pile of fluff so high it will block the sun, until you can’t bloody breathe, and that I swear.

But today is not that day.

Merry Thunderfrosty Christmas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thor sat on the narrow balcony of the hotel room with a drink he wasn’t paying much attention to, eyes unfocused, mind miles away. Or a few streets away at the very least. He was still reeling. They had jumped from “you fucking hurt” and “I want to forget you exist”, to “don’t come see me, maybe someday”, to “I want you I want you I want you I want you I want you.”

He could have fucking danced all night himself. He wanted to throw the windows and the doors open and let out the mightiest yawp, maybe tap-dance on the walls and the ceiling like Fred Astaire in one of those old musicals they used to watch with mum. He wants me!

It was an illusion of course. As good as it felt, it changed nothing about their situation. When had wanting been a problem between them? No, the problem was the hiding, the secrecy, the fear that they could be discovered at any second. Had any of that changed? No, if anything, it was worse than ever. The ripples of the scandal when they were young would seem tame and manageable compared to the typhoon it would unleash now.

They were not anonymous. They lived off having people with money trusting them to drive paying audiences to see them. That trust could dry up for a lot less than this. The simple suspicion of
something even remotely similar to this could ruin them both. And then there were the haters, and the
nutters, and the fucking right-wing press that would have a field day with this and skin them alive
day in day out… It’s not like they needed these people’s respect, but this shit wears you down,
feeling hated and despised and constantly targeted for attack and mockery. Thor himself feared it,
and he was of sound mind. As for Loki…

Not to mention that none of these things were what a young… couple needs in the beginnings of
their… Shit, their relationship. Their love. Our love. God.

Being realistic, could they ever get together and make something work, and be happy, while having
to hide and lie, and get beards, and look over their shoulders all the time, and try not to be seen
around together too often, and deny the rumours as they arose, and never be able to hold hands down
the street, or kiss in public, and never, ever being able to tell the fucking world the truth, and live in
fear all the time?

Fuck.

Loki still loves me. Loki still wants me.

Our love.

He had a little drink with a sad little smile, eyes wet.

The glass door to the balcony slid open and Jane popped out. She was wrapped in that Japanese silk
robe he bought for her when he was touring Master and Commander, one of the first presents he had
ever given her. Certainly the most intimate at the time. They had fucked soon enough after he
returned, Jane riding him wearing nothing else. It felt so weird to turn his mind back on it now,
almost inappropriate, an invasion, as if it was somebody else’s life, somebody else’s memories. There
was a knot burning in Thor’s throat.

“Aren’t you coming to bed?” she asked, hugging herself against the brisk night air.

He shook his head no and had a sip of his drink.

“Wired up,” he said. Which was completely true. And he did not think he could sleep next to her
right now, that was the rest of it. Not with the kind of thoughts that were spinning around in his head.
It felt profoundly wrong.

“Can I sit here with you for a bit?” she asked.

“Of course you can,” he said. He even got up and shifted his chair, to give her more room in that
crammed little balcony. What a gentleman.

They both looked out to the night, to the quiet, deserted street. He was glad the hotel they had chosen
was a little place like this. A bit like Loki’s place.

“What a strange evening,” she said.

Thor had a drink. Nothing to say. She was looking for an opening to talk. Thor was not sure he
wanted to give her one. He was afraid of where it may lead.

She rubbed the goose-bumps that broke over her skin when the cool night breeze touched her arms.
“Is it always like that, with Loki?” she asked.

Thor turned his eye to her.

“Like what.”

“A… a whirlwind. I don’t think I managed to relax properly for one second during the whole dinner. It’s like every word he says has a double meaning. And the way he looks at people…”

“He’s intense,” said Thor, with the tiniest smile he could manage. He fucking adored that about Loki.

“He’s, uh, a bit exhausting.”

“When you’re not used to it, I suppose he can be.” He had a sip. He did not add his own two cents—that Loki was a live wire with unending energy and passion and talent. That he never just looked at things, but drilled into them instead with fascination, and set them on fire in the process, until everything shone brighter and more vibrantly, including Thor himself. He did not say that, when it was fixed on Thor, Loki’s intensity was not exhausting at all, but a source of pure, thrumming electricity. He did not say his brother was the only person in this world that made him feel alive like that. Because you do not fall into praise over the man you’re in love with in front of your current girlfriend.

“He didn’t like me,” she said then.

Well, there wouldn’t be any old beating around the bush then. Perhaps the fact that Thor was not taking her side was bugging her.

“You didn’t like him,” he countered.

There, she had her opening. She bit her lip, perhaps gathering some courage. Well, she had always been brave.

“No, I did not,” she said. "He planned all of this tonight. He did it on purpose. I mean, he’s not stupid, there is no way he would have forgotten what day it was! I don’t know what he intended, but it did not feel like an innocent joke meant to amuse anyone. He wanted to cause mischief. And even if it was a joke, the way he enjoyed himself seeing you so affected by it… I’m just convinced that this is why he did it. I’m sorry because he is your brother, and I know you love him, and you know I wanted to like him, but he just doesn’t seem a very good person at all. He’s sneaky, deceitful and manipulative, and he likes to hurt you and play you up. I’m sorry but no, I did not like him.”

Thor was boring into her with a hostile squint. She stared back, standing her ground.

“You don’t know him,” said Thor at last. “You don’t know where he’s coming from.” A bit feeble. Unconvincing, perhaps, but he could not use any of his other, much more powerful arguments, because they were not supposed to ever see the light of day.

“That’s true, I don’t,” agreed Jane. “I’m just describing what I saw. He knows he has some sort of… power over you, and he uses it. He likes to make you uncomfortable and give you a hard time. It just doesn’t seem like a very nice thing to do to me, least of all to your own brother, especially when you have done so much for him.”

Thor gave that some thought.

“Are hard time?” he asked, looking down.
“Yes, it was like… Like he knew your weak spots and kept poking at them. I think he deliberately set out to dislike me and make me feel out of place. It’s as if he was… jealous. As if he could not stand that you love anyone else. He should be happy for you, right? And instead he was… I don’t know. He doesn’t seem like a very healthy person to be around.”

A long silence which he spent rolling the drink in his glass.

“…Are you saying you don’t want me to see him again?” he asked, slowly, a loaded question.

“I can’t tell you that,” said Jane.

She was sensing the battle-lust in him, as if he was baiting her to give him reasons to fight. That was not like Thor at all. He usually avoided arguing with her like the plague. Was this Loki’s doing too? Oh, she was angry, years worth of frustration, of banging her head against the brick wall Thor had turned out to be. She had never intended for this to become a settling down of the accounts pending between them, she had not wanted to address the wider issues tonight. But she had had enough and right now she did not fucking care.

“I just… I wish he didn’t have such a strong effect on you,” said Jane, her tone collected, but severe. “I had thought that having him in your life again would help you, I don’t know, focus. That the fact that there was unfinished business with him, I mean, that you felt so guilty over what had happened in his life, and how much you missed him, was what kept you from settling down and… be there for me again, like you used to. And I hoped that, once you got a good relationship again, and saw him doing well and getting on with his own life, you would get rid of all that guilt and let yourself be happy. With me.” A choke in her voice. “But it’s made it worse! I don’t know what else to do, Thor. You won’t talk to me! I don’t understand!”

He gave that some thought, nursing his glass, dwarfed between his big hands.

“…You want to break up?” he asked, his words slow again, dense and heavy with the weight of what he was saying.

Her eyes widened in dread.

“No! I want to sort it out! I want you to open up and talk to me! I don’t even know what you think about what you’ve just said!” Her face was all anguish and consternation. Had she really not seen this coming?

Thor mulled this over for a long time. He looked out to the night while he said this.

“You were hoping that me seeing Loki again would bring some kind of closure for us both. But there can be no closure between us. It’s just not like that. Loki and I… There is no resolving our problem, if you want to call it that. I don’t think Loki wants it resolved either, not the way you would like. And I know I don’t.”

She did not understand, of course. It was all gobbledygook to her, everything vague and unspecific, a fucking riddle.

“What does that even mean?” she said.

“It’s complicated.”

“Complicated? It’s pathological!” Angry now. “I wish you could distance yourself a bit because… It’s as if he was in love with you or something!”
Thor smirked. He raised his gaze slowly, slowly, and looked her straight in the eye, a strange expression on his face, loaded, full of intent. He stared and stared and stared.

She frowned, deeper and deeper, as the pieces suddenly shifted one quarter on themselves and started to fall into place. She started to see everything with new eyes. Loki’s resistance to meet up with them, his instant dislike of her. The way he had behaved all night, throwing his wonderful life and his wonderful friends and his wonderful lover to Thor’s face. She had said it herself, he was trying to make Thor uncomfortable. The-the flirting. That was what Loki had been doing, flirting with his brother. The songs, my god… those songs…

“Oh my god.”

Thor broke eye contact and looked down to his hands, clasped tightly together. He exhaled.

She knew.

“Is that what it is? Really?” She was stunned, aghast. “He is really in love—in love with you?”

He nodded. There was a brightness to his expression, a smile more in his eyes than on his lips. He knew what he looked like right now. He looked quite happy, and rather smug. He could not fucking help himself. Loki loved him. He loved him enough to burn his throat raw singing it to the whole fucking room, to the whole town.

The way she stared at him. Well, smugness was not not what one expected from one’s boyfriend upon the revelation of some very fucked up emotional dynamics in his family.

Unless…

Her eyes widened, shock and horror. It was as if she had seen the Blob advancing towards her.

“And you…?” she gasped, breathless.

Thor nodded, once. Then he locked eyes on hers again, daring her to cast the first stone. Because he would not take it sitting down.

She sat there gaping in silence for a long time, shell-shocked.

“Good god. …Since when?” she said when she was able to, with a feeble wisp of a voice.

“I can’t remember when we weren’t.”

She was unblinking, the monstrosity of it all engulfing her.

”Your own brother?” He gawked at him, maybe still hoping against hope that she had got it wrong.

Thor sat up, back straight, head high, princely arrogance bulking him up, making him grow. It was a quality that ran in the family, taking up more space than they physically occupied. His parents had filled entire theatres. Loki still did.

“Yes, my own brother,” he said after some time, defiant. It went like this. Only Thor got to put himself down. Attack him, and he would defend himself. He would never take it lying down, and he would most definitely not turn the other cheek. The more appalled she was, the more brazen he would become.

She stared at him as if she did not know him. His eyes, she could not find his lover and companion there; they were fierce and unyielding and held no affection at all, no warmth. He was not her man at
this point. Right now, he was on somebody else’s side, and she was on her own. More than anything else she had heard that night, it was that look in his eyes what broke her heart.

“And have you…?” she began to say.

“Fucked? Yes” he cut her.

She turned a whiter shade of pale, her eyes broadened even more. Oh, so perhaps that was not what she was asking then. Well, there it goes anyway.

“Your own brother…”

“Yes,” said Thor chin up, head high, eyes burning with defiance. “Always. All my life. Since before I could understand what I felt, and everyday since. I didn’t choose it, but I’m not ashamed of it, and I don’t regret it. I regret a lot of things that have happened, but loving him and being with him, I don’t.”

The fact that this was not completely true all of the time did not worry Thor at this instant. They were not in hair-splitting territory yet. He was trying to make a point, and he did not fucking care right now whom he crushed with it.

She was staggering from the sudden revelation, and she looked lost, helpless.

His eyes were cold to her distress. Right now, he did not want to comfort her or make her feel better. He had heard enough tonight of what she thought about the man he loved. He had seen in her face how she felt about their love. He could not see his woman either in that disgusted expression of hers. He saw a foe. Thor was not one to beat himself over things that could not be helped, and he was not one to take other people’s judgement meekly. He was not fucking ashamed of loving Loki. He would not try and soften the blow for her, not if that meant saying one word he would not wish Loki to hear if he was there to hear it. He owed him that at least.

She sat there, breathing agitated, expression distraught.

“So what now?” she said. “Are you going to…?”

Thor sat in silence, refusing to lend a hand.

“Are you going to go to him?” she asked, eventually.

He had a drink, and did not reply. He was not in the mood to discuss any plans, or lack thereof, referring to his incestuous love for his brother. Not with the woman who was still officially his girlfriend.

“Was that always the problem with us?” she asked then, suddenly very small, arms wrapped around herself, the silky wide sleeves of her robe undulating in the faint breeze, beautiful too in her dejection.

“Yes,” said Thor. He really was done with confusions and misunderstandings and half-truths and white lies. "It's always been him."

Her face was not disgusted anymore, nor angry. She looked forlorn.

It was over.

The fight left Thor as quickly as it had seized him. He sighed deeply, as the immense sadness of it all
started to take over him. That was his Jane there. That he had always loved Loki was not the only truth she deserved to hear tonight.

“Out of all the people in this world that aren’t him,” he said, “you are the only person I have ever wanted to try it with. I had never even considered it with anyone else.” He looked at her lovely, delicate face, mourning her already. “I wanted for it to work. I would have liked it if it had worked between us.”

She said nothing. Not tonight, but some day, he hoped it might make her feel better about all this. She did not deserve to suffer over his mess ups, and he wished there was something he could say or do to ease the feeling of betrayal, grief and abandonment she must be feeling. But all his apologies would never make it better, so he saved them. He would not ask for forgiveness. She was entitled to hate him if she so wished. He would suffer it gladly if that was what she needed right now. It was the least he could do.

Perhaps one day, they would be able to talk about this. Perhaps then he would tell her how sorry he was. Perhaps that day, he would ask her to forgive him.

“Did you ever really love me?” she asked, with a threadbare whisper.

Thor’s brow scrunched deep, his heart breaking. He rubbed a heavy hand to his eyes and face. That she had come to doubt that. Shit, he was not a bad person. Why must he always hurt the people he loved the most?

“Yes I did,” he said. “Very much.”

“But even in those times, you… longed for Loki?”

Thor sighed. If he was her friend and not her… ex-boyfriend, probably, he would advise her not to poke in the wound like that, and stop asking horrible questions. As a friend, he would refuse to answer them. As a boyfriend, he did not think he had the right to deny her what she wanted to know.

“Yes.” A drink. “But I thought it was impossible.”

“And now?”

He downed the rest of his drink. That was not for her to ask.

The break up had been civil in the end. Nobody rose their voices, nobody screamed, nothing was broken. Her eyes were cold and resentful on him as he packed up his things. It was all so fucking sad.

About the move, Coulson had asked Thor if he wanted him to prepare a press release. Thor had said no. When the noises started, that’s when they would come out with the break up. They were not to start the noise. That would give him a few weeks of peace.
Thor received an envelope with two tickets to the opening night of *M.Butterfly* in his new apartment in L.A. Loki had sent them to Coulson’s P.O. Box. The seats were central, right by the stage. He decided he would offer the second one to someone outside the theatre, on the street.

On the plane to New York, his thoughts spun around themselves again and again. He did not have a clue what he had to do. He wanted to do what was right by Loki. He had acted with his heart once and he… he very nearly fucking killed him, was not that what it came down to in the end? He wanted him, so he took him, and damn the consequences. He had wanted to swear to him things he knew were impossible, and he did, thinking perhaps that, if he wished it hard enough, they would come true. He broke Loki’s heart. He betrayed him. He took him and then he let him slip through his fingers. He didn’t mean to cause harm, but did that change that he caused it?

Nothing had changed between them. They were still brothers, and that would never change. It was as hopeless between them as it had always been. But he wanted to sit down with Loki and talk. They had never done that. If he was able to tell Loki how he felt, and tell him his reasons, and explain why he was choosing to stay away, maybe they would find some peace, and get over it, and… Fuck, he did not want to stay away.

*Yes, but it’s not about what you fucking want, Odinson.* It was not even what Loki wanted. It was about doing what was right by his brother, for once in his fucking life.

Fuck.

He would go to him, and sit down, and talk to him, and fucking go home and cry for the rest of his fucking life, and then one day they would get over it. And Loki would find a man who was not afraid of… showing the world how much he fucking loved him. Because even if his brother thought it was ok to be someone’s dirty secret, Thor knew it was not. Not in the short run, not in the long run. That would never make Loki happy and healthy. It was not what Thor wanted to give him, not what Loki deserved. And it was the only option, right?, the only thing he could promise, the only thing he had to give. More secrets, more lies. He was done with that.

Thor spent most of the trip wiping the tears as they kept coming, before they could swell and fall.

*

At the theatre, they let him through to the backstage because they knew who he was. An assistant with a board and an earpiece led him to Loki’s dressing room. She knocked and opened the door one sliver.

“Mr. Laufeyson, your brother is here to see you,” she said.

There was a mumble inside that Thor did not catch. The assistant smiled at him politely and let him through the door.

Thor was confronted with a strange vision of colours, lights and mirrors. The sumptuous costumes Loki was to wear hanging on a clothes-rail at one side, silks and brocades in red, gold, jade green, white, sunflower yellow, —a smart, black, out-dated male suit incongruous there among them—, and an explosion of flowers and bouquets on the other side. And his brother in the middle of it all, halfway through the process of becoming a *dan*, in front of the huge, wall-to-wall mirror that doubled up
the brightness in the room.

Thor stood there, out of words, out of breath. Loki’s face was masked in unblemished white, his eyelids infused with pink that radiated down his cheeks in a mist, thick black lines marking his eyes, his lips chrysanthemum red, his hair in a complicated do decorated with hanging beads and extremely long, arched feathers. He looked softer, younger, and exquisitely artificial, like something that belonged in a hothouse or in a dream.

He was looking at Thor with apprehension and a sheepish gaze, but Thor barely registered it.

“Wow,” is all Thor lamely managed, after a very long time. “Wow.”

Loki smiled. A small, closed-lip, demure smile.

“You look incredible,” said Thor.

Loki scrunched his face in frustration and displeasure.

“I look like a fucking drag queen. I’m too tall. My nose is too fucking big for this, and my face too… sharp. I should be all round-faced and little and sweet.” He huffed, irritated. “I really am not the best man for this. But anyway, too fucking late, right? Good news is, nobody out there has seen anything anywhere near real Beijing Opera so at least there is that… I still have to sing a bit of two fucking arias from Madame Butterfly though. Jesus, why did I agree to this.” He could not rub his face like he seemed aching to do, so he worried at the sleeve of his bathrobe instead. He looked wretched.

Thor had never in his life seen Loki insecure on opening night. Nervous, excited, anxious even. Insecure?

He kneeled down in front of him and held his hands. Loki observed him from under a frown, eyes from Thor’s hands to his eyes. He was still uneasy with him, Thor was still not making sense of why.

“You’ll be alright. You’ll be perfect,” said Thor, gripping his hands tight. “What did mum always say?”

Loki smirked, looked to their clasped hands.

“Know your lines.” A smile that was a pinch wider broke through the scowl. “I know my lines,” he said.

Thor squeezed Loki’s hands in his. “You’ll be perfect.”

Loki looked up to him, and his expression under all that make-up took Thor back to shooting *The Secret Garden*. Loki had been terrified of dad, convinced that he would disappoint him. Thor remembered losing patience with Loki at the time. “Stop whining. Why do you care so much what he thinks?” As if he had not cared just as much. They just expressed it differently. Thor got cockier, Loki turned in on himself.

Thor beamed at his brother, stroked his hands.

“I would give you a hug, but I’d fuck up your make-up,” he said, and kissed Loki’s hands instead.

Loki met his eyes and swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing quickly in his long, white throat. The white mask of make-up cut a line across it. Loki was baffled now, at a loss. He did not understand what was happening.
“Where’s Jane?” he said, glancing towards the door.

“She’s not here,” said Thor. And nothing else. There would be time to talk, but not before the show. “Are you alright?”

“Hm.” Eyes shut tight for a blink. “I think it’s the most difficult thing I’ve ever done.”

One last hand squeeze, a warm smile on Thor’s face that softened the tension in Loki’s brow one smidge, and Thor stood up.

“I guess you’ll have a big opening night party and the works later, but…” he started.

“You can come,” cut Loki in, quickly.

Thor smiled.

“I’m going to be a few days in town. Maybe we can talk?” he asked. There had been a mixture of hope and sadness in there, Thor himself had noticed it. Loki would not even know where to start to untangle and make sense of it. He pulled a small frown, bit the smallest pinch of the inside flesh of his lip, where the lipstick did not reach. He was confused, searching Thor’s face, trying to read him and figure out what his thoughts and intentions were. It was unfortunate. He needed all his concentration and focus now.

“You’re not mad at me?” said Loki, finally, anxious.

Thor’s smile swelled with love at that. *Loki.*

There was no time for this.

“I’ll see you later,” said Thor, with a little grin. He looked at him, putting everything he had in his eyes. Then he winked at him. “Break a leg.”

Loki smiled with just his eyes, dazzling bright.

Thor shut the door behind him and exhaled.

*Butterfly… butterfly.*

Lights off. Curtain.

It started with a rumour and it ended up bringing the house down. Thundering applause.

Lights on, spell broken. The actors took the stage, beaming, all friends again. A bow. Whistles and louder applause. Another bow. Another.

The play was heartbreaking, horrific, cruel. Nobody was nice, nobody was likeable. Up until the very end, it was impossible to feel empathy for any of the characters. And then, in the last few instants, the sad, miserable humanity of it all became overwhelming and crushed the soul.

Song appeared in the very first scene, an object of adoration that Gallimard longed for, dancing in
full traditional Chinese costume to the music that sounded so strange to Thor’s ears, eerily evocative and entrancing. Loki’s movements so fluid, his muscle control impeccable. That was Loki the ballet dancer right there, smooth as a column of flowing water. It had left Thor glued to his seat. Him and the whole theatre.

Song had a quick tongue, a quick brain, and an aggressiveness that was Loki through and through. His transformation into the fantasy passive, submissive, virginal, devoted little woman hurt to watch. And yes, fuck, Thor felt ashamed of it, what with the fucking theme of the play and all, but it was also a fucking turn-on. Loki managed to make himself look smaller, lither, weaker, and then grow again at the end, when he appeared as a man, in a suit, hair in a sleek ponytail and clean face, except for the very light make-up aimed to give him a vaguely Asian appearance, without turning it into a joke.

In his last scene, Song undressed to nothing, slowly, enticingly, and then left the stage chased away by Gallimard, with not a lot on. Thor had squirmed and wiggled in his seat, as discretely as he could (which was not that much when one is 6.4” and his width) trying to do something to accommodate and conceal his boner. Loki had quickly redressed for the curtain calls, but his shirt was still half undone at the neck, his hair loose and messed up. To Thor, he looked fucking ravished. Not helping, thought Thor, not helping at all.

Standing ovations for the key performers. Kevin had been tremendous. His Gallimard was stupid, despicable, weak spirited and pathetic, and then at the last minute, intensely human and painfully tragic, rising above himself to heroic martyrdom with the rare, untainted purity of his love in a world of muck, full of earthworms devoid of heart and imagination.

Thor saw Loki flinch and quiver when Kevin pushed him gently to the front of the stage to claim his own applause, as if he feared that, if he got singled out from the rest of the ensemble, it would turn to booing.

“Bravo! Bravo!” The applause grew stronger still. Loki looked… overwhelmed, a deer caught in the headlights. Kevin’s hand was at Loki’s back, stroking warmly, and then applauding Loki himself, a proud smile on his face. Loki took a bow, and the audience managed to crank the noise up another notch. Thor’s hands were aching.

He deserved it. Loki’s Song operated on three different planes, and they were patent to the audience at all times: the performance he put up for them, the one he put on for Gallimard, and the one he put on for himself. And it all crumbled down devastatingly in his last scene, when in arrogance and resentment he threw the lie to Gallimard’s face, undressing, leaving no room for the lie to hide anymore, and he challenged his lover. “You still adore me.” Then Gallimard laughed at him and turned him away, his cackles cold and hollow in the completely silent theatre, and the pain on Song’s face was even more poignant, casting a new light on Loki’s whole performance throughout the play. It wasn’t just shock and humiliation there, it was heartbreak. While Song had made a show of remaining cynical and aloof, at this moment he could not hide anymore that he had hoped. It had all been on Loki’s face, there and not there in an instant, so damn powerful that a muted gasp had risen from the stalls.

Last curtain call. Flowers were brought in. The director stepped out to receive his own applause, and then congratulate and embrace his actors.

Meanwhile, Loki looked for Thor in the first row, found him, and smiled with wet eyes. Thor touched an imaginary hat and bowed to him, his insanely talented brother, too fucking good for this world.
Down in the backstage, the party was at Kevin’s place. Loki’s dressing room was at the end of the corridor, a cul-de-sac, and the area was quiet. Thor heard someone say Loki was having a shower.

The corridor was crowded, attention turned towards Kevin’s room where they had all congregated. Thor walked pass, nobody stopped him. He spotted Tony and Natasha, but they did not notice him.

He let himself in the room.

Loki was naked, towelling his hair. He turned to face him.

His eyes, wide and vibrant with surprise.

Thor could not fucking think. He strode towards him like a wrecking ball. Loki dropped the towel, recoiled one step as if in fear, his back met the wall. Thor crowded him there, chest heaving, brain fogged with lust. He managed to stop himself for a moment, for a glimmer of clear thought to spark up, commanding with the weakest, most pathetic voice to turn back.

Loki hurled himself at him and kissed him, and that was his last chance gone. He returned the kiss like the world was ending tonight, hands around Loki’s neck, Loki’s hands frenetic in his clothes, in his fly, forceful tugs pushing his trousers down. He heard Loki panting and whimpering, felt him getting hard against him. He smelled of soap and of himself. Thor buried his face in Loki’s neck to saturate his senses with it. And all the time, Loki’s breaths and gasps and his heat. He bit into his flesh. He heard Loki laugh madly. Loki grabbed Thor’s hand, until then still around his neck, and roughly thrusting Thor’s fingers into his own mouth. His face, god, his tongue, the wet heat, the scrape of teeth. Loki’s mouth.

Then Loki’s hand on his cock, Loki’s thighs trying to climb him. Thor held his arse to help him up and crushed him between the wall and his own body, hands clenching firmly on Loki’s long, strong thighs. His cock was nudging hard in the cleft of his brother’s arse. He held Loki’s hips with a solid grip and pulled him close, to feel Loki’s cock against him. He took himself in hand and lined himself up.

“You can’t… fuck me dry, Thor,” panted Loki, kissing his throat, his ear, driving him fucking insane. “You’ll rip me apart.”

That sobered Thor up, froze him cold.

What are you fucking doing.

He had stopped, chest heaving, head light.

Loki reared his head back to look at him. Thor wanted to fucking die. He started to put Loki down.

“No, no, no, no, no!” Loki clung onto him, claws dipping deep in the flesh of Thor’s neck, trying to capture him in a kiss once again.

Thor grabbed his wrists and removed him, his own limbs feeling heavy and uncooperative.

Loki’s eyes. He was devastated, brokenhearted. He did not understand.

Thor backed away, slowly, panting with more than frustrated arousal, his throat choked and burning.
He walked back until he met the opposite wall. He scrubbed his face hard.

“I can’t… baby, I can’t do this.”

Loki’s face, agony and spite and hatred. Thor shut his eyes tight. He could not bear his gaze on him like that.

A smash, sudden, strident, made Thor jolt up, forced him to open his eyes. Loki had hurled a bottle of champagne against the wall.

Loki’s expression was one of vicious scorn.

“Let me explain,” said Thor, raising his hand in supplication.

“I don’t want to hear it,” said Loki, cutting.

“Please, baby,” Thor choked out, his voice thick.

Knock knock.

“Loki?”

Loki stared Thor down with contempt and hostility.

“Romanov,” he said, collected. “Give me a second.” He flicked with his eyes to Thor’s state of disarray.

Shit, he hadn’t even finished pulling his fucking pants up. He sorted himself out with clumsy, shaky hands. Loki’s eyes on him were pinning him down like an insect.

Loki was a fucking picture. His mouth flushed pink and swollen, his wet hair messed up in all directions, a blush of red around his neck, between his white thighs, fucking fingerprints on his white butt. And Thor’s mouth, no less puffed and ravaged. There was no fucking doubt what had just happened here.

Thor did not give a fuck what it looked like. All he cared for was to get away from the burn of Loki’s eyes.

He passed Natasha without a look or a word on his way out.

Loki sat himself down on a chair, back slumped, bare arse on the cold metal bringing his cock down almost instantly, not like a dead weight, but close enough. He spotted Natasha on the threshold, out of the corner of his eye, but didn’t face her.
Natasha walked inside the room putting one foot in front of the other gingerly, as if treading on a minefield.

Loki saw himself in the mirror. What a pathetic, miserable wreck he was.

“Wasn’t that Thor? Your brother, Thor?” she asked, carefully.

Loki hm-hmm’d. Natasha frowned.

“Tell me I’m imagining things.”

Loki reached for his pants on the clothes-horse.

“You’re imagining things.” He didn’t even try.

Chapter End Notes

It hurts me more than it hurts you.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Hm. The aftermath. Warning for extreme fucking up on both sides, including third persons.

It would seem this author doesn't fucking learn, does she?

Chapter Notes

I do what I want, Thor!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Come on,” said Natasha, once Loki was dressed and ready. “I’m taking you home.”

“What about the party?” asked Loki. He might be angry and wired up, but he was a professional. And a grown up, or so they told him. Responsibilities and all that.

“Do you want to go to the party?” said Natasha, all business.

“Hell, no,” said Loki.

“Then leave it to me.”

On the taxi, they were quiet for a long time.

“Is Thor Odinson a problem?” she asked, when they were a couple of streets away from the house.

Loki chuckled bitterly for a long time. She didn’t ask again.

Once inside the house, she followed him right in and stood there with crossed arms, still and observing.

“Suicide watch won’t be necessary, Romanov,” said Loki, his back to her, pouring himself a glass of wine.

“I didn’t think it was,” she said. “An explanation, though, would be welcome.”

Loki turned to her, assessing her expression, that little pout he had a weakness for.

“How long has this been going on?” she asked.
“There’s nothing going on,” he snapped.

“Loki,” she warned.

He studied her face. That vertical crease in her brow, he was very familiar with. It had been there when he gave her the full disclosure on his past, when she asked to be “briefed on all she needed to know to do her job effectively”. It was thoughtful, had a tinge of worry, but was mostly about weighing risks and considering options. Loki wondered whether she would hold it against him that he had left such a fucking big part of his life out of that brief.

“I can’t prepare for this unless I know what I’m dealing with,” she said.

“There’s nothing to prepare for, Romanov.” It came out as a grumble. He was aware of the grimace that had just crossed his face. “There is nothing, full stop.”

“That’s not what it looks like, and that’s not how it feels,” she countered. She would not let it lie, would she?

Loki felt his lips tremble, his eyes stinging. Hell, no, not that, and not in front of her.

“Well, ask him then!” he roared, hurling the glass across the room. It shattered on the floor. “Because I sure as fuck don’t have a fucking clue!”

Natasha had barely flinched. Which was both irritating and oddly calming.

Not that there was any calming Loki, not for a while yet. With rage and hurt soaking his brain, he was done with caution, secrecy and dissimulation.

“He wants me, he doesn’t want me, I don’t fucking know!” he roared. “He can’t make up his own fucking mind!” He started to pace the room, wishing he could break more things. If only he wasn’t renting… Damn! When did he become a bloody grown up?

“…Are you in love with him?” asked Natasha.

Just like that.

It froze Loki on the spot. Not for long though.

“I fucking hate him!!” he screamed.

Again, Natasha did not flinch and did not show any particular reaction of alarm, just cool, collected concern. Her silence pulled the words out of his mouth as surely as if she had them tied to a string.

"And him?" she asked.

“Him? He’s a fucking coward!” shouted Loki, pacing, pacing, his breathing increasingly difficult. “He obviously doesn’t fucking love me enough!”

He crumbled. Tears started falling, sobs shaking his lanky frame. He hid his face behind his hands, rubbing much too hard. The make-up girl would fucking adore him tomorrow. Shit! And all over that sodding blond beefcake he could not fucking rid himself from!

He stomped to the bathroom, locked himself up there, and splashed his face with water as cool as he could get it. After a while of this treatment, his chest still caved in with the urge of sobbing, but tears had been cut off. He toyed with the idea of never getting out of the toilet again. He pictured his own skeleton lying in the bathtub, covered in parchment-thin skin, nails curled on themselves, hair to his
ankles.

But, yeah, no. Grown up, remember? Get some fucking balls, Laufeyson.

When he walked back into the sitting room, he heard the whistle of the kettle. He drifted to the kitchen, eyes low, breathing thick and shivery. Natasha’s phone was on the worktop, next to the two mugs in which she was brewing his best Sencha (he could tell by the fragrance.)

“Sigyn will be here tomorrow around midday,” she announced, discarding the light mesh infusers.

“I don’t need a fucking nurse,” he grunted.

“No, you need your friend,” she countered.

A long silence. He wanted Sigyn right here right now so very much. But it was bloody annoying how ready and eager everyone in his life was to leave whatever they were doing and come to mollycoddle him, at the drop of a fucking hat! He was not a goddamn baby! —No, idiot, he told himself, you’re a nutter. They think this is a medical emergency, make no fucking mistake.

“I’m a professional,” he said, chin up. “This is not going to get in the way of the play, if that’s what you’re worrying about.”

“No, that’s not what worries me right now,” she said. She blew on the boiling tea, her pout even poutier. “I know how seriously you take your job. But you’re in pain and you need a kind of support you will not take from anyone but her.”

Loki huffed, suddenly exhausted.

“You’re not even a bit shocked about this?” he asked, in dismay.

Natasha shrugged.

“It is what it is,” she said, philosophically, and she took a small sip. She winced with the burn. So, she was human after all.

Natasha left in the morning, leaving him with a cup of coffee on the table next to him, and a heavy look he tried to sustain, but didn’t quite manage.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” she said, from the hallway.

He had been perching on the armchair then, wrapped up in a quilt, and he was still there when Sigyn knocked on his door, hours later.
“I don’t want to talk,” was the very first thing Loki said to her, after seven hours on an airplane, plus a couple more in Gatwick, plus another decent hour travelling from the JFK. What a fucking charmer, eh?

“So don’t,” she said.

He resumed his self-pitying exercises on the armchair, nested in the quilt.

She made some tea, finding her way around the kitchen with very few glitches, and then sat cross-legged on the couch, and stretched her neck. She whipped out her mobile and phoned her mum, reported she had arrived and everything was fine. Then she phoned her dad and finally the hospital. Then she started scrolling. She must have gone on Tumblr or something.

A quiet period of time ensued in this manner, Sigyn busy, Loki sulking.

Soon enough, he was feeling pretty stupid.

“Where’s Minnie?” he said.

“At my mum’s,” she answered, with a little smile, eyes on the screen.

Loki rubbed his brow, trying to ease the strain. He had slept dismally and he had to make for the theatre in a few hours. He really wasn’t feeling up to anything right now, but the show must go on, right? Fuck!

And just then, bang on cue, ping! the umpteenth fucking message of the day. Loki did not even check it. He knew perfectly well who it was. He grabbed the phone and threw it against the wall, where it made a satisfying crackle of broken glass.

“I know what I’m getting you for Christmas then,” said Sigyn, eyes still on the screen.

Loki growled, looked out the window towards the Hopperish red-brick façade. His stomach was grumbling. He had deprived himself of food all day, of course, because he was moping, and in this state one should not do base, positive things such as eating, lest one’s mood should improve before running a full, satisfying course of intense dejection.

A thought crossed his mind then.

“Has he contacted you?” he asked her.

“Yes.”

He eyed her with a wary squint.

“What have you told him?”

“That I’m here now and he doesn’t need to worry,” said Sigyn, with a nice, untroubled grin.

Loki took a moment to consider that, while he showed some teeth.

“What did he say?”

“He said that he wants to talk to you.”

“I don’t want to fucking see him ever again,” snarled Loki.
“I’ll tell him,” said Sigyn, as if he just sent his regards.

Loki kept his scowl firmly set in place.

“What did Natasha tell you?” he asked.

“That Thor came to see you after the play, there had been some sort of altercation in your dressing room (her words), and that you were in a lot of distress.”

“Nothing else?”

Sigyn shook her head.

Loki’s lip remained twisted in a bitter grimace. He opened his mouth to start talking, but his throat choked up tight. Apparently, he wasn’t ready to open up just yet.

Sigyn stopped staring at him. She finished whatever it was she had been doing on the phone, stood up and made for the kitchen, with a detour to kiss his head first.

He heard her clanking some pots. After peace and quiet returned, she appeared on the threshold, leaning against the door frame.

“I’m making pasta,” she said. “Garlic and oil alright?”

Loki was hungry. And tired.

“No garlic,” he said. “I’m sure Monsieur Gallimard would not appreciate it.”

She smirked and went back into the kitchen.

The moment the pasta went in the water, along with a bay leaf, the smell started to spread around the house, plain and hearty and mouthwatering.

Loki sighed. What a fucking idiot he was. A self-centred, obnoxious, overdramatic diva, who for some reason had been granted friends he would never deserve.

He got himself up on his feet, still wrapped up in the quilt, dragging it behind him like a makeshift cape. He shuffled unsteadily to the kitchen, with a light head. Fuck, he had forgotten his meds.

When Sigyn spotted him, she smiled and carried on grating long shavings of hard cheese. There were whiffs of fragrant steam in the air from the pasta. Loki collapsed on a chair, hoping the burn in his throat would stay under control as he told his tale.

“He came to see me before the play, and he wasn’t angry at me about the party,” he began, hoarse from pushing his voice through the urge to scream and bawl. “He was… he was very sweet, and he looked at me like… Shit, I don’t know. And Jane wasn’t there, I don’t know where she was. And after the play he came into the dressing room again and… He had that look on him, the ‘I’m going to fuck you against the wall’ look. And we kissed and…

Fuck.” He rubbed his eyes hard. He was absolutely determined, not one fucking tear more, not one. “He was going to fuck me, I mean, we were there, but then he stopped and… I don’t know what the hell happened there, Sigyn, I just don’t.”

Sigyn gave that some thought, as was her manner. She checked her watch and headed for the stove. She turned it off, drained the pasta, served it, drizzled both portions with oil and sprinkled on some salt and herbs. She put one plate in front of Loki, one on her spot, got the cutlery, and sat down in
front of him.

“…Have you thought about asking him?” she said, twirling a mouthful of spaghetti around her fork.

Loki squinted at her with green, malicious eyes.

“Are you kidding me?” he growled. "Too fucking good for him."

She swallowed her mouthful.

“If punishing him you punish yourself, what’s the point?”

“The point is he can go fuck himself, that’s the point!” he roared, and he very nearly did something unforgivable with that full plate of food her friend had just kindly prepared for him. “He’s fucking scared, that’s what it is,” he groaned. “He’s scared about the scandal and aboutruining his career. The same fucking story all our lives. He wants to be a fucking movie star more than he wants to be with me. That’s all there is to it.” He could feel tears welling up in his eyes and he did not have a chance to stop them. “I can’t fucking believe I actually had hopes. Haven’t I learned anything?”

“I’m not excusing him,” said Sigyn softly. “I just think that your brother is not a bad person. If you could understand what went on better, you could deal with it better, that's all.”

“Yeah, fuck, as if I’m going to sit down and listen to the same fucking shit all over again, just so he can feel better about himself.”

Sigyn shrugged.

“It’s up to you.”

They ate in silence.

A full stomach made Loki’s mood less volatile at least. When she curled up on the couch for a nap (she had had an early morning after all), with ‘Murder She Wrote’ in a low humdrum on the telly, he ended up sliding behind her, big spoon, the familiar scent of her shampoo and the citrussy perfume she wore as soothing as the smell of home. She tangled their hands together.

He also needed a nap. He did his best to get one.

She went along with him to the theatre, and they found her an empty seat. She had her own ticket for a few weeks later, when she had managed to arrange a full week off work to visit him, but when Loki mentioned it, wondering what was happening now with those plans, she said “I’m sure I’ll want to see it again.”

Loki was a professional, but unfortunately, as it turned out, also human; his performance was, indeed, affected by his personal circumstances this time. On his second night, Song’s dancing moves were far from perfect (not that he thought anyone but his coach would notice), and he was particularly vicious, particularly contemptuous of Gallimard, his reveal more aggressive than enticing —trying to kill his heart there, not fan his passion; there were indeed tears when Gallimard turned him away, but they were tears of fury: and finally, Song’s quiet contemplation of his lover’s suicide
was that of a spider or another creature without a heart.

Applause was thunderous again. Loki took a step forward to claim his due with less hesitation that night. He stared at the indistinct sea of faces, as people kept getting up on their feet for a standing ovation, and try as he might, he was not warmed by it. You people just don’t fucking know, he wanted to shout at them. I was all over the fucking place tonight. You just like the fucking drama. Go watch Jeremy Kyle or something. Stop with the flattery. I earned none of it.

Loki cried in the shower, like a worn-out cliché. He was seething with anger, at Thor, at the world, mainly at himself. He made a scathing remark in his own head about ‘these artistic types’ that sounded so much like his father, he even heard it in Odin’s voice.

There were knocks on the door while he towelled his hair distractedly, and his heart skipped a beat because… because he was pathetic, that’s why. It was fucking Gallimard he should be playing. He was the fucking idiot who would happily die over a fucking fantasy, right? Maybe not happily. Damn, he was crying again.

Sigyn came in and wrapped him in her arms without one word. He slumped on the metal chair, naked as the day he was born, and she held him as his shoulders shook and his whole body ached with it. Natasha was on the threshold, he had spotted her flaming red hair out of the corner of his eye.

He wondered what they made of him, big, stupid cry baby.

All this fucking drama. Over what.

Sigyn laid with him on his bed, petting his hair. He mumbled more self-pitying babble for some time, but soon enough he was boring himself out of his mind, and he asked about her work. She entertained him and enlightened him with stories of people who suffered, of the bizarre, unexpected ways an ailing mind manifested its mysteries, and the new programs they were trying to bring these people comfort and some relief, and the ones she had been reading about. She sounded excited.

Loki looked at her round face, those dimples on her cheeks that popped so quickly with her easy smile. He kissed her forehead. She grinned, and he tried to grin back.

“Sleep” she said.

He closed his eyes and tried.

He had learned he did not so much overcome things as he got used to them just being there, burrowing inside him like a dormant parasite. Same thing really, he supposed.

Sigyn left the next evening, and Natasha resumed her duties as watcher and guardian, diligently and
with not many words. She did not insist that he talked to Thor. Clever girl.

Loki carried on with his work. Song remained quite vicious, but eventually he began to feel he had control over his performance again. He enjoyed going to that place in his mind, gutting Gallimard night after night, and every time he had to exit the stage with tears of pain and humiliation, it grated a bit less. Talk about catharsis.

He was less suspicious of the audience’s praise and applause, but he realised how stiffly he took his bows still, how hard his eyes when he smiled.

Fucking Thor, and fuck himself. How brilliant they had always been at turning everything they touched into bile and ash.

*    *    *

(3 months later.)

New Year’s Eve at Chez Stark.

Thor had four pairs of jeans, five shirts and three sweaters on the bed, waiting for him to make a decision. He did not even know why he was trying so hard. Chances were, Loki would turn up, see him there, and leave. He would certainly not stop to comment on Thor’s bloody outfit.

And yet.

He settled for faded blue jeans, old and snug, white shirt, cream bulky knitted jacket with a snuggly collar. He looked softer like that, Loki used to say. He had said something once about him wearing knitted jumpers... In Iceland. *Fuck.*

Hair up or hair down? He was growing it again. He had finished shooting for *The Cold Six Thousand* a few weeks ago. He was on for Master and Commander 2 next.

Loki had said once he liked the bun. He also used to weave his fingers through Thor’s hair in the throes of passion, and pull. Damn, his insides stirred. It’s not like you’re trying to woo him, Odinson, is it? *Fuck.* He was such a fucking mess. Hair down.

Loki had not answered one single message, had not picked up one single phone call. Thor had contemplated calling from a different mobile (Tony had suggested it) but he refused to sneak up on Loki.

Look at him now, getting ready for an ambush. How the mighty have fallen.
He talked to Sigyn often. She did not tell him much or give him details — she was loyal —, just what she felt Thor needed to know to keep him from worrying himself to a burn mark in the carpet.

He went to see the play again, and he noticed a considerable difference. Song’s hatred so pure at times, coming off in waves. It had made Thor flinch in his seat, feeling it all aimed at him.

Yes, a month ago he had refused to sneak up on Loki and treasonably force him to face him, because he had no right and all that malarkey. But let’s be honest here, what had kept him so strong and pure in his resolve was the unarticulated hope that Loki would relent and agree to hear him out. Why had he ever believed that, knowing how bloody stubborn his baby brother was, he had no idea, and it was a testament only to the wreck Thor had become, and to how much he was now living on wishful thinking.

By now, Thor had lost his faith. Not to mention a good deal of his sleep and his appetite. So, when Tony had suggested the New Year’s Eve party at the top of his Manhattan tower, Thor had been too desperate not to jump into it with both feet.

Which is how he had ended up sitting all stiff on the edge of one of Tony’s leather couches, with a beer, bouncing one leg anxiously, waiting for Loki, who had not been informed that Thor would be there. He was surrounded by fancy people clustered in groups, some talking, some dancing, most flirting, and he had never felt like such an outsider in a social situation ever before in his life.

When Loki finally walked in, Thor sprung up in his seat. He watched across the single-space penthouse as his brother got rid of that majestic black leather and grey furry collared coat he had seen him wear in London. He looked luscious underneath, in deep green leather pants, clunky motorist boots, a chunky knitted black turtleneck, his hair up in a perfectly studied messy bun, kohl on his eyes, black nails and lipstick. He was like a creature from another time or another planet. The very colour of the walls had changed when he had stepped into the room, things had turned sharper and brighter. You’re so fucked, Odinson, Thor told himself. You have every fucking symptom in the book, and then some.

Loki spotted him from across the room. There was a frown there, and a tumble of emotions in quick succession that Thor was simply not able to untangle. He waited with apprehension, holding his breath. What would his brother do. Thor expected at any moment a dramatic spin and Loki walking away in a flurry of anger.

But there was none of that. Loki’s expression turned impenetrable under a light smirk, and he swaggered leisurely to where Thor was sitting, long, graceful strides. Thor’s heart pounded in his chest. Loki did not rush it. He took a second to say hello and dole some kisses to acquaintances as he encountered them, stole a glass of champagne when a waiter with a tray zoomed by, and sauntered for the last few steps with his eyes boring hard and flaming on a very, very jittery Thor.

“Don’t get up,” said Loki, interrupting Thor’s movement before it started.

“There he is,” said Tony, just in time, returning with a drink of his own. “Everything alright over here?”

“Perfectly fine,” said Loki, his tone artificially light, ringing hollow. “Life is too short to waste it holding grudges, isn’t it?”

“Right,” said Tony, his expression saying he thought this had been way too easy. Which is what Thor was thinking as well.
“Do you mind if I sit here?” said Loki, a tiny smirk on his face, eyes drilling on Thor’s.

“Of course not,” said Thor, beginning to shift to one side to make room for him.

Loki flopped unceremoniously on Thor’s lap, his hard, tight arse crushing Thor’s crotch.

*Oomph.*

Tony raised an eyebrow, but he obviously believed he knew enough of Loki not to be confounded at most of what he did. So he sat down beside them.

As for Thor, he was stunned, and *squashed.* He tried to get Loki to shift with discretion.

“Sorry, am I too heavy?” Loki wiggled. Right against his…

Thor gasped. That had been *deliberate.* He frowned and threw Loki a glower.

Yes, of course it had been too easy. That’s because it wasn’t over. Loki hadn’t even bloody started yet. He sat sideways, legs on Tony’s lap, and they both started to exchange some gossip which completely flew over Thor’s head.

Because his brain wasn’t fucking in it, his blood steadily abandoning the upper reaches and flowing south. Loki was a fucking fidget, always had been, the tough muscles of his butt fucking *massaging* Thor every time he moved. And he did not stop bloody moving. He had one arm around Thor’s neck for balance and he was drinking champagne from the glass in his other hand. He kept throwing his head back, to drink or to laugh as he talked with Tony, his throat just fucking *there,* his *smell.* He kept grinding and rubbing on Thor. And he had to have noticed his hard-on, *of course* he had. Because that was the fucking point of the exercise.

Grin and fucking… *ah, damn,* bear it, Odinson. His pulse was up, he felt short of breath, and he should fucking dismount his baby brother right this minute but… oh, fuck, do that again. …*No,* I mean, don’t fucking *do* that…

“Should you be drinking with your meds?” Thor grunted, his voice thick.

“Now you’re suddenly a medical expert?” said Loki, with a smirk and a minute hip roll refined to do the utmost damage with the least expenditure of energy. Well, he had fucking done that for a living once, didn’t he?

Enough of this.

“Tony, do you mind?” Thor said then, thinking he had to get back at least some measure of control over the situation. “I need to talk to…”

“And who is *that?*” cut Loki, eyeballing someone by the bar.

“Erik Lensherr,” said Tony. “A jerk.”

“Well, well, well,” purred Loki appreciatively, running his gaze over Mr. Lensherr from head to toe, and then back. “The fuck-me-against-the-wall-type,” he mused. And then Mr. Lensherr turned to face them, and Loki’s eyebrows shot up. The crotch rise on that suit was *high.* “Bloody hell,” said Loki, licking his lips. “I bet when *that* gets hard, there’s no blood left to irrigate the brain. I like that in a man.”

Thor drank up. Tony drank up. Loki kept checking out Erik Lensherr.
“He’s straight,” said Tony, which was as much as he could say without making himself sound ridiculous.

“Good job I’m flexible then,” said Loki, downing the rest of his drink and putting the glass to one side —his butt rubbing and pushing with acute precision as he did. Thor oomphed and bit his lip to stifle what had every fucking chance to have come out as a whimper.

Tony had to be seeing Thor’s face. He fucking had to. Which made Thor blush even more.

“Want to dance, pet?” said Tony then, life saviour.

“I thought we said non-exclusive,” said Loki, mellifluous. Tony raised an eyebrow. “Go fuck someone else then,” hissed Loki, with a downright vicious leer. Because he had been ambushed and he knew it, and he had venom to spare for everyone tonight.

“Geez, I’m dry,” said Loki, “back in a sec.” He helped himself up to his feet, with a full, solid palmful of Thor’s straining crotch. Thor winced and hurried to cross his legs. To say he was bothered would really be an understatement. His cock was throbbing against the seam of his jeans. Next time, don’t go for the snug ones, Odinson.

They both looked at Loki as he strutted towards the bar, right by where Erik Lensherr was perching, surrounded by a throng of girls. Loki had an unearthly quality which opened spaces around him and drew the eye. He leaned on the bar, his perfect arse on display, and Thor’s crotch tightened painfully.

“I thought you couldn’t stand Erik Lensherr,” groaned Thor, as the aforementioned and his girls turned to Loki for a chat.

“And I can’t. He came with someone.” Tony was stewing in it. “Did he just check Loki’s arse? I think he just checked Loki’s arse. The slut. I was sure he was straight. Is there nothing sacred.”

Thor almost countered “yes, but have you seen that arse?” He downed the rest of his beer instead.

After some time, his cock had returned to a state of plump, yet decent slumber.

“I think I need something stronger than this,” he said.

Loki was still talking to Lensherr, batting his eyelids, his wicked smirk doing double duty. He had spotted Thor walk up to the bar and was throwing him sly glances. He was fucking enjoying himself. Thor’s stomach turned as he was brought back to that seedy club once again. His brother had had the same look on his face that day, when he was tormenting Thor with his body and with suggestions of what was done to him in that place. His fists closed around thin air, feeling as furious as he had felt back then. That was what he did to Loki, this is what Thor’s fuck ups turned him into. He wanted to scour that cruel sneer from his face and reveal his brother underneath it.

Thor watched Loki turn on his heels and walk away, making for the bathroom. Thor almost expected Lensherr to follow him there, if the look on that shark-smiled fucker was anything to go by, but he didn’t.

Thor did, and waited.

Loki came out of the room, gave him a quick side glance.

“Too much beer, brother?” he said, with a little grin.
Thor was trembling with a tangle of emotions, anger coming up on top, as it often did.

“If you have a problem with me, don’t take it out on Tony,” he grunted, fists in a ball at his sides.

Loki cocked his hip, his eyes dripping poison, and replied with a tone that was deceitfully sweet.

“You don’t get to fucking tell me what to do,” he said.

“I should not need to tell you anything,” countered Thor, curt and cutting. “You’re acting like a goddamned brat. He does not deserve to pay for my…” He gritted his teeth. What to fucking call it. “Talk to me or don’t talk to me,” said Thor. “Just fucking stop whatever it is you’re doing.”

Loki had a very wicked, knowing smirk that was making Thor uncomfortable. Those green eyes that saw right through him...

“If I did not know better, Thor,” said his brother, demure smile on his sharp face, honey in his voice to disguise the venom, “I would say you were jealous.”

Thor’s cock still fucking strained from that lap-dance earlier. That look on Loki’s face, that fire in his eyes. Nobody there, a closed door with a lock. Thor swallowed on dry.

The best defence is a good attack, they say.

“Jealous?” he said, derisive. “I can have you whenever I want.”

Downright disbelief and contempt on Loki’s face. ‘The fucking nerve’ kind of expression. It looked good on him, big eyes widened, and those eyebrows, so expressive.

“What makes you think I’ll let you lay one hand on me ever again?”

Thor felt that in his gut. Beyond reason now, he advanced towards Loki and crowded him against the wall. Looking down on him, he felt Loki’s breathing spike up, a shiver there was no mistaking for anything other than what it was.

“Right here, right now,” he whispered between gritted teeth. “And all you would say is ‘yes’, ‘more’, and ‘please’.”

Loki gulped, and did not whimper because he had no voice to whimper with. Murderous anger was starting to rise just below his obvious arousal, just as sure as the sun sets in the West.

“Two can play this game, brother,” said Thor, taking way too much pleasure in Loki’s state of disarray and in his power over him.

And then his brain kicked in.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Thor walked backwards, short of breath, knowing this one might just be the worst one yet.

Loki’s eyes were a narrow, dark slit, seething with green fire. The hatred in them was not pure, it was tainted with hurt.

“Loki…” he began, his tone subdued now. He was ready to risk his life by uttering a sincere apology his brother would fucking choke him to death with.
Loki whooshed past him, stomping in rage.

Thor braced himself. There would be blood.

* * *

Loki was ready to rip somebody’s head off, his heart pounding, nails digging deep into his palms. He spotted Bucky, who was trying not to see Peggy and Steve dancing cheek to cheek to a slow, sexy tune. It would do very fucking nicely.

He strode to Bucky, who was slumped on his couch, beer in his hands, brooding and wretched.

“Dance with me,” he told him, proffering his right hand.

Bucky looked up to him with a confused frown, shaken out of his little bubble of hopelessness.

“Er…” he said, looking side to side to make sure Loki was actually talking to him. “I don’t … dance with men,” he tried.

“Maybe you should,” said Loki, grabbing Bucky’s hand and pulling him to standing.

Bucky was a lot more pliant than he himself would have anticipated, and let Loki drag him to the centre of the dancing area, where lights were lower. Loki wrapped two long arms around Bucky’s neck, and Bucky astonished himself by putting his own hands on Loki’s waist.

“See? You’ve got it already,” purred Loki right into his ear. And he sensed that shiver.

They started to sway together. Soon enough, Loki was letting his hips do most of the dancing, grinding, grinding.

“I… I don’t think I can dance this,” said Bucky, putting some distance, pink high on his cheeks.

“Can you fuck?” countered Loki, hands crawling down Bucky’s back, settling low on his hips, long fingers caressing the sides of his arse.

“…Yes,” said Bucky, swallowing.

“Then you can dance this,” muttered Loki, an iron grip on Bucky’s hips, gluing their crotches together.

Bucky harrumphed. “Really, I don’t think I-…”

“Show him what he’s missing,” whispered Loki in Bucky’s ear.

Bucky reared his head to see Loki’s face, alarmed. Was he really that obvious.

Loki’s expression had more compassion in it than he had intended at the start of this. He rubbed against Bucky harder. Bucky gasped, his frown became deeper. His body was reacting, and he had
not expected it. Before he had a chance to think about it, Loki twirled in his arms, turning his back to him, grinding his arse against Bucky’s hardening cock. He was being deliberately crass. He threw his head back on Bucky’s shoulder, and hooked one hand around Bucky’s head, pushing his mouth against the skin of his own throat. Sure enough, Bucky kissed his neck, and pushed back against his arse. Hmmm…

Out of the corner of an eye, Loki saw Steve watching openly, frowning in complete bewilderment. And oblivious of his girlfriend as well. Loki almost laughed. You did not see that coming, did you, Steve? He spun around in Bucky’s arms, snaking his hips. Bucky bit his lip. The boy looked like sin. Loki guided Bucky's hands to his own arse, and was rewarded with a nice squeeze and a hum.

When another quarter of a turn let Loki see Steve again, he saw him gaping, the guy’s eyes glazed. Now did Loki chuckle.

“What?” said Bucky, who had fallen into step with him now, pushing his semi-hard cock against Loki’s without a hitch.

“Men,” said Loki, contemptuous.

What they were doing now was basically upright foreplay. They finished the dance kissing wetly and messily.

Loki saw Tony back on the couch, his brother on one corner, both sulking. Well, fuck you all, said Loki in his mind, thrusting his tongue deeper into Bucky’s throat. Bucky groaned.

The music changed to something faster and Loki pulled back, eyes locked on Bucky’s, lip’s edges blurred, pink and ravished. He looked like pure, unadulterated sex.

“Let him see you leave with me,” whispered Loki into his ear, and started to walk to the lift pulling him by the hand. Bucky followed.

They got their coats and walked out of the place hand in hand.

Once inside the lift, Loki let go of him.

“It should give Steve something to think about,” he said, suddenly drained.

“Wait… that’s it?” said Bucky, looking for a second like a despondent little boy.

Loki smiled, almost endeared.

“I thought you didn’t… dance with men,” he said, eyeing him with a smite of fondness, because he looked kind of cute like that.

Bucky blushed, hands deep in his pockets, shoulders slumped.

“So did I,” he said after an instant.

The lift opened doors to the hall of the building. Loki sighed. He was in turmoil. He could still smell Thor, he could still taste the rage and the hatred in his tongue. And Thor had not been the only one with a fucking hard-on when he had sat on his lap.

“Want to come to my place then?” he asked.

Bucky hesitated.
“I’ve never…”

“You’re in the hands of a professional,” cut Loki. “You’ll be fine.”

Bucky mulled it over some more, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. Then that expression of defiance and determination. He was a fucking delight, this boy.

“Yes, alright.”

“You’ve never had a rimming?”

Bucky moaned and clenched the pillow tight, fucking the mattress. Loki had to grip his hips really hard to keep him still.

He was so needy. He liked kissing one hell of a lot. He was taking everything Loki was selling with greed. It was as if the doors of a besieged town had been thrown open and citizens kept pouring out to breathe the fresh air they had been denied for years.

Loki liked that Bucky was a blank page with men. And that he could not get enough now that he had uncorked that bottle. He was pushing against Loki’s hand unabashedly when he was fingering him, moaning like a cat in heat. Loki had him relaxed and aroused and melting in his hands, and ripe for the taking.

“Do you want to save it for him,” asked Loki, peppering small kisses on Bucky’s spine, his leaking cock nudging and stroking at the cleft of Bucky’s arse, ”or are you of the opinion that a piano sounds better when it’s been played?”

Bucky hesitated, turned his head to one side, a frown of puzzlement that took ten whole years off his face.

“I’m asking if you want me to fuck you,” explained Loki.

Bucky was panting, suddenly shy. Loki would bet his right eye it was the thought of saving his cherry for Steve that was giving him pause for thought, because otherwise, he looked like he was gagging for it.

“Roll over,” said Loki.

Bucky did, big eyes, mouth a puffed up mess.

Loki took him deep in his mouth and finger-fucked him to completion. That face undone by pleasure was indecent, but, in climax? Angels would bloody weep.

Loki jacked himself off, fast and business-like, Bucky’s eyes on him wide and glazed.

“Steve doesn’t know, does he?” asked Loki, once clean and settled together in bed, both smoking.

Bucky lowered his eyes. Long, dark lashes.

“He’s only ever seen me with girls,” he said. “I’ve never told him.”
“Why not?”

“He’s my best friend. He would freak out.”

“Hm, would he now,” said Loki, puffing smoke. “Did you not see how he looked at us when we were dancing?”

“Yes, well.” Red blossomed on Bucky’s cheeks. “I guess he was surprised. I am surprised.”

“You had never been with a man before? Really?”

Bucky squirmed on the mattress, nervously.

“In the army, a few times. Hand-jobs though, no kissing. You know.”

Loki did not know, but he could imagine it. In fact, he was imagining it right now, hence the smirk.

“But when I came back I…” Bucky stuttered. “I guess I realised what I really felt for him.” And this last bit had come out with quite a bit of difficulty.

Loki took a long drag, not immune to the vulnerability he felt in him.

“Do you two go back then?”

“Kids,” said Bucky. “We grew up in Brooklyn together, both wanted to be actors. Went to the same auditions. We didn’t have much, so we were to join the army to get an education. Just before we did, Steve got a break, a part in a show. I didn’t. So I enrolled on my own, did three tours. I’m discharged now. Anyway, I come back, Steve has become a movie star and has met the love of his life. His words.” The sourness on Bucky’s expression could curdle milk. “If he found out, I bet he would feel the need to take a step back so that I don’t…. so that he doesn’t hurt me or give me false hopes or something.”

Loki’s turn to huff now. He took another deep drag of his cigarette.

“What a pair of fucking doormats,” he groaned, staring at the ceiling without seeing it.

Bucky turned to face him.

“Doormats?”

“Look at us both,” he mumbled.

Bucky seemed to give that some thought.

“Have you ever met someone you would do anything for? Anything? Just to be around them? And it’s not even how they make you feel, because it hurts like hell most of the time, but because they’re just… worth it? And you know you may find someone who’d make you suffer less, but you’d always compare them to him, and they would never be enough?” Bucky sighed, suddenly out of steam. “I don’t know. I just don’t know how to get myself away from that. If that makes me a doormat, well, at least it’s over someone who deserves it.”

Loki scowled, killed his fag, lit up another.

“One day you have to know when to say when, though," he said.

"I’m not there yet,” muttered Bucky, downbeat but with a flicker of fire and defiance there, always.
Loki took in a deep breath, deflated, forsaken.

“Yeah, well,” he said. "Who is."

In the morning, they kissed at the door. Bucky blushed like a schoolboy. Loki wished him good luck.

“Listen, thanks for…” hesitated Bucky. Loki would have not been sure what to say either.

“It was my pleasure,” said Loki.

Bucky stopped at the bottom of the steps, military coat tight around him, collar up, cheeks pink with cold. He turned to Loki up on the threshold. He was looking a lot less gloomy than yesterday night, that was for sure. Let’s hear it for Loki’s magical touch.

“Happy New Year,” said Bucky, that sexy grin on his lips.

Loki managed half a smile.

“And you.”

Chapter End Notes

Problem?
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The right script comes along.

Chapter Notes

Nuts, I feel so... ugh! Clunky writing alert. Anyway, here is Wonderwall.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(September)

INT. DAY. A meeting room at Stark Tower, windows on three sides, Manhattan down below, and all around. A long table presides the space. Thor, Phil Coulson and Tony Stark sit at one side, Loki and Natasha at the other.

The air was tense; the silence, peppered with soft coughs and the creaks of the chairs on the hardwood floor. They were all waiting for Heimdall. He was in the building, so they’d been told, and to be fair they had only been waiting a few minutes, but it felt like a lot longer.

Thor was sitting crossed-legged, one ankle on the opposite knee, consciously trying to keep his shoulders relaxed, and reigning in the finger-tapping to keep it in the ‘bored’ rather than the ‘anxious’ spectrum. He was pretty sure that there was an unspoken competition with his brother to see who could appear less bothered by the other’s presence. Loki was bloody good at it. He was draped elegantly on his chair, unmoving, except for his eyes. He looked supremely blasé. And very fucking handsome in that black, trim, three-piece suit, skinny green and gold brocade tie, and a long, dark green silk scarf flowing down his neck.

Thor felt underdressed in jeans and a leather jacket. But he knew that this plain white, long-sleeved cotton top looked good on him, neck buttons undone, the material thin, sort of taut across the chest. He could swear he had caught Loki’s gaze dipping to his pecs a few times. And the air in the room was crisp. Thor had not checked, but he knew his nipples tended to pebble easily. Sure enough, Thor took off his jacket, draping it on the back of his chair, and Loki turned his eyes resolutely to the windows. Thor smirked.

The day was grey and damp, and Thor had noticed the ends of Loki’s hair starting to curl. It made him smile some more. Loki noticed it and squinted at him darkly, wondering perhaps what was so funny. Thor cleared his throat, with the image in his mind of Loki as a little boy, fresh out of the shower, in his Mickey Mouse pyjamas, spiky hair pointing in all directions, getting ridiculously annoyed when his older brother teased him that he looked like a wet kitten. A puffed up, furious wet kitten. He made Loki cry with this a few times, and afterwards he would smother him in a hug, still laughing, mocking Loki’s angry tears at the same time as he told him that he was a very cute wet kitten. He did get a few scratches out of it, but it was worth it.
Thor’s eyes had lost their focus now, looking back, and his expression was warm and dreamy. And when he glanced back at Loki, he caught him staring. Loki quickly looked away, almost ruffled. Thor 1, Loki 0. Shame Thor didn’t really feel triumphant. He was not ten anymore. Ok, maybe a little.

The door flew open and Heimdall barged in, droplets flying off his long black coat.

“Apologies, gentlemen, Miss Romanov,” said Heimdall, getting rid of his wet clothes on an empty chair by his side. Everybody straightened up in their seats, even Loki. The man could fill up a room.

Thor and Loki had met him many times, since he was an old pal of their parents. He had worked under Odin at the RSC, and several times in the West End with Frigga, and there had been periods of time when he had been often at Asgard House for dinner. Loki used to joke that Heimdall looked as if he could fuck Thor himself against a wall, which had teenage Thor blushing in Technicolor, perhaps picturing it. Like right now. He squirmed in his chair and lowered his eyes.

Heimdall took his seat at the head of the table and started talking without further ado, his deep, booming voice commanding attention without effort.

“We all know why we are here today. I’m looking to make a movie. Mr. Stark has offered me the money, the freedom and the trust, with one condition, that I cast Mr. Odinson and Mr. Laufeyson for the leads.”

A pause. Some soft harrumphing here and there. Thor threw Loki a quick glance. He was picking at his nails. And making it look classy.

“I am familiar with both these gentlemen’s careers, and I agree they are perfect, on paper, for their respective parts.” A pirate’s smirk. “On paper because, alas, there seems to be a fly in our ointment, in the shape of some sort of family feud, the nature of which concerns me not, but worries me. If I am to even begin to consider the possibility of working with Mr. Odinson and Mr. Laufeyson in the same project, I want assurances. From both parts.”

He paused again, master of tempo and dramatic build up, and regarded each brother in turn. Thor met his gaze, those golden-brown irises heavy on him. He held his stare, but it was not easy.

“This meeting today,” proceeded Heimdall, “is not about convincing me that you can indeed be civilised to one another, and that the shoot will be a place of work. Because that, gentlemen, I am taking for granted. We are all professionals. I would not even be here if I did not believe that. So this meeting today is, first and foremost, to convince me that you are both not only willing, but also capable of working together. Not alongside each other, and not merely tolerating your mutual presence on set, but working together. This story rests on the relationship between our two main characters. Without it, we have nothing to tell. Therefore, what I am looking for today is simple. I want to feel the enthusiasm, the generosity, the commitment and the passion that will produce a genuine spirit of collaboration between our potential leading actors. If I am not satisfied, I will not be persuaded to cast you, and if Mr. Stark here is adamant it’s you or nothing, I will walk out of here with my script, and we can all go our merry ways, no hard feelings. So,” concluded Heimdall, hands open, palms up, “who will go first?”

A silence. The atmosphere was awkward to say the least. Loki’s mouth was pursed, thin, his eyes low. Dignified and stubborn, and, if Thor knew him a bit, scared shitless to reach out first and be rejected. Thor cleared his throat.

“I will,” he said. Because they would be there all day if he did not. Loki threw him a quick glance, and then returned to his nails. “It’s in my best interest,” said Thor, “to see this project through. Not
only because of the potential for critical recognition, which we all know is massive, but also because it matters to me.” Harrumph. “I feel personally connected in many ways to this story. Ever since I first read the script, it has become important to me. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so invested in anything before.” Harrumph again.

He had managed to pull it off without one stutter, even though he felt like he was skinning himself alive under unsympathetic, scrutinising eyes. Tough audience. Loki’s eyes were the coolest, trying to make Thor feel like an insect he had taken a vague, passing interest in. Thor carried on, shedding layers as they got tangled in the brambles of that gaze, playing at making it hard for him just because they could.

“As for my brother,” continued Thor, staring at Loki straight, “I can say this one thing. That since he was a little boy, he has always committed himself fully, heart and soul, to whatever he undertakes. I have full confidence that, if he signs up for this, he will give it nothing but his all. I won’t be scared to open up and turn myself inside out doing this, because I know he’ll be right there with me, doing no less. I think Loki is one of the finest actors alive, if not the finest, and that he is the best possible choice for this part. I think we can make something extraordinary together. And I’m looking forwards to it.”

Thor reclined back, had a sip of water. His hand was remarkably steady considering that he was feeling brittle and quivering like a leaf.

Loki had his eyes low, his hands resting one on top of the other on his crossed knee. He looked way too nonchalant. Overacting, brother?

Attention was on Loki now. He looked up, blinking innocently.

“Yes, what he said,” he mumbled, as he dusted an invisible fluff off the sleeve of his suit.

Thor suppressed the urge to snort, irritated. He knew Loki’s reply was a pose, but it nettled him just the same. He had put it all out there, and he had expected to break through to Loki like that, and get a serious answer in reciprocation.

“Loki,” admonished Natasha.

Loki huffed, irritated, and kept his sight on his nails when he spoke.

“I’ve said it before, but I can say it again. Mainstream cinema, Hollywood in particular, interests me very little, and most definitely not enough to ever begin to compensate for the slavery to the publicity marathons it entails. I just can’t be bothered. And when I was approached with this script, that is exactly what I said. Of course, this is not an ordinary script, and it will not be an ordinary movie. If there is a project I am willing to put up with the publicity tours for, it is this. I really can’t express my interest in higher terms.” Piercing green eyes on Heimdall, then Thor. “If I get this part, nothing, absolutely nothing, will get in the way of my work.” Eyes low again. “My brother is perfect for Bobby. And I am perfect for Johnny. Mr. Heimdall I have admired for a long time. This is going to be extraordinary. I want to do it.” Loki rests.

Natasha glowered at him, urging him on. Loki rolled his eyes.

“Yes, Mr. Odinson is a terrific actor and I would be most honoured to work with him.” And a sweet, toothy grin.

Heimdall smiled back, with the same lack of sincerity. Natasha may or may not have sighed, dismayed.
“You will forgive me if I remain sceptical,” said Heimdall, still grinning, his expression not one breath less reptilian than Loki’s best efforts, which was no mean feat. “As it’s plain to see, the problem is as bad as I had heard. I doubt very much that either of you can really isolate your feelings from your performances, specially in roles as emotional as this, and so personal, by Mr. Odinson’s own admission. Two brothers with issues playing two brothers with issues could either be a disaster waiting to happen or the best idea Tony Stark has ever had. So the question for me is not really whether you can leave your family lives at home, but whether whatever problem we have here will enrich or ruin your work. I would like us to meet again in a couple of days, and do a read of your main scenes. Until then, I’m not signing anything. Is that acceptable?”

Loki and Thor exchanged a quick look, and then looked away. They both nodded.

“Excellent. We shall meet again in two days.”

(Back to New Year’s Eve.)

* 

_Fantastic._ Just fucking great. Loki and Bucky were now kissing, tongue half-way down each other’s throats, Bucky’s hands digging into Loki’s butt, Loki’s arms wrapped around Bucky's neck, their groins glued together and grinding more or less to the music. Thor made himself watch, even though it was eating at him like acid. Every time Loki had whispered whatever the fuck it was into Bucky’s ear, the boy had blushed that bit redder, and Thor had clenched his jaws that bit harder. And when the happy couple made for the door hand in hand, Loki with his wicked grin, Bucky with his blush, his pink mouth, puffy from kissing, and his look of astonishment, Thor grimaced with rage, tasting bile.

He knew what Loki was doing. He knew it was all for Thor’s benefit. Should he be feeling triumphant? Because it didn’t feel like he was winning. The fact remained that Bucky was taking Loki home, and Thor was not.

He downed the rest of his beer in one very long gulp and put it down, ready to go get himself the first available piece of arse that came his way, but his eyes fell on Tony first. He was staring at him, and frowning quite a lot.

Thor looked away, cursing inwardly. How long had he been observing him? And now he was approaching. Fuck.

Tony stood right next to him and cleared his throat.

“May I ask you a question?”

Thor kept his eyes away into the middle distance, with an unfriendly frown. He knew enough about body language, and what he was doing did not invite conversation. Tony asked anyway.

“What was your fight with Loki about? At the theatre, on opening night.” Straight from the hip.
Thor stood quiet and still, tense as a bowstring. What the fuck could he possibly say? Why had he not given the issue five minutes of his time, to try and make up a believable explanation? He had told him “we had a big argument” and left it at that. Bollocks.

The silence was stretching, and Thor still had nothing.

“Can we sit down?” said Tony.

“I don’t want to sit down,” grunted Thor.

“Very well, don’t sit down. What’s the deal with you and Loki?”

Thor exhaled angrily. There were lots of answers to that. None of your fucking business was the first that came to mind, but that was not altogether fair, now, was it?

“It’s complicated,” said Thor.

“Would you accompany me to my office? It’s quieter,” said Tony. He sounded graver than was his usual manner.

Thor gritted his teeth. Was he really going to have this chat? Not that he knew how to get out of it. And right now, he wasn’t sure he wanted to anyway. He was so bloody tired, wrung out down to his soul. He could not stomach the idea of lying outright, of staring at Tony in the eye and denying Loki. On the other hand, just walking away and leaving Tony to draw his own conclusions didn’t sound good either. No, Odinson, it was out. Time to face the music.

When the doors of the lift closed on them and blessed silence fell, Thor sighed in relief.

It didn’t last. Good job the trip was short, the atmosphere was bloody awkward.

The upper floor was dark and empty and peaceful. The office had commanding views of the city, at the moment a black sea of twinkling lights. There would be fireworks soon enough. The guests downstairs were looking forwards to them, with their front-row seats in this prime location. Just one more of the many attractions of Stark’s New Year’s Eve do.

Thor plummeted on an armchair. What a fun night it had been. Tony offered him a drink. Thor said he would have some water.

Tony sat on the armchair opposite Thor’s, with a tumbler of scotch in his hand. He rolled the drink in his glass.

“Do I get three guesses?” he said, after some deliberation.

Thor had a sip of water and observed him under a deep frown. He didn’t have a clue what Tony was getting at with this. Fearing he might regret it, he dipped his head in assent.

“Fine, ok, we can play at this. Just don’t break my neck.” Tony gave Thor a second to express either acquiescence or… or not. Thor kept his peace. “First guess, it was already going on when I met you.” Tony cocked an eyebrow, awaiting a reaction. Thor didn’t change his expression, a hostile squint. Tony proceeded. “Second guess, it’s not platonic.” Thor shifted in his seat. “Third guess, it’s been consummated.”

This time, Thor’s eyes flickered, his fist squeezed the neck of the posh glass water bottle. Still, he didn’t say a word. His expression and his rocketing discomfort should be enough of an answer.
A silence while Tony absorbed it, staring into space.

“Well, that explains a few things,” he said at length, and had a drink. He gave him a strange look. “We never stood a chance, did we?, Jane or me” he said.

Now Thor did look at him.

“You’re in love with him, aren’t you?” he said.

Tony shrugged, put on a blank face. Thor sighed. He had not even considered that Tony might have feelings involved in this too. Or feelings, in general.

“It’s not like we cheated on you. Or her. That’s not how it was. Is.” Thor buried his face in his hands and scrubbed his eyes. “Fuck this” he grumbled. “We haven’t been together for a long time.”

Tony sat there and let Thor work his way in and out of his own muddle.

“May I ask, when?” he said.

Thor had to brace himself to answer that. It didn’t feel like it at the time, but it seemed quite shocking to think about it now. They were only a couple of kids…

“He was fourteen, I was not yet sixteen” he said. Better just get it out.

A terrifying silence, although Thor was not sure what he feared.

“…What happened?” asked Tony then, his voice mild, gentle.

Thor took another deep breath. This was hard, and no way to spend New Year’s Eve.

“We were… lovers for a few months” he said, struggling with the term for what they had been, reeling from the one he had chosen. It sounded so strong, so very grown-up. “Then real life got in the way. It all went to hell. Loki tried to kill himself.”

Tony’s eyebrows arched up.

“Right. Wow.” he said, with a frown. “…Are you always so hard on yourself?”

“What?” That was not what Thor had expected to hear.

“…I mean, that’s how you think about it?” explained Tony.

Thor gave that some thought, got nowhere.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean…” Tony scratched his scruff, pondering. “Do you remember it as a mere prelude to your brother’s attempted suicide?”

Thor glared at him.

“I don’t understand what you’re on about, Tony.”

“You make it sound as if it was all your fault.”

Thor was baffled. What the fuck was Tony getting at with this? What did it matter? He had just confessed to bloody incest, for god’s sake!
“Does Loki blame you? For the suicide attempt,” asked Tony, impervious to Thor’s perplexity.

“I don’t know.”

“But you do. Blame yourself.”

“I know what I did,” Thor’s throat tightened.

“What exactly did you do?”

Thor grappled for words, and air to voice them.

“…He’s my baby brother!” he roared then, lurching forward, hands in a fist. He took a couple of strong, noisy breaths, trying to cool down. When he spoke next, it was with a much weaker voice. “I fucked up. I should have never… Jesus. I should have known it was impossible. I should have never let it happen.”

Tony bit the inside of his cheeks, seemingly giving that some thought.

“You know, Thor, there’s thousands of years of literature and art history that humanity could have been deprived of, if only people were capable of doing that” he said.

“Do what?” snapped Thor.

“See the future and ignore their hearts.” Tony raised his glass with a toothy, cheerless grin, and had a drink.

Thor remained mightily confused. This is not how he would have imagined this conversation, and he had no idea where it was going next.

“Did Loki want it?” asked Tony then.

“What the fuck are you implying?” Thor’s nostrils flared, menace in his tone.

“I’m implying that it was not only your call.” How cool Tony was, how even. People tended to be a bit more restless in the face of Thor’s fury.

“Of course Loki wanted it!” exclaimed Thor, just in case it was not clear. “I wouldn’t have laid one finger on him if he had not wanted it! Ever! What the fuck do you take me for?”

“Exactly,” countered Tony, calmly.

“Exactly what?” barked Thor, not calmly at all.

“That you both wanted it. It was not all down to you.”

“Loki was a kid!” snarled Thor.

“So were you.” Tony shrugged.

“I was the oldest.”

“You were fifteen.”

Thor was utterly thrown off. He was gaping, trying to find words. The world upside down, him making the case for the prosecution, Tony pleading his defence.
“Is that why Loki is so pissed off at you?” asked Tony. “Did you tell him you wished it had not happened or something along those lines? That you regretted it?”

Thor suppressed the urge to shout that he did not regret it at all. Because he had just said he did, didn’t he? Gods in heaven, he was such a fucking mess. Confusion sapped the rage out of him, leaving him flat and jaded. At least there was a question there he knew the answer to.

“That’s not why he’s pissed off at me. Not this time, at least, I don’t think.”

“So what happened in the dressing room, then?” asked Tony.

Thor felt disarmed.

“We… kissed.” Harrumph. And a fluster. “I stopped it.”

Tony gave him a second, just in case he wanted to add anything to that.

“…Why?” he asked at length.

“Because…” Thor raked his fingers deep in his hair, scrubbed hard. “Because I shouldn’t. It’s impossible. And it hurts him. His… his health.”

“His head,” said Tony, seeking clarification.

“Yeah,” mumbled Thor.

“And he wasn’t happy about you stopping” Tony urged him along.

“…I had started it.” Thor had his eyes low now. His stomach churned unpleasantly, in shame.

“Right,” said Tony. “And now he’s making you pay.”

“…Yeah.”

A pause for thought.

“And you’re in love with him,” said Tony.

Thor met his stare, boldly, unblinking.

“Yes, I am,” he said.

“And he is in love with you,” said Tony, but this time he was not expecting a reply. He had been at Loki’s party too, he had heard the songs. He knew Loki well, and he had just been given the piece he had been missing to understand his heart. So that was that. There was a flash of sadness on Tony’s face, very brief, Thor had never thought him capable of. He had not realised it ran so deep. Goes to show. Loki was the sharp and insightful one, the one who could read people. Thor never could.

He felt for Tony. He was going to say something.

“Right. Ok,” said Tony, cutting him off. “Thanks for telling me. I was beginning to think I was going mad.”

“I’m quite sure I am” said Thor to nobody in particular. He was still waiting for Tony to react properly to what he had just heard.
Tony smirked with a hint of humour. Then, a frown.

“Wait. One more. Four guesses. Your pet name for Loki is ‘baby’.”

“How?”

“Baby. That’s what you call him. Isn’t it?”

Thor blinked, in a daze.

“...Yeah.”

“Hm. Figures” said Tony, clicking his tongue.

“What are you on about?”

“He doesn’t let anyone else call him that.”

Thor needed a second then.

“Really?” he asked, with a frown.

Tony nodded, with a shrug.

There was a surge of warmth inside Thor. And damned if he didn’t feel a very slight grin break through and soften his face for the first time in hours.

Reclining back in his chair, he exhaled, slowly and wearily.

“That’s it?” he asked then, eyes on Tony.

“That’s what?” said Tony.

“That’s all you have to say?”

“What would you like me to say?” Tony blinked sweetly.

“I used to fuck my own brother, and I wish I was fucking him still,” said Thor, pushing for the shock factor. “Surely you have more to say about that.”

Tony smiled.

“I don’t have words as much as I have thoughts,” he said, drinking up.

“Thoughts?” said Thor, raising an eyebrow.

“Hm, yes. You and Loki.” Tony stood up, made a big show of stretching his back and arms. “You’ll find your way out, won’t you? I’ll be in my bunk.”
Award season. The Golden Globes in January, then the BAFTAs, then the Oscars. *Blood Meridian* got nominations in all the big categories, including Best Actor for Thor. He plunged into the whirlwind, the publicists both on his and Stark Productions’ side eager to drum up his name for *The Cold Six Thousand*, which aired in the spring. It was not his favourite part of the job, but he had been doing it for years. He did not need to put a lot of him in it to navigate it with success.

Ray Winston got his Oscar for Supporting Actor. Thor lost the three awards. He took it philosophically. That biopic on Christopher Reeve had been really good and wildly popular. He had never really expected his character to win anyone’s heart. He was as proud of that movie, and of his work in it, as he had been before all of this.

The commiserative words at the after parties, however, did become very repetitive and quite irritating very fast, and they were always hard to stomach by the end of the evening. But it was part of the territory. He was a professional actor. He had to be able to fake it with some grace.

His father’s words, for once, were the only ones to bring him real comfort. Odin had no time for the Hollywood circus, or for his ‘Miss Popularity badges’ as he called the Oscars, and was quick to remind him that this was not why he was in the business at all.

“Nobody remembers who won the Oscar last year. But your part, your performance? That, they will not forget.”

He had said thanks, dad, half choked, and the old man had grumbled “what in the world for?”

Thor felt it more when Loki lost his Tony for *M.Butterfly*. It was a fucking injustice and a crying shame. Thor had been in the Pyrenees shooting *Post Captain*, the sequel to *Master and Commander*, when he heard.

Loki had not attended the ceremony, so Thor did not watch it. He phoned Sigyn. She said that Loki was alright, that he had not expected to win.

“Tell him…” Thor struggled with his words. He had stopped begging her to ask Loki to talk to him months ago. He did not think talking would make much of a difference anyway. “Look after him” he said at last.

“I will. I always do,” she answered, softly.

Thor gulped, and went for it.

“Tell him I love him,” he said.

A short silence.

“I will.”

Thor was quite sure Sigyn knew. Perhaps one day he would sit down with her, and talk.
Tony had made a big secret out of the reason for dragging Thor from L.A. all the way to Stark Tower in Manhattan.

“I hope it’s worth it,” Thor had mumbled, as he sat down in Tony’s balcony with a beer.

“Have you heard about *Mariners*?” said Tony, taking his seat next to him.


“Heimdall has the rights. He’s already written a script. We’re producing it.”

“Good for you. It should be good.”

“It should be *great,*” corrected Tony. “Pulitzer and Booker. Praised as the newest Great American Novel. And you have to see what Heimdall has done with it. It’s mind-blowing. Have you read the book?”

“No.”

Tony dragged his butt towards the edge of his seat now, leaning forwards, eyes bright, hands expressing enthusiasm and eagerness, his big brown eyes glinting like a little boy’s on an adventure.

“Based on a true story, from the journals of the author’s beatnik uncle. It’s the early 1950s. This is the journey across America of two estranged brothers, young World War 2 veterans, to take the ashes of their father to his birthplace down South. Wrecked by their experiences in the war, they struggle with civilian life. Bobby, the oldest, married his high-school sweetheart the moment he set foot on shore and tried to build the perfect 1950s life, but he struggles with alcoholism and his demons. Johnny, the youngest, incapable of conforming to that narrow pattern, takes to the beatnik life. His search for a truer way of living is leading him to self-destruction. Drink, drugs, loneliness. They both yearn for the days of their youth and can’t find peace in the present. They’re disconnected, and lonesome. We see the whole thing through Johnny’s eyes. Do you follow so far?”

Thor nodded heavily. He could already tell where this was leading.

“Right. When the brothers reunite for their road trip, we see Johnny’s disappointment at what his older brother has become. He doesn’t recognise Bobby in the tidy little copy of their father he has made himself into, drunkenness included. Their father was a career soldier, a larger-than-life figure who kept them both under his thumb. Johnny feels he has stood up to his father with the life he is now leading, and he feels Bobby is betraying his promise to do the same. Johnny senses suffering and struggle in Bobby, but can’t get him to open up. They clash again and again. The tension rises, fights and discord. The feeling of mutual distrust and alienation increases, both brothers wretched for it, but incapable of reaching out to one another. Yes? And all of that plays in the confines of the cabin of the pickup truck, in dingy roadside motels and run-down little towns, and the open American landscape around them. Yes?”
Thor nodded again.

“Then, Johnny catches Bobby with another man, a young hustler, and everything is explained. Bobby thinks it’s the end of the world and of his life, but Johnny, the beatnik, couldn’t care less. All he cares about is that he now understands what was eating Bobby alive, and he wants to help him. Bobby is completely averse at first, caught up in the sin mentality of his times, but little by little, Johnny gets to him. Bobby frees himself of guilt and shame, through the love and understanding his brother offers him. They bury their father’s ashes, and everything he represents, and return home as a family again. The ending is open, but hopeful.” Tony grins. “In real life, Bobby did divorce his wife and eventually he moved to San Francisco. His wife banned him from seeing his kids, and it was years before they could be reunited. And it was through her uncle’s diaries that the author tried to learn more of the father and the uncle she had barely known. And then she wrote this novel as a way to get close to them, and to honour them. Jesus, I’m crying again” finished Tony, wiping a real tear from his eye.

Thor observed that with coolness, and then returned his gaze back to the city.

“I see,” he said, and had a drink.

Tony gave him a long stare.

“You know what I am going to say next, don’t you?” he said. “You would be perfect for the part. You and…”

“…Loki,” completed Thor.

Tony nodded. Thor sat back.

“He’ll never work with me,” he said.

“I’ve already spoken to Loki.”

Thor turned his head to him, his eyes low, guarded.

“What did he say?”

Tony pursed his lips and looked up and away.

“I see,” said Thor again, with a dark smirk.

“But I left the script with Natasha,” said Tony. “She will read it, and then she will make Loki read it, and I’m expecting a phone call some time tonight or tomorrow, depending on how stubborn Loki is (which possibly means tomorrow, right?) Anyway, he'll phone, I'm sure. It's that good.”

Thor raised an eyebrow at Tony's certainty.

"That good?" he repeated.

“Read it!” Tony pushed the stack of paper his way. “Thank me later, when you pick up the Oscar for best actor.”

Thor had a quick browse. The copy was full of notes and scribbles.

“What makes you think I want to work with Loki?” he asked, putting it down.

Tony smirked.
“Just read it.”

Thor read it.

It was understated, insightful, restrained, poetic. To express the differing mindset of the brothers, Heimdall had ingrained in the structure a subtle juxtaposition of elements of beat culture — scenes that flowed like a stream of consciousness, saturating the senses with visions and sounds —, opposed to more rigid, more straightforward storytelling, still pictures thick with unexpressed emotion Thor could already envisage, like paintings. He intended to use symbols and images and the vast American landscapes to reflect and convey the characters’ minds and tell the story. It seemed really exciting.

The dialogue was sharp, minimal, naturalistic, with silences just as eloquent as the words. It had Thor already thinking how he would do it. He could even see Loki’s face giving him the replica. This script played to all their strengths. It was touching and intimate, rich and nuanced, intense, risky, and brave. And yes, it was Oscar fodder for both or either of the leads. They were career-defining roles, and in Heimdall’s skilful, elegant hands, cinema history in the making. And it was being handed to Thor on a platter.

So, the only question was Loki.

There was no bloody fighting this. After tasting him again in that dressing room, after that damn lap-dance in New Year’s Eve, and after seeing Loki trembling with desire for him, Thor couldn’t escape the facts. They could not be just brothers. Not now, not any time soon, maybe never. It was not what he wanted, and it was not what Loki wanted either.

All the reasons he had debated again and again to stay away from Loki were as relevant now as they had always been. Weren’t they? It was not possible for them to be a normal couple; coming out was unthinkable. Hiding was a repulsive notion and a scary one. It had destroyed them once, and it had almost gotten Loki killed.

With that in mind, he should stay away from his brother. Right? And if Loki wanted to do this movie, he should say no. Sod cinema history and the fucking Oscars.

However, Thor found himself tossing and turning in his mind several conversations he had had with Tony about Loki these last few months. In particular, what Tony had said about Thor’s “bad habit” (his words) of blaming everything on himself and shouldering all the responsibility for Loki’s "bumpy ride", as he called it.

“The diva in Loki would gouge your eyes out if he knew how much you push him to a secondary role in his own life” he said.

And he did also say, “Loki wants you, he has made that clear. Is it really down to you to make his decisions for him? No wonder he is so mad at you. He’s not a child anymore, he doesn’t need you protecting him from himself. You’re not his big brother in this, Thor.”

“What am I, then?” Thor had asked, cynical, and sore.

Tony smiled to him.

“That’s up to you. Both of you.”

Up to them. What a scary notion. Had history not taught them that, when things got left in their
hands, horrible things happened?

Tony had stuff to say about that too. Whenever Thor mentioned 'historical precedent' as a thing to consider, he laughed.

"You were a pair of infants" he would say. "Forget about ancient history. You have no history. This starts now."

Even if Tony had meant 'no history before their reunion in London after The Rocky Horror', Thor could not agree with that in a million years, because he could only guess about Loki, but he himself carried a very real, very heavy burden of mistakes and regrets that predated even their first time together. It may be ancient history, but it informed his present. He wish it didn't, but to be fair to Loki, he would not just put it to one side and forget it, even if he could.

Still, something about what Tony said did resonate with him. Because Loki and him, they had grown up. They were older, some would say wiser, their worldview not so extreme. Loki was not fourteen anymore, he was not a lonely kid with black and white vision and nothing to live for. He had friends, a job he was bloody awesome at, a care regime that worked for him, and a life beyond Thor. He had resources.

And Thor was not a teenager either. He had learned a lot. As a young kid, he had felt the need to break away from all of that and push Loki away. Because it wasn’t normal, because it wasn’t healthy, because there was a wider world out there.

Well, he had been in the world, and he had looked and he had tried, but at twenty-five, it was dawning on him that he would not find anywhere else what he had with Loki. Whatever the fuck it was, no matter how bad it hurt. Everybody else paled in comparison, everything else faded to a dull, lifeless grey, while Loki towered blindingly as the source of all light. Thor could not imagine spending the rest of his life without Loki, one way or another.

*One way or another.* Who do you think you're fooling, Odinson.

Could they make it work somehow? Could they cope with the difficulties and the compromises and the suffering they would no doubt have to face, if they decided to have a go at it? Could they have a chance after all? Thor wanted to believe it so very much. For the first time in his life, he was considering how they could make it possible, instead of sinking and drowning deep under all the ways in which it could not be.

That is, if Loki wanted to see him ever again.

Thor leafed idly through the script in his hands. "JOHNNY and BOBBY fuse in an awkward yet increasingly strong embrace, both stunted by and brimming with all the things they have kept from each other since the end of the war." He sat back and exhaled.

Fuck it. If Loki was up for this, so was he. He was ready to throw caution to the wind, roll the dice, and see what happened. He was not built to live in fear, he never was.

“Stark,” said Tony’s disembodied voice at the other end of the line.

“Tony, tell Loki I’ll do it if he does.”

“Right.” Tony cleared his throat. “Loki just called.”
And?

He said yes.

Stark Productions meeting room. The read.

Thor and Loki sat opposite each other on either side of the table, their copies of the script open in front of them. Nobody else was at the table, to give them space. Tony was in one corner, Natasha and Coulson in another. Heimdall was sitting down several steps away from the head of the table. They had all chosen positions out of Thor’s and Loki’s line of sight, but from which they could still see both their faces.

Light was low, the day was gloomy. Loki had that sexy messy bun again. Thor’s hair fell to his shoulders. They would both have to cut it short for this, maybe even dye it (Thor darken it, Loki lighten it), to create some resemblance to each other. Thor was distracted for half a second wondering what his brother would look like with short hair.

No games of cool today. They were both focused and intent, no time to play.

They had selected half a dozen high voltage scenes, starting with the awkward reunion at the Greyhound station. Bobby appears with his pickup truck, Johnny is leaning against a post with his guitar. They’re happy and excited to see each other again, but wary. Much has passed since they were young boys who went to war, their father’s death not the least of them. A hell of a lot had to come through in a couple of seconds. Cinematography would do its share, and Heimdall had told them how he planned to shoot it, but the flesh and bones part of it was down to them.

“Whenever you’re ready,” said Heimdall, his voice low, as if there was a spell being cast that he did not want to disturb or hinder.

Thor took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He struggled at readings. If he could not use his body, he felt disempowered. He liked to have the space, the set. He was never better than on location. In this kind of situation, he was always uncomfortable. This particular scene, written around a hug he could not physically represent, was a steep start.

“Thor,” he heard Loki say, his tone soft.

When Thor opened his eyes, Loki was staring at him with intensity. He dipped his head to Thor once. And then his expression brightened up with his character’s emotion at seeing his long lost brother once again, anxiety there, joy too, and a humdrum of tiredness and age behind it all. Johnny has been through a lot in his short life, and has become an old soul, cynical and weary, but seeing his big brother after such a long time makes him feel like a little boy again, for a second. And it was all there, in Loki’s face, in his eyes.

Thor smiled back, Bobby’s face breaking through his own, tired too, grieving, saddened at first to see what time and life had done to his baby brother, and therefore to himself, and then true joy
shining through, when he sees the little boy Johnny once was still there, under all that, and perhaps senses young Bobby still alive within himself for a spell too.

“Johnny!” said Thor, trying to put all of that in his voice.

“Bobby!” replied Loki, mirroring his tone.

From that moment on, it was a dance. Loki lead the way, and Thor followed. Loki was able to infuse Heimdall’s purposely stuttering, laconic dialogue with nuance and truth. His voice was the sharpest tool in his skill box, always had been. Thor was physical, his face and his body did the heavy lifting, but with Loki’s eyes on him like that, it seemed so easy. All he had to do was talk back, and it happened, Bobby’s voice that is, his character’s true words and thoughts.

And then there were the silences. Even Thor could hear how thick and thrumming the silences were with things unsaid. How much of that was acting was a matter of debate. Whatever it was, it worked. It rang real, alive. It told the story.

Heimdall did not intervene once. Nobody made a sound. Thor broke character once, when Bobby in a strop makes Johnny laugh, and Loki’s laughter came so light and easy as Thor had not heard it since god knows when. Bobby was supposed to keep serious and take offence, but Thor could not help but smile.

The last line in the script was Johnny’s.

“Hey, you never know;” read Loki, so much warmth and hope in his voice.

In the silence that followed, some sniffling was heard, from Tony’s side. Thor saw that even Loki was affected, his eyes unfocused, his expression adrift. He wanted to touch him.

He saw Heimdall nodding towards Stark, and then turned his eyes back to them.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “it would appear we have a movie. I’ll see you in three weeks, when rehearsals start.” He stood up and started gathering his papers.

The spell was broken. Loki got up as well and grabbed his script and his jacket.

Thor felt shaken up, and drained. He threw Loki a glance. He looked tired too. Thor spied him approaching Heimdall.

“Have you got anyone for the hustler?” Thor heard Loki say.

“No, not yet.”

“You want to give this bloke a ring, James Barnes. I’ve seen him in off Broadway. He would be perfect.”

Heimdall said he would, Loki said he’d send his details to Heimdall’s office.

Thor clenched his jaw.

Tony and Loki shook hands. It was remarkable how Tony’s demeanour around Loki had changed since his first chat with Thor about the subject. Loki probably thought that Tony’s casualness, the businesslike manner, and the blatant lack of flirting was a result of the New Year’s Eve rebuff, so he put a haughty stance to it. And he got in return a knowing, warm expression he could not possibly
know whence it was coming, and made him frown, suspicious.

Waiting for the lift, Natasha and Coulson were conversing a few steps back, coordinating schedules. Loki and Thor were standing two steps apart, stiff and quiet.

Thor cleared his throat.

“Hey, good work in there,” he said. *Lame.*

Loki whipped his head around to face him, and stared at him, cool and fierce.

“This changes nothing,” he said. “I still hate your fucking guts.”

Thor frowned. He had not expected Loki to be so blunt.

“And don’t be having any ideas about this, ok?” added Loki, prodding in the wound. “There’ll be no family reunion. I’m here to make a movie. That’s all.”

Thor stared back at him, head high, and squared his jaw.

“Same here.”

The atmosphere on the lift was thick. Loki did not look at him as he made his way out of the building. Natasha did.

Chapter End Notes

Mariners. Right, I made the story up. And the title. And don't ask where I got it from, because it was hard enough to come up with something in the first place.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Scandal.

“Oh, just spit it out already,” groaned Loki, whooshing inside his hotel room, as he got rid of his jacket with a (really majestic) dramatic flourish. On the taxi he had been jumpy, legs bouncing, finger-tapping, unable to concentrate. He was making up for it.

“Why waste my time?” said Natasha evenly, helping herself to the chocolate on his pillow. “I’ve said it all before.”

“Yes, and I am not going to sit down and have a fucking chat with Thor. I am not.”

“You’ve already said that too.”

“What’s the bloody point, tell me!” he snarled.

“Oh, just clear the air, find out where each of you stands, clarify potential misunderstandings, set a common ground to build up a successful professional relationship. What good could that possibly make?” Sarcastic. She unwrapped the chocolate with two precise, efficient movements. Strong hands.

He scowled, showing teeth.

“I know what he has to say, and I don’t want to fucking hear it. Why is that so hard to comprehend?”

“It isn’t. It’s just irrational and absurd, so people will tend to call you out on it.”

If Loki was a dog, he would be growling.

“Anyway,” she insisted, “you may think you know what he wants to say, but what about what you have to say? I’m sure there are a few things you would like Thor to hear.”

“I thought you were not going to bother because you’ve said it all before,” grumbled Loki.

“I’m persistent,” she smirked, putting the chocolate in her mouth, her pout exquisite. “It’s one of my finest qualities.” She chewed.

Loki huffed, shoulders slumped, one hand on his hip, the other rubbing his eyes.

“Look, I’m tired. Do kindly persist tomorrow.”

She kept the tiny, sexy smirk on. That expression of hers, that “I’m going to take that bullshit off your hands and take it home, but you know, and I know that you know, that I don’t buy it, and it shall be returned to you presently whenever I choose, with my compliments.” He was a bit enamoured with it. He could swear it had powers. It sapped the snark out of him, or some of it anyway. What was the point? Nothing got through that woman’s skin. What a power duo, they were
fucking meant for each other. If they ever decided to take over the world, there would be no stopping them.

He took a deep breath, and tried to appear calm, or at least not as wired as he felt.

“I’m fine, see? I don’t need a babysitter today.”

“Can I hear it?” she said.

He rolled his eyes and got it out of the way.

“If I need it, I will call someone,” he parroted. He had been programmed for years now to mean it when he said it. By Sigyn, by Bruce, by his shrink. He took it a lot more seriously than he made it sound.

That did not mean he did not have some space to move within the boundaries of the definition of “needing it.”

She made her way to the door, licking the tips of her fingers.

“We’ll have to ask Thor not to wear that shirt to work again, won’t we?” she said as Loki shut the door behind her.

Loki’s glower could have left a dent in the wood.

Alone. Fucking finally. Now he could proceed to have his meltdown in peace, all by his little self.

He got to it straight away. Well, not straight away, he gave it one minute to make sure she was safely packed away in the lift. He counted Mississippi.

He only made it to forty-something.

He started to pace up and down the room, and tighten his fists, and huff between clenched jaws. He should really go to the gym and work it out of his system, but he was not fit for public consumption at the moment, clearly. He did not scream, as he was dying to do, because well, neighbours, but he did jump up and down, shook his hands vigorously, as if he had just got burned, and shook his head, hair flying free from its bun and flowing in all directions quite nicely. He felt so pumped up his hands were quivering, his teeth gritting.

The read.

The fucking spark. Hell, not a spark, a bloody wildfire. He could almost hear the buzz of electricity crackling under his skin. It had been like… like fucking. Like fucking Thor. Like having him there naked and open and willing, following wherever Loki may lead. He showed the way, and Thor walked it. Forwards, backwards, like a dance, like foreplay. Throwing words and stares and bloody emotions at him, and observing Thor’s respond to it so vividly, as if Loki was touching him with his hand, playing him like an instrument. The strength of the connection was so intense it was almost tangible, like a physical bond buzzing and beating between them, tying them together, invisible through the air, but so fucking dense, so real, Loki had felt he could close his hand around it and feel it. Just as if it was… yes, that.

Jesus Christ. He had not foreseen this. He had predicted awkwardness, stiffness, mistrust, rigidity, and perhaps some fencing, not… not this falling into each other’s arms as if waltzing or…
Loki shivered, throwing his arms around himself, ran clawed fingers down his arms, down his back. Guess what, he was horny, so fucking horny. He cupped himself, hard, a vein throbbing there with deep, strong pulse.

It was fucking scary. This movie could fuck with his head big time. Was it Thor there in that gaze, in that tone of voice, or was it Bobby. Who was there behind his eyes in that silence, who was smiling now from his lips. Ah! He jumped, he paced. The floor is lava, Thor.

He should run away from this project as fast as he fucking could. He should not fucking do it. Whatever semblance of inner equilibrium he had managed to achieve, this fucking movie was going to wreck it. But how in hell could he not do it? Look at him, he was burning!

He stroked himself through his clothes, his eyes fluttering. He pictured himself jumping over that table at Stark Tower, pulling his brother towards him by the neck of that stupid semi-transparent top (had he fucking washed since he wore it in the first meeting?) and ripping it to shreds. Thor would try to kiss him, Loki would dodge his mouth. If Thor kissed him, he was lost.

He would put his mouth in a much safer place. Oh, Thor would be amazed at the things he could do now, after his intense training at The Dark World. He would fucking get those tight jeans down, and get all the heavy artillery out. The pretty tight balls, with their soft golden fuzz, and that big fat beautiful cock, darker than the skin around it, deep pink at the head, almost purple, the mighty vein that ran all down the length of it… Loki had had it in his mouth only that one time in L.A. He licked his lips. He hungered for it now, heavy on his tongue, stretching his lips around its girth, spurting pre-come he would lick straight from the slit, with his eyes fixed on his brother's eyes, blazing…

Loki squeezed his own cock. He was desperate. He undid the buttons and fly, slid his hand inside his pants, shivered when he felt his own bare skin, his own hard flesh. Oh, Thor's hands… Delicate for such a big bloke, but big and strong just the same.

Had Thor learned some new tricks too? Or had he been ruined by all those fucking women? Had they turned him saccharine sweet and gentle and soft? Had that woman made him soft? Had he forgotten how to fuck an arse? How to fuck his brother's arse?

That frown on Thor's brow at the corridor, when Loki had told him that he hated him. The hurt in his expression before he hastily plastered some arrogance all over it.

He spat on his hand, got his cock and balls out and started jacking, as he squeezed his sack just to the verge of pain. He bit his lip hard. Yes, fuck, I fucking hate you so fucking much, you oblivious, self-righteous, hypocritical, cowardly bastard…

Back in the boardroom. Oh, no, hell no. No kissing. Loki would bend over the table on his stomach. Thor could fuck him like that. The rest could watch.

Nothing felt like his brother, no-one. Loki closed his eyes, and from the deep end of his more precious memories, he fished for the sounds his brother made when he fucked him, and tried to conjure them up. Even more, he sought the sound he made at the first thrust, the moment he entered him, that strangled breath, that sharp gasp when he bottomed out. Ah, that sensation. Thor inside of him, stretching him, filling him, overpowering him. Everybody else had been but a fucking tourist in Loki’s body, a guest at most. But Thor was the master there. Whenever he allowed himself to remember Thor fucking him, Loki’s whole body rocking under his thrusts, it turned his brains to fucking soup.

He was jacking fast, thumb sharp at the head, twisting his fist, legs shivering, back trying to curl forwards, him trying to keep himself upright and on his feet.
Thor could be such an animal in those days. He could really lose it and fuck so damn hard. Loki had been done pretty much in every way he could think of, but Thor was so strong, so fit, he went at it like a horse. His cock felt so fucking good, but it was his lust, his hunger for Loki that really killed him. Oh, those sounds, those groans, the breathing, the moaning. The knowledge that Thor wanted him beyond reason, that he lost himself in lust for him. Ah... His beautiful brother, who could have anyone, and everyone, desperate for him like a dog in heat, Loki his leaking, willing bitch.

Oh, fuck... Loki was so close now, so close.

In the boardroom, Thor grabbed his hair in his big strong hand and forced his head around, fucked in, and kissed him. Loki bit down on Thor's lips, wanting to draw blood. His brother groaned in pain, and Loki came, his moaning loud and breathy, his knees all but giving, come on the carpet, his back jolting.

He trembled, eyes out of focus, a quiver in the muscles of his arms and thighs.

Feeling drowsiness starting to descend upon him, he shuffled to the bed, pants around his knees, and sat boneless on the covers, panting hard. He wiped his hands on the bed and pulled his trousers up, trying to put himself back together. He had not had an orgasm like that in... god fucking knows, he didn't exactly keep a diary of these things. Maybe he should.

His eyes focused on the script, a seemingly harmless stack of paper on the small, plain, bare desk by the window. (In the boardroom, Thor's copy so crumpled and dirty, a perfect circle of coffee on the front page, Loki's copy neat and crisp, his handwriting sharp and impeccable.)

This movie was going to be the death of him, wasn't it? He would be carried out of the set in a fucking straight-jacket, or directly on a bloody stretcher, with a tag on his big toe.

He plopped backwards, his chest still heaving, still seeing his brother's face when he shut his eyes.

Well, there were worse ways to go. He knew first-hand. He had tried a couple.

Natasha was with him at all times, and in constant contact with the people back home. When she needed to be away, she actually sent her whatever he was, Clint. The guy was quiet, mostly unobtrusive. He read or played video games, and reported to Natasha. Sigyn phoned at least once a day, and they texted constantly. Loki complained they were all doing his head in, and how the fuck was he supposed to concentrate and take in the bloody script with so many people hovering around him.

Inwardly, however, he was very, very grateful. They all reminded him what this was about. And he needed it.

Because the read had been intense, but the bloody rehearsals...
Heimdall was a bit too bloody eager to play up to the mad vibes he had felt at the read. He told Loki he was holding back. Damn right he was holding back, he was trying not to scream like a banshee from sheer pent up tension, just from being around Thor so often, for such long hours, skinning each other alive with that damn dialogue. It was all so raw. They played the whole thing from back to back a couple of times, before focusing on any specific scenes. And Loki found himself simply incapable of keeping a professional distance from the fucking progression of things between Bobby and Johnny, from the early mistrust and alienation to the real reunion, when the wall came down between them, and they finally became a comfort and an aid to each other.

Heimdall was very interested too in showing the progression of the relationship through the way the brothers touched. That is, from the first heart-felt but awkward embrace, through to some pushing and shoving in one of the worst fights, all the way to the last hug. And he wanted to sharpen each and every one of those touches until they were clear as glass. Meaning, a fucking lot of hugging. A fucking lot of smelling Thor. A fucking lot of feeling him against his flesh, his big, strong, absurdly muscled arms tight around him. God fucking dammit, it was hard. And he could tell how bloody happy Thor was to be allowed to touch him like that. It made Loki want to rip his own eyes out with his nails. It was so fucking nice. Fuck nice. Thor could take all his nice and shove it up his perfect arse. Loki did not want anything to do with it.

And everybody was so excited, anticipating how good this thing would be, that it was catching. Even from inside, Loki was able to tell they were on fire. The light in Thor’s eyes after they killed a scene got under Loki’s skin every goddamn time. A couple of times, he had even smiled back. Damn.

He did not enjoy being mad at Thor. He was not fucking ten anymore. But he felt he had to keep himself at a safe, grudgy distance, because he had no middle ground… He could not walk around just being friends with Thor, he was incapable of it. He knew himself well. What with the way Thor was behaving towards him, if Loki did not go around actively hating him, he would start to have hopes. And he was not fucking putting himself in the position of being rejected by Thor again. Never fucking again. He could not claim to have much pride left, he guessed, but if there were any dregs there, he would protect them with his own miserable, pathetic life.

So fuck Thor’s puppy eyes, fuck his long, warm stares at lunchtime, fuck his attempts at small talk and fuck his offers of further rehearsal at home. No, we’re not friends, Odinson, and I’m not your brother, I never was, so fuck you, fuck your olive branch, fuck your brotherly good intentions. We’re nothing to each other, nothing. Fuck you. Sideways. With a barge pole.

Oh, but what the fuck was Thor playing at. The bastard, when they were kids, he would push and push and push, but when he felt Loki drifting away, he would pull the leash and assert his claim. That was even before they started having sex. Was that what this was about, the look he had given him after Loki walked out of the room with his new 1950s hair-cut? Thor had taken his time to examine it, quiet astonishment in his eyes, then a frown.

“That bad?” Loki had said, incapable of helping himself. Vanity.

Thor smiled warmly, the jerk.

“No, you look great,” Thor said, his eyes fucking stroking the long waves that were not there anymore. “But I’ll miss your hair. I love your hair.”

Loki had shown teeth, venomous spite in his eyes. How did he fucking dare? Loki trying to keep it professional and that fucking tease, stringing him along… King of fucking mixed signals. It was forgivable when he was a teenager with little or no control over how his words and actions came through, and the extent of the effect they had on Loki, but now? Now he was taking the fucking piss.
Loki had never had his brother for a cruel man. What the fuck was that all about then?

Loki had turned on his heels in an angry whirl. He had been this close to punching his stupid golden face. The only reason to restrain himself was Heimdall. Loki knew better than to piss off figures of authority. (Thor did not. He always got caught. And yet, somehow, everybody always blamed Loki.)

Rather than breaking Thor's nose, Loki resumed his cold war tactics. For example, chosen at random from a long list, ignoring Thor, smiling mildly with nothing but politeness when he spoke, and every now and then, sigh as if he was bored. Worked like a charm. The dark cloud on Thor's head, oh, it was fucking beautiful. And well fucking deserved.

Three days to the start of the shoot. Thor rubbed his eyes and stopped the alarm. He had been getting up early to go jogging. His character was a military, outdoorsy type in a rough spot. He was supposed to be buff, but worn out. He was shedding some weight.

He stared at the ceiling, drowsy, scratching his stomach and balls, psyching himself up to get out of bed. It was getting harder and harder every morning.

This thing with Loki. He had not expected it would be easy, but he had hoped to have made some inroads by now.

He knew how stubborn Loki was, and he understood his brother had good reason to be, er, not well-disposed towards him. Thor had fucked up a lot after all. He had come ready to endure Loki’s punishment.

But he had also hoped he would get through to Loki at some point, and even he could tell he was failing miserably at finding the right approach. Loki refused to speak to him about anything that wasn’t acting, and went to whatever lengths necessary to make sure they were never alone together. Thor just did not know what to do.

Loki did soften up now and then, but Thor had stopped celebrating that soon enough, fearing the backlash that he knew would follow. For every kind look Loki deigned to cast at him, Thor had better brace himself for three good days without one single civilised word. For every time they hugged in rehearsals, Thor knew he would have to pay for it in hundreds of Loki’s vicious jabs or, worse still, his pointed indifference. It was grinding him down.

Anyway, surrender was not in his nature. He would keep trying, until he got it right. Loki could not stay mad at him forever, could he? …Bloody hell, of course he could. This is Loki we’re talking about.

Well, whenever he was stuck, there was one thing that never failed to make him feel better. So Thor went for his run.

He was towelling himself dry after a shower, when he heard the phone. He had thirty missed phone calls. In the last half hour. What the fuck?
“Yeah?” he said, cautious.

The words came out like machine gun fire.

“Mr. Odinson. NBC. What are your comments about the breakout on the internet of your adoptive brother’s sex tapes?”

Thor’s face scrunched up in complete befuddlement.

“What?”

“What are your comments on…”

He hung up.

His heart, thumping in his chest like a buffalo stampede, the prickle of adrenaline under his skin.

What?

The phone went off again.

“Fuck off!” he shouted.

“Thor, it’s me,” said Tony, calmly.

“What the fuck is going on, Tony?”

“E! TV. Now.”

Thor fished for the remote on his bedside table, phone still glued to his ear, while Tony waited in silence. He could hear him breathing.

There it was. Loki on the street, outside his hotel, chased down by paparazzi, flashes like a thunderstorm, making Loki’s pallor appear a sickly fluorescent white. It must have been early this morning.

The running line at the bottom froze the blood in Thor’s veins. “LOKI LAUFYEYSON SEX TAPES SCANDAL. PAST COMES TO HAUNT ASGARD HOUSE’S YOUNGEST. Sex tapes from past as prostitute published on internet video platform.”

“Good god…” gasped Thor, feeling sick.

A snippet from Loki’s street interview followed. Loki with his sunglasses on, shoulders slumped forwards, head down, on the defensive.

But he did rise his chin to address the vultures, with pride. The questions were unintelligible, but with Loki’s Shakespearean diction, Thor did not miss one word of his brother’s reply.

“Well, I haven’t seen them yet, so I can’t give an accurate review. But I seem to remember that my performance was greatly praised at the time. I somewhat doubt that the cinematography does it justice though, the means must have been rather rudimentary. Anyway, as most of my work, I’m sure it was more effective live. I’m a theatre man after all. Now you have your comment. Leave me the (- - -) alone.”

They chased him down the street some more, and then the clip cut off to the news presenter, waiting with a stiff, artificial grin for the stupid transition tune to finish.
Thor turned it off, struggling to breathe.

“Where is he now?” he choked out.

“At Natasha’s. I can be there by you in five minutes. With an unmarked car.”

Thor nodded, cleared his throat.

“Please.” He swallowed. “Has anyone told Heimdall?”

“Don’t think about that now. I’ve got it. You just… Just wait there, don’t answer the phone. I’ll come round the back. Just hang in there.”

* 

“Thank god,” said Natasha, a wave of relief on her face, upon opening her door and finding Thor there. “He’s in the bedroom. This way. Why is your phone off? I’ve been calling.”

Thor followed her, shaking with alarm. Loki had looked alright in the TV, sassy and strong. He was coping, right? I mean, he was Loki, for fuck’s…

He found him cowering in a corner, on the floor, by the bed, his eyes puffy and red, curled in on himself, hiding behind his own bony knees.

When Thor approached him, he flinched. He was terrified.

“Loki…” gasped Thor.

He kneeled next to him slowly, reached up to stroke his face. Loki winced away, as if he feared that Thor would strike him.

Loki sniffled, his lip quivering.

“I fucked up…” he muttered, with barely any voice.

Thor’s heart broke to pieces.

Fuck this.

Thor wrapped him in his arms and pulled him to his chest.

Loki started shaking with his sobs, curled in on himself, but didn’t fight him. When Thor kissed his hair and his forehead, Loki leaned against him. He couldn’t stop crying, whining like a child.

“I’m here, baby. I’m here,” said Thor, again and again. “I’ve got you.” And he started crying too, as he held his brother tight.
Loki started to unfold himself, pushing to disentangle from Thor’s arms. Thor’s first instinct was to cling tighter.

“I need to pee, Thor” grumbled Loki.

Reluctantly, Thor let go. Loki got on his feet stiffly, stretching his back, and made his way to the bathroom.

Thor stood up too, muscles knotted up as if he had overworked himself in the gym. They had been holding each other on the floor for a long time. Loki had cried for a good part of it. In the end, he had ended up sitting between Thor’s legs, crushed against his chest, resting his head on his brother’s shoulder, as Thor petted his hair.

Thor’s own tears had dried quickly. Loki in his arms again, taking comfort in him again, accepting his embrace and Thor's kisses on his head, letting himself be soothed by his big brother's presence, like he had done such a long time ago, it seemed a whole lifetime. In many ways, it had been a lifetime. All Thor had felt during that time was gratitude.

Thor got out of the room to find the apartment empty. There was a note on the fridge. “Help yourselves. NR”.

He presumed everyone had gone to battle stations. There was a hell of a lot to deal with, wasn’t there? Thor rubbed his eyes tiredly. Ah, none of that mattered now. Let Natasha and Tony and his army of lawyers and publicists and spin doctors take charge. Loki was the only thing that mattered to Thor now.

He put the kettle on —bless Natasha for her British mannerisms; the thing even had a British plug—and rummaged in the cupboards for some tea.

“The second to your right” said Loki, leaning on the door frame, hands in the pockets of his tight, black jeans, long and lean and lovely, even with his puffy eyes and that bitter pinch in his mouth.

Focus, Odinson. He found the tea and poured the boiling water. Loki came to fetch his mug, his expression jaded and weary. He padded on bare feet back into the guests bedroom and plopped on
the bed like dead weight. His breathing was still wet.

Thor followed him there. He sat on the bed next to him, at a distance. He really did not know what Loki would tolerate from him, and what he would consider an intrusion, now that the first moments of the crisis were over. But Thor just did not want to stay away. He would risk it.

Loki eyed him on the sly. He looked tense.

A bristly silence Thor tried to navigate with a sip of boiling tea that scalded his tongue.

“Are you mad at me?” asked Loki after a long time.

“Mad? Why would I be mad?”

“For… for putting you all in this position.”

Thor shook his head, an acid choke in his throat. ‘Do I look mad to you’ and ‘Why do you always think the worse of me’ and ‘why must you always say these things’ all came to his mouth and pushed to come out.

“I’m not mad” he said instead.

“And Natasha?” said Loki anxiously. “She must be furious.”

“Why would she?” Thor knew he looked genuinely at a loss.

Loki huffed, angry at himself, but took pity on Thor’s confusion.

“She worked so hard to… to prevent this” he explained.

Thor still did not know what he was talking about. He had a very solid headache, give him a break. Loki elaborated.

“Early on, when she took me on as a client, she thought this could happen. When she learned about… that time in my life, she…” Loki rubbed his eyes tiredly. “I told her I believed Malekith had stuff on me. Malekith was my boss at the club.”

As if Thor could ever forget.

“Stuff?”

“Tapes. He recorded stuff, you know. For blackmail purposes I presume. Anyway, Natasha went to Malekith and struck a deal. It cost us everything we both had at the time and some more we had to scrounge up, but Malekith sold us what he had.”

“You don’t think this is him?”

“No. He would not just drop it on youtube, he would come to us with it and try to squeeze something out of us. It’s just not his style. And he may be a bastard and a psychopath, but he knows honour, and we did make a deal. Besides… it’s not his stuff. His recordings were in his place, hotel room type. These are… These were taken with mobile phones in the alleyway.”

Thor took a breath. This was hard for him and harder for Loki. Loki kept throwing looks at him, watching his reactions. Thor was stunned, more than anything, overcome by all of this, unsure how to address it. Loki carried on.
“When Natasha closed the deal with Malekith, she thought we were home safe. But I knew we weren’t. I knew there was more. But I did not tell Natasha. …Because I did not know where to start” he had cut over Thor when he had opened his mouth to ask. “I don’t know who these guys were, or how to even begin to track them down. I guess I just… crossed my fingers and pushed it to the back of my mind, and hoped that it would just go away. I felt— I was ashamed of myself for being such a fucking idiot, for letting it happen. I don’t know what I was thinking back in those days, I swear.”

Thor took yet another deep breath, because he wanted to cry and he was trying to handle it. He reached for Loki to stroke his face. Loki let him.

“You weren’t thinking” said Thor, cupping his brother’s jaw, stroking his thumb on his cheekbone. “You weren’t yourself.”

Loki snorted.

“Or I was more myself than ever, depending on how you want to look at it.” He attempted a little smile that came out more like a grimace.

Thor held his hand now.

“It changes nothing. It’s not your fault. None of this is your fault.”

“You say that because you don’t understand” snapped Loki, snatching his hand back and lighting a fag. “This was not a natural catastrophe nobody could stop, ok? It did not have to happen. I let it happen. I did this to myself. You don’t know the half of it.”

“So tell me” Thor urged, his voice soft.

“You don’t want to know” countered Loki, cutting.

Thor considered that for a beat. He really wanted to do the best he could. If Loki wanted to protect him, he would honour that. If he was given a choice, he wanted to make sure he did not take it lightly.

“I do” he said after some time.

Loki took a long, long drag, and assessed him with a piercing eye. He deliberated for an eternity and a half.

“Right. Ok.” He sighed at last, puffing smoke. He took yet another minute to gather his thoughts. “Let’s see. The first time I turned tricks was in Moscow” he said, as he worried at his shirt like a little boy, eyes low. “I was running out of money, and I was in a club, and this guy came to me and… anyway, he gave me money to spend the night with him. He wasn’t repulsive or anything, so I did it. It was easy. He passed me to a friend, and then to another friend, et cetera. That went on for a month or so. The money was good, but the best part was… It felt… good in a way, as if I was shitting on Odin’s name. Do you know what I mean?”

Thor guessed he could understand that, given enough time, so he nodded, He had a very unpleasant tumble in his stomach. Loki carried on.

“When I came back to London, I was broke, and I was still very, very far from done with Odin. I stumbled upon that club. And for a while it… sufficed, sort of. But everything I touched seemed to turn to… not gold, but let’s call it shitty gold. I mean, I was looking for something seedy and disgusting and I find myself in a reasonably clean place, and I start pole dancing and I get a mention in Out Magazine… It wasn’t cheap enough. It wasn’t debasing enough. Yes, I had to fuck people for
money, but the guys Malekith got me were… well, they were kinky fuckers most of them, no fucking Richard Gere’s there, but it was so polite, so professional, so sanitary. I don’t know. All I could think was Odin finding out and going ‘Oh well, if he has to be a whore, at least let him be a high class one.’”

And he had mimicked Odin’s voice and tone so well Thor had to smile. Loki mirrored it for a second.

“Anyway” said Loki, smoke escaping his lips, “it just would not do. So I started doing it in the alleyway. And that was more like it. That was less kinky, but a lot cheaper. And it pissed off the boss to boot, so he punished me. They never beat me up, they did slap me around sometimes, but they didn’t want to spoil the merchandise. No, what he did, he got me clients that were not so… sanitary. Or he gave them permission to, I don’t know, go a bit wilder. And I just… I just swallowed more pills and got on with it, and didn’t give a shit. Because that’s what I wanted. I knew it was fucked up but… But it made the rest feel right. Or better. You have to understand. I was… I was a mess, ok? I was taking sedatives and shit I got in the street to sort of numb the anxiety, but the rest of it was left to run rampant. My head was a very sick, very dark place at the time. Anyway, when the guys in the alleyway started to film shit… I let them. I could have stopped it. I had a bouncer who was a friend, he could have stopped it if I told him to. But I didn’t. It just added to it. It made me feel appropriately dirty and used, and it made me…” Loki stopped when Thor’s tears started really falling.

He tried to wipe them out but they just kept coming. All that hurt he had never known about or begun to imagine. So many places in Loki’s mind that scared the shit out of him, and Loki there by himself, and no chances of letting Thor in, to be there with him and try to make it better, or at least suffer it with him if there was nothing to be done. It made him so goddamn angry.

Loki lit up another fag with the butt of the last one.

“I used to get my kicks thinking of the videos getting to the press and making dad die of shame. Careful what you wish for, eh?” he said, with a sour smirk that cut like a knife. He sat back and stared into space. “I didn’t even think of mum back then. I mean, that mum would suffer too. I can’t understand that now, how I managed to push her under a rug like that, as if she did not exist, while I did all those things. I can’t figure out how… Anyway. At least there is that. She’s not here to see this. Though her name will be dragged through the shit with mine just the same.” A wet, shuddery sigh.

Thor took a few deep breaths, pulling himself together. He glanced at Loki, trying to think of something to say. Loki beat him to it.

“I’m so fucking sorry” he said, as his face scrunched up with the urge to cry. He wiped the tears furiously.

Thor shook his head but he could not get anything out.

“Have you seen them?” asked Loki, his voice choked.

“No” said Thor.

“I don’t want you to.” Loki sniffled. “Please.”

“I won’t” said Thor.

Loki wiped his eyes furiously.

“Everybody else will” he said.
Thor leaned over, hooking one hand strongly around Loki’s neck. He kissed his forehead hard, then his cheek, and pulled him tight against his chest.

“What am I going to do now” sobbed Loki, hiding his face. “Fucking hell, Thor” he said weakly, crying. He clung tight.

Thor wished he knew what to say.

“I’m here, baby” said Thor. “I’m here. I love you.”

They laid in bed together on top of the covers, Loki shaking with deep sobs. Thor felt almost guilty that he was feeling so… Damn, in spite of everything, here they were, together. He cradled his brother in his arms and kissed his head again and again, breathing in his scent, and Loki calmed down little by little.

After some time, Loki’s eyes started to droop. Natasha had said he had taken a sedative, under doctor’s instructions, after all hell had broken lose earlier this morning. Now that he had calmed down, he was bound to feel drowsy and exhausted. It was a blessing. Loki would be able to forget about it all for some time.

He put him down gently. Loki’s eyes fluttered, saw Thor, and closed again. He rested his head on the pillow. Thor kissed his forehead, and saw Loki’s mouth tugging with the hint of a smile. Now Thor did want to cry.

He extricated himself gently from Loki’s arms, draped a blanket over his brother, kissed his hair, drew the curtains closed, and pushed the door almost shut. Let him rest.

He needed some painkillers for his head, and he needed to move. He felt restless, pent up energy crackling under his skin. Coffee was not a good idea, but bollocks to it, the taste was comforting.

Checking his phone was an even worse idea, and not comforting at all. He thought that even as he waited for the damn thing to start up. Sat on the couch with his mug in one hand and his phone in the other, he raised his eyebrows at the number on the missed calls register, and then he checked the news. He was instantly sickened. The latest bombing in Gaza was still front page on all the serious newspapers, but the fucking sex tapes was the most viewed and shared story in all the news sites he browsed. Some articles on the sleazier media even had fucking screen caps, for extra colour. They were not too explicit, the details blurred and hazy, due to the dim light, the low resolution, and the editor’s last shred of decency, but fuck.

The debate in the comments section was the worst of all. Sure, there were commenters taking Loki’s side, but many others seemed to take the approach that the videos had been taken in a public place, that Loki was a prostitute at the time anyway, and that he was a celebrity now and courted popularity, so he could not complain if people were interested. It made Thor want to throw up, or kill someone, or both, one after the other.

He closed the browser. For his sanity and the structural integrity of his phone.

He had so many messages he would never get through them, and his voicemail was so full it had packed up. And sure enough, there were seven incoming calls (he had it on vibrate) in the twenty minutes since he had turned on the phone. He switched it off again, and contemplated very seriously just dumping this one and getting a new one, with a fresh new number he would never fucking give to anyone.
What a bloody mess. He slumped on himself, elbows on his knees, face in his hands.

He needed to stay strong for Loki. He just wasn’t sure how. He felt so impotent, so helpless. He could not make this thing go away. He could not take his pain away and shoulder it for him. His worst nightmare was Loki crumbling between his fingers again, and doing something to harm himself… He could not think of that. He could not bear the thought. Look at him, he was shaking.

What could he do, what?

What would mum do if she was here?

“You made what?” said Loki, rubbing his eyes, hair a bird’s nest. He had slept for over three hours.

“Chicken soup” said Thor, with the steaming bowl in his hand. “Do you want some?”

Loki had a look of intense and utter disbelief on his face.

“How the hell did you make chicken soup?” he said, as if Thor had told him he had put together a helicopter out of toiletries and kitchen appliances.

“I boiled chicken and vegetables” he said, purposely toning it and pacing it as if he was talking to a very slow little boy. “Natasha has a full fridge.”

Loki’s mouth and eyes were open wide, with a touch of humour. It looked good on him, but it still irked Thor.

“Listen, I’ll chuck it if you don’t want it” he said, pissy.

“No, no, I’ll eat it” hurried Loki, conciliating.

Thor let it go. He approached with the bowl, the spoon, the napkin and the tray, and set it all on Loki’s lap. His brother looked dozy and flat, but there was a glint in his eyes that was almost cheerful.

“Are these spring onion slices floating?” he said.

Thor huffed, losing his patience. “Yes.”

“Why is it yellow?”

“Turmeric.”

Loki’s eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

“It’s Javanese chicken soup” explained Thor.

Loki’s mouth fell open again.

“What the fuck do you want from me?!” snapped Thor.

“Nothing! Nothing!” said Loki, holding his hands up in appeasement. “It’s just… since when can you make… Javanese chicken soup?” he asked, in complete bewilderment.
“Loki, I’ve lived by myself since I was eighteen. I can cook, alright? Deal with it” he said, a bit too aggressively perhaps, given the topic of conversation.

Loki looked at his food. He had to stop biting his lip to put a spoonful in his mouth.

“It’s really nice” he said.

“I know it is” snapped Thor.

Loki couldn’t keep a straight face, but he kept eating.

“Thank you” he said, after a while.

Thor relaxed a bit.

“You’re welcome.”

He sat on the bed, carefully. He would get a lashing if he made Loki spill soup on himself. He leaned his back against the headboard, his eyes unfocused, with the little noises of metal on porcelain and his brother’s very quiet, very delicate slurping. The scene was oddly domestic and peaceful. It felt good.

“Done” said Loki, wiping his mouth.

“Do you want anything else?” said Thor, as he picked up the things. He was feeling smug. Loki had finished it all.

“Some tea?” asked Loki, angel face.

A smile tugged at Thor’s mouth.

“Your wish is my command.”

Loki had a strange look on him, glancing at Thor through a squint.

“What” asked Thor.

“You’re full of surprises, aren’t you?” said Loki.

Thor took his brother’s face in, feeling damn pleased with himself —Loki was smiling.

“You have no idea” he said. And he left a kiss on his brother’s head before taking the stuff to the kitchen.

They were sitting on the bed with their mugs of tea when Loki sniffed the air.

“You’re… baking?” he said, the look of shock and incredulity back on his face.

Thor’s eyebrows shot up.

“Fuck!” he said.

He jumped from the bed and rushed to the kitchen.
The biscuits had burned slightly at the edges, but they polished even the crumbs.

Sigyn arrived late in the evening. Loki started to cry again in her arms. Thor stood to one side and backed away, to give them some privacy. Loki whipped his head around.

“Don’t leave” he said.

Thor smiled at him.

“Never. Never again” said Thor.

And he thought Loki understood when he got out of the bedroom and left the two of them alone.

Sigyn emerged from the bedroom after half an hour. Thor stood up from the couch.

“Loki has gone for a shower” she said.

He nodded, resisting the urge to wring his hands.

“It’s great to meet you at last” said Thor. And threw his arms around her, timidly.

“Yes, same here!” she said, hugging back. “How are you?” she asked, when they sat down.

Thor puffed a long breath. He had intended to keep it light, but he found a choke in his throat and he was unable to speak.

She seemed to sense it. She gripped his arm lightly (not much of it, with her average sized hands) and rubbed it as if for warmth.

“Hey, I’m going to tell you what I told him, alright? Just breathe and take it one step at a time. I know it seems impossible right now, but you’ve been through worse, both of you, and you pulled through.”

Thor shook his head, disbelieving. Sigyn grabbed his wrist firmly now, and shook it to get Thor’s attention. She drilled into his eyes with hers.

“Listen to me. This is not the worst thing that’s happened to Loki, or to you. This is not the end of the world. And yes, before you say anything, I am perfectly aware that an actor is his image and all of that. Loki has explained it all already, extensively. I know that, but I’m still saying this. It might seem as if life as we know it has ended, but it hasn’t. And we’ll pull through. And in time, entire months will go by without us even remembering this ever happened. And you’ll be fine. And Loki will be fine. Alright?”

Thor stared into her green-brown eyes. Her vehemence was a thing to behold. She seemed capable of standing up to a hurricane.
Thor by contrast felt like a slight breeze could topple him right now.

“I don’t know what to do” he confessed.

“You’re doing fine.” She gripped his hand with both of hers. They were strong. “You’re doing what he needs from you. Seriously, he does not need you to go and slay him any dragons. Just stay with him, let him know you love him. That’s what he needs.”

Thor swallowed, and went for it.

“Sigyn, you know, right? About… about Loki and me.”

She smiled kindly.

“Yes.”

He took a breath.

“And?”

“And what?”

He opened his mouth, but he didn’t even know what he was asking.

“Do you want to know how I feel about it?” she guessed. “Sad and frustrated, is what I feel about it, you pair of idiots” she said.

Thor frowned some more.

“Idiots?”

“A pair of idiots, so crazy about each other and incapable of…”

He widened his eyes.

“Really? Loki is…? He’s told you that?”

She huffed, rolling her eyes.

“I rest my case.”

He laughed, full chuckles. It felt good. Even he could tell his face had brightened up. He suppressed the mighty urge to grill her about what Loki told her about him. He guessed he had no right to pry. But damn, it was tempting.

His eyes darkened then.

“It’s not just about being… crazy about each other though, is it?” he said. “We’re brothers. It wouldn’t just ruin our career if it ever came out, but hiding… it would make our personal lives hell” he said. “Probably.”

“Are they so great right now?” she asked.

He observed her carefully. She was serious.

“Point taken. But it’s not just about having a hard time of it. Loki is… he’s fragile.”
Sigyn shook her head. She was having none of that.

“He’s stable, medicated, he has a good support network, and he has been through a lot, and learned to deal with a lot as well. He is strong. And you would be there for him.”

Thor smiled sadly.

“I’m usually the problem, Sigyn.”

She sighed deeply, seemed to weigh her thoughts.

“Look, I’m probably talking too much and Loki will kill me for it but… It’s not being with you that’s the problem with Loki.”

Thor looked away.

“You don’t believe me” said Sigyn, in dismay. She leaned forward, clutched his hands tight. “You’re the person he compares everyone else with, and nobody has ever come close, not since I’ve known him. And I know him very well, you better believe that. Listen, I know that being in love and… er, lusting for each other, by themselves, don’t justify a relationship. But that’s not all there is to it, is it? The way he talks about you… You were happy together, weren’t you? I mean, it worked between you. Right?”

He had never thought about it like that. He had only thought about how miserable they were. But they had been happy in Iceland, perfect together. A good team. And there had been days back in England… She was right. It had worked between them, when guilt and fear of being discovered didn’t get in the way.

“And it doesn’t seem to work with anyone else…” she added. “I don’t know, Thor. You’ve tried being apart and that hasn’t gone so well for either of you. Perhaps you should think about that?”

“I do” confessed Thor. “I’ve thought about that too. I’m… I’m willing to try. It’s what I want.”

Her face lit up with joy.

“But I can’t see Loki giving me a chance ever again” he said. “Not after all that’s happened between us. And I don’t blame him…”

“Right” she said. “I’m going to stop that train of thought right here, ok? Because that’s where you start to go wrong.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“You’re assuming things based on nothing” she explained. “Just bloody ask him!”

He looked down, chastised. The girl was a whirlwind.

He hated to sound so bloody negative, but…

“He won’t talk to me” he said.

“I can try and help with that” she replied.

“If I am right, and I ask him, he’ll tear me to pieces.” he said.

“But what if you’re wrong?”
“He’ll probably tear me to pieces anyway.”

She laughed.

“Maybe” she conceded. “Not a bad way to go though.”

He laughed. And blushed.

“Will you think about this?” she urged.

He grinned.

“Non-bloody-stop, I predict” he said.

“Good.”

“Think about what?” said Loki, hair wet, shirtless. “Conspiring against me?”

Thor’s heart jumped up to his mouth, his cheeks burst into flame.

“Loki Bloody Laufeyson!” exclaimed Sigyn, standing up and rushing towards him. “Put a shirt on right. now! You’ll catch your death!”

She had done that on purpose. Distraction manoeuvre. Thor loved her already. Even if she was pushing his shirtless brother back into the room to cover him up. He could even forgive her that.

*

At midnight, Natasha burst into the flat, with a bag full of Loki’s clothes and things. They were all still awake.

“We’re moving you to Stark Tower” she said. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Thor checked on Loki, who nodded.

The girls took charge. Thor said he would stay behind, and go to his hotel to pick up some clothes. Natasha ordered him his own Starkmobile.

Loki looked at him warily.

“Are you coming later? Or… tomorrow?” He had tried to sound even and casual, but those big, anxious eyes were giving him away.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can” said Thor. “Tonight.”

Loki nodded. “Ok.”

“Hey,” said Thor, grabbing his neck, stroking his jaw, “as soon as I can. I promise.”

He stayed behind as the small group made it out the door. He saw the flashes go off, and some shouting. Natasha had said it was quieter now than it had been. Crazy, the world had gone crazy.

It wasn’t even about Loki’s celebrity right now, there wouldn’t have been such a big fuss if it was
just him. He was a theatre actor about to embark on a Hollywood career, well-known in Britain, not so much in the US. This was about their parents, their name, about Thor himself. It made him feel ill.

* * *

When he made it to Stark Tower, he was told that Tony had allotted them all suites in the guests floor (one of them anyway), and Thor had his own. Still, Thor asked to be shown to Loki’s straight away.

The look on his brother’s face when he saw him, bright like a little boy’s. It made him feel warm.

Sigyn and Natasha were talking by the kitchenette. They had ordered take-away and offered Thor to reheat him some. He declined. Not hungry.

He sat down with his brother on the couch. He was watching a whale documentary on mute.

“Hey” said Loki.

“Hey” said Thor, ruffling his brother’s hair. And Loki didn’t bite his hand off, how about that.

“You made it” said Loki.

“I made it.”

“How is it out there?” said Loki after a while.

Thor shrugged.

“There was some people outside my hotel, nothing major.”

“Did they bother you?”

“Nah. Unmarked car, tinted windows, back door. Piece of cake.”

Loki smiled a little smile.

They were quiet for a long time.

“I’m glad you’re here” muttered Loki.

Thor sighed with a tangle of emotions inside he could not begin to work through. It was overwhelming at times, Loki being… civil, candid, sweet even. Thor had the constant urge to hug him, now, while the walls were down. He did not know how long they would stay this way.

“Do you want to watch a movie?” he asked.

He was exhausted. He didn’t think he was going to keep awake after the first ten minutes, and he thought Loki could see that in his face. But he wanted an excuse to stick around, and for Loki to stay relaxed around him. His intentions were probably transparent to Loki. Thor braced himself for a rebuff.
“Do you think Tony has *The Crimson Pirate* somewhere?” said Loki, with a smirk.

He woke up to the smell of coffee. He had spent the night on the couch of Loki’s suite, apparently, and someone had covered him up with a blanket. Thor rubbed his eyes, and managed to focus them on the cup of coffee on the low table in front of him. He got himself upright, scratching his head, his stomach, stretching his back. Coffee sounded good. And it smelled even better.

He turned his head around, only to see Loki on the balcony, having a fag with Bucky. They were talking calmly. There was trust there. Bucky had a hand on Loki’s shoulder, and was smiling warmly. Loki looked deflated, his smile faint, his eyes sad. They talked for a while longer, and when they finished their fags, Bucky kissed Loki on the mouth and hugged him close, and Thor clenched his jaw and looked away. Drank his coffee in a few gulps. It was still warm. He got up to make himself another one. He had a long day ahead.

The balcony doors slid open.

“You’re awake” said Loki, with a tiny smile Thor struggled to match. It made Loki frown.

“Morning” said Bucky, rubbing the back of his neck. He was still madly shy around Thor.

He was a good actor, with a lot of presence, and the camera loved him, if the screen tests were anything to go by, but it took him a while to warm up —pun intended, considering the scene they had to shoot together- and it had been a bit stiff. Thor was to blame for a good part of it, of course. He struggled to put the image of Bucky’s and Loki’s dance out of his mind. And Bucky seemed to sense that Thor did not like him, and reacted to it. Steve said once that Bucky had been outgoing, self-confident, cocky even, before he served. Thor found that hard to believe, seeing him now.

He tried to be friendly.

“Thanks for coming, man” said Thor, shaking Bucky’s hand.

“No problem. Er, see you later, Loki. Take care, guys.” He grabbed his jacket and made for the door.

Loki walked him there. At the door, Bucky kissed Loki again, on the cheek. Thor looked away.

“Stay strong, eh?” said Bucky, with a sweet smile.

Loki nodded.

“You too.”

Alone now.

“You didn’t even make it to Isla Cobra last night” said Loki, grinning.

“I was knackered, alright?” snapped Thor.

Loki frowned.
“Sorry” said Thor.

Loki’s expression was cold.

“I’m going to have a shower” mumbled Thor stiffly. He picked up his bag, still on the floor by Loki’s door, untouched since yesterday, and went to find his suite.

He was jealous, wasn’t he? Thor was jealous. Of Bucky. Loki huffed. The fucking nerve. Couldn’t he make up his fucking mind? Did he want to be brothers or… or what? Did he just want Loki at his feet for the rest of his life, pining for him, alone for ever? God fucking dammit, Thor.

Loki picked up the cup of coffee he had made for his brother from the table where Thor had left it, and dumped it with a decent clank into the sink. It didn’t break, but it could have.

“Whoa” said Tony, poking his head through the door. “Are you decent? Can I come in?”

Loki’s first impulse was to throw him some snark. He composed his face. He owed Tony a lot.

“Yes, come in” he said, really trying for calm and welcoming.

“I just bumped into Thor. You two alright?”

Loki stared at him, a pinch in his brow.

“Dandy” said Loki, and rubbed his eyes. “What’s going on, Tony? Nobody tells me anything.”

“Nothing is happening” said Tony, flashing him a quick grin. He looked tired. “The shoot is postponed, until you feel up to it.”

“Postponed” repeated Loki. “Not cancelled.”

“No.”

Loki sighed deeply.

“It’s going to cost you a fortune.”

“That’s fine” said Tony. “It was not an expensive movie to begin with.”

“It will be now.”

Tony shrugged.

“Listen…” said Loki. “I’m pretty sure there are grounds in my contract to sack me but… I’ll pull out. I’ll go quietly. I won’t give you any problems.”

Tony stared straight into his eyes.

“I don’t want you to pull out” he said, sharp. “Try and pull out, and I’ll give you problems.”
Loki grinned at that.

“Seriously, Tony. I bet you have all your people telling you to drop me.”

“It’s my money” countered Tony.

“You’re going to lose it. Lots of it.”

“If money was all I’m about, I wouldn’t even be making this movie. I’d stick to the superheroes. I’m doing this because I love it.”

“Precisely” said Loki. “If I’m in it, nobody will pay attention to the movie. I’m a fucking porn star now, and that’s all they will see.” He sighed. “This story matters. It’s a difficult sell enough as it is. It deserves to… It deserves to have a clean chance, not have any of this shit smeared all over it.”

“They’ll forget about all of it when they see it. Your acting is out of this world.”

Loki sighed again, and he almost smiled. Tony was his biggest fan.

“What does Heimdall say?” he asked.

“He called five minutes after the news broke out and told me that, if we fired you, he was walking out.”

Loki rubbed his eyes.

“You’re all very kind” he said. “I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve this.” His voice came out weaker than he had intended. He had been aiming for sarcasm, and instead he had sounded… well, he had sounded sincere. Which he was. How about that.

“Well, it’s certainly not your charming ways and sunny disposition” said Tony, with a smirk.

“Seriously now. It’s not kindness. We want you to do it, because you’re the best for it. This movie deserves you, what can I say.”

There was a part of Loki that was capable of taking a compliment and accepting shows of admiration with generosity. It was the part his mother had nourished and coached since he was a baby, with sweet words, unwavering encouragement and unconditional love. His mother had taught him that people said nice things because they felt them, and they offered them expecting nothing in return. And that the right thing to do, the decent thing to do, was to make people feel good, by accepting what was given freely and kindly, let it get inside, and feel the gratitude. It wasn’t inherent to Loki, this part. It had had to be fabricated and trained, and it felt alien to him, an uneasy guest in an unwelcoming frame, a disturbance at times. It sat ill, it annoyed him. But he owed it to his mother, and he strived to keep it alive.

There was another part of Loki that he saw as properly himself, that knew better. It told him ‘what a fine liar you are’, and ‘you’ve pulled the veil over their eyes again’, and ‘they are fooled once more. You know and I know, that you’re not that good. It’s just the people. They’re not as clever as you, they’re not as demanding. They don’t see what we see.’ And that part made him recoil and spit venom when people were nice to him. He didn’t really want to fool them. He was afraid of the day he would be discovered and exposed for the cheat he was, an impostor. He resented them and despised them for having allowed themselves to be fooled. Every time he tricked someone he had looked up to into liking him or admiring him, he respected them a little less. If you were as good, bright and sophisticated as I had thought you were, you would see me for what I am, and you would not be very impressed with it.
These two sides were in eternal conflict within Loki. Very often, he didn’t even know in advance which one would be talking through his mouth when he opened it to reply.

“I appreciate your loyalty” said Loki, his eyes low. “I really do. You’ve done so much for me, and I know I haven’t exactly been the best friend to you. If you let me go I… I won’t hold it against you. I will understand. I do.”

Tony put a hand on his shoulder and gave it a quick squeeze.

“Loki, you know I don’t want to let you go. Now you’re just fishing” said Tony.

Loki tried to smile.

“You just want to get in my pants again, don’t you?” he said, through squinted eyes, trying to change the subject.

Tony laughed.

“Buy me dinner first” he said, turning on his heels and making for the door. “I need to make some phone calls. Will you be alright here?”

“Sigyn should be back in a bit.”

“Ok. …Hey” said Tony, at the door. “Don’t give your brother a hard time. He’s about as smooth as an oil rig, but he loves you.”

Loki stared at him with a hint of suspicion. Tony shut the door behind him, acting as if he had not noticed.

It was a strange day. People treated Loki as if he was a recovering patient. They spoke quietly around him and brought him things, bloody flowers and chocolates even. Lots of messages of support from people in the business he had never even spoken to. He did not know how to feel about that. ‘Hypocrites’, shouted the one side, ‘trying to make themselves look good. They don't give a shit, not really’. “What do we say, Loki?” said the other side, in his mum's voice.

Sigyn returned from her raid for groceries in the kitchens at the basement of the tower. Thor returned from his shower, all fresh, shaved and sparkling, and tried to act normal.

The three of them sat on the couch and played video games for a while. Sigyn loved Mario Kart. It was awkward at first. She was sitting in the middle (Loki had made sure of it) and she was so tiny between them two. They ended up having a good time, and laughing. He caught his brother stealing a glance at him every time he pushed him off Rainbow Road. It had him swallowing dry.

Natasha and Clint walked in after lunch, with reports. The police were trying to identify the people who had published the videos, and seemed to be making good progress, with the spontaneous help of Anonymous, apparently. The funniest part? There was a growing throng of fans who had taken it upon themselves to track and take down every copy of the videos they could find. They called themselves “Loki’s army”.

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Loki listened to all that with raised eyebrows first, and a wicked smirk after.

“How’s that” he said. “I have an army.”

They spent the rest of the day watching movies, all the flicks Thor and him watched a hundred times as kids. The Goonies, Sword in the Stone, Indiana Jones, The African Queen. Thor made hot chocolate as their mum used to make it, by melting a bar of dark chocolate and mixing milk and cinnamon in. Loki observed absent-mindedly as his brother’s big hands broke the tablet into chunks, and found it way too sexy for his peace of mind.

They dipped fruit and sponge fingers in the chocolate. He caught Thor staring out of the corner of his eye when Loki was licking his fingers clean (honest to god not trying anything, he didn’t even realise he was doing it), and his stomach did a flip.

They were all rubbing their eyes and yawning by 1 a.m. It had been agreed without a word that Sigyn and Loki were going to sleep in the same suite. The bed was gynormous anyway. There was even room for Clint and Natasha, if they should feel inclined to join them.

Sigyn got up to go to bed.

“First to the bathroom” she said. She kissed them both on the head and padded away with her cute Snoopy pyjamas.

Thor and Loki waited their turn in silence on the couch. As if there weren’t hundreds of places to have a wee and brush one’s teeth within walking distance in this place.

Loki wanted to be angry at Thor, but he wasn’t. He had had a brilliant day. His brother looked hot in that snug white t-shirt and soft knit lounge pants. And he wasn’t wearing much underneath, Loki would bet money on that. It seemed so easy, so natural, so right, to just lean over and… Fucking hell, Laufeyson, no. Because he'll kiss you back, he'll get hard, he'll get you hard, and then suddenly he'll come to his senses and push you away, and just, no.

But fucking hell.

“Where is your room?” said Loki, after some time.

“Four doors down” said Thor, big hands clasped on his lap, his eyes fixed on them.

Loki took a breath, as quietly as he could. Dammit Laufeyson…

“You could stay” said Loki. And very quickly. “Stay.”

Thor stared at him, that beautiful face of his lost in thought.

“Ok.”

Loki felt a shiver.

They continued to watch the Blue Ray menu on a loop until Sigyn called to say the bathroom was free.
Loki startled awake, shaken up, panting. He couldn’t remember the dream, but he identified the sensation it had left behind. It felt like when he was sleeping rough. He used to startle awake a lot then. His heart was pounding.

Sigyn was asleep. There was a storm outside. The rain battered the windows, swayed this way and that on strong gusts of wind. There was lightning and very distant thunder.

When Loki was a little boy and he had a nightmare, he never went to mum and dad’s bed. He went to Thor’s.

Loki had woken up from a nightmare many, many nights, for many years now, with Thor lost to him, and the thought that he would never have him back weighing on his heart and mind. He had had to put himself back to sleep, or endure the rest of the night awake, and the fear, and the loneliness, by himself, without a hope.

Loki looked to the door.

Thor was woken up by the rustling, the sudden cold when the blanket over him was pulled back, and the warm weight against his chest that followed. He recognised the smell in an instant, with his eyes still blurred with slumber. His heart beat faster.

“Hey” he said, softly, sleepy.

“Hey” said Loki, his back glued to his body from head to toe.

The couch was narrow. They could not move, or Loki would fall off.

“Are you alright?” muttered Thor.

“Can’t sleep” said Loki, with a small voice.

Nightmare, guessed Thor. His arm was resting on his side. He wondered if he should, if he was allowed to… Loki wiggled against him.

“Shift. Need more room” he said.

“Don’t do that” said Thor, against all his instincts. His cock was stirring.

“What, this?” said Loki, and pushed.

“Hey” warned Thor.

They stood still and quiet for some time. Thor was casting his mind into the most outlandish directions to get his body to cool down. He was sure Loki could feel him.

Loki turned his head around to face him. Even in the darkness, Thor could see his eyes glint. A long,
loud thunder shook the windows. They stared at each other, Thor breathing deeply, his chest heaving against Loki’s back. His vision was getting used to the darkness and he could make out his brother’s sharp face, his mouth, his eyes still trained on his.

Thor was at a loss. He did not know what Loki wanted, or did not want. What he did know was that Loki’s life had turned upside down in the last twenty-four hours. That he was shaken, adrift, afraid, probably confused, and vulnerable.

Loki’s warmth, his bones against Thor’s body, his scent. What did Loki want.

Loki pushed closer. Thor slowly kissed his forehead, his temple. Loki kept his eyes open wide, Thor could see the faint light reflecting on them. He kissed his cheek. The corner of his mouth. Loki closed his eyes. Thor kissed his mouth, a chaste, closed-mouthed kiss, a bit like the very first one. Loki’s breathing caught.

Suddenly, Loki turned. Thor thought he would run away. He didn’t. His breathing was rushed.

“Stay with me” muttered Thor. “I’ll behave. Please.”

Loki did not move or speak. After some time, Thor arranged the blanket so that it covered them both, threw his arm around Loki’s waist, and wove their fingers together. He almost could not breathe for the memories. He fell asleep with the smell of Loki’s hair and the ebb and tide of his breathing falling in time with his.

Chapter End Notes

Javanese chicken soup. I’ve been to Java, and we were given a broth that is the nicest thing I have ever had in my whole life. And I’ve had some amazing food in my life.

*Java*, sigh.

Isla Cobra is a place in The Crimson Pirate. Thor lasted awake even less than he thought
he would.

The Crimson Pirate is a wonderful adventures movie with Burt Lancaster my grandfather used to put on for us, when we were home sick or off school and they looked after us. He made me watch some amazing movies I would probably never have known otherwise, even coming from a family of movie buffs. It's a great movie, really entertaining, doesn't get old, I swear.

The African Queen is another wonderful oldie bestowed upon us, this time by my mum. It warms my heart. John Houston (my favourite, along with Billy Wilder) directs, old Humphrey Bogart (his only Oscar) and Katharine Hepburn star. Adventures, autumnal romance, courage, mosquitoes, a river, an old boat, and if you've never seen Bogey mimicking a hippopotamus, and Kate's adorable snorts when she laughs, you don't know what you're missing.

I'm sure you've heard about the others.
“Are you watching the TV?” said Natasha on the phone.

“No.”


A press conference. Odin was sitting at a long table, surrounded by microphones, flashes on his face. He looked old, and weary, and brittle, until he spoke.

“Ladies and gentlemen” he said. His theatrical lungs and presence had not deserted him. These three words were enough to silence everyone in the room, the glint of his fierce one eye falling here and there like a judge’s gavel. He had command of the space, just as he had commanded entire theatres. The majesty and intensity of his presence was palpable even through a television screen.

Thor glanced at Loki, who returned it briefly. Thor saw his Adam’s apple bobble in his throat. He reached for Loki’s hand, and Loki took it, with a slight tremor.

In the TV, Odin had a drink of water and tidied his papers, but he did not read from them, his memory still formidable.

“I have heard too much these days” began Odin, “about whether or not these videos belong to the public, and who has a right to them. I have heard arguments made on the basis of what my son did or did not do at the time, and what he does or does not do today. Somehow, for reasons I can’t comprehend and baffle me completely, all the discussion seems to revolve around my son.”

“What I haven’t heard yet is an unqualified condemnation, not only of the people who have published these videos, not only of those who took them, but also of the people who abused my son at the time.”

“My son was a sex worker for a brief period of his life. But that was not the product of a well-matured decision, taken freely as the best of several, perfectly acceptable options. And it was not a life-style choice either. The fact that his family is well-to-do made no difference to him at the time, since he had cut himself off, and he believed he would not be welcome back -something for which I, and I alone, must be held responsible, and I regret profoundly. He was a desperate young man who had suffered too much already, in a terrible place in his life and in his mind, making unsound choices that caused him harm.” The fire in Odin’s expression was now brutal. “And none of that was ever a concern to the men who used him. They never asked. They did not want to know. They took advantage of his vulnerability and abused him. To argue that he did it voluntarily and freely is to willingly forget the nature of the disease he suffered, and even more, to ignore his desperate situation at the time, healthy or ill. And this is true for so many others in the sex business.” And now Odin showed teeth and lost his even tone. “And on top of everything else, now my son has to hear the ‘respectable public’ taking sides with those bastards, in the name of some twisted understanding of what the concept ‘freedom of information’ means, and has to hear discussions about censorship and prudery and whatnot, when all this sad, disgusting business deserves is an uproar about what some human beings will do to other human beings less fortunate than them, just because they can, just because nobody is bloody stopping them.”

Silence in the room. Odin’s fury abated, but still burned.
Thor looked at his brother, whose eyes were glued to the screen, his expression one of astonishment and confusion.

“My son did not bring this upon himself” continued Odin. “He is not responsible for any of this, he did not do anything to deserve it, and he should be excluded from the discussion altogether. The release and dissemination of these images, perpetrated with the only aim of causing pain and humiliation, and to damage my son’s career and public image, is a criminal act, and my son is a blameless victim. The fact that he was a sex worker once does not mean that his body is public property forever more. The fact that he consented to these images being taken, in the very specific personal conditions I have outlined before, does not mean he consented to seeing them spread all over the internet today. The fact that he has a past that society, in its rampant hypocrisy, frowns upon, does not mean he doesn’t have a right to his future, to his dignity, and to his privacy. I cannot understand why I’m even speaking about this here today. It should be redundant and self-evident.”

The old man seemed to be staring down individuals in the audience, perhaps journalists that had covered the news in a way that pissed him off. Thor practically saw them cower under his father’s wrath. He felt himself grow with pride and love for his dad. He clutched Loki’s hand tight.

“My son has nothing to be ashamed of” said Odin. “He pulled through a very dark time in his life, and a very dark place in his mind, and has made a success of himself. And I’m not talking about his acting career, which is a privilege to witness and does honour to our profession. I’m talking about the fine young man he is today. Even if he has now taken his name of birth, I am still proud that my own name is still associated with his. I have no claim to his achievements, because they are his and his alone, but I am, I have always been, and I always will be, proud of my son. Nothing further.”

Odin stood up amid a lightning storm of flashes and shouted-out questions he ignored. The connexion returned to the BBC news presenter, and Thor switched off the TV.

He turned to his brother. There was an array of minute expressions playing on his face, too quick for Thor to read.

“Are you alright?” asked Thor.

Loki, glanced at him, and retrieved his hand from Thor’s iron hold.

“I don’t know” he said. He got up slowly from the couch, picked up the cigarettes from the table, and made for the balcony.

Thor gave him some time. He tried not to stare. He exchanged a look with Sigyn, who seemed to be turning what they had heard in her mind.

“What do I do?” said Thor after a while, impatient, his nerves finally getting the better of him.

“Go to him” she said. “It’s your dad too.”

Loki had his eyes lost in the hazy distance. The sky was a pale grey, as if it was empty. He was smoking slowly, and did not acknowledge Thor’s presence when he stepped into the balcony. He hesitated, but eventually Thor put a hand on his shoulder. He was ready to be snapped at, but Loki just carried on smoking.

“Hey” said Thor. “Are you ok?” he asked.

Loki extended a hand in front of him, and examined it with detached, mild interest. It was shaking badly.
“I don’t think so” he said, “but judge for yourself.”

Thor took Loki’s hand between both of his, stilling it, and rubbed it as if for warmth.

“What are you feeling?”

Loki snorted and mumbled “Et tu, Brute?”

“What?” said Thor.

“Forget it” muttered Loki.

“Oh, right, Julius Caesar” said Thor, when he worked out the words. “What accent did you use?”

Loki stared at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m not a total idiot, you know?” said Thor.

Loki smirked.

“You’re too hot to have a brain as well. Not fair” he muttered.

Thor blushed, looked down to his shoes.

“I could tell you the same thing” he countered. Loki’s eyes flickered, under a frown. “But anyway, what I was asking is…”

“I know what you were asking” cut Loki. He sighed. “I don’t know. A part of me wants to take what Odin said at face value. You know, to believe he does feel like my father sometimes, and that this is one of those times. Another part of me is telling me that he’s just trying to make himself look good by… I don’t know, by appearing as a supporting father. But I just… I get tired of hating him. I get tired of being mad.”

Loki butted his fag. Thor rubbed his brother’s hand.

“I can’t forget the things he said that day,” said Loki, “or how he used to treat me,” his voice faltered, “but I would like to.” He sighed. “I guess old habits are the hardest to break.” He looked away.

Thor took in a breath, wondering whether he should or not.

“He asked me to tell you he was sorry, a long time ago” he said after some time. “When mum died. He said he was afraid of dying without you knowing he regretted how he had treated you.” He hesitated before adding. “He regretted that he had failed you as a father. And he hated himself when he was saying that. He was suffering.”

Loki eyed him on the sly, got his hand back, and lit up another fag.

“How about that” he said, toneless, with a puff of smoke.

*
He had lain awake in Thor’s arms for a long time early that morning, his brother’s slow, deep breathing at the back of his neck. Thor had always been a sound sleeper, and him a light one. They filled him with warmth, all these things that had not changed; a warmth he had not particularly asked for, but that he would accept. Thor was still Thor, no matter how much he had grown up, or how much time it had passed. It was comforting, as long as he did not think too much about all the other, less fortunate ways in which his brother would never change.

They could have fucked the night before. Loki was sure of that. Thor would not have turned him away this time. He would have put his big brotherly concerns to one side and gone along with whatever his suffering, needy baby brother asked of him. But that, of course, would have amounted pretty much to a pity fuck. Loki would not suffer pity from anyone.

And, still, he had been so tempted. He had thought how good it would feel to get lost in it for a while, get lost in Thor’s body and in his lust, and forget about tomorrow, about the moment Thor would start to apologise and back away from him, to try to do “the right thing” and be “just brothers” once again. And for Loki’s sake, of course, it was always for Loki’s sake. The bloody hypocrite, the fucking coward.

Loki guessed he should pat himself on the head for doing the right thing for his health, for once. Somehow, even after all that therapy, he had never gotten the gist of this part, the “well-done, you” part. He did not feel at all like self-congratulating. He felt like he had been cheated.

And while he was entertaining these thoughts, he had held his breath at the sensation of his brother’s rising morning wood growing against his arse.

How many times had they woken up like that when they were younger. Before they had sex, it had been very confusing. Loki knew it was something that just happened, and Thor was always so flustered and so embarrassed. Loki’s pulse would always race, he would feel himself getting hard, and later he would jerk off thinking about it, lost between hoping it was what he wanted it to be, and the voice in his head telling him to get real.

That morning, with Thor’s solid, majestic boner nudging at the cleft of his butt, reality had felt just about as bewildering and arousing as it used to be back then. And when Sigyn appeared from the bedroom and saw them both on the couch, she had an expression comparable to that of Frigga whenever she found her boys together like that, endearment and humour, and Loki flustered as much as he used to, as if all his thoughts were clearly printed on his forehead.

“Fuck off, Gyn” grumbled Loki, hurling a cushion at her.

At that, Thor woke up. And realised.

“Shit, sorry” he mumbled, pointlessly trying in that extremely confined space to get his erect cock away from his baby brother’s arse.

And with that, the trip to the past was complete. Loki had started to laugh, even though he did not feel all that cheerful.
Odin’s letter arrived in the afternoon, about three hours after the end of Odin’s appearance on TV. The paper thick, embossed with Asgard House’s watermark, handwritten with his vigorous, elegant calligraphy, needless to say with one of his finest fountain pens, the trace so sharp, spotless and well-defined. Priority expedited airmail, addressed to Natasha’s place in New York. Odin’s assistant had done his homework.

At first, Loki would not take it. Then he handed it, unopened, to Thor.

“Can you, please?” he said, after clearing his throat.

Thor ripped the envelope carefully and had a quick read. He offered the letter to his brother.

“Go ahead” he said.

Loki read it.

Dear Son

I don’t have to tell you to be brave and strong because you already are, and you always have been. Remember to be proud, as you make me proud.

You have my admiration, my respect and my love.

Your father.

Loki sighed and rubbed his eyes. He looked so tired. He passed the letter to Sigyn, who was stroking his arm.

“I had enough” Loki said. “Call Natasha.” And he added, hearing himself. “Please. If that’s alright.”

“What do you want me to tell her?” said Thor.

“Tell her I’m ready to talk.”

Meeting at Tony’s office to discuss strategies. The moment Thor took a seat on the couch next to Loki, his brother immediately threw both legs over his lap, and reclined his head on the arm Thor had on top of the backrest, like a cuddly cat claiming his human. He was exhausted, and needy. Thor wrapped his arm around him, and Loki cuddled even nearer, his head over Thor’s shoulder, his face close to Thor’s neck. Loki discussed his next step with Tony and Natasha in this guise.

Thor realised this was not your usual brotherly cuddle, not with two big, twenty-something grown-up guys like they were. But he also realised, with a sigh of relief that rustled Loki’s hair, that everyone in that room knew about them, Natasha, Tony and Sigyn, and that nobody cared. He fantasised about an afternoon like this, in the future, in a party perhaps, when he could just kiss his brother like he wanted to do, with people around them, and his only concern would be to keep it decent until he could get his brother home. Their home. He tightened his arm around Loki. When all
this was over, he would sit down with him, whether he liked it or not, and they would talk. 

Tony finally ended his phone call, and faced the small audience he had.

“Right, then, it’s all set. Tomorrow at 10 a.m. in the press room downstairs” he announced.

Loki sighed.

“Ok.”

“You can still change your mind” said Natasha. “We could prepare a statement I would read tomorrow, with no need for you to be there, and in time, a one-to-one, in-depth interview with a respected journalist would be perfectly acceptable. We would have greater control like this.”

Loki shook his head.

“I want to get it over and done with. I don’t want it to look as if I don’t have the guts to face them.”

“You have nothing to prove, Loki” said Thor. “You know that, don’t you?”

Loki didn’t answer.

Loki did not ask him to stay that night. Thor said goodnight at Loki’s door like he had done so many times in the past, sneaking into Loki’s bedroom to make love, and returning to his own bed before mum and dad found out that he wasn’t in his room. He didn’t snog his brother silly like he used to this time. God knows he wanted to.

“Call me if you need me” he said, instead of I love you. “Four doors down.”

“Goodnight, Thor” said his brother, avoiding his eyes, and shut the door.

He did not call.

* 

The noise in Stark Tower’s press room was monkey-cage worthy. They stood just outside, waiting for their cue. Loki was shivering lightly, anxiety spiking up, but his expression was determined, and no less fierce than Odin’s had been the day before.

Natasha would run the show. That put Thor somewhat at ease. The woman scared even him some times. She went in first, and they heard her address the attendants.

At 10 a.m. sharp, Loki took the stage. Thor followed him, and sat down right beside him. Tony would be there too. They faced the flashes, and waited alongside the journalists until the photographers were given instruction to stop. The chorus of shouted calls of attention from the journalists exploded straight after. Natasha took charge, calling the name of the person she was granting permission to speak. Thor was impressed: she knew them all.

“Loki! Loki! Is it you? Can you confirm it’s you?”
Thor was used to this kind of set up, but Loki was not. He knew it was confusing. Loki needed a few seconds to locate the journalist asking the question.

“Yes, it’s me” said Loki, his voice firm.

The shouting started again right after Loki’s answer.

“Have you seen the videos yourself?”

Loki cleared his throat.

“Only a couple of screen caps to confirm they were genuine.”

“Loki, here! At times it looks as if you’re teasing the camera. Did you know they were recording these encounters?”

Loki shifted in his seat. His expression remained even and cool.

It struck Thor all of a sudden that everybody in that room but him and Loki must have seen the videos.

“I must have been” he said.

“Did you consent to them being taken?”

Loki shifted again.

“I never exactly gave my permission, but if you’re asking me whether I could have stopped it, the answer is yes.”

“Why didn’t you?”

Loki huffed. Thor looked at him, squeezed his hand. Loki squeezed back.

“I engaged in many behaviours at the time that amount basically to self-harming, as a result of my chronic mental problems, which had gone unmedicated and untreated for months by that point.” he said.

“Are you worried about how this will affect your career?”

“Is that a serious question?” he snapped. “Of course I am. I’m afraid that all people will see from now on instead of my work is this. I don’t want to be remembered for my gymnastics in a fucking alleyway, and this kind of shit tends to stick. Of course I’m bloody worried.”

Thor never ceased to be amazed at the dynamics in a press conference. The shouting re-started as it had after every answer. Nobody batted an eyelid, nobody needed a second to pick up their breaths after Loki’s outburst, nobody was affected, even though Loki obviously was. It was like addressing a room of automats.

“You were open from the beginning about your time as a sex worker, and yet this has not prevented you from prospering in your career. Why is this different?”

“I wish it wasn’t. But knowing about it is not the same as seeing it” said Loki, after a sip of water.

“The police seem to be closing in on the people responsible for disseminating these images, how does that make you feel?”
Loki gave that a second’s thought.

“Nothing, really. I’m not even sure there is cause to do much against them, certainly nothing that’s worth much to me. The damage is done. I’m not particularly excited over the perspective of making them into minor celebrities, on top of everything else.”

“Don’t you want them punished?”

“I want to put this behind me. I’m not looking forwards to court procedures and all that malarkey knocking on my door in a few months time, when I’ve finally pushed this to the back of my mind.”

“A question for Mr. Stark. Tony, the shooting of Mariners has been postponed. Is it a temporary or is it a permanent suspension?”

“Not permanent at all, we start on Monday” said Tony.

“Is Mr. Laufeyson still involved in the project?”

“Of course he is. I’ll take this opportunity right now to dispel any rumours about discussions to fire Mr. Laufeyson on account of this situation. That was never on the table.”

“Even though the rumours came from high up in the hierarchy of Stark Productions?”

“I cannot account right now for what individual executives have said on a personal note. Make no mistake that I will address it with those individuals, in time. However, the buck stops with me, and with Mr. Heimdall, and we have never even considered anyone else for the role, apart from Mr. Laufeyson, from the start. We are still entirely satisfied with our choice, and we have not, and will not, entertain any other.”

“How will this affect reception of the movie?”

“That’s not my main concern right now. My main concern right now, what we all want, is to make the movie, and enjoy the process. But let me tell you that I believe that what we have already seen in the rehearsals is enough to wipe out the memory of anything but Mr. Laufeyson’s acting talent from anyone’s mind. This time next year, nobody will remember this. And if they do, it will make no difference to Mr. Laufeyson’s career at all. His performance is that good.”

“Loki, are you aware of the spontaneous internet movement called Loki’s Army?”

A little smile tugged at the corner of Loki’s mouth.

“Yes, I am.”

“Do you have any message for them?”

Loki grinned, though his eyes remained sad.

“My gratitude. But I will be addressing them through their own channels.”

“Thor, you and your brother have been estranged for years, since news broke out about his origin. Has this brought you closer together again?”

“As I said at the beginning,” cut Natasha, severe, “Mr. Odinson is just here for support, and will not be taking any questions.”

Thor sighed a little breath of relief. He had not been sure what he would have answered.
“Loki, what do you feel about your father’s statement yesterday?”

Loki squirmed, cast his eyes down, and rubbed them hard. He shook his head, voiceless. He was too affected to talk.

“All another time” said Thor to the press, squeezing Loki’s hand.

“Nothing further” stepped in Natasha, tuned like a fine instrument to her client’s state of mind.

There was one more explosion of flashes as they abandoned the press room.

* 

It had been four days. They had weathered the storm from Stark Tower, resumed rehearsals again in the studio, with Heimdall and the other actors, up and down the city in Tony’s fleet of inconspicuous cars, and Loki had been very, very quiet with Thor. And distant. Ever since the press conference, he had shrunk from Thor’s arms when he tried to hug him, he shied away from his kisses and other gestures of affection, and while he was not rude or horrible, but kind and polite, he was also rather cold.

On Saturday afternoon, with Sigyn gone, on her way back to London, and everybody ready to take a plane the next day for the studios in Toronto where they would be shooting interiors, Loki had told Thor he needed some fresh air, and whether he would go out with him for a cup of coffee.

Thor’s heart almost stopped at that.

Tony’s car left them at the door of a little place in Soho where nobody paid them attention. Loki said Natasha had found it. They made coffee Italian style.

They sat by the bay window and watched people rush by. They weren’t talking. The silence between them was weakened by the noises in the joint, conversations, low music, clanking in the back kitchen. Without these, it would have been quite a heavy silence indeed.

Thor was trying to psych himself up to ask. Apart from sheer terror, what was stopping him was that he did not know what this was about. He was looking for a sign or a nudge from Loki that would tell him it was alright, but with Loki’s behaviour towards him the last few days, he was all at sea. He did not want to bloody ruin everything just because Loki wasn’t in the mood to hear it.

“This is nice” said Loki, eventually. “Sitting together like this. No angst. No drama.” He sipped at his strong, black coffee.

“Yes” said Thor.

A brief silence.

“I could get used to it.” said Loki, weakly, as if it was hard. “I could…” Loki sighed. “I could be alright with this.”

Thor sought his expression for clues.
“With what?”
Loki sighed again.

“You know.” He gulped. “Just… being brothers.”
Thor went very still, and probably a bit white.

“Beats the hell out of being angry all the time” added Loki. “A bit of peace at last. Right?”
Thor scrambled for words in his head, panicking now. Loki assessed his reactions, with a very dark frown.

“What” he snapped.
Thor struggled.

“I thought… When this is all over…”
Loki pierced him with a green, poisonous glower.

“I can’t fucking believe you” he said.
Thor blinked.

“What?”

“Do you do this on purpose?” he hissed. “The moment, the second I start pulling myself together, the moment you feel me getting away, you…”

“Loki, no, that’s not what this is.”

“Make up your fucking mind already!” he snarled. A few heads turned to them.

They had a wildfire in their midst, and it was spreading. Thor tried to hold his brother’s hand. He nearly had his ripped off the bone. He raised his hands, trying to calm the situation.

“Loki, I have. Made up my mind” he tried to say. “I know what I want.”
Loki was not appeased, and he was not swayed.

“Is this your idea of fun?” he snarled. “Jesus fucking Christ!” He stood up, snatching the jacket from the backrest of his chair, and made out of the place in a fury.

“No, Loki, wait…” tried Thor.

“Go fuck yourself!” cried Loki, smashing the door behind him, the door bell tingling urgently.
Thor stood there, confused, all eyes trained on him, too fucking worried and hurt to care. He slumped down on his chair again, wiped a hand on his face.

Bugger.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thor ran the old-fashioned razor over his chin, put it down, and checked himself in the blurry, yellowing mirror. The dim light of a naked bulb fell on his haggard face, deepening his wrinkles, every roughness on his skin, the bags under his eyes, his chapped lips. He stared at his reflection with disgust and sadness. What had become of him, once so young, so brave, so full of promise. How had he managed to fuck up his life so very much. He felt old and a waste and a disappointment. He had lost all hope.

He ran some water in the sink and washed the rest of the lather away. Dried his face, avoiding his own eyes in the mirror, and with one last inhale, he turned his back to it.

“Ok, cut!”

Noise and movement. He waited for Heimdall’s signal. It was good.

Make-up Cher rushed in to check that he had not messed anything up on his face, even though the razor was dull.

The shoot was going well. More than well, they were catching up on the lost days and making a killing in the process. Heimdall had a very clear vision of what he wanted, and the hard work they had all put in during rehearsals and pre-production was paying off. It was plain sailing so far.

Loki had flown in a couple of days after Thor, and had been quiet and distant, though not unkind. He was behaving very much like a co-star, correct, focused, professional.

Thor had feared their first scene together, but he shouldn’t have. They had fallen into step without a glitch, from the very first take.

Heimdall seemed to have planned the shoot so as to ease them into it gently, from less loaded, more straightforward scenes to increasingly denser, more demanding ones. Having said that, Loki’s micro expressions and the nuance in his voice and eyes added layer after layer to the plainest shot. Johnny's face was always animated with his thoughts, emotions and memories. He was a deep and intricate character, just by virtue of Loki's performance. He had made of Johnny a real human being, and that did not switch off, even when it wasn't his line, or even his shot. It was fascinating to watch. On
paper, his part wasn’t as eye-catching as Thor’s, but from his performance, no-one could have guessed.

Thor was striving to keep up with his brother as best he could. He woke up every day feeling hunger. It was a good feeling. It helped with the other side of things, the simmering, quiet awkwardness when they weren’t actually shooting. There were things pending between them, hanging in the air.

After a long, long week waiting for an opening, Thor decided to push it. He was just getting out of his hotel room to start the day, when Loki walked by him with a quick glance and a mumble that was probably “Morning”, walking purposely down the corridor, headed for the lift. Thor took in a breath, and followed him.

“Loki…” he said, after gathering some nerve.

“If it’s not about the first scene,” cut Loki, a few steps ahead, without slowing down, “I don’t want to hear it.”

Ever the mind-reader.

When he was waiting for the lift, Thor caught up with him

“You’ll have to talk to me eventually,” he said, standing next to his brother.

“Will I,” mumbled Loki. He was doing something with the buttons of his cuff, shoulders tense.

“Baby.”

Loki whipped his head to face him.

“Don’t call me that,” he snapped. “You haven’t earned it.”

Thor winced. That stung like a motherfucker. But he was not going to give up so easily.

“Loki…” he insisted.

“Jesus fuck, Thor!” snarled Loki, taking a few steps back and away from him. “Can’t you just… give me some bloody air to breathe? I’ve had one fucking hell of a month. You can’t just dump something like that on me and expect me to… I need some bloody time! Why is that so hard to grasp!”

Thor sighed, feeling like an insensitive, uncaring prick.

“It isn’t,” he said. “You’re right.”

“Yes I bloody am!” shouted Loki. He started making for the stairs, talking over his shoulder as he walked. “I need to… I need to make a bloody movie. And you too. Just… Just leave me be. Ok?” He disappeared from sight the moment the doors to the lift slid open in front of Thor.
They had worked on The Big Fight scene most of the day, and now Loki felt drained to the bone and exhausted. The tone of the scene was mutual mistrust and disappointment, at each other and at themselves. The dialogue was stuttering, broken, jarring. It was the wretchedness of two people who could not understand how this other person, whom they once thought they knew so well, could now feel so alien and incomprehensible. They had different, clashing mindsets, and were so deeply entrenched in them, they could not begin to make sense of what was ailing the other.

Well, Thor and himself may have bloody big problems, but disconnection was not one of them. When shooting, Loki could swear at times there had to be some telepathic thing at play. Three words and two looks, and they had it. Next take, and what had been good or excellent became fucking magic. They had the team in awe. Loki himself was in awe. It was so fucking thrilling to work like that, feeling like a part in an exquisite mechanism, a well-oiled (lubricated, heh), finely tuned engine, were everything ran to perfection, that it was impossible to stay mad or to keep his distance. He was exhilarated.

And of course, for Loki exhilarated meant horny. And god, his brother looked so fucking sexy in that Neal Cassady look he had going on. Loki jerked off in the morning and in the evening and he still got heat waves whenever Thor got too near. Seriously, the amount of acting he had to keep up even when the cameras weren’t rolling, people wouldn’t believe. No wonder he was so damned tired all the time.

And still, Sigyn had pretty much run out of ways of telling him to fucking sit down and talk with Thor, without result. Will you all just give me some time, he kept telling her.

Time. He did not know what he needed it for. He was procrastinating and he knew it. Truth was, he was bloody terrified.

Loki was as scared of more rejection as he was of… not being rejected. Where would that lead, how would that fare, how would it work, even? He liked to give Thor a hard time about not thinking things through, but he was just as guilty of that sin as his brother was. Back in the day, he teased and taunted and chased and flirted and flung himself at Thor, and usually did it fully counting on being rejected. Not before they had fucked, that had been a recent development, but pushed away in time, just the same.

So it was never stable between them. To some extent, in that sense, it was never real. It was an eternal race, the one always chasing, the other one always running; they would clash now and then, and after that the tables would turn, so that the one following before now lead, and back to running. When had they ever been still enough for it to be real, like other couples are real, where being together is the point, not taunting and scoring and fighting and tempting and dodging and hurting.

Ok, Iceland, maybe. Loki had let Thor catch him there, and had stayed caught. And they knew peace then, he should say. Was that real. Because, out of the whole story between them, Iceland was what felt most like a daydream.

Chasing Thor hurt, but it was a pain he knew and understood. He knew how far it went, how deep. He also knew he could manage it. Damn, he had fucking loved the drama once, if he was honest with himself. It made him feel alive, inspired, constantly torn by one heart-wringing emotion or another, never empty, never bored. And Thor chasing him was fun too (if fun could ever begin to cover it.) It also hurt, but it was worth it (and again, cosmic understatement here.) It was such a thrill when Loki let himself be caught. The fucking fireworks.

They were both too old for these games now, Loki guessed, and even though he had no idea what
the fuck Thor actually wanted, (they could hardly move in together and get a dog, could they? Not that Loki fucking wanted another dog…) he surmised it was not taking up the chase where they had left it.

So here was Loki’s present conundrum. If they weren’t playing, then they were serious. If they tried to get serious… Shit, the depth of the pit of serious in Loki’s life was practically bottomless.

There were people in his life who could, and had, dealt with that side of him. Sigyn, of course, since she could relate and was strong and wise. Sam had also been good with that, so centred, so even-minded. Tony too; he had his demons, and they ran deep, but he was immune to Loki’s. Nothing seemed to shock him or unsettle him. But Thor… Well, let’s just say, Thor’s record in the dealing with Loki’s serious shit department was not filling his baby brother with confidence.

Case in point: the whoring issue. Let’s recap, shall we? There had been a meeting a couple of weeks ago, before the Sex Tapes Scandal thing. Thor, Heimdall, Tony, Bucky and himself had sat down to discuss The Fuck, to prepare for next day’s rehearsal.

Heimdall had spoken to Loki first, in private. He had told him candidly that he valued highly his opinion for that scene, because of his past experience as a prostitute, as much as for his fine psychological insight. Loki had appreciated Heimdall’s directness—he did not handle euphemisms and metaphors very well when it came to having fucked people for money— and told him he would be happy to share his insights. He had felt strong that day, comfortable in his own skin. It had all been safely tucked in the past. He felt mostly over it, and unaffected. No biggie. He was in control of it back then, he decided how much he shared about it. (Which was over now, and forever. But let’s not digress.)

They had sat down to talk. Heimdall started.

“The way I see this” he said, elbows on the table, fingers interwoven, leaning forwards, intent, “it’s a crucial scene that expresses Bobby’s very deep needs, the very deep hunger he keeps bottled. Now, what do we know. We know that sex has a great pull for Bobby, because he risks a lot doing this. He has probably put it back as much as he could, until he could put it back no more. This is what’s eating him alive, this is what he’ll end up losing his family for. It’s important. I don’t want just “a sex scene”, I want it to be memorable, something the audience is left with. I want Bobby’s soul on show here. And because of that, I refuse to have it ugly or sad. It’s about intimacy as much as it is about sex. I want to drag the people into this with these two men. The photography will be naturalistic. I’m thinking an off-frame shot to begin with, keeping people out, aware that they’re looking from the outside, and then a change, a moment of connection between these two men, and we cut to close shots, and we are there with them, we are them.” Heimdall reclined back on his chair. “And after that, I’m open to ideas.”

Nods all around. Loki thought this should be worth watching.

“Does he do this often?” asked Thor then. “Or is it his first time?”

“I think he does this often” said Tony. “There is no way a man like him is feeling so shitty about just dreaming about it. I mean, he’s always felt like that, right?, it didn’t start overnight. But before the war he was comfortable in his own skin, and he felt strong and pure, because we know that both Bobby and Johnny loved that person he used to be. There was no self-hatred then. But then Bobby goes to war, he has his first experiences probably, and when he returns he tries to stay away from it, by getting married, but he can’t. He feels guilty and wretched, and that’s why he’s drinking himself to death. So my bet is, he does this regularly.”

Heimdall agreed, and asked,
“So how do we show that?”

“The way he interacts with the hustler” said Loki. “It should be practised, smooth and confident. He would identify what the hustler is very quickly, and know how to catch his attention, just with a couple of lingering looks. It wouldn’t take long to sort themselves out without words. Once he’s made contact, Bobby would check, discretely and systematically, that nobody is paying them attention. He would not be nervous, but he would be tense, alert. He would also know where to go. He would walk to the restroom without hesitation, and search it thoroughly, fully trusting that the hustler will follow him there in a couple of minutes. His behaviour would be controlled, self-assured and inconspicuous, until he knows he is safe.”

The stiffening of Thor’s posture while he talked did register with Loki, he just didn't think about it much. He was working.

“And then boom,” said Tony. “Lust unbound.”

“No boom” said Loki. “First things first. Money up front, all sort of mechanic and rushed, because somebody could come in at any minute now. It’s in both their interests that this goes swiftly and smoothly.”

“But then…” said Tony.

“Well, that’s his tragedy, isn’t it?” said Loki. “It’s the sex but it’s not just the sex. Bobby is lonely and trying to make do with something, his marriage I mean, that’s just not what he needs, and here is this lovely boy who, for a few minutes, will give him what he needs. Bobby would want more than a quickie in the restroom, he’d want the connection too.”

“How,” said Thor, darkly, almost confrontational.

“I’d say Bobby wants the hustler to come as well” said Loki, all business. “He wants him to be there with him. He wants the fantasy. I found that with closeted guys a lot. Not that closeted guys are the only ones who are lonely, but anyway.”

“What would they actually do?” asked Bucky.

“Well, it could start with a blow job, for example, which is an obvious go-to in this setting” said Loki. “Bobby pushes the hustler down to his knees. The guy picks it up quickly. Then we zero on Bobby’s face, aroused and hungered, and sickened at himself probably, and his loneliness and his shame. Then something would change. The hustler is responsive. Because Bobby is the cherry on that boy’s cake tonight. He’ll have to do some pretty disgusting guys, but look at this one. I’d be responsive too. And there, there is the connection, when Bobby feels that the hustler also wants him. So Bobby pulls him up and kisses him. The hustler would feel how desperate he is, he would have a glimpse of the person under the client, and react to that as well, and that’s when the ugly goes, and warmth sets in, because it’s intimate, and human. And then Bobby would fuck him, which is more personal. And make sure he comes, with a hand job as he fucks him. It should be sensual, and hot.”

The discussion continued, mainly on technical details after that. His brother listened, but he barely talked. Loki noticed his hands in a fist on the table, his knuckles white.

So to be honest, Loki had sensed the gathering storm. He should have addressed the issue with Thor that very same day. He had not. He had not exactly made a decision, he had just let it go. He had not much to say in his defence, except that he was scared shitless. Not to mention that, at the time, Thor and him were still not on speaking terms, but “I'm sulking” is hardly an excuse, is it?
Fast forward to this evening. They were going to shoot the sex scene tomorrow, so there had been one last meeting about it today, with the whole team, techs and actors. They had refined the choreography, detailed the shots, made sure everyone knew what was what.

It would be quite complicated, an ultra-dense micro-opera, contained in a narrow cubicle, and expressed only through the performance of two actors, with no words. It was a pivotal scene in Bobby’s arc, a turning point. It told his tragedy, but it also contained the kibble of his future redemption. Not only was this scene the prelude to his full reconciliation with his brother, but it also spoke of the journey that would start after this one, what Bobby would set out to find, and once he had it, he would cease to hate himself, and be whole again, and free. In short, it would be one hell of an intense day of work for the actors.

So when Thor had stormed out of the meeting room half-way through the discussion, people had shrugged and pegged it to the sensitive disposition of “the artistic type.” The fact that Thor had never once done anything remotely like it in a professional setting was mercifully overlooked —mercifully, because it kept people from asking more questions, providing breathing space Thor could surely use.

Loki knew his brother. He was not this kind of “artistic type”. If something was up his arse, it had to be personal. And he had an inkling of what it was.

He gave him a couple of minutes, and seeing that Thor still wasn’t coming back, he excused himself and went to look for him, with shaky hands.

He found him where he thought he would be, outside, between the parked cars, pacing. Fresh air therapy. That was so Thor.

His brother spotted him and looked away.

“Are you alright?” asked Loki, from a distance.

Thor did not reply. He kept on pacing, breathing hard, as if hurling rage at it could help him battle whatever it was he was feeling.

“Hey. Stop that,” said Loki, taking a couple of steps towards him.

Thor kept on doing his thing as if Loki hadn’t said a word. He looked furious, Loki could not work out why.

“Thor. Say something.” He almost reached out to him, to shake him out of it. “Talk to me. Please.” You’re scaring me.

“You were talking out of experience!” roared his brother, startling him.

Loki was confused. He wasn't sure where Thor's rage was coming from. His mind was scampering in all directions, trying to figure it out. Don't assume things, said Sigyn's voice in his head then, just bloody ask him!

“Are you angry at me?” he asked, his heart beating frantically. “Because I was a whore?”

Thor lowered his eyes, and tried for words that weren't coming. He looked awfully busted. Perhaps he did not even know what he was so furious about. It was just his default reaction when things became too much, wasn’t it?

“I'm not angry at you,” he tried. "I'm angry at me, at them, I'm angry for you. Shit, I don't even know. Makes me feel... impotent. And to hear you talk about it just like that, as if it’s nothing, I
just… I mean, isn’t it hard for you? To be reminded of it?”

“It was a long time ago, Thor. I’m fine.” said Loki. Which wasn’t a lie, but not exactly the truth either, not since the visual illustration of his actual fucking portfolio of services had been broadcasted globally through the world wide web. But this was not the time for nuance and detail. He wanted that fury out of Thor now, for his brother and for himself. “Don’t think so much about it.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not fine, and I can’t stop thinking about it,” said Thor, with a grunt. “First the tapes and now… It’s on my mind, ok? It gets to me. I can’t help it.”

“What does?” asked Loki. “What I was, the things I did?

Thor’s silence spoke loud and clear. No, please, not this. Loki felt the cold, caustic surge of shame, guilt and self-loathing, thick in his throat, heavy in his chest.

“Thor, it’s there, it happened. Can’t be erased. You have to… you have to deal with it.” He was urging himself no less than his brother. He was sick with fear, terrified that what he had done was irreparable. He had wanted to tear it all down and watch it burn, but for years now he had been hoping he had failed...

Thor had stopped pacing. He was rubbing his eyes instead, very hard. Please don’t fucking let him pop one out, he already reminds me too much of Odin at times. Loki was shivering like a leaf, gearing himself up to asking a question. He did not want to put ideas in Thor’s head, but he had to know.

“Do I repulse you when you think about me like that, doing those things?”

The look on Thor's face. Loki knew that expression. That was the ‘I need to say something right now but please god don’t let me fuck this up more than I already have’ face, the conversational equivalent of being forced to run as fast as your legs can carry you across a minefield, because there's zombies at your heels. With Thor’s big mouth, Loki had seen it often back in the day.

“No, ba-… Loki, no. I swear,” said Thor. “I just… I can’t fucking live with myself thinking that you had to do that. That I wasn’t there for you. How much I failed you.”

Right, thought Loki. The saviour complex. A distracting stratagem? As much as it annoyed him, he wanted to grab that explanation with both hands and run with it. But there was that furious itch at the back of his mind that was far from satisfied with that answer. He steeled himself.

“You don’t think I’m, um, tainted,” he asked.

“No, baby,” he said, struggling to force the words out. “No.”

“Because I’m not the same person I was before,” insisted Loki, pushing for the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. “It wasn’t a neutral experience, and it has changed me. The way I see myself. The way I see things. The way I fuck.” He pressed on, trying to be impervious to Thor’s increasingly distraught expression. “You need to understand that. And get it in your head that you can't just put it in a drawer and pretend it's not there, because there will always be something that will remind you of this. I need to know that… shit.” His voice had kept thinning and thinning, until it failed. Severely touchy territory there. He had not planned on going there today when he woke up this morning. Deep breath. “That whatever happens between us, if we do… If… That you won’t suddenly turn in disgust wondering whether this is something I did with a client.” He had pushed this last bit out as fast as he could.

Thor gaped like a fish out of water, protestations crowding on his lips.
“Loki, I would never-…”

“You’ve just had to barge out of a room and have a panic attack because you could not bear to think about it!” cut Loki, with a shout. And took a breath. And then another. “This is important, Thor,” he said, sternly. “Give it some bleeding thought at least! Talk to whoever you have to, do whatever you have to do, but make sure you can handle it, because…” He was trying to stem the tears by rubbing his eyes raw. “…Because out of all the things that could screw us up, I can’t have this be one of them.”

As Loki’s words sunk in, a new, searching glimmer began to shine in Thor’s eyes.

Yes, said Loki without a word, I am saying what you think I’m saying, but other things besides. Please, listen to them all. And guess what, Thor might be hearing him, because he wasn’t talking.

Calm down and fucking think, Loki.

“What would help?” he asked. “Do you want to ask me questions? To put your mind at ease? It might be not as bad as imagining it.”

“Jesus!” huffed Thor, with a shiver of horror. “Maybe. I don’t know.” he said. But that scrunched forehead said that he did know, and that the answer was not ‘maybe’. He sighed, disarmed. “I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“Think about it,” said Loki. He wished he had something better to offer.

Then Thor stared at him, interrogating again, that question in his eyes, ‘did you just say what I thought you were saying’, softening his face and brightening it up with hope. Loki looked away. It was unbearable, he was so beautiful.

“We need to get back in,” said Loki, skittish, overwhelmed by it all. He never got used to Thor looking at him like this. How could anyone ever get used to it. He seemed bloody lit from within.

“Focus, Thor. The movie,” mumbled Loki.

“I’ll sort this out, brother,” said Thor then. “I promise.”

Loki wasn’t great at wishful thinking. He had pretty much had to live on it at one point in his life, and what a fat load of good it had done him. How about you try trust instead, said Sigyn’s voice in his mind.

He returned Thor’s stare, taking in that open expression, no-questions-asked, all heart, all yours. I fucking love your face, he thought, aching to touch him.

Loki, you dolt. What’s stopping you.

Fuck it.

He reached up and stroked his brother’s cheek, stubble tickling his palm. Thor’s hand sprung up to hold Loki’s, and he nudged into it, with his eyes closed. It was electric. He pressed a kiss to Loki’s palm, and smiled with gratitude. The fucking heavens opened over their heads and all manners of sunshine and burning comets came dazzling through.

Loki was really feeling overwhelmed now. He made to go, but his brother clung on to his hand.

“Loki, I…” Thor took a moment to find the right words. “You may not be the same kid you used to
be, but neither am I. And you’re not tainted, and you’re not broken, and you’re not wrong in any way. You’re still Loki. You’re always Loki.” He held his breath, for courage. “My Loki.”

Loki swallowed with difficulty around the knot in his throat. He nodded. It was as much as he could do right now. Slowly, he got his hand back.

As he was walking through the door, Thor spoke again.

“Thank you,” he said.

Loki peered over his shoulder.

“For what?”

“For letting me keep this.”

“Keep what.”

Thor cleared his throat.

“My Loki,” he repeated.

That’s it, Loki was going to fucking cry. He went in.

* 

So that was that, thought Thor, after Heimdall called it good. The last detail shot, done. The studio shot, done. Location next.

Thor shook hands with Bucky, whose mouth was still red from kissing, and they had a few words and a hug. They were all knackered. It had been a very long, very intense day. And Loki’s eyes had been boring into him from start to finish. At times, it was all a bit of a mind-bend.

The scene involved no nudity (they had not needed Loki’s expert advice to point out that a shag in the restroom would hardly allow for people to take time unbuttoning shirts) so there had been no need for the whole Hollywood orthopaedic props to protect the actors’ modesty.

Thor preferred it. In this kind of scenes, if his cinematic bedmate tolerated it, Thor would rather wear just his skin, no bloody flesh-toned socks and no stupid thongs making him feel ridiculous. Au naturel for him, thank you very much. He did not struggle with bed scenes or with nudity at all, never had, and he got through the awkwardness with humour, and mock flirting if the mood was right.

The comrades-in-arms approach had come to Bucky very naturally, and Thor had gone along with that. And so, whereas the scenes themselves were taking a lot out of them, the breathers in between (some fairly long waits at times) felt very light and untroubled, and they had laughed. Specially after that heated orgasm take, when Loki, sprawling on his chair, with a wicked grin, had purred playfully, “I could watch this all day.” Some blushing may have occurred under the chuckles, both on Thor’s and Bucky's part. That's Loki for you.

As for Bucky, who had been rather shy and stiff in rehearsals, he seemed to find himself in the real shoot. He was a sexy bastard, and he played that part well. But he had also a vulnerability, a
tenderness to him, those big sad eyes. Once he was in character, Thor had not struggled to melt in the hustler’s hands. He had even managed tears in several shots, which he had not expected beforehand.

Heimdall was elated. He had the scene he wanted. He had even hugged Tony in celebration. They both had that “wait, what?” look straight after.

That evening, they went out for a drink to say goodbye to the Toronto crew. They took over a whole bar. Tony walked in with that assistant producer he could not get enough of (was it Penny? Pepper?) and Steve Rogers.

“He was in town,” Tony said.

Natasha had turned up, and she had brought along Clint. She told Thor there had been developments in the investigation of the tapes (“nothing bad, nothing earth shattering”), but she saw Loki dancing by the jukebox with Bucky, carefree and having fun, and she kept it to herself.

Somehow, Thor and Steve ended up at a table together, with their beers, talking shop and stealing longing glances of the dancing couple.

It was an odd night. Thor felt deflated, drained, his brain a tangle of thoughts and emotions. He had a lot to turn over in his mind. The conversation he had had with Loki yesterday chief among them. He had put it on the back burner all day today, but it was coming back to the fore now.

There were feelings he could not help. There were thoughts in his head he could not make disappear. He simply was not sure how he felt about some things in Loki’s past. He wanted to swear to Loki that what he feared so much (that the thought of what Loki had done would come back to haunt them) would never happen, but that was a promise he could not make lightly. He had been asked not to, and he would honour that.

There was no denying that it turned his stomach at times. He had tormented himself for a long time with questions and guesses at what Loki had had to go through, what he had had to do. The vague hints Loki had dropped now and again had only made it all more disturbing. He wondered sometimes how could it be that it wasn’t always on Loki’s mind, how he went about his day without this thing, these memories, crushing him under their weight.

He needed to talk to someone, he guessed. Someone he could bounce this stuff off with and get some fresh perspective on the subject. Somebody who wasn’t Loki. Natasha was practical and direct. Sigyn was warm and understanding. Tony… Tony had been in love with Loki. He had… he had been to bed with Loki. He guessed each had something of value to tell him. Perhaps he should talk to them all.

It was in the small hours when they returned to the hotel where most of them were staying. They walked. Thor and Steve closed the march, with Loki and Bucky a few steps ahead, and Tony and Pepper, Natasha and Clint at the head of the group, a way away.

Thor and Steve watched without a word as Loki and Bucky joked, laughed, and acted very, very comfortable and at ease with each other.

“So how’s Peggy,” asked Thor after some time, to make conversation.

Steve was taking a while to reply.
“Umm…” he said, eventually.

“Oh,” said Thor, catching up. “Sorry.”

Steve smiled.

“I’m a bit… I’ve been a bit of a mess lately. Well, for a while now. And I… I needed some time to… I don’t know. I wasn’t being a very dependable companion. There are things I have to sort out. So we’re taking a break.”

“…I see.”

They walked in silence again.

Then Loki and Bucky slowed down.

“Steve,” said Loki, turning to them, “Bucky here says you used to be a scrawny little fellow and that he had to get you out of fights?” he said, with a tone of incredulity.

Steve laughed.

“Yes, it’s true.”

“Mr. America?” said Thor. “Scrawny?”

“A goddamn twig,” said Bucky, laughing. “I’ve had so many broken bones because of this punk. He went around the neighbourhood picking up fights. He was, like, 90 pounds, and sick half the time, and he would still go around looking for trouble with guys literally twice his size. At least.”

“I was just defending myself.”

“Picking up fights,” countered Bucky.

“Did you really get Bucky thrown into a rubbish bin?” asked Loki.

Steve laughed heartily.

“God, I had forgotten about that!”

Bucky mocked a severe frown. “I hadn’t. Head first.”

“Remember that guy, Bucky?”

“Hard to fucking forget, he left the shape of his knuckles imprinted on my face.”

“You still got him though,” beamed Steve.

“Well, d’uh, he was going to twist your neck!”

“I had him against the ropes,” said Steve, with almost a serious face.

“That’s what he always said,” laughed Bucky. “Cocky little punk.”

“We stole a beer off my mother’s fridge afterwards, remember?”

“You got so drunk,” Bucky shook his head in mock despair. “On half a beer. You’re such a lightweight.”
“I’ve grown a bit since then.”

“You still can’t drink.”

“Which is the reason I don’t.”

“You woke up under your bed.”

“You probably pushed me off it!”

“I’d never!” protested Bucky, and proceeded to fluster quite badly.

“Remember that time I stole a steak for you eye, and mum nearly killed me?” Steve was saying then, not exactly ignoring Bucky’s last outburst, but not acknowledging it either, except for those two dark spots on his cheeks (in the daylight they probably looked pink.)

Loki had been slowing him and Thor down, very, very slightly, until Bucky and Steve had left them both well behind, caught up in their reminiscing and laughing together.

“What’s that all about?” asked Thor, walking next to his brother.

“I’m his fairy godmother,” said Loki, with a sly smirk.

“What?”

Loki winked. He lit a fag. They walked in silence for some time down the quiet Toronto streets.

“You’ve done really well today,” said Loki after a while, puffing some smoke. “It was very moving, very affecting. I think you achieved something important with that scene. Nobody will be left indifferent. It was quite extraordinary.”

“Thank you,” said Thor.

“It was weird to watch. For countless reasons,” smirked Loki, playfully.

“It was weird to have you watching,” said Thor, eyes down on the pavement. “For countless reasons.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Loki’s smirk grow wider and naughtier. How beautiful he was, white skin, black hair and every shade of silver in between, under the moonlight and the dingy clarity of the lampposts, shadows carving his sharp features sharper still.

“He’s a bloody good kisser though,” said Loki, with his impish grin still on.

Thor threw him a a glower, but he wasn’t really mad.

“What?” said Loki, coy. “Well, you both are. Are you happy now?” he shrugged.

Thor sighed, not in the mood for banter.

"I could be. Happy, I mean,” he tried, still hesitant about how to approach this. And it was possibly not the right time, or the right place, but fuck it, it was done.

Loki was quiet.

“You know what-…” said Thor.
“Yes, I know what you’re saying,” cut Loki, with a quick puff of smoke.

Thor waited for some sort of an answer, with bated breath. When it came, it wasn’t what he had wanted to hear, but what he had expected.

“I’m afraid,” said Loki.

“Of what,” asked Thor.

Loki took a minute.

“… Hoping. Trusting. Having my heart broken,” he confessed at length, hiding behind the smoke of his second consecutive fag.

Thor was afraid too. This conversation… They would never be ready for it, never. So he might as well just go ahead and have it, since Loki seemed willing tonight.

“I know I’ve fucked up again and again,” said Thor, throwing in all the guts he could find. "I know. There is nothing I can do to change that. I wish there was. I’ve been such a mess, but I couldn’t stay away, and… And even before that. Jesus, I’ve screwed up so much with you, Loki. I’m so sorry. There is nothing I would not give to be able to go back and make different choices.”

Loki had listened in silence, his expression unreadable to Thor.

“Different choices” he said, dryly, after aheartbeat.

Thor’s stomach sunk.

“No, not… that’s not what I mean. I don’t…” He huffed in frustration. He had to make sure this came out as he needed it to. “I wouldn’t change that we… that we were together. I mean, I wish I had been braver, and not so much of a mess, and wiser, and I wish I had been nicer to you, and I wish I had realised what was happening to you and I could have done something, anything, when you started to go down, to stop you before you…” He took a breath. “But as hard as it was at times, I don’t think I’ve ever been happier than when we were together. It may be selfish of me, but I could not regret that if I tried. I just fucked up so much, and I’m sorry that you had to pay for it.”

Loki took some time to process that.

“Not absolutely everything is always your fault, you know?” he said, after a while. “I can fuck up all by myself. And I have. Repeatedly.”

Thor was frowning deeply. Loki examined his expression and seemed to weigh his thoughts for a minute.

“You know,” he said at last, “even when I tried to kill myself after Iceland, I didn’t blame you, and I didn’t hate you.” Loki saw Thor’s expression, skeptical, puzzled even, and put on a tiny smile. “It’s true. It wasn’t something I was doing to you. I just… I thought my life was over.” A puff of smoke.

“I thought I would never be happy again. It didn’t work between us and it never would, and you were moving on, and I… I was so lonely, and everything was so hard and it hurt so much. School was tough, and I felt like I had nothing, nothing that was worth the effort. I couldn’t see a way out. I couldn’t see how it would ever get better. Because I would always be the way I was. The person I was. There was no escaping that. And I didn't like that person much at all. He-he sucked at living. I had everything, I was the most privileged kid in the fucking universe, I had been blessed with all sorts of things, and still, I felt like that, and I was like that, and I... I couldn't fucking stand to be that person anymore. That waste of space. That fucking headache for mum and dad, and this fucking
disappointment I had turned out to be. And I was hurting so much. These thoughts, they never fucking went away, they gave me no fucking rest. They kept me awake at night, they hit me in the daytime, for any reason, for no reason at all. I couldn't escape them, or distract my mind from them. I felt like... Like I was on a black downward spiral to... I don't know. Nowhere good. And nothing I tried to tell myself to put these thoughts into perspective worked for me. There was always an ugly, mean voice inside finding the cracks in everything I tried to build to keep the black shit away. God, I was so fucked up." He smiled at himself. “But what I was, more than anything, is sick. Do you understand that? I didn’t see it then, but I know it now. Because as long as I’m on treatment, I don’t want to kill myself. I may fantasise about disappearing sometimes, when I’m scared or stressed out or cornered or... but I don’t feel like jumping off a bridge. I just don’t. There are no black spirals. If I get black thoughts, I can talk myself out of them. I can enjoy things, and I feel... I don’t know. Hope, I guess. For tomorrow. Interest at least, curiosity to see what is yet to come. I can just get on with it, I can just be, without having to justify my existence to a higher order of beings. As long as my meds are doing their job, I just don’t feel like that. I'm... fine, normal. Still a fucking crackpot, but, you know, safe around cliffs and sharp objects. So that sort of tells you it’s a disease. You know what I mean?” He grabbed Thor’s arm and stopped him. He made his brother look him in the eye. “If it’s a disease, it’s not your fucking fault, Thor. Are you listening?”

Thor’s eyes were stinging. He had been listening. But he too knew a thing or two about ugly, mean voices finding cracks in things. He had his own black thoughts, terrible stuff that he had never even tried to shake off, because... well, because he shouldn't, should he? How could he atone for what he had done, if not bearing the pain of his guilt? Those stones around his neck, they were his punishment.


There was a heavy weight on Thor’s chest, the taste of metal in his mouth. Why was it so hard, confessing? Did Loki not know perfectly well which was his crime?

“I let you go. That day, in Asgard,” Thor choked out. "I didn't stop you. I watched you run away. I let you go."

Loki’s frown of concern dissolved into compassion. He spoke softly.

“What would you have done, tie me to a tree? Lock me up in my room until I saw sense? Do you think what I was feeling would have cleared away in the morning? A cup of tea and a good night's sleep, and there, I'm over it? There was nothing you could do that day, brother. I took off because I had to."

"If you'd talked to mum. If I had made you wait for mum."

"Mum was wonderful, and I loved her with all my heart, but that morning... she was a part of it, don't you understand? She had been in on it, all those years. I hated her that morning. I would not have listened to her."

"Maybe..."

"Well, I didn't. And we'll never know what would have been. And I left, and my life happened, and here we are now. And it's not such a bad 'now', don't you think?"

Thor could hardly believe his ears. Was that really his brother speaking?

Loki had started walking again. Thor caught up with him. They walked for a while in silence.
"Do you resent me?" asked Thor. "That I didn’t stop you, that I didn’t find you sooner? That I didn’t save you?"

Loki took a deep, long sigh.

"…I used to" he confessed. "I went through self-pitying fits when I would blame everything and everyone, and yes, you had a supporting role in that show, with Odin heading the bill. But even then, deep down, I knew I wasn’t being fair. And you did find me. You did try to… -God, I hate that word- to save me. But I was beyond saving for a long, long time. I was so fucking angry. I had to… the shit had to run full course. I know it sounds zen-y, and you know how I feel about these things, but, purely from a mental perspective, I guess I needed to go through that journey to get to where I am today. In my head. In my skin."

"Mum used to say that," said Thor. "That you had a journey to make. I’m not sure what she meant either."

"Thor…” Loki huffed, as if out of patience. "My entire life revolved around you. You were my whole world. And not in a good way. I needed to get my head out of my own arse, learn that there is more life out there, and become… my own man, so to speak. It was not healthy and not good for me, the way it was then. Or for you. It’s too much to carry, don’t you think?, somebody’s entire being, all his focus, all his hopes of happiness. Trust me, you don’t want that."

Thor would need to have a good sit down with himself and ponder all that was being said tonight. It was one thing to feel in his bones that his baby brother had loved him with all his heart, but hearing it from Loki’s mouth was quite another.

"Do you regret it?" asked Thor. "Would you change anything if you could?"

"Anything? Are you talking about the whoring or... Wait. You mean, if I would choose not to be with you back then. That’s what you’re asking, isn’t it?"

Thor nodded.

"No," said Loki, without a thought.

"Have you ever wished it?"

"No," said Loki, again without a moment of hesitation. And he looked away to add, “It was the bloody highlight of my sad, useless life. The one time I had it all.”

Oh, the muddle in Thor's head. He was sure he would be better off for all that had been said tonight, that both of them would, but right now he just felt a sour taste in his mouth, as if what had been between them in the past had been sick, and harmful, something Loki had had to get over to get to a healthier state of being. As if their time together, and Thor himself, had been a pernicious obsession, a drug habit, a disease whose sequels still carried in Loki’s life today.

"Do you still love me, Loki," he asked.

"Bloody hell, Thor…” huffed Loki, stretched so thin that he was fraying, what was beneath now showing.

That was not the real question though, was it? The question was, do you still love me as much as you used to back then? Or am I a tamer, weaker, duller emotion now, something manageable and boring, something you could feel for anyone else? Have we become normal, Loki, mere mortals, when our being together had once made the earth shake and the skies break open?
And Loki was bound to be irritated about this line of questioning, and Thor knew it. Because Thor was never needy, was he? Loki was allowed to be needy with Thor, and Thor would dote on him, and thrive on it. But Loki needed something solid to cling on to, someone who did not doubt himself or them, who would not waiver or falter when Loki fucked up, which Loki believed he was forever doing. Someone so solid and dependable that Loki could never break him, someone whom Loki could never hurt so badly that Thor would need to leave him. Someone who did not need bloody reassuring, requiring him to open up and be vulnerable and risk rejection. Someone who would just know.

Thor knew all that well, but he still waited for his answer.

“You know I do,” said Loki after a long time, with a small voice. And then, with an even smaller voice, “Now I love you better.”

Thor sighed. He guessed he should be the exact opposite of disappointed, but he wasn’t. He was tired. What he really wanted was… fuck, what he wanted was a hug. Not one, fucking hundreds of them. Everything was so fucking complicated. He wanted to stop bloody talking and roll with Loki in bed for days, kiss him until their mouths were numb, get drunk on his brother, see him undone and his. Something simpler, purer. And no more words.

He would have to make do with this for now.

“I wish you had not had to suffer so much,” he said, after some time.

“… Well, me too, sometimes,” said Loki. “Other times I’m just grateful that I am here. Others did not make it. I’ve been lucky.”

Thor shook his head.

“You’ve been strong and brave and magnificent. I’m not sure I could have done it. I’m proud of you,” he said, timidly, fearing a lashing.

“Shut up,” was all Loki said, very quietly.

They walked on.

It came naturally, and so easily, and it felt so bloody right, when their hands just came together and tangled in each other. For a brief spell, they just walked hand in hand down the street, as they once did. And when they approached the hotel and they had to let go, Thor was glad that he could still feel Loki’s grip on his skin, and deeper still.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Moving on.

And Happy birthday, Thor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thor had not been expecting that when he got up this morning. He had forgotten about it. So he got out of the lift and into the lobby of the hotel as usual, and was taken by surprise by the whole crew congregated there, even Heimdall himself, singing Happy Birthday in several different keys, as they aimed at his face with the business end of their camera phones, and stunned him with an explosion of flashes. He gasped and laughed, waves of affection soaking him, blew the candles of the cake that was thrust under his nose, and even retained enough presence of mind to make a wish.

Which sort of came true a moment later, when Loki wrapped him in his arms. Thor held his brother close, eyes shut tight, and if the crew thought it was a bit over the top… fuck it. Fucking fuck it, seriously. He had needed that hug like the air he breathed.

There were even presents, mostly jokey ones —because what do you get a man who has everything, or the means to get whatever he wants. Still, the team had come together to have him custom-made a gorgeous belt buckle with an old ship and sea motifs and, on the reverse, an inscription reading “Mariners”, the date, and a sweet dedication. He had wanted to hug everyone.

Loki waited until the party had dispersed to give him his present. Thor felt a bit wobbly. When was the last time he had had his baby brother with him on his birthday? And had he bloody appreciated it as he should have back then?

“You sappy oaf” mumbled Loki, as Thor unwrapped his present with a stupid happy grin and wet eyes.

It was a digital camera, compact, shiny, red and gorgeous.

“You’ve gone all Cartier-Bresson on us. Might as well use a Leica and do it properly” said Loki, trying to sound nonchalant, in spite of that timid blink in his eyes.

Yes, since they had set out on the road almost two weeks ago, Thor was forever taking pictures on his phone. The landscape was majestic, and they encountered some very unusual sights and people. He had never felt more British than deep in the heart of America. The further south they got, the more, shall we say exotic it all became to a London boy like himself. Not even life in the New Mexico desert could have prepared him for that trip. Crazy Americans.

Then again, America was the theme of only half of his growing archive, at best. His brother had full lordship over the rest. Loki perched on the back of the pickup, going over his copy of the script, Thor’s Indiana Jones-style fedora hat shading his face. Loki listening to Heimdall, arms crossed, face
intent, one hand touching his lips, a corn field swinging behind them. Loki doing yoga in a disused convention room in a hotel, lean white arms, tight butt, the arch of his back, his sharp posture. Loki laughing with Tony, tongue between his teeth, crinkles in his eyes. Loki having a fag as the sunset fell outside their motel, mind wandering, eyes lost somewhere far away. Loki sprawling on an old porch swing in that abandoned, crumbling Gone with the Wind-style mansion, hiding from the scorching afternoon sun, a hat covering half his face, his legs so long. Loki snoozing, leaning his head on the backrest of the pickup, pale skin touched with the first sunlight (he had stirred awake when he heard the camera go off, and had smiled, sweetly, dozily, before groaning at him to put away the fucking phone already.) Loki with his earplugs on, dancing by himself in the alley between two battered houses of that small town with that amazing name (Was it Redemption? Ascension? Loki would remember.) And the photo taken immediately after, which showed Loki telling him to fuck off when he realised he was being watched; he had been blushing in all colours, too bad the camera did not catch it. And a few selfies of them both, squinting with the sun in their eyes, pulling faces, mock-brooding super-model style, Thor kissing Loki’s cheek as Loki frowned, trying and failing to contain a smile. And so many more. Thor went over the whole collection every night, back to back, with a foolish, lovesick grin on his face.

“I love it” he told his brother, cradling the beautiful little Leica between his hands. “Thank you.” He hugged him tight.

He caught the look in Tony’s face out of the corner of his eye. It did come to mind that, if the intensity of their cuddles and the lingering gazes they threw each other didn’t out them, (“If somebody gets caught in the crossfire at the wrong time of the month, we’re talking triplets at least here, boys” said Tony) then it would be Tony’s own permanent “awww” expression that would end up giving them away. Then again, Thor was too bloody in love to even try to care.

He had been doing his homework, pretty much by accident, these last two weeks. He had meant to put it all to rest until after they wrapped up at least, taking the very sensible view that the middle of the shoot of the movie that could define both their cinema careers might not be the best time to tackle the very important, very complicated, very sensitive issues that stood between Loki and him. He had made his decision, and was determined to stick to it, and yet he found himself, again and again, doing exactly what Loki had told him to do —talking to people.

The very next time Natasha dropped by to check on her client, Thor had found himself unexpectedly asking her if she would have a cup of coffee with him. He had meant to ask how the court procedure for the tapes thing was going (Anonymous had identified the people who had posted them, and Loki’s Army was still hard at work searching the net for new copies, campaigning against sites that weren’t doing enough against the users who spread them, and showing their support for Loki in a variety of other ways. Bless them.) Thor’s mind probably betrayed him, and the conversation had quickly taken a turn towards Loki’s past, which Natasha had researched intensively and thoroughly when she first took him up under her wing. In the end, Thor had ended up discovering that Natasha herself also had what some would call a colourful history and, even though she did not express it in so many words, Thor felt just how fond she was of Loki, how proud, and how close. It warmed him. Anyone could use someone like Natasha on their side. She was a formidable ally and, as it turned out, also a good friend. Loki was in even better, more caring hands than Thor had thought.

The text conversation with Sigyn had also steered itself, sort of, in the direction of Loki’s past. As a prostitute. Past as a prostitute, Odinson, repeat after me. Sigyn said Loki didn’t care for euphemisms, so no bloody euphemisms then.

From texting they had moved on to long e-mails, and then to even longer phone conversations. And what a ray of sunshine she was, how much she loved Loki, and what a way she had to make things feel… well, not easy perhaps, but possible. Whereas Thor was looking at a mighty, forbidding
mountain, Sigyn was already pointing at all the passes and all the pathways, and leading him up by the hand. Thor felt there was nothing she could not help him with in regards to his brother, one way or another. She became her sounding board for everything concerning Loki.

No euphemisms, Sigyn had said, and no pity either. She said lots of wise things.

“Nobody expects you to just get over it overnight, Thor. But it would be so good if you could just get used to it being there, and cropping up now and then, without big drama... One or two steps in that direction would already mean so much for Loki, and do you both so much good. You have to understand that Loki pretty much only feels shame or self-loathing about this when he looks at it through his family’s eyes. Haven’t you noticed? With the world, his attitude is pretty much they can all go fuck themselves, and if someone so much as sneezes at him about his whoring, he’ll rip their heads off. You know Loki. But with the people he loves and he looks up to... that’s a different story. If he feels you are ashamed of it, or him...”

“I am not, not at all” Thor had cut. It was lots of things, but shame, it was not.

“I know that. And the way to show Loki is to become more comfortable with this, so that he doesn’t have to fear the next time something pops up that may remind you of it. More than anything, you need to talk about this so that you both stop bloody wondering what the other actually feels and thinks about this, wouldn’t you say?”

Yes, Sigyn spoke a lot of sense.

And so, Tony was next.

But Tony turned out to be harder to approach than Thor had anticipated. They had been friends for a long time after all, right? He would have thought it would be easy to talk to him. But, what do you know, Thor happened to have a bit of a bug up his arse with people who had enjoyed Loki’s sincere, shall we call it, admiration, his body, and on top of that, his trust.

Listen, Thor was a reasonable, mature guy. He didn’t get jealous. He didn’t have a problem with his girlfriends having exes or, you know, eyes, even while they were dating him, and he had even forgiven infidelities and not given them much of a thought. He was not insecure, and he was not a brat.

But come to think of it, that had been with people who were not Loki. There was a chance that he might get a teeny tiny teensy bit possessive when it came to Loki. (Just say it already, Odinson) Yes, ok, it bugged him that Loki had confided in Tony about these very private, very sensitive issues, and not him. That Tony knew more than him about something concerning Loki. It jarred with him, alright? It was hard. It brought home just how much distance there had been, and still was, between Loki and him. And he did miss being Loki’s one and only sometimes. So shoot him.

And still, he also somehow ended up having a conversation with Tony about the subject

“Yes, by all means, ask him questions” Tony had urged him. “Seriously, you’ll feel comforted by how Loki talks about it. Yes, the tapes were a blow, because of you and your mother and his career and all, but the thing itself, the whoring, the gory details, he’s got those rationalised. It was a job, and he got on with it, and he’s not doing it anymore, and that’s that. It’s not him. So let him tell you about it, let him show it to you through his own eyes. It can’t do any harm.”

Thor was not so sure about that. Tony sensed it.

“Listen, Thor, you’re afraid of the unknown right now. I mean, I’m sure there’s a lot going on
underneath, because that’s Loki we’re talking about after all, but he can laugh about it now. So if
you learn to do that as well, instead of it being the big fucking elephant in the room… He has
hilarious anecdotes, and tender ones, too. I’m sure it’s not as bad as you think. Try him.”

Thor started to psych himself up to sitting down with Loki for a chat. After the shoot, that is. They
had enough on their plates as it was.

It was seldom away from his mind, however. There was so much dead time, so many hours on the
road, and so many nights spent in remote, little towns with nothing much to do, except going to bed
early and think… He wondered how he would do it, the precise words he should choose to start up
the conversation, whether he should try and keep a blank expression or be spontaneous, whether
they should do it in a quiet bar or at someone’s place, whether it was better to just pop up the subject
or to give Loki fair warning, whether it was a good idea to have Sigyn there or to be by themselves.
And more and more questions. It kept him up at nights.

In the end, as it turned out, he should not have bothered. Thor was sitting one evening on the back of
their pickup (yes, he was going to buy it after the shoot, by now it was his baby), with a beer and his
thoughts, when Loki climbed up and crawled to him. He settled under the same fleecy blanket that
was keeping his brother warm.

“Tony says you’ve been thinking about asking me questions about my Belle du Jour epoch” he said,
just like that, as he lit a fag.

Thor was startled.

“Y-yes. I have” he said.

“Great. Shoot” said Loki, with a toothy grin, puffing smoke. He was not as relaxed and aloof as he
wanted to appear. Somehow, that put Thor a bit more at ease. They were both on the same page
here. Yes, this was bloody scary, but they could do this, together.

But he did not know where to start. He did not know what he wanted to know, even, to be honest.
And when he realised that the silence was stretching, and that he still had nothing, this is what he
confessed. And Loki laughed.

“Ask me how much I could make in one night” he suggested.

Thor did, and Loki told him. And Thor gasped, wide eyed.

“Bloody hell” he muttered.

Loki had a smug, shit-eating grin on his face.

“I’m a class act, what can I say” he said.

“How much is that an hour?”

“You do the math” said Loki, shrugging. “But with me it was usually per type of service rather than
an hourly rate.”

Right. That did give Thor an unpleasant chill.

“I think they got it cheap” he said, trying to make light of it. “Sounds like a bargain to me.”
“Ah, flattery will get you everywhere” said Loki, grinning.

Thor tried to smile as well.

“I bloody mean it” he muttered.

Loki bit his lip. How awkward, how tricky again, and how very quickly.

“Ask me what’s the weirdest thing I’ve ever been asked to do” said Loki, thinking on his feet.

Thor gulped, and did. Loki told him, and they both burst out laughing, exploding with their nerves. And they laughed and laughed and laughed, stopped, looked at each other, and they were off again.

They talked for hours, way past their bedtime. Soon enough, Thor had taken the initiative and started to ask his own questions, as he identified the things he really wanted to know about. Vague at first, and shy, but increasingly bolder as he saw that Loki seemed more relaxed and upbeat, not less, the more they talked about it. Loki did get uncomfortable and squeamish at times (when Thor had asked “did you ever enjoy it”, for example), but he had answered every time, sooner or later.

The conversation strayed eventually, and they had winded up talking about Loki’s journey after he left Asgard, to Moscow, across Northern Europe, all the way to Iceland. How lost and lonely and scared Loki must have felt, and how brave he was, how driven, how determined.

“I was just desperate” Loki said, with self-deprecating detachment, as if despair made his efforts and his courage any less praise-worthy. His head was resting on his brother’s shoulder, their hands woven together.

“And yet you kept going” Thor said, stroking a thumb on the back of his brother’s hand. “You never gave up. Not even in Iceland.”

“I wanted revenge. I wanted to cause harm” mumbled Loki, barely a whisper.

“You never gave up” countered Thor. “You chose to live again and again, as painful and tough as it must have been for you then. The illness in your head, the hardships in your life, they never defeated you. Mum always said you were the strongest of us all.”

Loki took a minute then.

“She said that? To you?”

Thor nodded.

“And to dad.”

Loki took yet another minute.

“She used to tell me that too but… but I thought she was just trying to…” His voice broke. He swallowed. “Did she know, Thor?”

“About the prostitution?”

Loki nodded, Thor felt it on his shoulder. He had to think about that. Because she might have. Loki wasn’t hiding, word travels fast, and Thor was sure Frigga would have done her own digging. But they had never discussed it.

“I never told her” he said at length. “They knew I was looking for you, but I never told mum and dad
that I had found you.”

Loki was quiet.

“I thought about telling her, a lot” added Thor. “I thought that, if there was one person who could get you out of that club, it was her. But I never made up my mind. On the one hand, I had you telling me to leave you alone, and what she always told me about respecting your decisions; and on the other hand, I could not fucking sleep thinking of what they were doing to you in that place, and I just fucking wanted you home.” He sighed when Loki squeezed his hand. “And while I was pretty much paralysed with doubt, you left the club and disappeared, and that was the decision made for me, really. What was the point in telling mum anything then.” A pause. “But the fact that she never asked me any questions… well, I don’t know, Loki. I don’t know what she knew.”

Loki’s breathing was slow and regular, and for a second Thor thought he had fallen asleep. They had both been yawning for the last half hour.

“Say something” urged Thor.

“I’m glad you did not bring her to the club” said Loki, in a mutter. “If you had, my last memories of her would have been a bitter argument and some very nasty words from my side that I could never have taken back. And I would still not have returned home, even if she had asked. I would have read her worry as duty, and pity, not love, and I would have hated her for it. And myself, for being the shame and the burden that I was.” A puff of smoke. “The way I saw it then, I did not deserve her, or anything that came from her. Because she wasn’t my real mother, and because of how much I had fucked up and how much damage I had caused her. You did the right thing, brother.”

Well, Thor would have thought that no question could scare him anymore, after three hours talking with Loki about some of the most difficult things one can talk with a baby brother. But as it turned out, there was one thought that frightened him more than even the kinkiest shit he had heard that night.

“Do you still feel this way about her? About us?” He cleared his throat, his voice still came out thick. “That she was not your mother.” God, just saying that fucking hurt.

Loki took his time. Deliberating, or trying to round up some courage?

“You know, Thor, a part of me will always…. will always resent the lie and be very fucking angry about it. I can’t explain it. I know it’s not rational. Mum and dad, they did nothing wrong. They took me in, and they brought me up, and they did their best and… and they brought us together. And they loved me. Even dad, sometimes, I think. I really should not feel this way about them, and I know it. But there is a well of very fucked up logic in my head that says that… That everything I believed to be true…” He huffed, irritated that he was struggling so much to convey his meaning. “Sometimes it feels as if even the floor I tread on is not real, as if it’s going to crumble and swallow me in at any second.” Loki was gesturing with his hands, as if that would help him find the words. “I feel cracks under my feet and I start questioning everything, every hug and every kindness and every show of love. And I get so furious. I start thinking who the fuck I really am, and who the fuck was Laufey, and who was the person that gave birth to me, and what happened there, and… And it hurts, because they didn’t fucking want me, and it’s them I hate, I guess, and I’m making do perhaps, or…” He took a deep breath. “But that’s just the bad times” he added after some time. “When I don’t think too much about it, mum is mum, and dad is dad, and you’re my brother. And I usually manage to leave it at that.”

Thor had a knot in his throat. He had his brother wrapped tight with an arm around his shoulders.
“You do know that I feel you’re… I mean, that we’re one flesh, right?” said Thor tentatively. He was afraid of angering Loki, but he guessed tonight was not about dancing around the things they would usually leave undisturbed. He elaborated. “I’ve never felt any different, not before we found out, and not after. I’ve always felt like we’re blood. That we’re brothers, no qualifications, no gradations.”

Loki took some time to ponder that.

“Kinky,” he teased, after a while.

Thor laughed softly. They remained in silence for a spell, their eyes heavy, a few more yawns.

“They did bring us together, didn’t they” said Thor. “Dad picked you out of all the babies in that ward, and took you home, to me. What were the fucking chances. Do you ever think about that?”

Thor had turned his face to his brother, and saw him smile.

“I may have,” mumbled Loki.

Thor kissed his hair.

“I love you, brother,” he said.

Loki burrowed into him and muttered something that, Thor could swear, sounded like “I love you too.”

—*

Ask me again if I can handle the prostitution thing, brother, thought Thor to himself that night, alone in bed, awake, wired up, going over the conversation in his head. Ask me.

He wasn’t squeaked and he wasn’t horrified. The images in his brain were now more vivid and quite a lot more detailed than they had been before their chat, but Thor felt like he did not need to look at them through his fingers anymore. It was all bizarre and outrageous and still shocking, but he didn’t feel sick thinking about it, and he wasn’t horrified.

A bit nervous, maybe. He realised how vanilla he was, and how crispy deep fried Vietnamese grasshoppers with dragon fruit coulis his brother was by comparison, and he wondered if he needed to do some research and, um, try to up his game, if he was to keep Loki satisfied.

—Let’s sit down and consider this a bit, shall we?, said Thor to himself. As of tonight, a change of paradigm had occurred, which entailed, among many, many, many more, countless things, that satisfying Loki, as in, having sex with Loki, was going to be a real possibility in the horizon. (Yes, good idea, Odinson. Breathe in, breathe out.) Because the one condition Loki still had, Thor now met. The last thing that had been standing between them had been removed tonight.

Thor laughed in bed, all by his silly self, thinking about his next step, imagining passing a folded piece of paper to Loki under the table, scribbled with “Do you want to be my boyfriend?” (Heart heart heart, cross cross cross cross cross…) But he was going to wait until the end of the shoot. This time, he meant it. Cross his heart. He did.
He definitely did. He was a professional, goddammit.

He had stayed true to his very good intentions for a few days. He was buzzing with anticipation and impatience, but he was managing to wait.

But then, his birthday had happened. That same day, the moment he found himself alone with Loki in the close confines of the cabin of the pickup, with another twenty good minutes to wait before they could do another take, he simply could not hold it back another minute.

“So… about Bucky” said Thor.

Loki gave him a sideways look, tensing up before Thor’s very eyes.

“What about him” he said.

Neither was looking at the other right now. Thor was examining his hands.

“Are you two… something? Anything?” Thor asked.

“I’m this close to telling you to mind your own business” snapped Loki, fully on the defensive now.

Right.

“Well, it might be. My business, I mean” said Thor. Harrumph. “If, say, I wanted to… ask you out. After wrap-up.”

A long silence. Thor was tracing a groove in the palm of his hand with his nails, and leaving an angry red trail. He was ready to swear he had never been more nervous in his life.

“Out?” said Loki, at long last.

“Out, you know.” Thor cleared his throat. “Dinner, a movie…” And this time Thor did peek out of the corner of his eye.

Loki looked stunned.

“You mean, out on a date?” said Loki, as if that was the weirdest notion he had ever been confronted with. And he had encountered some pretty weird shit in his life, this much Thor knew.

“Interested?” said Thor, and tried for a cocky half-smile that hopefully distracted from how jittery he was.

Another long silence during which Thor was very damn close to screaming.

“Why after wrap-up?” asked Loki at length, sounding collected, and a bit suspicious.

“Because if it doesn’t go well” said Thor, stomach turning, “I’m not sure I’ll be able to keep it professional.” An elegant way of saying he would be crying into a ball for the foreseeable future, and in no condition to so much as look at Loki, let alone act with him.
“And if it does go well?” said Loki, still even.

“If it does go well,” smirked Thor, “I’m sure I won’t be keeping it professional.” He didn’t know exactly what he meant by that, but it made Loki smile, so who cared.

Yes, Loki was smiling, though he kept a bite on his bottom lips to try and refrain the smile from overflowing. He dazzled.

“What’s with the date thing,” asked Loki then, picking at his nails, voice firm, hands trembling. “Dates are what people do to get to know each other. Aren’t we sort of passed that stage?”

“I don’t want this to start with a romp in a dingy motel room, do you?” said Thor. “I want to do this right.”

Loki gulped visibly, and deflected.

“Pepper would object to you calling this place dingy. She works hard at finding the best there is for us.”

“Yes, well,” countered Thor, ready to steer the conversation back to where he wanted it, “it may call itself high-end, but the walls are paper-thin just the same. I don’t want to have to keep it quiet” he said, like it was nothing, although his heart was pounding.

The expression on Loki’s face, his raised eyebrows, the blush spreading all over his cheeks and his neck! Thor was having second thoughts about waiting already.

“Are you still as loud as you used to be?” he asked, wiggling an eyebrow, just because it was fun.

“Do you still go at it like a wild animal?” Loki volleyed back in a warm purr, with a smouldering stare.

 Fucking hell, Loki, thought Thor, as his cock decided this was a conversation that obviously concerned it.

“Bucky and I are just friends,” said Loki then, gnawing the corner of a nail distractedly, slight tremor in his fingers.

Thor gulped and aimed for casual.

“Is that a yes? Will you go out with me?” he said.

Loki clasped his hands together on his lap, his knuckles white, his eyes lowered.

“Why now? Why not one year ago?” he asked, grave now. "What has changed?"

Thor rubbed his belly under his navel, where the knot of nerves had just tightened up another notch.

“Nothing. Everything” he said. What had changed. It had been a slight variation in the direction of the wind, a subtle dawning of a realisation that was not really new at all. He had always known he loved Loki. He had always known it was him he wanted before anyone else. And yet, just knowing that, feeling it in his bones even, had never been quite enough to make up his mind, had it? So what had changed?

"I talked to Tony," he said. "I think maybe that's what did it for me. I re-evaluated things under someone else's point of view. I got some fresh air on things and... and all of a sudden I..." He took a deep breath. "I don't know. I found myself feeling less guilty and less scared and more... I don't
Loki was looking at his hands again now, with a pinch in his brow. You're putting on a very poor case, Odinson. Fucking try harder.

“I’m in love with you,” he confessed then. “I’ve been crazy about you my entire life. We grew up thinking that we could not be together because it was wrong and sick. But to me, it’s never felt wrong, and it’s never felt sick. I did believe, though, that it wasn’t good for you, that it screwed with you health, with your head I mean, and that it would screw you up again, and it terrified me. For a long time, I thought it was impossible, that it would never make us happy. Because it would be too hard, because of how much you suffered from having to hide, because even now I think of having to lie to people and I really, really fucking hate it. I just did not know how this could ever work, how we could be together and be anything but miserable, and end up hating each other.”

“And do you know now?” cut Loki.

Thor sighed.

“I’m not sure. But I do know that things are not the same as they used to be, that we’ve both… grown up, I guess, so maybe, I don’t know, maybe we can find the way, together?”

Loki didn’t say anything. That deep pinch was still in his forehead, his mouth tense. That was not the face Thor had wanted to see when he had started this talk.

“I can’t fucking be without you,” he said, softly. “This I do know. So instead of thinking of all the things that might go wrong, why not think of all the things that would be right? I can’t give you what other people have, and it won’t be easy, and it won’t be perfect, and there’ll be lots of times when we’ll think we’ve bitten more than we can chew, both of us. And I am scared, I am not going to lie. I’m scared of fucking up again, and I’m terrified of what it might do you, and I know we’ll be facing pretty difficult things from the very first moment we step out of the house, and…”

Loki started to laugh, warm, gravely chuckles. He laughed and laughed and laughed, jaw-splitting grin, all his teeth, eyes warm.

Thor frowned, confused, but already feeling his own expression respond to Loki’s contagious laughter.

“What?” Thor said, puzzled.

“You’re not exactly selling it to me, are you?” he said. "I'm fucking swooning here."

It was Thor laughing now, rubbing his face. He was so uptight.

“God,” he said. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Loki had calmed down, his face still animated with humour, eyes out of focus. Thor gazed at him like the adoring, lovestruck idiot he was.

“We belong together,” he said, fervently. “We’re strong together. You’re the love of my life. I want to look after you and be with you always. I won’t give up on you just because I’m scared. I’ll do whatever it takes to make it work. It’s fucking worth it. It’s worth everything.”

Loki was not laughing now. Thor sought his face but could not read it. His heart was fluttering with panic.
“Say something, please,” he urged, when he couldn’t stand it any longer.

Loki stared at him point blank.

“You don’t get to take that back, do you hear?” he said.

“I’m never taking it back, never,” said Thor.

There was a silence that to Thor’s mind might have lasted a minute or ten. Loki spent it looking out the window, unseeing.

Then he turned his face to Thor, eyes still low.

“Yes,” he said.

“Yes?” asked Thor.

“Yes, I’d like to go out on a date with you, after wrap-up.”

Holy fuck.

Loki looked at him, raised an eyebrow.

“Are you alright?” asked Loki to Thor’s blank mask of shock.

“Happy birthday to me,” muttered Thor.

Loki smirked, rolled his eyes, and elbowed him in the gut.

It was already the best birthday of his life. He was missing his mates, but he had heard them yelp on the phone, overjoyed, when he told them he’d be in London in a couple of weeks, and that he would be staying for a while (he didn’t want to jinx it with Loki, but he had decided that he was going to stick in England for some time, no matter what.) He received good wishes from friends and colleagues and wonderful stuff from the fans, and that night there was a little, cosy party, all singing and dancing, with Loki sitting next to him, feet hooked under the table, and not one fucking dark cloud over their heads, as far as the eye could see.

Thor danced with everyone who asked him then, while Loki and Tony had a heated debate about Martin Scorsese’s recent work, until he saw Loki mock-strangling Tony, put a peck on his mouth, and bid him goodnight.

And then he walked to where Thor was finishing his (second? third?) dance with Make-Up Cher (happily married, mother of four), who was really, really fond of groping his butt.

“Can you come out for a second?” whispered Loki in his ear.

The vehicle fleet of the movie crew had taken over the car park. Loki grabbed his hand and dragged him to the narrow space between two tall white vans, and turned to face him, his eyes low.

Thor gulped. He had not changed his mind, had he? Loki looked so serious all of a sudden. Thor opened his mouth to ask what was wrong, heart in his throat. Then Loki was there, hands at the nape of Thor’s neck, and he was kissing him.
Thor gasped, his eyes closed, he gripped Loki’s slender wrists. The wet heat of Loki’s tongue made him gasp again, the soft stroke of his lips.

Loki pulled apart slowly, leaving Thor gaping, eyes hooded, his feet all but hovering one foot above the ground.

“Happy birthday” Loki whispered.

Thor was breathless, speechless, lost in Loki’s face.

“So I’ve still got it then” teased Loki.

“Fucking hell” Thor choked out, when he found a wisp of voice.

Loki grinned, mischievous.

“Sleep tight, Thor.”

And he strutted away, graceful as a fucking panther, leaving his stunned, butterfly-filled brother counting the fucking minutes until he could get both his hands on him again.

*\

The rest of the shoot was a roller coaster ride. He sprung out of bed every morning, impatient to get out there and start the day, no matter how little and how lightly he had slept. It was like Christmas morning again and again. What would the day bring? Just bumping into Loki unexpectedly made his pulse ramp up. There might also be half an hour alone together inside the pickup, and they might play footsies again. That thing Loki did, when he rubbed his boot up and down the back of Thor’s calf, until Thor was panting, squirming and throbbing in his pants. Yes, just from that. The touch was nice, but Loki’s eyes on him as he did it, that indecently smug expression… Or maybe Loki would sit next to him at lunch time and purposely make himself a nuisance, brushing and nudging with his elbow, making Thor drop food on his lap, until Thor would be completely justified in restraining Loki’s wrists behind his back, and Loki would eyefuck him to a mush from a few inches away. Which yes, had happened, to the greater eye roll of Tony “What Have I Done” Stark, who would pull a twisted smirk and purr “please, don’t mind me.” Or they might talk on the back of the pickup that evening, about everything and nothing and, who knows, perhaps Loki would kiss him again, because a boy can fucking dream, and because Loki was as bloody desperate for it as he was. Thor was surprised lightbulbs didn’t blow up when they walked by.

If Loki was not so focused and dedicated while actually shooting, and if Heimdall didn’t have that professorly quality to him, that made Thor unconsciously sit up straight and feel like raising his hand whenever he had a question, by now his performance would probably be all over the place. Good news is, the scenes left now where all from the reconciliation and liberation sequences, and his character demanded that he was enthusiastic, elated, enormously relieved, and hopeful. So basically, all he had to do was turn up and say his lines.

And try to not fucking spontaneously self-combust and disintegrate into a little pile of ash. Ever since the date talk, Loki kept flirting. It was exquisitely subtle (a lingering stare, a quick once-over, licking his lips, angling himself just so, to give Thor the best possible view of his butt…) but he really needn't
try any harder. Thor was on a simmer. He could almost swear his cock was half-hard more often than it was soft, and his mind was permanently under his belt.

Just five more days, Thor was telling himself, sitting in the pickup between takes once more, Loki’s scent drenching the cabin. Five more days, he mumbled, as Loki turned his face towards the window, causing his neck to tense up, and there, that tendon there, that groove, those bloody freckles. Five more days, he thought, as his eyes stroked down Loki’s throat, that dip at the base, the collarbones, the wisp of hair he knew traveled, spare, down his chest, soon the navel, the happy trail there, all the way down to… Fuck. Five more fucking days, he was not going to fucking make it.

The things he wanted to do to him. When they were teens, well, Thor had gone down on several girls and he did some on Loki, but it hadn’t been so great, to be honest —Loki would come in under a minute. Loki was overexcited, and Thor probably sucked too hard or something. What did he know about teasing and playing and making it last, he had been spinach green in those days. In L.A. he had done a bit better, but only a bit. He was just prepping him really, and so bloody desperate to get inside him, he had not really been paying attention, what a godawful shame. But he had learned some things since then. He had had a handful of one-night stands, and then of course, Fandral. He had learned a lot with Fandral. He couldn't fucking wait to jump on Loki and...

Thor, wake up mate, you really don't want it to get any hotter in here than it already is...

Two minutes might go by with Thor's mind distracted with a point in the scene or simply wandering around in the woods, and then he was back to it.

Loki must have learned things too... He had been too squeaked to do it to him back then —he had been only fourteen, for fuck’s sake. But in L.A… Jesus, the thing Thor’s crotch had just done, simply remembering Loki’s face when…

“Will you stop staring at my crotch,” protested Loki, without even looking at him. “Give it a rest.”

Thor laughed.

“I can’t,” he said. “You, sitting there, flashing your neck and having that mouth, and those hands, and those fucking legs… Have you no decency.”

Loki laughed, but Thor had managed to make him fluster.

“You need a cold shower,” he said.

“I keep trying that. It’s not doing much for me.”

“Obviously.” Loki’s eyes flicked down to Thor’s crotch. “You’re going to give Cher a heart attack,” he said.

Thor adjusted his semi in his old-fashioned trousers, fortunately baggier than his own everyday civilian clothes.

“Now who’s staring,” he quipped at Loki then, making him startle and smile.

And now Thor was a bit lost in his lips. Loki noticed, of course. He curled his tongue against his front teeth, in a manner suggestive to Thor of many skills.

“Jesus,” huffed Thor, taking a deep breath, while Loki kept right on grinning.

Five more fucking days. Five more fucking days… Might as well be five fucking months for all it
The wrap-up party. It wasn’t even midnight yet, and Thor was already thinking about going up to bed. He feared he was coming through as a miserable bastard by turning down each and every invitation to dance, but he just did not have the oomph this time.

He was nearing the end of a very, very long journey.

The last twenty days on the road had been more demanding than he could have ever imagined. He had been the first on board when Heimdall had suggested that they could actually be on the move while on location, and Thor was convinced that both the movie and his performance had been a thousand times better for it. But that had meant packing and unpacking constantly, finding their bearings in a new place every three or four days, sometimes less, and the long hours on the road that left them all stiff, sweaty and knackered. Even if his own personal circumstances had been plain sailing, he was exhausted and he had had enough.

And plain sailing, these last couple of months, it had been not. Not in his mind, nor in his heart, not in his life, and not in his body either, and tonight he had stopped, and he felt drained down to the bone. It was as if he had been roaming the earth without rest, banished from home for years and years, and now he had finally received his letter of pardon, in a far-out post somewhere deserted and remote. It would take everything he had to get back. He had nothing left to spare. He did not feel like dancing or making merry. He wanted to go home, now. Home. Loki.

His brother was dancing, of course, arms up, head titled to one side, body swaying slowly, eyes shut, blissful expression, sexy as fucking sex itself. Loki was the only one he would have dragged himself up for a dance, tonight. What a bitch, eh?

As it was, he did drag himself up, but for a beer. Steve was at the bar with the same idea.

“Where’s Bucky?” asked Thor.

Bucky had been invited to the wrap-up party, along with the Toronto crew (many had made it over here) and had brought Steve along, because it would appear that they were seeing a lot of each other in New York lately, now that Steve was doing a play there. They had seemed glued at the hip all evening.

“Uh, he said he felt like dancing,” said Steve, and gestured with a dip of his mighty jaw to where Bucky was dancing with Loki, not too far from Tony and his girl Pepper.

“Hm.” Thor scratched the scruff on his chin.

Bucky and Loki were hot as hell together, and they always seemed to be having an unfair amount of fun. Thor looked at Steve, who was physically incapable of being nasty or mean, or anything less than decent, understanding and generous, and at this moment in time had an expression that reminded Thor vividly of an old dog that had just been dumped at a refuge by an uncaring owner, and was now watching said owner walk away with a tiny, adorable, fresh new puppy. Said dog would never bark and groan, he would do exactly what Steve was doing: watch Bucky dance away into another’s arms and sigh silently “as long as he is happy.”
Thor sighed as well, for another reason.

“Do you like dancing?” he asked.

Steve thought he was just making conversation, so he focused on Thor, put on a more upbeat expression and made conversation as well.

“Yes, I love dancing,” said Steve. “I’m not that great, but…”

“Just fucking ask him, Steve,” said Thor, cutting across.

Steve followed Thor’s eyes back to Loki and Bucky, with a frown.

“Oh,” he said, and looked away. He was blushing, and looking a bit like a deer caught in the headlights, but he did not rush to utter denials or make allegations. He was a brave one, Steve.

“He’s—… he’s with Loki, isn’t he?” he asked, clearing his throat. And he didn’t mean dancing.

“He’s not with Loki,” said Thor.

And just because poor old Steve looked like he still needed a push (or a kick in the butt, Thor was happy to provide both), he boldly went on to trespass into “not really my place, I know” territory, simply because he had the impression that it was going to take more than just one fairy godmother, if they were going to get anything done here.

“I have it on good authority,” added Thor, “that Bucky’s heart is elsewhere.” And then, just in bloody case, with the thickest brush, (there were not many brushes left that were thicker, short of shoving them both naked into a room, lock the door and throw away the key,) he made sure the message was clear. “I think Bucky would really, really, really like it if you asked him to dance,” pounded Thor.

Steve’s face. Thor wished he had his Leica with him. He would have immortalised it, and show it to people who were having a bad day.

“Really,” said Steve. And there was no duplicity and no manipulation in his tone, on his face, in his voice. Joy was coming through it, unfiltered and unrestrained. Steve was not one to play it cool.

“Really,” said Thor. “Go on.” And he was pretty damn near to start pushing him.

Steve put down the beer he had only just started, squared his epic jaw, and made his way to the dancing area. Thor watched him stop a couple of steps away from the dancers, rub the back of his neck and shift his weight from one leg to the other, not daring to interrupt. But then Loki opened his eyes, and then opened them some more. He immediately stepped away from Bucky and all but shoved him into Steve’s arms. And he very nearly had to, because neither of those two lemons was moving. Finally, there were some shy grins, some fierce blushing, and just as Thor was about to walk up there and show them physically where to put their hands, they sorted it out between themselves.

And Thor had to smile, feeling endearment as much as second-hand embarrassment. That had to we the most awkward, stiffest dance in the world ever, a pair of eight-year-olds pretending they were grown-ups, their cheeks so red and hot Loki could probably light a fag on their skin. It was adorable.

Loki turned up next to him, with a soft drink.

“I was having fun then,” he said, sitting next to him. “Were you jealous?” he teased.
Thor put on a little, sad smile.

“Bitterly,” he said. “Look at them.”

They both did, in silence. Thor wondered if Loki was thinking the same as he was. That Steve and Bucky got to do that, and they didn’t. Food for thought.

He threw an arm around Loki and pulled him close to kiss his hair. That, he could do. When he let him go, he heard Loki sigh.

“I think I’m going up to bed,” said Loki. “Had enough.”

“Yeah, me too,” said Thor.

He did notice Loki’s sideways glance. It made his heart beat faster.

When the mirrored doors of the lift shut in front of their faces, Thor checked Loki out, up and down. Loki grinned.

“I can tell you where I got them,” said Loki, meaning his clothes, Thor guessed, “since you seem to like the fit so much.”

Thor grinned as well, crossing a lingering stare with his brother in the mirror. He wiggled an eyebrow, and Loki wiggled his. Their smiles grew wider.

Ding!

The doors opened to a quiet, carpeted, empty hall. The corridor was too narrow to walk side by side, so Thor gestured gallantly for Loki to go first. Loki shook his head.

“Please,” he said, his tone perfectly polite, his snigger wicked.

Thor chuckled and started to walk.

“Hmmm…” purred Loki a few steps behind.

“I’m sure they make them in your size,” said Thor, without turning.

“They probably also do them in yours, have you looked?” teased his brother.

Thor grinned to no-one, feeling Loki’s hot gaze on his butt, blood pumping in his veins.

The door to his room. Thor turned the card key over and over in his hands as Loki caught up with him. He inserted the card and the door clicked open.

“Right,” he said.

“Right,” said Loki.

Thor swallowed.

“Good night, then.” And he leaned closer to kiss Loki on the cheek. Loki took it on his mouth. His tongue. Eyes closed. Lingering.

God.
He grabbed Loki’s face with both hands and crushed their mouths together. He felt his hands on his waist, digging harder in his flesh as Thor deepened the kiss. Loki’s breathing, more and more agitated as Thor plundered his mouth, was making every hair on Thor’s body stand on end.

He walked them both into the room, their lips connected at all times. Once inside, he backed Loki against the door until it shut. He kissed him with all his hunger, taking all Loki was giving, and then some. He pushed a thigh between Loki’s, and heard a soft, pained moan. He pressed harder, one hand in Loki’s hair, the other squeezing his arse.

Then Loki broke the kiss, and started to push him off.

“Thor…” whispered Loki, head back against the wall, expression drowsy. “I put out on the first date but, before the first date? What would people say…”

Thor tried to smile, still only inches away from each other, his smell, the hardness and heat of his body, his half-hard cock just there.

“This is not how I imagined this,” muttered Loki, apologetic, eyes lowered, looking shy.

“I know,” said Thor. He sighed. “I know what you mean.”

“You don’t think I’m being all… Disney princess about this?”

Thor smiled.

“What’s wrong with a bit of Disney,” he said.

“We’ll be in London in a few days,” said Loki. “Let’s wait.”

Now Thor did chuckle.

“I’d never thought I’d hear you say that.”

Loki giggled. Thor sighed. Hooking a hand around his brother’s neck, he brought their foreheads together, and then one last kiss.

“Loki, Loki…” he muttered, with his eyes closed.

And then he let go, and tried not to look too miserably dejected.

“Jesus,” he said, trying to make light of it, his grin weak. “I need a cold shower. Several.”

“There are other ways to deal with your present predicament, you know?” said Loki, his voice a honeyed purr. “I intend to experiment with a few of them the moment I get inside my room. Think about that.” A wink.

Thor glowered at him, murder in his eyes.

“You want to fucking kill me,” he groaned.

“No, baby, to kill you I would use my hands.”

Thor’s heart jumped. Baby, he called me baby.

He could not believe he was actually letting Loki go.
“I hope you’re staring at my butt,” said Loki as he started his walk down the corridor, without turning.

“Bloody right I am. That fit…” he said.

“Oh, and, Thor?” Loki stopped and threw him a look over his shoulder, those long lashes. “Get tested.”

Loki did want to kill him. And he succeeded, every single time.

Chapter End Notes

Did you spot the Torchwood ref? I'll never be over über-cool Captain Jack Harkness nervous about asking Ianto out. Gawd, I miss them.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Date night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Just fucking ask him, ok?” snarled Loki.

“Why don’t you ask him?” said Sigyn.

“Because, because, because… Just do it, ok??”

“Ok, ok, calm down, I’m calling him now. Stop pacing.”

Loki grunted, and carried right on pacing.

“Hey, Thor. It’s Sigyn. This place you’re taking Loki, is it formal wear or…? …Alright. Ok. …Ok, I’ll tell him. …Yes, he’s fine. He’s just climbing up the walls but… Ow! Yes, he pinched me. …Yes, I’ll live. Alright. See you!” He hung up and turned to Loki. “Casual wear.”


“You were just moaning about having to wear a suit because it reminded you of a premiere…”

“Yes, but what the fuck do I do now? I have nothing to wear!”

Sigyn ran her eyes over the wall-to-wall clothesline, and then raised an eyebrow at Loki.

“Yes, whatever. Jaysus, must you be so literal? You know what I fucking mean.”

Sigyn rolled her eyes and mumbled something under her breath.

“Pardon me?” snapped Loki.

“Nothing.”

Sigyn rolled up her sleeves and started reviewing the situation. Loki crossed his arms and tapped his foot. He was crackling with tension.

She went for the tight black velvety trousers, of course.

“Oh, puhleese,” said Loki. “Can’t you be more obvious?”

“You look red hot in this!” protested Sigyn.

“It’s going to look like I’m trying too hard!”

“Get out. They’re fucking black trousers, how is that trying too hard?”
“D’uh! Velvet?”

“Imagine Thor running his hands over them.”

Loki did just that. He spaced out.

Sigyn grinned.

“So that’s the bottom sorted. Now, for the top.”

Another half an hour of huffing, puffing, pacing, bickering, to-ing and fro-ing.

“No” said Loki categorically to the tenth shirt he was made to try -the dark green one, that looked almost black except when the light caught it right. “Look at it, it’s a fucking tent!”

“No it isn’t! It fits you perfectly and it hangs very nicely!”

“Looks like I’m wearing a robe.” He squinted at her, glaring. “You’re grumbling again.”

“I’m allowed to grumble” she said. “You’re a liiiittle bit impossible tonight. Even by your own standards.”

Loki huffed and sat at the foot of the bed, or rather plummeted. Sigyn sat next to him.

“I’m fucking nervous, ok? Dammit. Why did I agree to this? We should just… meet here, naked, and fuck. Why complicate things so much?”

“Because you wanted it to be special. Both of you.”

“Special,” mumbled Loki. “I don’t need any fucking clothes to make it special. Though food is a good idea.”

“Not on the settee, please” she said.

“It’s my fucking settee.”

She turned her eyes to the heavens, with a sigh.

“So, do you know what you’re doing yet?” she asked.

“What we’re doing? Dinner, that’s all I know” Loki shrugged.

“And… after dinner? Movie? Theatre…”

“Fucking.”

Sigyn laughed, and nudged an elbow to his side.

“You do know you’re blushing, don’t you?”

He did, and he did not need reminding. He buried his face in his hands and gave it a good rub. Like this would help. Stop it, you idiot, you’ll give yourself a rash. Sigyn started petting his hair.

“My fucking hands are shaking,” he whined.

Sigyn chuckled and hugged him around the waist.
“You’re going to have a great time,” she said. “It’s going to be fun. You’ll chat, you’ll flirt, you’ll laugh. And the rest… I’m sure it’s like riding a bike.”

“That particular bike just keeps getting harder to ride.”

“What do you mean.”

“I mean that… I don’t know.” Loki huffed, irritated —more like terrified, really, but who’s counting. “After building it up so much, what if he’s…?” He didn’t even want to think it, let alone say it.

“…Yes?”

Loki sighed heavily.

“Disappointed,” he said.

“Aw, sweetie.” Sigyn gave his waist a squeeze. “I was in the same apartment when you were dating Sam, and I’m still trying to get over it. Thor won’t be disappointed.”

Huff from Loki.

“What,” she said.

“But what if we never get to that stage? What if we actually sit down for dinner and have nothing to say to each other?”

“Loki, darling, listen,” said Sigyn, with her ‘snap out of it and stop the nonsense Loki-boy’ tone. “You’ll be fine. He’s crazy about you. You have both managed to fuck up spectacularly with each other again and again, and here you both are, stronger than ever. You’re indestructible. You’ll have a great night, and the only thing that should worry you is that Miss Green-with-envy downstairs calls the police on you again on account of the noise. Just make sure Thor doesn't get the door in his undies.”

He made himself take a long, deep breath. She smiled at him, and gave him a shoulder nudge. Loki nudged back.

“We’re going to fuck on every flat surface, and the bumpy ones too, better get used to the idea right now,” he warned.

“As long as you keep the food play out of the fucking settee.”

Loki almost laughed. Sigyn gave him one last comforting squeeze, and then a good shove.

“Right, mister. Shoes,” she said. “You’ll be late.”

“What time is it?” asked Loki, and checked his watch. He went pale. “Oh my god! Why didn’t you fucking tell me?!”
They hadn’t seen each other for a few days. Loki had flown back to London from the nearest airport, but Thor had gone back to L.A. to pack. Apparently, he was planning on staying in England for some time. Which was great of course, right? And also fucking petrifying, judging by the void in Loki’s stomach whenever he gave it some thought.

For an extra layer of surrealism, Thor had told Loki, just like that, that he would need him to take him shopping for winter clothes, if he was to spend the season in England. At the time, Loki had just said “yes, sure”, but then it had started to sink in. Clothes shopping, with Thor, in London. (And making out in the changing rooms, if he had his way.) Into what bloody alternate dimension had he stumbled? How did that happen, any of that?

Three months ago, they weren’t talking to each other, and Loki was pretty sure that he hated Thor's guts and never wanted to see him again in his life. …Yeah, ok, ok, whatever. But he did hate him, and he would have been willing to swear on some sacred book or another (how about Billy Wilder’s own original, annotated copy of the script of Sunset Boulevard) that he would never forgive Thor for one fucking spite too many after a whole bloody lifetime of them.

And look at him now, gnawing his nails in a taxi, counting the fucking seconds until he could hurl himself into his brother’s outrageously muscled arms. Maybe he had no fucking spine. Then again, right now he had no use for a spine. What he needed, desperately needed right now, was his brother's—... warm embrace.

But don’t you start counting your fucking chickens yet, Laufeyson. They were both of volatile temper, their conversations still felt like a minefield most of the time, the baggage they had between them could cause Gatwick to collapse (not that it took much), and everything that had been a problem before had every chance of being a problem again.

And as scary as it felt right now, this date was the easy part. Imagine everything went swimmingly tonight, what happened next? They would then be, what? Lovers? Boyfriends? Partners? How would that work? The specifics? There were details to discuss, strategies to devise. People would be watching. He should have talked to Natasha...

His brain kept jumping the gun and scattering in all directions, as if he needed any more on his plate. This would not be easy, whatever they had between them. And they couldn’t make the difficulties go away just by fucking. Although, if it was up to Loki, it would not be for lack of trying.

The taxi left him on the corner, as he had asked. A little time to regroup and gather his thoughts, if only for a few steps.

It was dark already, and it had been for hours. After those few weeks in the bright American south, London’s winter nights were so bloody gloomy. He looked for Thor, heart pounding.

There he was, under the little white marquee. Black jeans and a deep red shirt with a slight sheen, three-quarter length coat, thick cowl. And a bit of a scruff. Be still my beating heart, mumbled Loki under his breath, and remember, no hello kiss and no hello arse-grope, because brothers. Forbidden love, he sniggered idiotically to himself. How romantic.

Thor turned to him and saw him. He smiled, and his face lit up, and the winter gloom bowed down to his might and glory and actually figging retreated and lifted, or Loki would forever swear that it
did. His heart skipped a bunch of beats.

“Hey,” he said, and admire his coolness and the serene expression, what a damn fine actor he was.

“Hey,” said Thor, and ran his eyes all over him, head to toe, and back again, with the least brotherly expression imaginable. “You look amazing” he whispered. And then, cocking his eyebrow just so, “Is that velvet?”

It was a little, cosy, family-run place, with a no-frills decorative style, and an authentic feel, like someone’s home. Loki loved it at first sight. They seemed to know Thor. He introduced him as his brother, and they were lead to a table in a corner, obscured by a panel of intricate trellis and some plants. It was out of the way, and shielded from the outside windows, a nice table for a movie star to have dinner in peace. Discrete. Intimate. With potential for mischief.

“Home-style Indonesian food. This is where I got the recipe for that soup. Remember?”

Loki grinned.

“Of course I remember.”

Loki let his brother order. He didn’t know any of the dishes.

“My friend Sif discovered it,” said Thor casually.

“Sif?”

“From drama school. I hope you can meet her one of the days, she’s great” grinned Thor.

That blink.

“You’ve fucked her,” said Loki, on an impulse.

Thor frowned, harrumphed, cast his eyes down.

“Hm.” He probably did not know what to say.

Of course he has fucked her, grumbled that ugly voice inside, when the fuck does he ever not fuck them.

Shut up, shut up, shut up, he screamed at himself. Fix this!

“This is nice. I like it,” he said, looking around the place, trying to sound civilised and upbeat.

Thor flicked a minute smile. He was tense. Way to fucking go, Laufeyson, proud of you. You managed to ruin everything in under five minutes, a new record.

“You really do look awesome,” he sighed hopelessly.

Thor looked into his eyes and held his hand, with a quick squeeze.

“Thanks,” he said.

“I’m sorry,” said Loki. “I’m… jumpy.”

“It’s ok,” said his brother, with another squeeze.
The waiter approached with the drinks and the starters and Thor withdrew his hand. His movement was smooth, and therefore inconspicuous, his expression untroubled and light. The waiter didn’t notice anything. Loki assessed it with a very complicated feeling inside, the satisfaction of a ruse well executed against the irk of being denied.

Boo fucking hoo. Just get over it, Laufeyson, you always knew where you were getting yourself into.

They tried small talk. How was the flight, where are you staying, how is Tony, how is Sigyn, blah blah blah. You could barely call it a conversation. It had been an exchange of words at best, uptight, stuttering, stumped with false starts. They didn’t know how to do this, and they didn’t like to do this.

It helped when the food arrived.

“Fuck, this is delicious!” said Loki around a mouthful of a ridiculously nice noodle dish with a range of flavours many vanguard, ultra posh restaurants would struggle to achieve.

He realised Thor enjoyed his delighted noises. The moans especially, so he pushed it a bit. While he was at it, he decided to eat the satay straight from the skewers, sharp white teeth dragging the beautifully spiced chunks of meat down the stick. How his brother looked at him then, part alarm and part dilated pupils. How the fuck was that sexual? Oh, brother, you are weird.

“So, what do normal people talk about on a first date?” said Loki, sucking his fingertips, as they reached the halfway point of their meal. The mood was definitely lighter by now.

“Hm, I don’t remember,” grinned Thor. “Hobbies?” he shrugged, pushing the last of his mee goreng down with a sip of white wine.

“I play the piano,” said Loki. “I like to read. Bit of bondage. Nothing exciting. And you?”

Thor raised his eyebrows and put on a proper smile. Fucking finally.

“I work too much to have hobbies, ” he said.

“Oh. What do you do then?” Loki leaned over, all eager.

Thor smiled some more, and played along.

“I’m an actor.”

Loki pretended to be impressed.

“Really? Are you famous?”

“Can’t complain” grinned Thor. “And you?”

“Would you believe I’m an actor too?”

“What a coincidence.”

They both smiled. The atmosphere was now officially relaxed. Second course arrived, the glasses were refilled. Perhaps they could crank it up a notch?

“So, what do you look for in a man, Thor?” flirted Loki.

“Hm, good question.” Thor rested his elbows on the table, joined his hands in front of his face,
rubbed his thumbs on his own lips. His gaze was intense and fixed on Loki. “He has to be unfairly beautiful, insanely talented, interested in everything, with a dry sense of humour, cleverer than almost everyone else, and pretty cocky about it, dangerously sexy, adventurous, never boring, always curious, always hungry. He has a soft core he pretends is not there, even when it keeps popping out again and again. He loves cuddles but only on his own terms. He has an exhibitionist streak, loves old movies, quiet Saturday afternoons, wild, vigorous sex, and traveling.”

Loki squirmed in his seat and swallowed on dry. All power to main shields, because he was fucking shivering.

“So, not demanding at all, are you.” His voice came out a lot weaker than he had intended.

“And what do you look for in a man, Loki?” his brother said.

Loki gulped again.

“I like a hot stud who can go at it all night,” said Loki, offhandedly.

Thor laughed, but his heart wasn’t in it. He was disappointed, wasn’t he? Fucking hell.

You can fucking do this, Loki-boy. It would have to break through so many walls it seemed impossible, but you can do it and you fucking will. So he took a deep breath, and pushed with all his might. He managed a tiny murmur of a voice.

“Protective, kind, gentle, endlessly patient with my shit, supportive, devoted, generous, with a heart of gold, brave and strong and decent, believes in the good in people and fights for it, will never abandon what he thinks is a worthy cause, even if he’s fucking wrong. Feels everything deeply, but can also be light as a feather, made of pure joy and sunshine. He lives fully, always throws everything in and saves nothing for later. Loves with all his heart. He’s a real-life knight in shining armour, and he’s the most beautiful thing that’s ever walked this earth. The fucking moon and stars laugh with him when he’s happy.” He swallowed thickly. “Preferably blood related, but adoption bond also acceptable.”

They were quiet. Thor was speechless. Loki could not lift his eyes from his plate, where it was safe.

“I want to kiss you,” said Thor.

Loki looked up at him. It was so easy to feel sorry for themselves, to take the woe is us persecuted lovers street, and curse this cruel world and all its stupid conventions. But you know what, tonight there was no fucking woe is us. Tonight, Thor had taken Loki out on a date. They were going to be born under a laughing star, or else.

He grinned, eyes sparkling with humour and mischief, and watched his brother smile knowingly in return.

“So, Thor,” he said then, because this was supposed to be fun, god dammit. “Have you ever been pleasured under the table of an Indonesian restaurant?” he said, as he bent to one side, to take one boot off.

Thor watched his movements with some alarm and went a little pale, and then a lot pink. He gulped.

“No.”

“Would you like to?” purred Loki, rubbing his foot up Thor’s leg.
“Probably, but that doesn’t mean…” (Loki’s foot was climbing.) “Oh fu-…” (Loki had made port.) “Oh, …Ok.” Thor swallowed again, and Loki shifted his foot. “Easy there…” Loki pressed down when he felt the growing hardness. Thor gasped, squirming in his chair. Rub rub rub. His eyes flickered. “Fuck…”

He was expecting at any second to see that expression on Thor’s face, the “have you gone completely mad?” look of horror he used to get from Thor all the time back in the day, which he hated with a vengeance. Instead, he was getting glazed eyes, a parted mouth, fluttering eyelids whenever he shifted his foot, some heavy breathing, and Thor’s cock getting harder and harder under his ministrations.

“Aren’t you going to stop me?” said Loki, mellifluous.

Thor shook his head and licked his dry lips. Loki bit his. This was so fucking beautiful. He was passed the butterflies under navel stage, beyond the delightful tickles in the groin, and straight to raging boner himself. He stroked his straining crotch, and Thor's face when he saw it, damn.

“Are you having any pudding? Say no” said Loki, grinding his foot, stroking, stroking.

Thor chuckled at the odd phrasing.

“Why not?”

“I fancy some ice cream. I have some at home.”

Thor was panting slightly, that flush in his neck.

“Yeah?” A gasp. “I’m sure they have ice cream here.”

“Yes, but I don’t want it on a plate,” smirked Loki, push and rub.

Thor gaped and stared and could not speak for the images that had just put in his fertile imagination. He was so fucking suggestible, seriously, even talking about wall paint could get him going, if the tone was right.

“I’ll get the check,” Thor said, deliciously husky and choked up.

They walked back. It was not far. Fresh air and a bit of exercise to help the dinner down, among other things. They were carrying a few tubs with the food they had not been able to finish.

“Do you know what this reminds me of?” said Thor, nudging him with an elbow.

Loki grinned. He was thinking the same thing.

“Do you ever think about that night?” Thor asked.

Loki took a nervous minute to consider his answer.

“More than I used to,” he said.

He deliberated a bit longer. If he said what was on his mind, would he come across as the sentimental fool he was? Oh, fuck it, Thor was a sentimental fool himself anyway.

“You know when in the movies they’re talking about one afternoon 30 years ago and they say ‘I
remember you wore blue’?…” he mused. Thor nodded. Loki took a little breath, and went for it. “You were wearing that old tight red t-shirt that was hanging by a thread, and dark blue jeans, very snug, and those stupid sneakers with fluorescent stripes, and that black hoodie with a… what the fuck was that, a surfer skull?”

Thor’s smile was illuminating the street. He looked a bit giddy. Loki felt smug.

“And the Germans wore grey,” Thor said. He kept his eyes low and a tiny grin on his face. “You wore tight black jeans and one of your ballet tops” he said then.

Loki looked at him, in awe. He felt wobbly inside. So he deflected.

“That’s what I always wore,” he said. “I knew it did things to you.”

Thor laughed.

“Bloody right it did.”

They walked some more.

“Is that what you did? Trying to, er, entice me?” asked Thor.

“All the fucking time. Don’t tell me you didn’t know.”

Thor smirked.

“I knew you liked to tease me,” he said. "I just wasn’t sure you knew what you were doing. I mean, how it would come across. I really did not know how much you knew about... you know, sex and all that.”

“Yes, because I was a blushing virgin.” Loki elbowed him in the gut.

“You were. Literally. I remember you…” Thor cut himself off.

"...Yes?” urged Loki.

"I remember you. That night. Your face. When you..." Thor grinned, colour on his cheeks. "It was the sexiest thing I had ever seen in my whole life. Nothing virginal about you at all then." He harrumphed. "It still does things to me, when I think about it.”

Loki flustered, quite badly, a swarm of bees under his skin.

A few more steps.

“I’m sorry about… what came after,” said Thor then, his voice smaller. “I really wasn’t feeling... you know, disgusted or anything. I just... I was so fucking scared.”

Loki took a second. He didn’t want to think about that part.

“I know,” he said.

“You must have been so frightened too, and I-…”

“It doesn’t matter, Thor,” he cut him.

His brother insisted.
“I really didn’t know how-…”

“Thor,” he stopped him in his tracks and forced him to look him in the eyes, “you don’t have to apologise for every single fuck up in our lives, ok? You were a kid. Forget it.”

Thor’s expression was full of regret. Loki didn’t fucking want that. He wanted to bark something at him, shake him out of it. That’s not what Sigyn would do. That’s not what mum would do. He hesitated, because he was not fucking used to this, and he was probably not great at it, but in the end he got over himself and just hugged him. Thor hugged back, tight. It felt good, like it was doing something.

“I am so very fucking sorry, baby,” murmured Thor.

It would seem Loki wasn’t the only one with a shedload of serious on his back that would take some work, and some time, to deal with. Loki hushed him, checked the street again, and put a quick kiss on the corner of his lips.

“Enough,” he muttered, with a little grin. Seeing it seemed to lighten Thor’s burden.

For a second, they even risked holding hands. Loki put an end to that by lighting a fag. He didn’t want their first date on the cover of Hello magazine.

“So, here we are,” said Loki, by the little metal gate of his front yard. His flat was on the second floor.

“Here we are,” repeated Thor, looking up to the darkened window.

They stood there for a moment, like a couple of idiots.

“Hm, I’ve had a lovely evening. Let’s do this again some time,” teased Loki.

Thor gave him a half smile, eyes full of humour, so bloody beautiful.

“Wanna come in?” said Loki. “For… coffee?”

“Bit late for coffee, isn’t it?” said Thor, kidding too.

Massive eye roll from Loki.

“So come in for cheese and crackers, I don’t care.”

Thor grinned some more.

“Somebody said something about ice cream?” he said then.

Loki smirked, with a generous pinch of mischief.

“Let’s see what I can do.”

He let them both into the hallway. Thor probably thought he hadn’t, but Loki had noticed him check the empty street for prying eyes before he followed him in.
“Where’s Sigyn?” asked Thor, handing his coat over when Loki asked for it.

“At her mum’s, with the dog."

“Were you feeling lucky tonight, then?” winked Thor.

“Better safe than earplugs, is what she always says.”

Thor laughed.

Loki hung the coats and took a breath, facing away from Thor. He was trembling, his heart beating hard. When he turned around, he saw his brother staring point blank at him, warm, and piercing, and thoughtful.

Thor took a step towards him. Loki’s stomach took a plunge.

“Do you want that ice cream now?” said Loki, abruptly.

Thor stopped cold, with a little frown of puzzlement.

“Er… do you?” he asked.

“Not really” answered Loki, wanting to kick himself. Why was he so fucking nervous again?

Awkward silence. Thor had his hands in his pockets, and looked at ease.

“You know what we’ve never done together?” said Thor then.

"I can think of a million things off the top of my head,” said Loki, with a tiny grin.

Thor smiled.

“We’ve never danced,” he said, offering his hand.

Loki stared at it, frozen again. Thor didn’t wait. He stole his brother’s hand and dragged him to the centre of the room, and then pulled him close. He guided Loki’s hands, one on Thor’s shoulder, the other one trapped against Thor’s chest. So Loki was the girl then. Typical. Jesus, his heart was pounding so fucking hard they could probably dance to it, though it wouldn’t be a slow one.

“I wanted to be a ballet dancer,” babbled Loki, “I couldn’t risk your big clumsy feet disabling me for life.” Jabber jabber jabber. He couldn’t shut up.

“What about now?” mumbled Thor, sounding a lot more self-possessed, stroking one big thumb on Loki’s hand, trapped against his chest, one arm around Loki’s waist, solid as a continent.

“I’ve changed careers,” muttered Loki, a thread of voice.

“So you can risk it,” said Thor, close to his ear. Loki’s lids fluttered in response to the shiver that trickled down his back.

“I guess,” is all he managed.

Thor held him tight, close to him, and started swaying.

“There’s no fucking music, Thor,” murmured Loki. Even his snark sounded shaky.

“Isn’t there? I can hear it…” whispered his brother right by the shell of his ear.
“You sappy idiot,” grumbled Loki, without heat.

Thor hummed.

“Someday, when I’m awfully low, and the world is cold…”

Loki went rigid, his throat choking up. Thor held him tighter, his big hand rubbing Loki’s back gently.

“I will feel aglow just thinking of you and the way you look tonight…”

Loki’s eyes welled up. He was crumbling. He clung onto Thor’s neck. His brother kept humming, without words now. They swayed together, slowly. Of all the daydreams and fantasies Loki had nursed as a kid involving his brother and an impossible future happiness together, he had never even dared to imagine this. He rested his head on Thor’s shoulder, breathing him in. He tried to become aware of everything, to feel everything, to let nothing go amiss.

They had all night for this, all night. There would be no need to sneak back to their separate rooms at midnight. No need to keep an ear out for an unexpected arrival out of schedule. And no need to bite the sheets to keep it quiet.

Loki reared his head and kissed Thor, a slow kiss, long strokes of their lips, gentle tongues, Thor crushing their bodies together with that strong arm around Loki’s waist. No rush, no fear, no shame.

Thor broke the kiss to breathe, their foreheads touching.

“Ah, baby…” sighed Thor, as a man who had long been outside in the cold and had just been allowed to come in and sit by the fire, holding his hands up to the warmth.

He cradled Thor’s face to kiss him again, deeper and harder this time. Thor’s eyes were shut, his forehead scrunched as if in pain, his expression intense. Loki pushed the hair out of his face to kiss the frown away. Thor was crushing him so hard in his arms. He kissed his neck, open mouth, a good suck that would bruise, and felt Thor tremble. His ear next, and there was a moan.

The arm around Loki’s waist had gone. Thor started to tug at Loki’s shirt to untuck it, sending the butterflies in Loki’s underbelly barking mad. Loki watched Thor’s face as he undid the buttons of his baby brother’s shirt, the raw hunger in it, the urgency in his gestures, how his eyes widened as he revealed Loki’s skin underneath. He sought Thor’s mouth with his as his brother peeled the shirt off his arms and let it fall down. Then his mouth on Loki’s neck, the scruff bristling the delicate skin there, making him shudder and suck a sharp breath between his teeth.

When his arms were free, Loki threw them around his brother’s neck once more. Thor’s hands were feeling his arse, crushing their groins together. They were both getting harder by the minute. And Thor was still dancing with him to whatever tune was in his head. That made Loki smile. If he wanted to dance, they would dance. He spun in Thor’s arms, giving him his back, and got close. He pushed and rubbed his arse against Thor’s crotch, and heard him groan, strong hands on Loki’s hips, gripping firmly. Loki arched his back to grind harder, and Thor stroked up with his hardness. Loki’s pulse had gone kabooie now, and heavy breathing had become full-on panting. Thor’s hands down his body, anchoring on his crotch, palmimg his erection, unbuttoning him. Loki rubbing, rubbing. Thor’s hand sliding inside his pants, closing his dry, bare hand around Loki’s cock, his mouth on Loki’s neck, his stubble there, his lips, scrape of teeth.

Thor slid Loki’s trousers over his hips and dragged them down his legs, his mouth traveling the
length of Loki’s spine as he kneeled. Loki let Thor help him out of his boots and stepped out of the clothes pooling around his ankles. He was completely naked, Thor was completely dressed. Thor spun him around with big strong hands, Loki’s hard-on level with his lips.

How did people go about their lives without this, and what was the fucking point of them anyway, if they never got Thor Odinson on his knees in front of them, pleasuring them with his mouth. It was the sexiest, most sinful thing he had ever seen, and he had seen some stuff. Loki looked down, jaw unhinged, brow knitted, eyes wide, as his brother licked and sucked the living daylights out of him with lewd delight. That expression on Thor’s face was simply not bloody decent.

Loki’s legs struggled to sustain him. He raked his fingers in Thor’s hair and on his shoulders. His brother held his arse tight, encouraging his movements, and Loki gently fucked his mouth, trembling, with sharp, shuddery breaths and desperate whimpers.

“I’m going to come,” he muttered, breathily, pushing him off.

My god, Thor’s mouth, puffy and pink and ravished, sweet baby Jesus on a surf board. He stood up, wiping his lips.

“What do you want,” whispered Thor, hugging him and kissing him again.

“You know what I want,” replied Loki against his mouth, in a low rumble, his bare skin against Thor's clothes, the soft, sensitive flesh of his cock crushed against the tough crotch seam of his brother’s jeans.

“Tell me,” Thor dared him, kissing, licking.

Loki bit his earlobe.

“I want your cock,” he whispered, letting the words fill his mouth, feeling Thor's shiver. “I want you to fuck me.”

Thor bent over and lifted him on his fucking shoulder. All Loki had to say to that was “Hmph!”

“The bedroom was over there, if I remember it correctly,” said Thor, making his way.

He dumped him on the bed and left him sprawling, cock jutting up, throbbing; apparently it had enjoyed the manhandling very, very much, perhaps more than Loki himself.

Thor started on his own clothes, big hands, clumsy with haste around the tiny buttons. Loki propped himself on his elbows to have a better view, biting his lip in anticipation. Thor undressed without fussing, concentrated on shedding his clothes as quickly as he possibly could. The fact that he was so eager to get naked and inside him was hotter to Loki than the most tortuous strip-tease he could ever attempt.

Thor had to sit down to kick off his boots, and Loki took in that back, with a sigh of sheer lust. He had no idea, did he? Thor. He lived inside that body, and he only knew that it did things to people because he saw it happen, but he probably didn’t have a fucking clue what it really was to be around his naked glory like that.

Doesn’t mean he didn’t enjoy it when he noticed the effect it caused. He had caught Loki all but ogling, and he was smirking with a smugness that had to go, because there was cocky sexy and then there was that. Loki pillowed him on the face. Thor laughed, launched himself on top of Loki, took the pillow off his hands, and pinned Loki’s wrists over his head.
“Fuck, yes,” hissed Loki. His cock tugged, trapped between his body and his brother’s. He wrapped his legs around Thor’s, grinding.

Thor was serious all of a sudden, his expression adoring, transported. He leaned over to kiss him, with reverence. None of that. Loki bit down, not too hard, but enough that Thor gasped and tightened the grip on his wrists.

“You little…” Thor held his chin tight with one strong hand and kissed him again, with hunger this time, wetly, roughly. His hands free, Loki raked his fingers down that impossible back, with a groan of delight. He tried to reach blindly into the drawer in the bedside table.

Thor helped. He went to coat his fingers with lube.

"I'm already open, Thor," he murmured, kissing him. "I'm good."

Thor was disconcerted. Loki rolled his eyes to the heavens.

"I was horny, impatient, and have a house full of toys,” he explained curtly.

Thor smirked, and he flustered, possibly with a picture in his mind, or several. He sat on his heels between Loki’s knees and slicked himself up. Loki watched the operation with bated breath and a hard bite on his lip, which only got sharper and sharper, as his brother kept stroking himself, obviously just to torment him.

“Shall I leave you two alone or what?” he snapped.

Thor grinned in smug silence some more, and positioned himself between his brother’s thighs. Loki wrapped his legs around Thor’s waist, his heart pounding, anticipating, eyes on his brother’s cock.

“Look at me,” said Thor, a husky murmur.

“Oh, I am,” said Loki, but he did look up, and his eyes remained locked on Thor’s (he couldn’t tear them away if he tried, damn) when his brother took himself in hand and started pushing in. Thor’s eyes fluttered, but remain fixed. Loki hissed when he was breached, and whimpered when Thor kept fucking in. Thor’s groan when he was fully sheathed, his breathing. He looked overwhelmed. Loki couldn’t fucking handle it.

And just when he was about to make some sarcastic remark or another about what having only girlfriends for years had done to his brother’s bed skills, Thor pulled out, blazing eyes spearing his, and slammed in, pushing the air out of Loki’s lungs. Loki’s mouth fell open, as Thor started slamming against him again and again, propped on his arms, Loki dipping his eyes to the place where their bodies connected, to the rippling muscles on his brother’s stomach.

They were quiet, just their breathing, the wet slick of their fucking, the bed starting to creak. Loki was lifting his hips to meet his brother’s thrusts, each impact reverberating up his spine.

Soon enough, just as Loki had expected, Thor stopped, chest heaving, and pulled out. Loki knew what that meant, and didn’t hesitate. He rolled over and got on his hands and knees, panting with anticipation when he felt Thor taking position behind his back. One big hand raked down Loki’s back, and he arched under it, with a strangled whimper. His cock was leaking and throbbing. Come on, dammit. The cold tip of Thor’s cock just nudging into him, teasing. He wanted to groan in frustration. Instead, he pushed back and took him in. Thor gasped, strong fingers digging into Loki’s hips. He pulled out completely, and hammered right in. And again, and again. He picked up the pace, slow and hard still, until Loki had to brace himself on the headboard. Oh his fucking god, he had fucking missed this.
Again, the noises of their fucking were all there was. They were quiet, gasping and hissing and panting and huffing, and no moaning.

“I want to hear you,” said Thor then, fucking vigorously. He rolled his hips, aiming for it, and grazing it. “Let me hear you,” insisted Thor.

Loki bit his lip harder, just to be contrary.

“Make me,” he panted.

One big hand on Loki’s hair, digging into his scalp, the way he knew it drove Loki wild. Good move. Thor pushed Loki down on the bed roughly, Loki’s chest on the mattress now, butt up in the air, and picked up the pace.

“Fuck...” gasped Loki between gritted teeth, clenching his jaw hard.

“What was that,” panted Thor, speeding up, going at it like a man possessed.

“I s-said... ah, fuuuuck...” That was it. That was the fucking he had yearned for all these bloody years. “Oh god, Thor...” And he was moaning now, inarticulate, undone by Thor’s fucking.

“Yes, fuck,” huffed Thor. “Let me hear you, baby...”

And Loki was now cream. Fuck playing games and fuck holding back. He moaned like that fucking deserved, like his body was aching to do.

He was lost in it. He had thought he would put on a bit of a show for Thor, eye-fucking, vocalics, dirty talking, the works, but all he could do right now is let himself be torn apart and remade again in every single fucking thrust.

When Thor stopped and pulled out again, Loki turned his head, and caught that little gesture of Thor’s head. He didn’t need more. He laid on his back again, as Thor pushed his knees up and apart. His brother entered him slowly this time, eyes on his, rolling his hips, trying to drag it out. He was a vision like that, gleaming with sweat, all his muscles tense and bulging.

Loki knew he was close. It wouldn’t be long now. He reached for Thor’s face, a thumb on Thor’s lips, on the sweat-pearled brow. Thor was frowning, his jaw clenching, as if he was in pain. He stared at Loki with an expression that broke through him and left nothing standing or unturned inside. He bent Loki double to kiss him.

With their eyes locked again, Thor dipped his chin once. A breathy “yeah?”, and Loki nodded back, holding his knees up. Thor propped himself on his arms, and started fucking harder and faster again, husky moans, desperate breathing, so fucking beautiful. Another look and another nod from Thor, and Loki started touching himself. Thor watched, from Loki’s cock to Loki’s face, reading in his sounds, his expressions and his movements his progress to climax. A long groan when Thor almost matched the pace of Loki’s hand. Loki went still and squeezed, letting his brother’s cock carry him the last stretch. Thor slammed into him hard and fast again, panting anxiously, and Loki’s name fell off his mouth as Loki came, hissing, a low groan.

Loki stroked himself leisurely now, squeezing the last drops, his brother’s eyes burning him. And then Thor kissed him again, deep and rough, and went for it, just for himself now.

Loki was watching him, his face. He loved this part, he always had. The first times they fucked, when he had felt basically discomfort, or a weird fullness, and not very much at all that was pleasurable, seeing his brother falling apart inside him had been worth every pinch and every stretch.
Once Loki started to like, really like, being fucked, Thor would make him come first if he could, and then Loki was able to lie there (or bounce there) and feel all of Thor, his lust, the sounds of his pleasure, seeking his orgasm in Loki’s body, and Loki fucking loved to be in full possession of himself as he did.

Like now. Thor’s face. His brow pinched, his mouth unhinged another bit, the husky, raspy moans, his eyes shut tight, fucking faster, faster. Loki clenched, and Thor jolted sharply, suddenly, gritting his teeth, groaning, another sharp thrust, another, and he was still, panting, sweat on his brow, his breathing heavy and rushed as he crumbled slowly, so wonderfully heavy, on Loki’s chest.

Loki wrapped his arms around him, crushing tight. After a moment, Thor shifted so that Loki could unfold himself, but stayed on top of him, heaving, panting. Loki wrapped his legs around him too.

After some time, Loki grumbled and wiggled.

"I can't breathe, Thor."

Thor chuckled, and sighed, and dragged himself off and onto the mattress.

They stayed like that, side by side, sprawled on the covers, breathing hard, no words. Thor turned his face to him, and even with his eyes focused on the ceiling, Loki could see his smile. He smiled as well, and now Thor’s teeth were flashing. Loki shook his head.

“So you’re still the same snarky little shit in bed, then,” said Thor, beautifully smug. “And I can still get you to shut up.”

Loki was too well-fucked to argue. He exhaled a deep sigh. When his brother held his hand, he gripped tight.

Chapter End Notes

Refs to Casablanca, points to you if you spot it.

Refs to chapter 2, points OFF if you DON'T spot it. Pay attention, dammit!
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Making up for all the lost time... And they have a LOT of lost time to make up for.
Good job they're both young and fit.

Having said that, relationships are never easy. Talking helps, but there is no such thing as miracles...

Chapter Notes

How much smut is too much smut? Hey, I've been waiting for this for more than 100k words. Don't judge.

About the miracle of the multiplying chapters. Many moons ago, I worked out what was left of the plot and sorted it into chapters. But as I get closer to certain points in the story, I have found again and again that I want to spend more time on this and that, and ta-daaa!, one chapter becomes two, to allow for more focus and more space. (Do you mind? I'm going to miss them when it's finished, and there's no rush, is there?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(The past. Iceland.)

They stop their bikes when they hear splashing, hysterical laughter and high-pitched squealing and shrieking coming from behind the slope. They walk up to investigate. There is a lake, surrounded by a ring of ice, and people are diving into it.

“Insane,” says Thor, looking on. And he catches his brother’s impish grin with the tail of his eye. Uh-oh.

“I dare you to jump into that lake,” says Loki.

“…I knew this was coming,” grumbles Thor. They’ve been playing chicken for days. Among many other things, Loki likes to dare him into (increasingly outrageous) public displays of affection. Thor knows what he’s doing, and very, very happily plays along.

Loki smiles smugly.

“Will you or won’t you.”

“We’re going to catch our deaths” says Thor. Seriously? Frozen fucking water?
“Chicken,” says Loki.

It shouldn’t nettle Thor so much, should it? He’s not a baby. But still…

“Alright then” he says. “But if we catch pneumonia, I’m going to kill you. And then dad is going to kill me. And then mum is going to kill dad. Are you sure you’re ready for this bloodbath?”

“Just don’t fucking catch pneumonia,” shrugs Loki.

Thor assesses him head to toe. And starts getting rid of his anorak.

“Last one sucks dad’s Golden Bollocks!” he shouts as he runs. They would never tire of mocking the pair of Golden Globes Odin won last year.

It has taken them quite a while to stop shivering. At least they have the fire-lighting business down to a T. They have unzipped the old-fashioned sleeping bags a sound tech in dad’s movie crew has lent them, zipped them together, and now they're snuggled up skin to skin in its soft, fluffy embrace, exchanging body heat. It’s cozy. Thor has enjoyed vigorously rubbing Loki’s blueish skin way past white and straight to pink. Loki was whining.

“It fucking itches!”

“You kiss your mother with that mouth?” kidded Thor.

Now Loki is sitting between his legs and leaning back against his chest, Thor’s arms around him. Thor is going to start getting hard any minute now, he knows himself. I mean, his arse is just fucking there. He’s not made of stone. He kisses Loki’s neck. Loki tilts his head to the side.

“My turn,” mumbles Thor, nuzzling his scruff against the delicate skin of his brother’s throat. “I dare you to say ‘I love you Thor’.”

Loki snorts.

“Say it,” insists Thor.

“No.”

“Chicken.”

“Whatever.”

Thor nuzzles into his ear. Loki shudders, goosebumps all over his neck and arms. He had not thought it would be easy. He’ll persist.

“Say it.”

“No.” Loki pushes him off and slithers out of the sleeping bag. He sits on the mat and covers up with Thor’s anorak, his hands open to the fire.

Thor huffs unhappily.

“Why not” he says.
“Because.”

“Hm, really mature.” Loki can be stubborn. He can be stubborn-er. “Say it.”

“Why?”

“Because… because I want to hear it.”

“Then say it yourself.”

Thor smirks.

“Ok. I love you.”

Loki rolls his eyes.

“No, it was ‘I lo-…””

Thor’s smile is broad and white now. He almost caught him then. Loki shakes his head in dismay.

Thor looks at his brother’s green eyes glinting with the tiny flames. It’s gone past getting his own way now, and Loki knows it too.

“Say it. Tell me. …Please.”

Loki exhales a resounding, exasperated sigh.

“Why?”

“Because… because I want to hear you say it, alright? Just once.”

“And whatever Thor wants Thor gets, isn’t it?”

“…It’s not that” protests Thor. Don’t change the subject, brother. “Why won’t you say it?”

“Because… Because you know it already. What’s the point in me saying it? It won’t make it more real whether I say it or not.”

Loki is blushing faintly and it brings a smile to his brother’s lips. Nonetheless…

“I’d still like to hear it. It would make me feel good. Don’t you want to make me feel good?”

“I don’t need to parrot empty words to make you feel good, do I?” And he throws him a stare from under his eyelashes that leaves no doubt as to what he’s referring to.

But Thor is not in a flirting mood right now.

“…They’re not empty,” he argues, hurt.

“Everybody is saying it all the time about every fucking thing. It’s worn out. It doesn’t mean anything.”

“…It does when I say it to you. Doesn’t it? Or are they empty words then, too” says Thor. He knows that’s not what Loki meant, but he’s not above playing dirty.

Loki must know he’s stuck his foot in it, his expression between resentful and guilty. He set his own trap and fell in it.
"Are they?" insists Thor, because damned if he is going to let him get away with it.

Loki looks away and mumbles something that features somewhere a reluctant "no".

"…Then tell me," says Thor, tireless.

Loki takes another noisy, irritated breath. He gets up, loses the anorak, gives Thor a shove so that he can slide inside the sleeping bag with him again, and straddles his lap. He plants a long, hot kiss on Thor’s lips and starts stroking his cock, which rises to attention immediately. They fall back, with Loki on top, kissing him all over.

"Tell me…” begs Thor.

"I am telling you," murmurs Loki.

"…It’s not the same thing," says Thor, as his brother coats his own arse with the lube he always keeps magically handy. It’s a vision that always makes Thor double up with a sudden stab of blood in his groin.

Loki kisses him again, quite the expert now, nibbling at his bottom lip, pushing his tongue in.

"Tell me," says Thor against his mouth.

"I want you…” says Loki hands around Thor’s neck, rolling them over, pulling his brother over him.

"Loki…” Thor nuzzles into his neck as his brother slicks him up.

"Fuck me…”

"Baby… Tell me…”

Loki spreads his legs and wraps them around Thor. Thor’s cock slides in easily.

"Oh fuck…” Loki rises his hips to meet his brother’s first thrust. Thor groans when he feels fully sheathed, and starts moving straight away, since Loki is not wasting any time. He loves to hear their breathing become heavier and heated. He loves it when Loki’s panting starts to flesh out with his moans. But if Loki thinks Thor will forget, he’s very wrong.

"Loki, please… Tell me…”

"God, fuck, yes…” Loki fucks up faster. “Harder, harder…”

Thor couldn’t bloody stop himself if he tried.

"I love you, baby…” He huffs and pants. “Say you love me…”

Loki is biting his bottom lip hard, and maybe Thor is breaking his resolve.

"Loki… brother…” He fucks fast now. Loki has stopped moving, he can’t keep up with Thor’s pace in this position. He’s lying there, gripping the sleeping bag, and taking it, moaning like he’s falling apart. Thor is about to come, and Loki must feel it, because he starts jacking off, quick and desperate, his moans higher-pitched now.

"Oh god, oh fuck, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! Oh, fuuuuck… brother…!"

Thor explodes inside him and Loki follows right after, with Thor’s last jolts. Loki looks debauched
and glowing, his tongue peeking out to lick his lips, teasing his brother in the process.

“Say it,” pants Thor.

Loki grins his wicked grin, his eyes drowsy, a blissful expression of content, and says nothing. Thor did not break him.

“Chicken,” says Thor, and he crumbles on top him.

(The present. Loki’s flat in London.)

Loki slept. Such a simple thing. He slept, his chest rising and falling, his face softened, at ease. The light outside was brightening, fading into white. It touched Loki’s skin with a tinge of blue. He would fidget every now and again, a line might disturb his brow, his lip might tense, but otherwise he seemed so peaceful, so content. He looked like a little boy.

He had changed. He used to be so skinny, Thor could always see the ribcage through the skin when he was lying on his back like that. He had put on muscle, but he was still lean, still lithe, so graceful and slender. Thor had enjoyed some damn fine specimens in his time, but Loki… It wasn’t just that he was beautiful, it was the way he moved, and the way he stood still, his elegance, his poise, his majestic arrogance. He was a prince, always had been, always carried himself as one, with a haughtiness that would have been hateful and unbearable in anyone else, while in Loki was irresistible. Especially because Thor knew His Royal Highness here became the sluttiest, most wanton, most lascivious creature when he found himself in the throes of passion, not one ounce of pride or aristocratic detachment to be seen then. In bed (or in any other setting he chose, and he loved variety), he was shameless, lewd, insatiable and oh so demanding. He was like nothing and no-one else Thor had ever known. And he had him back.

Loki felt remote and unattainable in his sleep. Perhaps it was this lonely hour, with its eerie light, but Thor was really yearning to shake him awake, to drag him over here, with him, right now.

He would end up doing something silly, and he knew very well what Loki was when he had not had enough sleep, and they had had a late enough night as it was. Thor was hoping for a pleasant, mostly uneventful Saturday at home, so he whispered his love right against Loki’s skin, brushed the lightest kiss there, and got out of bed.

In the bathroom he found a robe big enough to be Loki’s. It was tight around the arms and shoulders, but it would do. He got the kettle going and took a second to pick up Loki’s clothes from the floor where they had dropped them the night before, and drape them over the back of a chair. It brought a smile to his lips. Loki. How he had clung to him when they danced. Even with all the hugs they had shared these last few weeks -both the ones for the cameras and the ones for them alone-, having him
like that had been like nothing he remembered. It was quite overwhelming, after all they had already shared, that touching him could feel so new. Like when they were fucking. They had fallen in step with each other so effortlessly, reading and anticipating each other's intentions and desires like bloody Fred and Ginger. But they had been still a couple of kids the last time they had been together, with limited experience and a lot to learn. Well, they were not kids anymore, were they? Loki was a man... His body was new, and what that body had learned in the years since they had last fucked turned all their old routines into untried, unknown territories (and Thor's heart started to beat faster, just with the thought that yesterday night had been but a preview of what their sex life was going to be. Jesus fuck.) He would need to wrap his head around that thought. He was home, and it felt like home, but it was a new place, one he both remembered and did not know yet. He had him back, but he also had to learn him again. And it was exciting.

He plopped on the settee with his tea, smiling when he brought the cup to his lips and he found the smell of Loki still on his hands. Highlights of the previous night started rolling and tumbling happily in his mind. The impact of Loki’s love confession was still rippling through him, shaking him deep. He had never thought he’d hear a thing like that out of that snarky, caustic mouth. It was hard proof, if you will, of how much things had changed. How much they had changed. But they still slotted into each other like two halves of the same thing. It was a fucking miracle. True, you could still see the seam, and perhaps it was for the best, if it reminded them of how it had felt to be apart.

As disquieting as it was, Thor knew it was time to sit down and formulate a plan of action, because there were complicated times ahead. He had avoided it until now because he didn’t want to jinx their date, and because it wasn’t fun to think about, but there was no excuse anymore.

He wished he could put it back. All it got him was a headache, and some fucking heartburn. All he knew is that he wanted to get a flat in London and be close to Loki. Anything beyond that was a can of worms he wished it could remain shut tight for a bit longer. Because if he moved to London, he would have his mates around often. He hoped so, anyway. But that meant they would have to meet Loki. Which was great, on the one hand, and he could not wait, but on the other hand… What was he going to tell them about him? Would he lie, or would he come out? Right now, both options put an unpleasant tumble in his stomach. Because, if he could not tell them that, his best friends in the world, what the fuck did he have friends for? Then again, one simply does not know how anyone will react to a confession of this nature. Not everybody had the same attitude to taboo sex and unorthodox relationships (is that what kids are calling it nowadays, Odinson?) as Tony Stark.

Christmas was looming. He was going to have to see Odin soon enough, wasn’t he? More lying. Jesus, if they went down the baker's for croissants together they would have to pretend and hide and lie. Thor exhaled, slowly and noisily, and told himself to turn his mind to nicer, sweeter things, to the reason he was doing all of this. To Loki.

His brother had made him ice cream. After they had fucked for the first time last night, Thor had returned from the bathroom to find his brother by the open window, stark bollock naked, holding two unmarked plastic tubs in his hands.

“Do you want that ice cream now?” Loki had asked, with an anxiousness Thor could not understand at first. “Peanut butter or chocolate chips? Or both?”

Thor’s favourites as a child. He rushed to close the window, because Loki naked in the icy night December breeze awoke not just the big brother in him, but the bloody doting grandma too. Once that was done, he could not hold the smile back.

“You made me ice cream?” he said.

Loki had rolled his eyes, dismissive.
“I only chucked the stuff in, Sigyn's machine did it all.”

Thor got between his open arms and kissed him. Oh, no you don’t, baby boy, you’re not getting away that easily. He whispered in his ear.

“You remembered my favourites, you looked up a recipe, went out to get the ingredients, prepared them, put them in there until it looked good enough, and remembered to leave it on the window sill, instead of the freezer, so that it would be ready for me when I felt like it.” Another strong, long kiss. “Thank you, baby.” The ice cream had not been the only thing melting.

They had fed each other from the tub for some time, and there had been some food play, and Thor’s chest was still sticky from it (the rest had been licked clean a lot more thoroughly), but they had put the ice cream aside quickly enough and got on with what they were really hungry for. It had been fun, a bit strange, Loki’s tongue and breath so cool in very responsive corners of Thor’s squirming, writhing body.

The second time they had fucked Loki was tender, so Thor had taken it slowly. When they had been on their sides, he had watched Loki’s face, half turned to him, his eyes shut, mouth parted, a slight frown. Thor had wandered what had he ever seen in anyone else, and how in the world had he ever thought that he would find another. They were spooning soon after that, when Thor had started to get hard again. Loki had told him to give it a fucking rest already, but then he had started to tease him, wiggling and grinding. He had relented to a mutual hand job after the tiniest bit of coaxing, and a lot of Thor’s tongue in his ear and his lips on his neck. Thor had wrapped himself around his brother like an octopus after that, and Loki had allowed it, for a while.

Thor was floating. Whatever he had to do, it would be worth it, wouldn’t it? He had him back.

He had promised himself he would let Loki rest, but after 2 hours playing on his phone, nosing around the flat and browsing Loki’s library, he had had enough. He got into the bed with his brother and rubbed his nose against the nape of his neck. Loki groaned and mumbled “too early”, but when Thor started groping his arse, he threw his head back for a sleepy kiss.

“Morning,” said Thor, when Loki’s eyes slit open. “What do you want to do today?”

“This is just fine,” said Loki, voice still hoarse from sleep.

“I can do better,” muttered Thor, kissing down his chest, disappearing under the bedcover.

Loki took his coffee with lots of milk and no sugar now. It used to be black with a ton of sugar. Why Thor thought of that, and what he made of it, he couldn’t say.

Loki was still glowing from his orgasm as he ate his toast.

“Let’s go to the shops for blueberries and syrup later,” said Loki. “Let’s make pancakes tomorrow.”
Thor smiled, realising he was looking like a loved-up idiot.

“As you wish,” he said.

Loki kicked him under the table, but he was grinning.

Freshly showered, hair fluffy (blow-dried because Loki said they would catch a cold), they got ready to go to the shops. Loki lent Thor a t-shirt “because my oaf of a brother came to spend the fucking weekend and didn’t bring a fucking change of clothes,” he had grumbled. Thor had opened his mouth to explain.

“Yes, yes, you didn’t want to jinx it, I know,” said Loki, with an overdone tone of impatience.

Thor asked Loki to wear his leather and fur coat.

“It’s quite eye-catching,” argued Loki. “People tends to notice me in it.”

“I bet they notice you anyway,” said Thor, enjoying the view of his brother in his leather trousers, chunky boots and thick black jumper.

Loki rolled his eyes and turned his head away. He was never one to take a compliment nicely.

Later, when Thor caught the sight of them both on a shop window, he thought they made a very striking couple. A couple, he repeated to himself, and he ached to hold his brother’s hand. He brushed it a couple of times, and Loki gave him a small, kind, cheerless smile, as if he had read his mind.

Rather than come straight back home, they took a detour across the park. They were strolling quietly, the cold doing wonderful things to Loki’s face. Thor couldn’t keep his eyes off him for very long. His eyes sparkled and his mouth was pursed to reign in a smile, Thor's attention making him fluster. Thor was desperate to kiss him.

“I’m going to go see dad one of the days,” said Thor at one point, walking between the plane trees growing on either side of the broad path, under a canopy of bare branches entwined over their heads.

“…Ok,” said Loki, after a spell.

“Do you want to-…?”

“No,” cut Loki, abruptly.

“…Ok,” said Thor. “But is it alright if I go?”

“I don’t mind,” said Loki, with a shrug, hands deep inside his pockets.

A few yards in silence. Thor wasn’t sure this was the right time to talk about these things. But when was it? They had to get used to this, didn’t they? They could not just skirt around all the issues that were difficult for the rest of their lives. If Thor had learned one thing this last year, was that things usually got better between them when they threw them out in the open, even if it stung at first.

“Do you think you’ll ever want to see him again?” asked Thor, and he saw Loki’s shoulders tense up.
“…I don’t know,” said Loki, burrowing into the thick cowl neck of his jumper. And after some thought, he asked, “What will you tell him about me?”

“I’ll tell him that we’ve, uh, reconciled. That I’m spending Christmas with you.”

“Oh.”

Thor did not know what that meant. And Loki did not seem willing to expand.

“I thought we could go to Asgard,” Thor said. “We could head down on Monday. We’d be alone there, and out of Sigyn’s way. We could borrow the Jag and drive.”

“Hm,” hummed Loki.

Again, Thor did not know what he was supposed to make of that.

“Don’t you want to?” he asked.

“…I don’t know.”

“I’m kind of looking forwards to spending time there with you” said Thor, tentatively.

“Why.”

“Because it’s home.”

Loki ambled on, eyes lost in space, mind lost in thought.

“Because the last few years, the last few times I’ve been there…” added Thor, and stammered. “I want it to be a happy place again,” he said. “Make some new memories together, nice memories.”

“Hm.” Loki grinned mischievously. “We could make some very, very nice new memories in every room of the house. Is that what you had in mind.” He bumped into him with his shoulder.

“Not just that,” smiled Thor.

“I wouldn’t mind refreshing our memories from the tower,” purred Loki. “It’s been such a long time.”

Thor’s brain started to supply some of the old ones. He remembered his dad asking what did they do up there all the time. “Aren’t you too old to play knights and wizards?” he would say. Thor would flush blood red, and Loki would say, with a completely serious face, that Asgard brought up the little boy inside him. Odin knew he was taking the Mickey, he just couldn’t begin to imagine in what way. Or at least that’s what Thor was hoping, then and now.

“We could definitely improve on my memories from the studio,” mused Loki. And before Thor’s mind could venture too far into nostalgic, grief-stricken territories, Loki gave him a shove. “Those leather armchairs…”

Thor flustered just imagining it.

“The rug,” said Loki. “We could lit up a fire.”

That sounded very nice, actually.

“You could bend me over the desk,” suggested Loki, a hot whisper. “I’ll ride you on his chair.”
“God, Loki…” blushed Thor, his brain again helpfully supplying detailed illustrations.

“I’ll suck you against the awards wall,” murmured Loki. “Teabagging under the Golden Bollocks?” he wiggled his eyebrows.

Thor laughed.

“You’re wicked,” he said, grateful that he was wearing a three quarter length coat, blood already pooling south.

“You like me wicked,” said Loki, and winked.

“Fuck, yes. Yes, I do…” He sounded so hoarse, devouring his brother with his eyes.

“Oh my god, you’re Thor Odinson!” The squeaky, excited voice shook him out of his lurid thoughts. “And you’re Loki Laufeyson, oh my god!”

“Oh my god! Oh my god!”

It was two teenage girls already holding their phones in their hands. Thor noticed their thick, full school folders, plastered with poems, songs and photos with anything from Lou Reed to Start Trek to Thor himself, and Loki as Frank in The Rocky Horror.

“Hello, how are you,” said Thor, shaking hands with each in turn. Loki kept his distance until a tiny stare from Thor urged him to be nice too. Loki kissed the back of their hands and curtsied, sending the girls into a minute fit of hysterics. They nervously tucked and re-tucked their long, lanky hair behind their ears, expressing enthusiasm for their work, their eyes so bright, their excitement coming off in waves. They still had pimples.

“Can we have a photo?” they begged.

Thor indulged immediately, having to crouch down so that his face would be more or less level with theirs, while Loki took a whole step away.

“Rather not,” he said. “But you can have an autograph,” he offered. And they both signed the girls’ folders.

“Thank you so much. Thank you,” said the girls, melting into a puddle of bliss and radiating happiness.

“Our pleasure. Nice to meet you. Have a nice day,” said Thor, with his friendliest beam. They walked away; and smiled, but didn't turn their heads, when there was a muffled flurry of squees and ohmygodohmygodohmygod's at their backs.

Thor found himself a bit shaken then, wondering what they had heard, and how it had come across. He was aware that he had been giving Loki a very equivocal stare. Or not equivocal at all, depending on how you wanted to look at it. Calm the fuck down, Odinson, don't get paranoid.

“No photos?” Thor asked his brother after some time.

“I always look like FBI’s most wanted,” said Loki. “And my skin looks fucking fluorescent.”

Ah, vanity.

“You could try a smile,” said Thor, an elbow to Loki’s side.
Loki gave him his full, 32-piece, psychopathic crocodile smile, with big, bright, demented eyes.

“Ok, I see,” said Thor, with a laugh. And he saw Loki’s grin grow smaller, but truer, the glint in his eyes turn warm.

They walked some more in silence. They left the park behind and Thor let Loki lead the way down those streets he was not familiar with.

“So… do you think we’ll be going to Asgard for the holidays?” he asked. And after a harrumph, he carefully added, trying to sound light and casual, “I had even thought of having my mates from drama school over on New Year’s Eve. I haven’t seen them in a long time. And Sigyn too, of course, and Natasha and whoever else you want to ask.”

Loki said nothing to that, but his posture had stiffened again.

“They’re really nice guys, really good friends,” said Thor. “They were there for me when I was struggling at drama school and when mum died. I don’t know what I would have done without them. I miss them, and I’d like you to meet them. And them to meet you. They’re all theatre people, I bet they’re huge fans of yours already.”

Loki was still silent and tense.

“We don’t have to, though,” said Thor then, because his brother looked a bit green. “It was just an idea.”

“No, it’s… it’s ok,” said Loki. “Invite them. Only…”

“What?”

A tiny voice, “Are you going to tell them?”

“…About us?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know yet,” Thor confessed.

There was a passing frown on Loki’s brow.

”Loki…” began Thor, although he wasn’t sure what he wanted to say.

“It’s fine. I get it. It’s scary,” said Loki.

A few more steps in silence. Now Thor recognised the street.

“You know I’m not ashamed of this, don’t you? That I’m not ashamed of you,” he said.

“Hm-hm.”

“Hey, I’m not, I’m really not,” insisted Thor.

“I know, Thor,” sighed Loki, resigned. “We’re just… we’re protecting ourselves. I get it. I don’t need you to print t-shirts. I read the terms and conditions when I signed up for this.”

They were home. Loki let them in. The moment the door was shut, Thor held him in his arms for the long, messy kiss he had been holding back for the last hour. Loki took it with his eyes closed, and
kissed him back, but with little enthusiasm, his mind obviously elsewhere. When they parted, Loki’s eyes drifted away. They made up the narrow stairs in silence.

“Does it matter a lot to you?” asked Thor.

“What,” said Loki without stopping.

“Going public.”

“…No.” Loki kept climbing up.

Thor caught up with him when his brother was turning the key in the lock.

“It is what it is,” muttered Loki then, his eyes low. “I’m not deluding myself that we’re going to lead a normal life. That’s ok. I… I want to be with you. I know what is possible and what isn’t. I won’t hold it against you if you don’t want to tell your friends.”

He let them both into the flat.

Thor put down the groceries on the breakfast bar.

“Loki…” he said, with a sigh.

“Can we not talk about this anymore?” said Loki.

“…Ok.”

Loki started to put the shopping away.

“Fancy a movie?” he said when he was done, his tone artificially light.

They had changed into their scruffs and finished The Philadelphia Story, and were halfway through Empire Strikes Back, snuggled up on the settee with Loki’s legs over Thor’s lap, his head on the armrest, eating popcorn out of a big bowl on Loki’s stomach.

Thor had stopped paying attention to the screen for quite a while now, looking instead at his brother. He was stroking one lazy hand up and down Loki’s leg, from his ankle, over the shin and the bony knee, to the middle of his thigh, and back again, and back again.

Loki threw some popcorn to his head.

“What? Your legs are so fucking long…” said Thor.

“Did you just notice that?”

Hand up, hand down, hand up, hand down. They locked their eyes.

Hand up, up, and stopped.

Loki grabbed it and took it the rest of the way, snug and warm between his thighs.

Those lounge pants were less than nothing, Thor could feel him in high definition, the shape of his balls, the twitches of Loki’s cock getting hard. He palmed it, found the head and rubbed it with his thumb, watching Loki’s lids fluttering, his mouth falling open as he let out a little “ah”.
Thor’s heart was beating double time now. Loki raised one knee and started stroking his foot on Thor’s crotch. He was in borrowed scruffs, no more substantial than his brother’s, and that bit tighter on his bulkier rack. Loki’s foot was playing with fire on his sack. One false move, and Thor would be tearing up, and his mood would be spoiled for quite a while. Thor cupped Loki’s balls in his hand and rolled them. Loki swallowed, and whispered a little “hm.”

Suddenly, Loki sat up and crushed their mouths together, sticking his tongue deep inside, just as pushy and demanding as Loki himself was. Thor dragged him on top of his lap, and pulled him close to him with one hand to each buttock. Loki stripped him of his t-shirt. Thor slid his hands inside the waistband of Loki’s pants, reaching for his naked butt.

“Ah-ah,” said Loki, grabbing his wrists and shoving him away. He directed Thor’s arms to the top of the backrest. “I can touch you, but you can’t touch me,” he murmured close to his ear.

Thor threw his head back, with a groan of sheer, piercing desire.

Loki spun around on his lap and stood on his knees, giving Thor his back. He slowly lowered himself over Thor’s still clothed, raging erection, and stroked lightly, side to side, up and down, holding it in the cleft of his arse.

“Fuck,” grunted Thor. The touch was barely enough to cause anything but a painful strain. “Take your shirt off,” said Thor, breathy, wishing to see the muscles of Loki’s back rippling with that movement.

“Yes, sir,” whispered Loki, and obeyed.

That fucking word shot up pure boiling lava into Thor’s crotch.

Loki kept rubbing. Up, down, up, down.

“Stop teasing,” grunted Thor, positively on the edge of losing it now.

“Yes, sir,” said Loki, turning his head to eye him out of the tail of his eye. “How do you want me, sir?”

“Fuck,” grunted Thor again, breathing hard, husky. His brother’s neck tense from the twist, his back a white, smooth expanse he wanted to leave angry red traces on. His throat was parchment dry.

“How do you want me?” insisted Loki, rubbing, rubbing, turning Thor’s brain into fucking cream.

“Your mouth,” he huffed.

“Yes, sir.”

“Loki…” chuckled Thor, hoarsely.

Loki wasn’t laughing. He dismounted and slid down between Thor’s knees, with a white hot, burning stare that had Thor squirming, aching from the strain. His cock was jutting up, tenting the front of the lounge pants. Loki rubbed his cheek on the head through the fabric, his parted lips, his hot, moist breath.


Loki pulled at the waist strings and dragged the pants down, Thor’s cock springing free, purple and huge. The desire in Loki’s eyes was tangible. He got his lips close and stroked them gently up the
shaft. Thor jolted, even though it had been but a feather-light touch. His eyes shut tight under his frown. He focused on the feel of Loki’s lips on him, so subtle, pure torment. Then a flicker of his tongue under the head.

“Hnnnnngh…”

Sharp, hard, ruthless flicks on the frenulum.

“Jesus,” panted Thor, shaking with each one, grabbing the backrest of the settee tight. Loki’s tongue was relentless, a fucking metronome. Thor felt he could make him come like this, just like this, if he could keep it up. But he didn’t want that.

“Suck me,” said Thor.

Loki took the head in, just the head, and closed his lips tight around it. He hollowed his cheeks in a long, strong, constant suction that had Thor lifting his hips, tensing his arse, scrunching his face, whispering “god”. He reached to stroke Loki’s head.

The wet pop that followed made him wince.

“No touching. It’s the rules,” said Loki.

Thor was going to say something, but then Loki took him in, and in, and in, rising on his knees to get the right angle, and his throat closed around him, and all Thor could do was utter a shuddery, helpless moan. He opened his eyes wide to Loki’s head bobbing in his lap, Thor’s cock going all the fucking way in, Loki’s nose fucking brushing on the curls at the base of Thor’s cock. Was that even fucking possible?

When Loki withdrew, either to breathe or to stop Thor from coming straight away, Thor saw tears on the corners of his eyes, drool around his flushed, puffy lips.

“Doesn’t it hurt?” panted Thor.

Loki didn’t answer and went back to licking the head, as he closed one hand around the now wet shaft. He played with his tongue on Thor’s cock, sucking and licking and jerking off. Thor was so fucking close now, and Loki took him all in again, swallowing around him.

“Ah, god, fuuuuuuuck…” he groaned. “Oh fuck, baby, yes… yes… fuck… oh fuck… oh fuck… yeeees…” Loki’s throat was fluttering around the head of his cock and he was fucking gone. He came hard down Loki’s throat, shaking, knuckles white.

Thor opened his eyes to the vision of his brother’s utterly debauched face. He felt a shiver of discomfort, that he had thought he was over and done with, when he saw him like that, tear-stricken cheeks, lip’s edges blurred, bruised and swollen, licking a drop of come on the corner of his lip.

“Come up here,” said Thor, breathing hard.

Loki threw him an assessing look (those big eyes of his, Thor could never get enough of them) and slowly stood up in front of him, still between Thor’s knees.

“Can I touch you now?” said Thor, his voice a husky murmur.

Loki nodded. Thor slid the lounge pants down Loki’s legs, with a good feel of his butt. When he had him naked, he pulled him towards his lap again and kissed him with all he had. Loki kissed him back with a little husky whimper.
“Are you ok?” said Thor, breathing still rushed.

Loki nodded and kissed him again, now going for Thor’s neck.

Thor spat on his palm and took him in hand. Loki’s arms were around his brother’s neck, hands in his hair. He was still, one knee between Thor’s thighs, one foot on the floor.

Thor reared his head back to watch him. Loki’s expression started almost blank, just slightly tense, as Thor’s big hand jerked him slowly. When Thor flicked his thumb on the head of Loki’s cock, there was a frown.

“Yes, baby,” muttered Thor, still kneading his arse.

He wetted his palm again to get better friction. Loki arched his throat that little bit and started to pump his hips into Thor’s hand just slightly. Thor gripped him tight and encouraged him. He couldn’t stop staring at him, the dance of quickly changing expressions on his face.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” he said, knowing that he would never even begin to have the words to really express what he meant when he said that. He had been trying to find them for years, and still had nothing.

He sucked two fingers and pressed against Loki’s hole. Loki was open from yesterday, (and, uh, this morning,) aroused and relaxed, once he stopped pumping. His eyes fell shut when Thor slid in. He clenched around Thor’s fingers as he started fucking into his hand again, mouth silently gaping, his brow scrunching. Thor fucked in and out of him as best he could, trying to find his prostate. Loki sucked in a sharp breath when he found it. He stood still for a minute, to make it easier for Thor to rub him. Thor started to jerk him off again. Loki bit his lip, his eyes hooded and glazed.

“That’s it, baby,” said Thor, watching him. “That’s it.”

Loki had both knees on the couch now, straddling his brother. He was close now, his hands in Thor’s hair were digging deep, his arms shuddering. Thor brought their foreheads together, fishing a kiss or two, though his brother seemed far gone. Loki wrapped one hand around the one Thor had around his cock, and squeezed it. He started to pump his hips again, quickly this time, short thrusts. Thor got it, and maintained a tight grip. His palm was getting dry now, it would start to hurt if Loki didn’t come soon. He hooked his fingers inside Loki, pressing hard rather than fucking.

“Ah,” moaned Loki, so hoarse.

Thor did it again, twisting his fist around Loki’s thrusts. Loki dug his nails deep in his shoulders, and came between shudders and quiet, raspy moans.

Thor hugged him tight, Loki’s chest heaving, and kissed his face, his hair, his mouth.

“I love you, baby.”

Loki just panted hard against his brother’s shoulder.

After some time, Loki wiped himself and Thor clean with the discarded t-shirt and he curled in Thor’s arms to finish watching the movie, with a blanket over both of them. His eyes looked dreamy, his face soft with the reddish hue of the lighting in Cloud City. Thor just kept on watching him, looking for a kiss every now and then.
Mid morning. Thor was on his back and Loki was riding him leisurely, leaning over to kiss him again and again, and then leaning back, hands on his ankles, like a frieze from a fucking Greek vase, rolling his hips. Thor kept running his hands up and down Loki’s chest, and raking his fingers deep down his back, making Loki arch and groan. They were close. Thor began to pump his hips up too. Loki propped himself forward on his palms, bucking his hips, and started to go faster.

The noise of keys at the door.

“Fuck,” jumped Thor, freezing still.

Loki carried on.

“Oh god, brother…” he moaned, loud and clear, still a bit hoarse from yesterday. “Oh fuuuck…”

“Loki… shh!” Thor’s heart was pumping hard, half in fright and shock, half getting worked to death by his brother’s suddenly frenzied fucking.

“Oh yes, fuck me, yeeees…” moaned Loki, going at it like mad. “Fuck me, brother… Give it to me hard… Oh fuuuuck… Your cock feels so good… Oh god, Thor… Oh yes, yes, yes, yes…Oh brother!”

“Loki!” Thor was bright red now, and not just from the effort.

“Oh god, yes, yes brother, fuck me, yes!”

Thor came then, groaning, with Loki fucking himself on him and moaning like a cat in heat while Thor jolted and gasped with the aftershocks. Loki came soon after, jacking himself furiously, with the most obscene sounds he was able to produce.

He collapsed, boneless, on Thor’s chest, spreading his come over both of them. Thor threw his arms around him.

“You’re obnoxious,” he panted.

Loki licked his lips, with an impish grin.

“And good morning to you too dear Sig… Fuck.” The shit-eating grin was wiped out of Loki’s face, and was replaced by a deadly pallor.

Bruce Banner was there, sitting on the couch, with a cup of coffee in his hand and Minnie on his lap. The little dog jumped up excitedly when she saw Loki, and darted to run around his ankles.
Sigyn raised two mugs towards them.

“Coffee, anyone?”

That had to be one of the most awkward, most embarrassed silences in the history of the world ever. And Thor’s ears were surely in flames.

“Bruce, I believe you’ve met Thor…” said Sigyn.

Bruce got up, offering his hand.

“Yes. I loved Blood Meridian. How are you, Thor,” he said. His voice was even, but his cheeks were red.

“And yes, they’re together,” said Sigyn, impatiently. “Obviously.”

Thor and Loki said then, in unison.

“I’m adopted.”

“His adopted.”

There was a mutual glare.

“Congratulations to you both,” said Banner, startling them out of it.

“Sigyn, can I talk to you for a second,” groaned Loki.

They both disappeared into Sigyn’s room, Minnie skimping in toe. Good thinking, Loki, thought Thor. His room probably still reeked of sex.

Thor swallowed, finding his throat dry. To say he was petrified would be a gross understatement, his shock and embarrassment like a big flashy neon sign over his head. Banner had a sip of his tea, and Thor decided to do the same, and to sit down in the armchair just across, lest his knees decided to give up on him.

A couple of physically difficult, cringingly awkward minutes, with Loki’s voice coming loudly from Sigyn’s bedroom, the words difficult to make out, the general tone pretty much transparent.

Thor cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry about…” he started.

“It’s fine,” cut Banner, saving Thor from having to specify what exactly he was sorry about. “I’m… I’m familiar with, uh, with Loki,” he added.

“Right,” said Thor, taking a breath, and another sip.

“Though not as, uh, familiar as you,” said Banner.

Thor frowned. Banner smirked.

They both burst out laughing.
Meanwhile, in Sigyn’s bedroom, a flatmatecide was about to be committed. Loki was fuming.

“That will teach you…” teased Sigyn, all too pleased with herself.

“You could have fucking told me he was coming!” he roared, not in a jesting mood.

Sigyn realised Loki was not amused, so she too got serious, and pleading.

“Darling, I’ve been ringing and texting since 9 o’clock this morning. Don’t tell me you didn’t hear the phone,” she said.

“You told me you were going to your mum’s!” snarled Loki.

“And I did!” she countered. “Bruce rang this morning and told me he had the day off, and it’s my first free Sunday in two months, so…”

“Did you have to bring him here?!’’ said Loki.

“His apartment is all upside down with that leak, remember? And this is my house too.”

“Yes but, this precise fucking weekend?”

“Darling, you know how hard it is for us to see each other more than a few hours in the week…” She assessed his expression. “Loki, what is this about. You know Bruce, you like Bruce. What is it?’’

“It’s not about me, I don’t give a fuck! It’s… It’s Thor!’’ he roared.

“What about him?’’

“He… Christ, we only hooked up on Friday, and we’re already outing ourselves to strangers! What if he freaks out? What if he decides he can’t do it? What if this is all too fucking much?’’

(Sounds of laughter from the sitting room.)

“He doesn’t sound freaked out to me,’’ said Sigyn, with an angelic grin and a shoulder shrug.

“Yes, but you didn’t know how he would react!’’ shouted Loki, still not appeased. “Jesus!’’ he barked, taking a couple of angry steps, fists clenched tight at his sides.

Sigyn called Minnie to her arms. Perhaps she was worried that Loki would kick her in his fury. (He never, ever would.)

“…You know Bruce will never tell a soul,’’ said Sigyn. “He sees all sorts everyday, this is nothing. He loves you, we can trust him. Have a bit more faith in him.’’

“Don’t tell me, tell Thor!’’ he shouted.

“I will,’’ said Sigyn, gently.

Loki was gritting his teeth, still thrumming with unspent fury. At least Sigyn had an appropriately
concerned look on her now, rather than the incredibly annoying smugness she had before. That helped.

“He wants you to come to Asgard for New Year’s Eve,” said Loki then, finally losing some steam. “Bruce is invited too.”

“That would be lovely,” smiled Sigyn, petting Minnie. “I’ll tell him.”

Loki was still grouchy, resentment coming from more places than the earlier surprise party.

“What about Christmas?” he snapped.

“Bruce and I are going to my mum’s,” said Sigyn.

“You’ve only just met!” said Loki, with a hysterical note of inexplicable panic in his voice that even he was able to detect.

“I’ve known him for over five years,” argued Sigyn.

“But you’ve only been dating, what…?”

“Six months.”

“Is that the minimum acceptable period to introduce men to your parents? I really wouldn’t know.” His tone was abrasive. His hands were shivering for some fucking reason.

“Hey. What is it,” asked Sigyn, stroking his arm, and giving him a light, reassuring squeeze.

“…I don’t know,” grumbled Loki, shrugging her off, rubbing his eyes.

“Yes you do,” said Sigyn.

Loki cursed her telepathic powers.

“…It’s a bit… overwhelming,” he muttered. “Everything is fucking changing.”

“I know,” said Sigyn, putting Minnie down and wrapping around his waist. “I’m very happy for you and Thor, but I’m scared too.”

“You are?” said Loki, genuinely baffled.

“Of course I am,” said Sigyn. “I know you’re a bit mono-maniac. I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t!” protested Loki.

Sigyn squeezed tight.

“Then you won’t lose me either,” she said, tilting her head back to see his face, way up there. “We’ll be fine. We’ll both be fine. Things may be different, but I want you in my life, and I want to be in yours. We’ll make it work.”

“I want that too,” sighed Loki, and hugged her back.

They held each other for a few beats. Loki kissed her hair. Minnie kept scratching at his shin bones, begging to be held, probably ruining those old pyjamas he had spent years wearing down into powder-soft cotton. Why in the world hadn’t they adopted a fucking cat, he didn’t give a fuck about
Loki and Sigyn cooked a full English for brunch, with blueberry pancakes and syrup, and they all spent the afternoon merrily chatting and playing cards and actual board games. Thor had not had such a nice day in ages. He would have kept it clean with Loki anyway, out of respect for Sigyn and Bruce, and to compensate for the early matinée, but he needn’t bother, since Loki was distant, sulking. He did ask him a couple of times “what’s wrong”, but Loki just shrugged him off. Hm.
When each couple retired to their respective rooms for the night, Thor had a bad feeling. It was something about the tension in Loki’s back. Thor started to undress, and Loki kept his back to him. Again, *hm*.

“What’s wrong?” asked Thor.

“He’s adopted?” snapped Loki, folding the jumper he had just taken off with angry, abrupt movements.

Thor frowned, baffled.

“What?”

Loki threw a glower his way and proceeded to get rid of his t-shirt. Thor was speechless for a few seconds.

“You said it yourself!” he said then.

“It’s different,” grunted Loki.

“How the fuck is it different.”

“Because when *I* say it I don’t sound like Odin.”

Thor’s face fell at that.

“What?” he gasped, the hatred in Loki’s voice cutting him deep, for his father and for himself.

“*Whatever he has, now people will know it doesn’t run in the family,*” mimicked Loki, getting the tone and the timbre just fucking right, to a point that turned Thor’s stomach.

“I didn’t say *that!*” he barked.

“That’s how it sounds to me when you say it,” hissed Loki.

“I can’t fucking believe this,” said Thor. “You’re comparing me to *him*?”

“I think I just did.”

Thor shook his head, exasperate.

“…Fucking hell, Loki…” He paced, ruffling his hair to the point of pulling.

Loki was now down to his lounge pants, arms crossed, looking away, and pouting.

“Ok.” huffed Thor. “First of all, give the man a fucking break, ok? He has changed. And second… Only two fucking weeks ago you were telling me how you don’t feel that I’m your brother, or that our mother is not your mother. How the fuck do you think that makes me feel?”

“How does it make you feel?”

“Yes! Me!” barked Thor. “You’re not the only one who has fucking feelings, believe it or not!”

“Is that what I said? Were you even fucking listening?” screamed Loki.
“I was fucking listening!”

“Then you’re just as big an idiot as I always said you were, because you obviously didn’t understand one word I said!”

“Do I have to start taping our fucking conversations?” shouted Thor.

“I said a lot of things that night! And you’re just picking one fucking sentence, taking it out of context and blowing it out of proportion, just so that you can throw it to my face!”

“So when it’s you talking we all have to go about splitting hairs, but when I’m talking, or when it’s dad talking…”

“Why do you fucking defend him so much!”

“Because he’s my father!” screamed Thor.

“Well, he’s not mine!” cried Loki.

They stood there, breathing hard, their noses a few inches away from each other.

“Jesus fuck…” huffed Thor, bitterly.

Loki pushed his pants down and stepped out of them as quickly as he could. He immediately went for Thor’s.

“What are you doing,” said Thor, quickly hardening.

Loki kissed him ravenously, grabbing Thor’s neck with both hands.

“Fuck me,” he muttered.

“What?”

“Fuck me,” repeated Loki. “Now.”

“Fucking hell,” panted Thor. He spun them around, crushing Loki against the wall. Loki jumped to his neck, Thor held his arse up, kissing him hard.

“Come on come on come on…” begged Loki, thighs tight around Thor’s hips.

Thor spat on his hand, slicked himself up, and fucked in. Loki grunted. Possibly not enough lubrication, but he was relaxed and open, with some residual slickness from earlier this morning. In any case, the sounds Loki was doing as Thor started to thrust into him were not of displeasure.

“Oh fuck…” moaned Loki. “Oh god…”

Thor pressed a hand over his mouth to shut him up, and carried on fucking. Loki’s moaning became even more obscene, and still perfectly audible. Thor was falling apart, fucking hard and rough and furious. Loki was shaking his head, struggling to get rid of Thor’s hand muffling him, a hand on his own cock now, though it wasn’t easy to get a good stroke when Thor was smashing against him like that. When Loki’s teeth pinched into the flesh of his fingers, Thor could not say he was not expecting it. He kept right on fucking, because he was just on the verge by then, and he came with a loud grunt, with Loki’s bite getting downright vicious. He held Loki there while he jacked himself off, sucking Thor’s fingers into his mouth now, his moans softer, little desperate whimpers.
After a good couple of minutes just breathing against each other, Thor carried him and dumped him on the bed, and collapsed right next to him, panting hard. They said nothing. Loki reached for his brother’s hand. Thor held it tight.

Thor slept, golden and magnificent and unbearably beautiful, that broad chest of his rising slowly with his deep, calm breathing. Loki could not get his eyes off him. And he had tried a few times, believe you him. He would rest his head on the pillow and graze them on the imperfections of the ceiling, but then Thor would make a sound, or a small movement, or his breathing would hitch, or he would do nothing at all whatsoever, and Loki would turn his eyes back to him, and get lost in it.

Many times, as a little boy, while lying next to Thor in his bed, unable to sleep, he would suddenly feel a shudder, lonesome and lost in the quiet, with his brother far away in slumber. He would try to endure for as long as he could, but his terrors would circle around him like vultures (the worst of all, that Thor would open his eyes and they would be yellow, or green, or with a cat’s slit pupil, monster’s eyes), so sooner or later he would crumble and just shake Thor awake. Once he was sure his brother’s eyes were still human, and blue, and Thor’s, he would say “I had a nightmare”, and Thor would wrap him in his arms, say “it’s alright now”, his words slurred with sleep, and pull him to his chest. Soon, Thor’s breathing would return to its slow, peaceful rhythm, his chest pushing against Loki’s back, and Loki would feel safe from every horror he was able to conceive. What could there possibly be that his big brother could not protect him from. -Oh well, they were only children.

We may not be able to fuck the problems away, thought Loki, but damned if we’re not going to try. He burrowed under Thor’s arm and snuggled up against his body. Thor woke up just enough to pull him close and tangle one leg with Loki’s. He was heavy, and warm, and he smelled of Thor, and Loki felt grounded.

“I love you, Thor,” he whispered.

Thor nuzzled into his hair, and hugged him tight. So he was not asleep yet, then. Right.

“I love you too, baby,” he said.
Chapter End Notes

"Last one sucks dad's Golden Bollocks" -- Discontentmadeglorious helped me find a "last one is a..." that didn't sound completely OOC, for Thor and for a British teenager, and which wasn't sexist, homophobic or offensive to any minority, which I didn't feel like doing, because we get enough of that every-bloody-where. Easier said than done, that, we had to have a good think...

"I remember you, I do not know you" which is also there somewhere in Thor's inner monologue... that's hers too. I plunder her brains all the time, and this story is a million times better for it. I love you, Dissy. Thank you.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Andante. Adagietto, perhaps.

Chapter Notes

Slower than usual, I know, but there was lot to be said, and Loki needed his time... It just didn't feel right to rush him.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(The past.)

A gloomy week. They fucked on Monday, quietly, with mum and dad sleeping at the other end of the corridor. They fought harshly on Tuesday, god knows how it started, I hate you’s flew and fuck you’s were swung back, and when dad came home from rehearsals he found a dent in the wall from when Loki had crashed that ballet award against it, aiming for Thor’s head, and when he tried to find out what had happened, he ended up shouting at them both and confining them to their rooms, where he had found them to begin with anyway. An exercise in futility. On Wednesday, they gave each other the cold shoulder. Thor jerked off thinking of making Loki suck his cock. On Thursday, he heard Loki cry, shut up in his room. Thor stayed a long time at the door, and was very close to knocking, but he didn’t. On Friday, they were again throwing each other the long looks.

On Saturday, in the car, they’re quiet. Loki has his earbuds on and keeps his eyes on the landscape. Mum and dad talk about work.

The house is cold when they get there, and they’re tasked with fetching wood from the outhouse, and lighting up the fireplace in the rooms they’re going to use. Thor and Loki have to exchange a few words, strained and short, to arrange who does what where. They’re both pre-emptively short with each other lately, nobody wants to be the one to turn soft first. It’s all so stupid, and they both know it, and yet nothing changes.

When Thor is done, he wanders around until he finds Loki in the upstairs sitting room, eyes drawn to the little fire he is tending, absorbed in his thoughts. Thor watches him in silence for some time by the door.

“Are you done?” asks Thor.

Loki startles. “Fuck, you scared me!” he snaps.
“Sorry.”

Loki seems satisfied with that, because he doesn’t retaliate any further. Perhaps he doesn’t care. Among the hypersensitive periods, where the smallest things irritate him, and he’d surely bite Thor’s head off if he’d let him, he has spells when he seems supremely unconcerned, disinterested and absent. He won’t fight back, won’t shout names at him, and seems withdrawn somewhere far away, where none of the everyday things have any importance or meaning. Thor much prefers the other mood. Faraway Loki gives him the jitters, for a reason he can’t quite put into words.

Loki stands up, dusting his hands, and casts a side glance at his brother. Thor has been staring resolutely, trying to read Loki’s mood. If Loki does the same he’ll have absolutely no problem. Thor is hungry. Loki can probably smell it on him from where he stands, across the room.

When Loki walks by him, Thor grabs his hand. Loki doesn’t try to shake him off, so Thor pulls him close and lifts his chin up. Look at me. Look at me. Green eyes, impenetrable, will turn you to stone if they wish. Not today. Thor tilts his head down for a kiss, their mouths slot together with practiced ease. He pries Loki’s lips open with his tongue. When Loki’s body wakes to a kiss, it reminds Thor of something blossoming. Loki draws in a breath, encircles him with his arms, and lets himself be pushed against the wall, Thor’s hand still on his chin, the other one palming his crotch.

There are so many things Thor would tell him right now. I love you, I’ve missed you so much, I want you, I need you, are you mine, I am yours, please forgive me, I forgive you, and he won’t say any of them out loud, because it stings having them thrown back at his face. And Loki makes sure that it does sting, and badly, when he is in the mood for being mean. He doesn’t understand why Loki can’t bear to hear any of this anymore. Some time ago, even though he would not say it back, and he struggled when Thor told him, he did seem to brighten and warm up hearing it. It makes him bristle and hiss and spit now, sometimes it makes him cry.

“No, there,” says Loki then, breathy, when a clatter somewhere downstairs reminds them they’re not alone in the house.

“Tower?” Thor is short of breath already.

Loki nods.

Thor waits. This part of the tower complex has no roof, so the dim clarity of the day, though cloudy, will be upon them. He remembered to bring the blanket. He has spread it on the tuft of moss by the wall, as usual. The moss is thick there, and they cleared the bigger rocks a while ago. He has laid him on that spot before, and it’s almost comfortable. They never have long anyway. Thor remembers those long fucks in Iceland, making out for ages, teasing, changing positions, taking it slow.

“What took you so long?” grumbles Thor when Loki finally walks in. He had begun to fear he wouldn’t show up, and the mere thought has made him cranky.

“Mum wanted help with the groceries,” says Loki, blocking the heavy, clunky, run-down door behind him with the plank of wood they brought here from the outhouses, just for that purpose.

They’re unbuttoning and pushing down their jeans. They know it’s more efficient and quicker this way, although it was so nice when they used to undress each other. They’re both half-hard already. They won’t take any clothes off. It’s chilly, but more than anything, they’re in a hurry. It’s a big enough risk just dropping their pants down.
“What do you want to do,” says Thor, stroking Loki, feeling him harden. 

Loki shrugs. His brow tenses and his eyes become heavy under Thor’s touch. 

“Did you bring lube?” asks Thor, rubbing their cocks together. 

Loki retrieves a small bottle from the scrunched-up back pocket of his jeans. One can always count on Loki to come prepared. 

“Turn around.” 

Loki props himself on the wall, as Thor slicks himself up. He doesn’t know yet to open him up with his fingers first, he won’t learn about that until he starts watching gay porn, years from now. He just knows to go slow and let Loki will himself to relax and take him in. Loki says it doesn’t hurt. At times, Thor thinks he’s just saying that. 

“Hey, what’s wrong,” says Thor, panting, desperate to be inside him, when after some attempts Loki just won’t let him in. 

What he had taken for gasps are actually sobs. Loki is crying, hiding his face against his arm on the wall. 

Thor stops pushing, his hard-on flagging. He doesn’t know what to do. He tries to make Loki turn around, but Loki is resisting. Thor just tries harder, until Loki is facing him, his eyes low. 

“Leave me alone,” sniffles Loki, pulling his pants up, buttoning his jeans. 

“What’s wrong, baby.” 

Loki snorts, sarcastic, and tries to push past him. Thor overpowers him again, trapping him in a bear hug there is no escaping from, though Loki will always struggle. It’s a token gesture. It makes him cry harder, as if struggling broke through the hold he had until now over his suffering. He starts whimpering, actual whimpers, like he’s breaking in half. 

Thor doesn’t ask again what’s wrong. He knows what’s wrong. He holds him as tight as he can, as if he could keep Loki together with the strength of his arms. 

“I can’t… fucking breathe…” cries Loki, his sobs ripping Thor’s heart to shreds. 

Thor kisses him. He tastes his brother’s tears and his own. 

They’re sitting on the folded blanket, with their backs against the cold stone wall. Loki has taken up smoking. Thor knows he should not think that, but it makes him look so sexy, so grown-up. 

Loki stopped crying a while ago, but his eyes, still puffy and red-rimmed, tell the story. He said he’d stay away until he looks less obvious, to avoid mum and dad asking questions. So Thor has stayed too. 

He wants to say something to make it better, but Loki feels far away from his reach somehow. Whatever Thor says, whatever he does, it just doesn’t do anything for Loki; nothing good anyway. When he is not crying, his brother wears a blank, inexpressive mask. Thor knows it hides a very deep sadness beneath. He just doesn’t know how deep, he can’t understand it or even imagine it. He
has never known, and he will never experience, the kind of sadness that afflicts Loki now, the depths of despair he is sinking in. Barely-sixteen-year-old Thor is not aware that people can actually die from this, from this sadness, from lack of hope, or he would have… he would have done something, warned somebody, cried out for help before it was too late.

This is what will haunt him in years to come. That he saw Loki, he just did not understand what he was seeing. It scared him witless just the same. All he knew for sure was that he did not want to leave Loki alone, out of his sight.

“We have to get back. It will be dinner time soon. They’ll be looking for us,” he says, softly, as if Loki was a recovering patient. He lies, he tells Loki that his eyes are almost fine.

Loki seems to need some time to muster the will to move, before he starts getting up, sluggish, heavy-limbed.

They walk across the meadow side by side. Thor thinks how, before this year, he would always have an arm on his brother, around his shoulders, his waist, his neck, and how he can’t make himself touch him whenever there is the remotest chance that somebody will see them. He can’t do anything innocently around Loki anymore. It’s just not fucking fair. Where’s the bloody harm? But he is so, so scared. What would mum and dad say…

Loki sneaks up to his room by the back stairs. Thor hears his bedroom door slam.

He thinks he needs to make an appearance and stand in for him. He finds his dad setting up the table.

“Where have you been?” Odin asks.

The tower, says Thor.

“Aren’t you two too old to be playing wizards and knights?”

____________________________________

(The present.)

Loki heard the shower run before he had even blinked awake. He stretched on the bed with that dull throb in the small of his back he knew so well, from having been fucked to oblivion and back repeatedly all weekend. But this was not Malekith’s shithole hotel suite, this was home, in every sense of the word. He groaned contentedly, his muscles pleasantly strained, a tingle in his arse, nice memories to treasure, and hunger for more.

When the shower cut off, Loki turned onto his stomach and pretended to be asleep. He sneaked a peak when he heard Thor walk in, towelling his hair, so very dazzlingly naked. The mattress gave in under Thor’s not inconsiderable weight when he sat on the bed next to him. Then there was a big
hand on his hair, rough but tender (a big brother’s touch, rather than a lover’s), and then kisses on his shoulder (definitely a lover’s.) Thor felt smooth. He had shaved. Loki opened one eye.

“Good morning,” smiled Thor. The light of the window was behind him. It looked like he had a frigging halo.

Loki grumbled something, let’s not call it words, and turned his face away. Because, a halo? Are you kidding me? Thor leaned over for more kisses, this time pressing on the nape of Loki’s neck, which was blatant, shameless cheating.

“Sleepy head,” said Thor, right against his skin.

“My arse is sore,” grumbled Loki, just to be mean, because it was before bloody nine in the morning and why was he awake already, why?

“Hm, sorry about that,” said Thor, sounding genuinely concerned. “Anything I can do?”

“You did enough,” said Loki, meanly again, just because he could. He rolled onto his back, scrubbing his eyes and making a point of grimacing when his butt touched the mattress, although to be fair that did not hurt. The bed cover had caught with his leg, pulling back, revealing that slice of flesh under his navel, plus a good chunk of the side of his thigh, and artistically stopping just where it was decent. He enjoyed the look on Thor’s face.

“I’m going to dad’s now,” announced Thor, stroking a lazy hand over Loki’s stomach, pulling at this or that other hair of his happy trail, and descending, until Loki shooed him off —his cock was stirring, and it may be, but Loki was surely not up for anything at the moment.

“So early?”

“Yes, the sooner I get this over and done with, the sooner we can get to Asgard. The trip will be so much nicer in the daylight, and we need to start warming up the house before it gets too late in the day, because it’s going to be freezing.”

“You have everything sussed out, don’t you?” said Loki, a drowsy smile.

They held hands, entwining their fingers. They both looked at them in silence for a heartbeat. So bloody easy. When had it become so easy? How could it have been so hard before, impossible even, unthinkable? Such a little thing, so fucking huge…

Thor was smiling warmly.

“Will you get yourself ready? Pack some food?”

Loki nodded, and Thor kissed him, lingering there, eyes closed, a 1940’s Hollywood kiss, lips perfectly slotted together, favouring time and intensity rather than, well, tongue. Loki liked it, and licked his lips when Thor moved away, after a soft smack.

With an impish smirk, Loki kicked off the bed the jeans Thor had left there earlier, ready for him to wear. Thor rolled his eyes. Oh, darling, roll away, thought Loki, as his brother went to retrieve them. That’s it, baby, turn around. Now bend down low… Fuck, yeah…

Still snuggling under the covers, Loki watched Thor bustling about, making himself ready. He had to borrow one of Loki’s jumpers (the t-shirts were just too tight, what would their father think? —not that Thor had said that, but he did not need to), and Loki observed the edge in his gestures when he assessed his looks in front of the mirror. It made him want to kill someone, to see his brother, the
Mighty Thor, still trembling under his father’s shadow, to this very fucking day.

He went to say goodbye at the door, wrapped in the sheet, because it was nippy. Thor had a more relaxed manner about him now, and Loki was the shaky one. He clung to his brother’s wrist fast as they kissed.

“Are you alright?” asked Thor, sensing the anxiety in him, not to mention the fingers digging into his own arm.

Loki shrugged, and allowed Thor to kiss him again, slowly.

“Be back soon, eh?” said Loki then. It was the most he could say without sounding like a needy, slightly deranged idiot.

“As soon as I can, I promise,” said his brother warmly. And walked away.

Loki showered, gingerly examined the damage, if any —nah, just the burn—, had his breakfast, washed everybody’s dishes —his one permanent point of contention with Sigyn; she always said “later, later”— and felt incommensurably low for some reason. Honeymoon hangover, he guessed. Though that was not all of it, by any means, was it?

He’s adopted. Was that to be Thor’s excuse from now on, his defence? Is that what he would be telling to anyone who would listen?

Ah, Loki, you dimwit. You should be the one shouting it from the rooftops and exploiting it as much as you can. It was a fucking lottery win, that they were only adoptive siblings, wasn’t it? Wouldn’t that make it easier on the world, if it came to that? And who had been the one determined on going through all the hassle of having the bloody surname changed? Why should it hurt at all to hear what he already knew?

Yes, he was adopted, so what. Frigga loved him as her own. Now that his brain was clear, he never doubted that. And she didn’t have to love him. As Odin had proved every single fucking day of Loki’s life, love was not an automatic reaction triggered the moment some papers were signed. Frigga loved him because she wanted to and because she could, not because she had to. No biological imperative commanded her, and she didn’t owe him anything, and yet she had given him all the love in her heart. Wasn’t that a good, solid feeling, something one could hold fast onto, something that could carry someone steadily through life?

And Thor. Loki believed Thor when he said he felt they were blood, because that hunky, boorish, wonderful oaf he had for a brother was stubborn and single-minded, and fixated on things and refused to let go on fucking principle, and as it turned out, that wasn’t always a bad thing.

Adopted. Why the long face? It didn’t affect the people that mattered, and it might be an advantage in the future. So why the fuck had it hurt like that when Thor had uttered the tired, old, measly words?

There are worse tragedies surely, said Odin’s voice in his mind, and Loki’s fist clenched so tightly that it trembled with it.

Enough.

He started packing. Warm clothes, because even with every fire in the house blazing, and the central heating on full whack, Asgard House in december was going to feel like a barrack in the Siberian
And what a useful and cheerful thought that was, Laufeyson, and how much wisdom could be gained from entertaining it, until a solid migraine set in. Snap the fuck out of it, you idiot! You said yes. You said yes a hundred times, and now you’ve said yes once again. You will always say yes. Because, for whatever cosmic reason, the universe has decided that Loki would love his brother beyond all fucking rational thought, in spite of any obstacles. The stars have aligned, and the Fates have willed it so, and there is no fucking what if. You never stood a chance, you never will. In the end you will always kneel.

And even so, loving Thor as much as he did, he sometimes felt his brother loved him more than Loki ever could. Thor’s heart was bigger and better than his, there was no contest there. Would Loki put up with half the shit he had put his brother through, the shit he was still putting him through, every day? The shit he would be putting him through if they stayed together?

Oh, fuck. If they stayed together.

Loki, enough already, you’ll think yourself into some very fuckered up places if you don’t stop this right the fuck now.

He returned to tidying up the flat, although it was tidy and clean already, since the clothes and food and toiletries were packed and he had nothing left to do. Even Minnie was gone… When Sigyn predicted a long day, she sometimes took her to the old people’s home across the street from the hospital, to keep the residents company, and the little old thing entertained, instead of leaving her alone in the flat.

He was starting to climb up the walls. How much longer would he have to wait? Was Thor checking out of the hotel already, or was he still with Odin? Were they having a cosy father-and-son chat? Were they talking about him, the runt, the wayward son, the problematic one?

Loki would always look at them both as if from outside, a bond of unshakeable love between them you could almost touch; even when they argued, clashing antlers loudly over nothing, as people with all-too-similar temperaments sometimes do. Thor respected his father in a very old-fashioned way that was completely his own, and avoided confrontation with him if he could, but he had a quick temper, as did Odin, and when they did have a fight, the fucking walls would tremble. Funny thing was, no matter how much Odin seemed to wish to strangle Thor, it was also plain to see that he would willingly rip his other eye out for his son, without a second thought, if he had to. Even before Loki knew about his origins, he would watch them together and feel like… (He snorted bitterly to himself) —like he did not belong.

He wondered if Thor would get the Jag. Odin had always been so tight with it, even though it was really Frigga’s —she had got it as a bonus that year she did the publicity for the brand. That bloody ad had been a nightmare for her boys, taunted at school, faced with those huge billboards on the street, with their beautiful mother covered in flowing, nude-coloured veils blowing in the wind, displaying her long ballerina legs, and that smoulder that Thor once caught Loki practicing in front of the mirror. He was mortified, but Thor never teased him for it, and Loki never understood why. Until now, maybe.
He had a quick vision of mum and dad getting ready for an award ceremony or a premiere or something, so dashing and majestic in their finery, arguing about who would drive. The golden days of his childhood, before the bullying started in earnest, before the black moods began to creep in, before therapy, before the thought of mortality and things ending ever occurred to him.

Loki wondered if he would have to fight with Thor as well because, just like Frigga that night, he was absolutely going to drive.

Heading out of London, the city seemed to creep, clinging on to you, the suburbs spreading for ever and ever. Fields eventually, the traffic thinning, cattle, old, old trees. Thor’s face turned from him, taking in the views.

Loki had clung to Thor’s neck when he returned, as if it had been days instead of hours, and now, on long stretches without changing gears, they held hands over Thor’s lap. Loki was having a needy day, he guessed. Thor very clearly did not mind, far from it. Cat owners are trained to appreciate every smidge of spontaneous affection they can get.

Except for some scattered words here and there, they weren’t talking. Thor seemed lost in thought. God knows where his mind was, but if it had to do with Odin, Loki was not going to ask. Not just yet anyway.

And still, intrigue kept him guessing. Penny for your thoughts, Frigga used to say. Sometimes, she would just turn up in front of teenage, brooding Loki, slap an invisible coin in his hand and say “you owe me.” And eventually, Loki would tell her things. Perhaps not his thoughts at the time she had asked, (I wish Thor and me were still fucking, or I wish I could just disappear, does it hurt, would mum hate me, would Thor miss me, stop thinking so much about it and just fucking do it already), but he would tell her things, and he would feel close to her then, and warmer.

He missed her so much.

“Hey, baby, are you alright?” asked Thor, one hand on Loki’s thigh, a quick squeeze.

Loki nodded and wiped the corner of his eye.

The road snaked up a hill and then curved around it, affording an impressive vista of the house, with its spread of walled gardens, outbuildings and conservatories. Loki swallowed, uneasy, as they approached. Not all the emotions battling inside him were unpleasant, as much as he dreaded this place. His mother had loved it here, and this had been the stage of his happiest hours as a little boy, with Thor.

He had also been very, very miserable here, and this was where he had been dealt the mortal blow that had finally broken him, from which he was just starting to recover.

He knew he was not the same person who had left that morning, all those years ago. He wondered whether the ghosts of all the Lokis past still haunted the place, and whether they would want him there at all. Many of them had been very nasty bitches, who frowned upon forgiveness, self-esteem and joy. But by the same token, if they were around, Little Loki should be there too, running up and down the corridors, and wherever Little Loki roamed, present-day Loki felt safer in.
Loki had slowed down to a snail-pace as he got closer to the house. Thor didn’t rush him, didn’t urge him on, and didn’t ask. He only looked at him, with a calm expression, as Loki finally drove under the arch to the walled-in, gravelled drive and killed the engine.

“Hey,” said Thor, his hand so very warm on Loki’s thigh.

“Hey,” said Loki, and drew in a deep breath, for calmness.

His brother leaned closer for a kiss. Loki returned it with his eyes closed.

“Welcome back,” said Thor, opening the back door for him. He kept the tone of his voice light, easy on the drama, but the strain in his tight smile gave him away. This meant a hell of a lot to him. He just did not want to be seen making a big deal of it, for Loki.

Loki stepped inside with caution, looking around as if he expected to be pounced on at any moment by some unseen terror crouching in the darkness. The back hall, a narrow corridor between the kitchen wall and the service staircase, leading to a slightly wider space where they would hang their coats, had always felt cramped. But everything felt even smaller than in his memories, shadier, the ceiling lower, the ochre wall paint duller, the space even more confined and oppressive. At least, because the air was so cold, it didn’t smell musty or dank.

Thor brushed past him and started throwing curtains open, as if he was eager to dispel the shadows as well. Then he got busy turning on the gas and electric, the boiler and the heating. The cranky thrum of ageing machinery being suddenly shaken awake from hibernation disturbed the quietness. There would be squeaks, hums, creaking and groaning spreading throughout the house, as the heat started dilating the pipes. It sounded very much like an old, dormant living creature being dragged back to life against its will.

Loki walked to the French doors opening to the kitchen garden, a small walled enclosure with herbs growing wild, and small vegetable patches, now barren but for the weeds. Through the arch at the end of it, a slice of Great Aunt Idunn’s orchard could be glimpsed, rows and rows of bare-branched apple trees which bore tiny, hard, golden fruits in the Autumn, with a sharp taste Loki found himself suddenly craving.

Thor’s strong arms encircled his waist. Loki threw his head back, welcoming his brother’s mouth on his neck.

“You seemed a bit spaced out,” muttered Thor, close to his ear.


Thor held him a bit closer.

“Does dad come often?” asked Loki, one hand on his brother’s massive forearm, brushing over the dusting of golden fuzz in counterstroke.

“Not often.” Thor kissed the sensitive spot under Loki’s ear, making him shiver pleasantly. “He needs the rush of the city or he withers, you know. He misses her.”

“What did he say?” Now it was Loki keeping it light and easy, when he was feeling anything but.

“About you?”
“Hm-hm.”

“He asked me how were you coping with the business of the tapes. Then he asked me about the movie, and about your acting. He asked if you were, uh, keeping healthy. He asked me about Sigyn.”

“What about her.”

“He had heard you lived together. He wondered what kind of, uh, arrangement you had.”

Loki smirked.

“What did you tell him.”

“I told him that you were still gay.”

Loki laughed.

“What did he say?”

“He laughed as well.”

Loki kept on grinning, a genuine smile, as he slowly extricated himself from his brother’s arms. He unbolted the glass doors and stepped out into the kitchen garden, lit up a fag. Thor followed him there. The cold put pink on both their faces.

“Is he glad that we’re… I was going to say, together again,” smiled Loki.

Thor smiled as well.

“I think he is, yes.” Thor threw one arm around his brother’s waist. “He said he… He hoped mum could see it, wherever she was.”

Loki laughed. Thor frowned, baffled.

“Jesus, what a thought!” said Loki, still laughing. "Mum watching!”

Thor laughed a little. But he had something on his mind he was trying to say, it was plain to see. Loki calmed down and put on his pray tell face. Thor cleared his throat first.

“I’m not going to mention it again if you ask me to but… I think that, that it would do some good if you, uh, if you talked to him," he said.

Loki drew a long drag.

“Good to whom,” he asked.

“…Both of you,” said Thor.

Loki sighed. There was only so much forgiveness and reconciliation he felt capable of handling at the moment, and he had needed it all for Thor.

He did not want to hear about Odin anymore.

“We need to get to the village before they shut.”
The next time you need to change subjects, Laufeyson, suggest a tour of the grounds, or a survey of the outbuildings, or a fucking rabbit-spotting trip in the woods, and avoid the bloody village, if you please. He was walking side by side with his brother down the main street, feeling every single fucking eye fixed on him. He thought he could even see people spying from inside the houses, peeking behind the quirky crocheted curtains. At turns it felt like a Western movie, at turns like *The Wicker Man*. He kept his eyes front and his hands deep in the pockets of his leather jacket, hoping to fight like that the impulse to cling to his brother’s arm.

“Here for the holidays? How’s your father?” The Family Butcher (Loki had once written a horror story with that title) was the same ruddy-cheeked, round-faced, rosy-fingered man, with more grey in his hair and a bulgier beer-paunch. He chatted amicably with Thor (his brother always made it look so easy and effortless), and he darted a glance or two at Loki every now and then. Loki was quiet and tense.

On the short walk to the greengrocer’s, a couple of doors down, Loki noticed people watching from their open front doors. His heart was pounding. Thor nodded and said hello to whomever dared to look him in the eye, his dazzling smile eliciting timid waves and more smiles. Two little kids ran past, looking back, and Loki heard them say “Hey, it’s them!”

*Them.* The Odinsons, the Asgard kids. Everybody knew fucking everything about everybody around here. They were bound to know about Loki’s… let’s just call it ‘his past’, for the sake of brevity. Shit, they must have all seen the bloody tapes… Loki felt a chilly, deep-reaching, cutting shudder, and when Thor asked if he wanted to stop for some bread, he shook his head no anxiously.

“Let’s go back” he all but begged.

*The pink pills the pink pills the pink pills.* Hadn’t his therapist told him a hundred times to always keep a couple handy. You stupid, stupid, stupid jerk, you fucking idiot.

You may forget from time to time, but people never, ever will.

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This may have been a very, very bad idea, thought Thor as Loki got in the car, through the passenger’s side this time, his shoulders slumped in what Thor had already pinned down as a defensive posture. His expression was strained, there was a pinch in his brow, his hands on his lap were clasped together tight.

He’d better not ask again *are you ok?*, because Loki plainly wasn’t, and his already limited tolerance for stupidity didn’t get any more lenient in that state.

Back inside the house, Loki turned on the kettle and prepared the tea things with the same urgency as if he was fixing some lifesaving drug to inject a flatlining patient with. Thor turned the oven on and made a point not to stare.
He was trying to work out what was so terribly wrong. He just wasn’t very good at it. He lacked the right type of imagination, he guessed, and that’s why he had always relied on his mum to get a good translation of Loki’s moods, actions, and words into something that made sense to him. He should at least be able to come up with a more insightful question than *are you ok?*, shouldn’t he?

Loki looked so withdrawn, so distressed. Thor could not just stand there and do nothing. He took him in his arms, one hand gently tangled in Loki’s still short hair, lips pressed to his forehead, and his big mouth shut. Loki’s hands rested on his hips first, and then snaked around and up his back, as he tilted his head back for a kiss. What a relief. This was Thor’s territory. He worked his brother’s lips slowly, letting Loki lead it to wherever he wanted it to go.

The kettle started wailing desperately, and Loki broke the kiss and gently pushed him away. Thor watched him pour the water with a much steadier hand. He made Thor a cup as well. When Thor smiled at him silently, Loki smiled back. Thor thought to himself he had not done too badly this time.

With the pie in the oven, they went upstairs to unpack. They would sleep in Thor’s room, which had been refurbished over the years - Loki’s room had remained frozen in time, with a single bed, wizard hats and wands on the wallpaper, walls covered with posters of his passions as a teenager. Thor had spent hours in there after Loki went away, just looking around. There were old Hollywood movies, Ziggy Stardust, male ballet dancers Loki admired —in more ways than one, Thor assumed, jealous then and even now, a bit—, landscapes and maps of worlds from fantasy novels, creepy illustrations from the stories Loki enjoyed (Thor was squeaked by Giger and Lovecraft inspired stuff the most), all of it clashing with the curtain with moon and stars, and his old pyjamas with cartoon characters still in the drawers. A time capsule of Loki’s whole life until he was nineteen years old. No wonder Loki had carried on without stopping when they walked in front of his bedroom door, if he was already struggling with everything else.

Thor threw the curtains of his own bedroom open, and the dim winter sun tried half-heartedly to cast some pale shades. He noticed Loki’s stance was guarded again, reflective, as he scanned the place, with all its changes. The ugly, seventies-style modular furniture that used to be there had been replaced with some antique, elegant, very grown-up pieces from another part of the house, where the guests used to stay, back in the day when their parents entertained. There was a big carved wardrobe, a four-poster bed and a couple more things, in reddish wood, subtle carvings of branches and leaves.

Loki was bound to recognise the bed. It had been in the main guest room, and very high-up people had slept in it. He sat on the soft mattress and had a little bounce. He stared at him straight.

“Has Jane slept here,” he asked.

Thor blinked, dumbstruck, caught completely by surprise. He had not thought about Jane for months.

“So, she has,” said Loki. “Hm.”

Thor kept his mouth shut, his frown as light as he could manage. Was Loki looking for a fight? Because Thor very much wasn’t.

Loki sighed. He sounded tired.

“This is all so…” He rubbed his brow as if trying to soothe a headache. “Sorry. It’s a bit much.”

Thor sat down beside him and held his hand.

“I’m sure you’ll get used to it soon,” he said. He was aware these were not the wisest words ever
spoken, but could he please get some points for trying.

Loki squeezed his hand. And then he leaned closer to whisper into Thor’s ear.

“Do you think we’ll break this one too?”

Thor started to laugh. He had forgotten about that. They had once been fucking in one of the old beds in the guests wing, and they fucking broke it; the slate base snapped under them and one of the legs came off. They had to confess, of course, they could not just pretend it had not happened, so they had told their parents they had been bouncing on it. Odin had been fuming that his sons could be so careless and infantile, and they had spent the rest of the weekend cleaning windows, as punishment. And also giggling like a couple of idiots whenever they eyes met, which of course riled up their father even more.

“I remember your face when the wood cracked and the mattress gave in,” said Loki, his eyes bright with amusement. “You looked so confused. There was a big what the fuck just happened printed all across your forehead. And then the leg came off, the corner went down, but when you decided that that was it, that nothing else was going to happen, you were like oh well, that’s that, and just kept on fucking.” Loki was laughing wholeheartedly. Thor was laughing too, though he was feeling a bit silly in retrospect. Loki kissed his cheek sonorously, both hands around his face. Thor leaned into it.

“It was a good weekend,” he said.

Dark outside, the windows were blind, showing nothing but deep black. Thor had washed the dishes, and Loki was drying them. Thor was leaning on the rustic wood and tile worktop their mum had been so fond of, glass of wine in his hand, watching Loki’s waist, cinched in by the ties of the flowery apron, his arse shaking sideways just a tiny bit every time he gestured vigorously with his arms. And yes, of course he would wear an apron. “You know what a pain in the arse it is to launder velvet?” he had snapped at him, when Thor had made the slightest attempt at a tease.

“Still staring at my arse, brother?” said Loki, without looking back.

Thor grinned.

“Are you finished yet?” he asked, still beholding indeed his velvet-clad target.

Loki held up the porcelain bowl they had put the salad in, to show him it was the last bit. Thor put down his glass and went to stand right behind his brother. Loki’s breathing caught when he felt him there, and when it resumed, it was already slightly shallower. It was a rush, to be able to wreak such havoc on his cool, self-possessed brother just by getting closer. He had yet to lay one hand on him…

He caressed his lips on Loki’s neck, and Loki’s hands slowed down, forgetting about the drying. Thor surrounded him with his arms, and made him put down the towel and the bowl. He ran his hands over Loki’s thighs, the material soft as butter, the flesh underneath so strong, unyielding. He felt a pulse beating heavy and deep in his groin. He pushed against Loki’s arse, so that he would feel him getting hard.

“Shall we go to bed?” murmured Loki, delightfully choked.

Thor was kneading his neck with open-mouthed kisses and enjoying the feel of the velvet under his palms.
“No,” he said, pushing again, more than half-hard now. “Here.”

Loki drew in a tiny, strangled breath in feign shock, that made Thor snigger. He wondered what other sounds could he elicit from his very vocal brother. He searched blindly for the buttons of Loki’s flies, still working his neck, his brother tilting his head to give him more access, and all but melting in his arms. He dragged those lovely velvet trousers down Loki’s legs. No underwear, as usual. Naughty boy… Loki made to push them down completely, but Thor stopped them half-way down his thighs.

“Now you can’t run” he muttered into Loki’s ear.

He did get him out of his jumper, greedy for the feel of his skin. Goosebumps on Loki’s back when he lifted the shirt up his back.

“Are you cold?” he muttered, planting kisses on his spine, running his hands on Loki’s thighs, his cock getting harder with every brush, though Thor was avoiding it purposely.

“What do you think?” panted Loki, and his breath hitched again when Thor chuckled, low and deep, against his skin.

Thor slowly sank to his knees behind him, trailing his mouth down his brother’s back as he did. Loki made to turn around, but Thor fixed him there, one hand on each hip, his tongue reaching his tailbone. Now Loki was starting to get an inkling of what was about to happen, and Thor read anticipation in his breathing, rushed and eager.

He wanted to make Loki feel good. He wanted to chase away all his troubles and whatever dark thoughts had been haunting him, if only for a while. He wanted to see him like that, just filling his skin, and nothing else. He wanted to be someone his brother trusted to make everything right.

With a flat palm over Loki’s back, Thor made him lean forwards, plant his hands over the kitchen worktop, and spread his legs as much as the trousers around his thighs would allow. Just that already made Loki curse. Thor kneaded those smooth, perfect buttocks he could never get enough of, sunk his teeth gently in the flesh where arse meets thigh, and sucked and touched the tip of his tongue on the scatter of freckles he had mapped out in his mind, and knew like the back of his hand. With Loki like that, exposed, surrendering, the urge to fuck him was almost too much to resist.

“Are you going to do it or what?” said Loki then, his voice breathy.

Thor chuckled, parted the cheeks, and lapped from the base of the balls to his arse. Loki sucked in a sharp breath, as if it stung.

“Is this what you wanted,” mumbled Thor, right against the sensitive flesh.

“I’ll give you three guess-…” Loki’s voice broke when his brother started to work his hardened tongue on his hole. “Fuuuuuck…” he hissed, bending even lower, now resting the upper part of his chest onto the worktop, and burying his face in his arms.

“I have to confess,” said Thor, between long laps and lighter, teasing, flicking movements, “that I don’t have the first clue about what I’m doing.”

“This your… f-first time?”

“Hm-hm,” assented Thor, now pushing with his tongue, making his brother swear in… was that fucking Russian? “How am I getting on?”
The trembling of his brother’s thighs, and his knuckles, white, holding onto the edge of the worktop for dear life, gave him some confidence that, good or bad, what he was doing worked for Loki.

“Hm, fuuuuck…” Loki’s buttocks clenched, that beautiful depression on the sides became more pronounced, his arse fluttering. “Have you thought of doing this prof… oh god… professionally?” he joked.

Thor chuckled, and started sucking. Loki moaned, a high-pitched, slightly desperate sound that meant only good, good things. He was so hard himself. He had been palming at his own erection for a while, through his clothes, and now he wanted it out. He flickered his tongue quickly over the fluttering flesh while he did, to the sound of Loki’s whimpers, almost little sobs. He gave the head of his cock a few lazy tugs, his crotch clenching with the urge to get in there and fuck.

“Tell me what you want. Tell me what to do,” he whispered, one hand to himself, the other one on Loki’s hips, his thumb tracing circles on the bone.

“Your fingers,” muttered Loki. “Open me up with your fingers, and then… your tongue.”

Ah, fuck. Loki’s voice tore him to pieces. The hand Thor had to himself squeezed and pulled mindlessly at those words. He sucked his thumb dripping wet and slid it in, circling to loosen up the ring of flesh.

“Yeah? Ok now?” he asked.

“How the fuck should I know? You’re the one with the visual,” said Loki, snappy. “Trial and error, brother…”

Ah, Loki. He parted the cheeks wide open with his hands. If Loki spread his legs a bit further, and bent down a bit lower… There.

Another string of hissed words in what had to be Russian, in that hot, hot voice, and Thor wished he had another hand to work himself with. He could not get but a shallow penetration, nothing but the tip really, but it still seemed to please Loki, judging by the death grip on the worktop and the efforts to lock his knees, which seemed soft as jelly at the moment.

His jaw had started to hurt a lot quicker than he would have anticipated. He alternated with his fingers. Thor wondered whether the tongue was also a muscle that could be exercised and trained to last longer.

When he was finger-fucking him, Loki reached behind his back and grabbed his hand.

“Yes, please,” he said.

“What do you want,” said Thor, fucking in and out, slow and steady.

“Do you really need to ask,” grunted Loki.

Thor stood on his feet, stroking himself, wiping the drool off his mouth. Loki turned his face to him, glazed, wanton eyes. Thor stroked the tip, slicked with his spit, on Loki’s arse. Loki propped himself up on his palms.

“How do you want it, baby,” asked Thor.

“Jesus Fuck, just… inside me, now,” grumbled Loki.
Grinning, one hand on Loki’s shoulder, Thor aligned himself and started to inch his way in, the tension in Loki’s back visible in the sudden tautening of his muscles.

“Are you sore?” asked Thor, shifting inside.

Loki shook his head no.

Thor pulled out and pushed back in, slowly, snaking his hips a bit. He started fucking languidly and not too deeply, adding more spit as and when, Loki’s fingers clawing on nothing over the worktop, his body swaying to and fro, soft, breathy moans turning Thor’s insides to a mush. Loki’s breathing fell in time with his thrusts. Thor grabbed a handful of black hair and tugged gently, to expose more of Loki’s throat to his mouth.

The pressure was building up in his groin, aching for more intensity. Still mindful of yesterday, he gripped Loki’s shoulder, added more spit and took it up a notch or two. Loki groaned, trying to keep rigid, in place.

Thor was getting close now. He wrapped one strong arm around Loki’s waist, braced himself on the worktop with the other, and started to fuck faster, seeking the maddening friction with shallow thrusts. Loki brought a hand to himself, the sounds of his pleasure more strained, pleading, as he pushed back to meet Thor’s cock. His movements became more frenzied, until he got rigid, sudden jolts shaking him as he came with short, sharp breaths.

Thor slowed down and gave himself a moment to feel him like that, pressing kisses to Loki’s back, and then he couldn’t wait any longer. He slammed harder, faster, Loki shuddering upon impact, a hand still on his cock. It gripped Thor tightly when he came, after such a slow build up, Loki still whispering god knows what as Thor thrusted gently now, riding the aftershocks.

They were sprawled on the couch in front of the TV, Thor on his back, Loki draped half on top of him, feeling heavy and nice and warm under a very thick blanket. The film had not long to go.

On the screen, their mother was laughing on a couch of her own, sat between Maggie Smith, Judi Dench and Helen Mirren. They played a bunch of actresses in their autumnal years who have heard the news that a big lifetime achievement award is about to be bestowed on one of them, they don’t know who. They spend the first hour skinning each other alive, all jabs and sneers and cutting sarcasm, digging up years of enmity and cut-throat competition, but they have started to find some common ground now, and are turning their wicked wits and bitterness against the cruel world, instead of each other. It was a very funny movie, with ample room for each of the actresses to shine, like one of those black and white Bette Davies’ films Loki liked so much.

“I still think you look like her when you smile like that,” muttered Thor, petting Loki’s hair.

Loki did not reply, if not for a little nudge against Thor’s hand.

On the screen, their mum was singing *There’s no business like show business* on the piano.

“Will you play for me?” asked Thor.
“The piano will be out of tune after all this time,” said Loki, after a while. Thor had started to think he had not heard him.

“Maybe not. You know how dad is.”

Loki took his time again.

“We shall see,” he said.

Huddled up together in the huge, soft bed, their eyes heavy and tired, they found themselves somehow in each other’s arms again, drowsily kissing, their legs tangled, rutting lazily.

“Was that Russian, earlier,” Thor was panting against his neck, the pressure of Loki’s thigh on him not enough, or way too much, depending on where this was going, or not going. “What were you saying?”

“What does one usually say,” replied Loki, clutching with his thighs.

Thor whispered I want you and you’re so sexy and you drive me crazy and yes baby fuck yes, and Loki said something in Russian after each of those, Thor would never know what.

Christmas day. Thor had suggested they had their meal at The Lark, the local pub. Their parents used to like it. When they walked in, every head turned towards the door. He felt Loki flinch, and then tense. Battle stations. He saw him squaring his jaw and straighten his back, his head high, his posture princely. Thor kept one hand on the small of his back, slowly stroking.

“Odinson!” said Ray, the pub landlord, coming to meet them. Last time Loki had been here, it was Ray’s dad at the bar, and Ray was still cleaning tables. “Merry Christmas,” he said, shaking both their hands. “Your table is over there.”

Thor ordered some of their home-made cider (they still made it from Idunn’s apples) and lead the way.

“Alright?” he asked, when Loki sat right at the corner, close to the window, his back to the room.

Loki nodded. Thor hesitated, and then held his hand over the table. Loki put on a tiny grin and tried to pull away.

“I don’t give a shit,” said Thor. “I really don’t. Let them think whatever they want.”
Loki got his hand back. "You say that now, but wait until they start talking. Trust me, I should know."

Thor’s expression darkened. Some of the patrons in the pub today had been the ones to give Loki a hard time once, whenever his big brother wasn’t there to dissuade them. Thor had only realised something was wrong when Loki had stopped going to the village on his own, and wouldn’t say why. Thor had asked around until the woman at the newsagents, where they used to buy their sweets, had told him that she had had to pull the ears of a couple of bullies who had Loki cornered in the alley, calling him names and trying to steal his money. Apparently it had been going on for some time. Loki was thirteen then.

Once more, it hit Thor that this might have been a very bad idea. His memories of this place weren’t Loki’s memories. There seemed to be very little in Asgard House or in the village that Loki was happy to come back to.

Thor had felt differently this morning, when they had taken a stroll around the grounds. Loki had wanted to see the spot from which they had scattered Frigga’s ashes, on the top of a hill with broad views of the land and the house, with plenty of sky to see. Loki had said it felt lonely.

“We should put a bench here or something, so that we can come over and…” Loki had cut himself, looking away.

“And what?” Thor had urged.

“Keep her company. It’s silly, I know.”

“No, it’s not, it’s a great idea,” said Thor, holding his hand. “We could plant some roses too.”

“One of every fragrant variety,” Loki had said. One of their mum’s recurring aspirations that had never come to pass.

“Yes, let’s do that,” had said Thor, excited at the prospect. “She would love it.”

When they walked past the tower, Loki had hesitated before going in. The plank of wood they had used to block the door was still there, but the door had long since collapsed, nothing but a pile of rotten wood and the rusty hinges, fused together, still hanging on the wall.

Thor watched him have a look around. The vision of the tuft of moss put a choke in Thor’s throat.

“Did you ever come here, after I was gone,” asked Loki, brushing a hand on the lichens and the rock, tracing the mortar joints with his fingertips.

Thor swallowed and tried to sound even.

“No. Sometimes.”

His brother gave him a quick glance out of the tail of his eye, and continued his slow tour along the perimeter.

“I missed you,” he said, sounding purposely distracted, “all the time. I just wanted to see you again before I-…” He was far away and not looking at him, his words only audible because of the resonance in that place. Perhaps this was the only way he was able to say things like that.
Thor had his eyes shut, swelling with tears. To think of Loki, sick, suffering, alone, thinking about him, and Thor unaware of it, carrying on with his life. He wondered how many instances had there been, how many chances did Loki have and did not take, to end it all. It could have been so easy, it almost seemed frivolous. And Thor might have never known.

“Don’t cry, brother,” murmured Loki, suddenly one step away, stroking his face, wiping the tears that were running down his chin.

Thor hugged him, not as tight as he wanted, because he did not want to make a bigger deal of it than he was already.

“You’re here now,” he couldn’t help himself from whispering.

“I’m here now,” said Loki, hugging back.

“I’ve got you,” Thor sighed, the aftertaste of horror and grief mixing with relief. “I’m never letting go of you again.”

He feared Loki might bristle at that, but he actually clung tighter. Goes to show —Loki was a big fucking mystery to him still, and maybe he would always be, but it seemed that a good way to navigate Loki’s shoals was to follow his own heart, and love the fuck out of him. Which was really pretty bloody good, because he could do that. He could do that, for the rest of his days.

“It’s still here!” Loki had cried out suddenly, on their way back to the house. He rushed with long, graceful strides for that depression in the middle of the field which was often flooded with rainwater, attracting large, elegant, long-necked birds with massive wingspans.

Thor grinned when he saw what had drawn Loki’s attention. His brother was standing, with an awed expression, next to that hollow log they had once pretended was a dragon, or a whale, or a crocodile, or a space pod or a cave, depending on whether they were playing Middle Ages, explorers, Star Trek or Zombie Apocalypse. They would ride it, or fight it, or burrow inside it, pretend they had been devoured. It seemed impossible that they had once both fitted inside.

Loki’s expression was bright, as if he had stumbled upon a beloved old toy while sorting out the attic. His eyes glinted, pleasant wrinkles on their corners from his broad smile. Thor was warmed by a feeling of gratitude and tenderness he could not even begin to try to put into words. He almost felt like having the old log gilded and preserved in a hyperbaric chamber somewhere, for managing to put that light on his brother’s face.

They had walked back to the house hand in hand. Thor had thought Loki still looked much too sexy for his own good when he smoked.

The food at The Lark was nice, that had been Thor’s only consideration when he had suggested going. Loki seemed to enjoy his meal, eating up with a much better appetite than his lithe figure suggested. They had a view of the back lawn, which gently sloped towards the canal. There were several barges moored there, and ducks waddled in and out of the water as if they owned the place. A few years back, little Thor and Loki would have finished their meals in three mouthfuls, and
would be now begging their parents to be let out to play. Thor could almost see those two kids now, getting much closer to the canal than their mum had said it was allowed, throwing sticks into the water under the bridge to see which one came out the other side first, chasing the ducks, eager to watch them take flight.

They stared at each other for some time. Thor was feeling an overpowering impulse to lean over and kiss him.

Someone started banging the wall piano at the other end of the room, attempting to rustle up a sad, Sunday school accompaniment to a chorus merrily butchering *O Christmas Tree*. Loki was cringing.

“Somebody put them out of their misery,” he grumbled. "And me."

“You should be playing,” said Thor. “Show them how it’s done.”

Loki rolled his eyes and drained his glass.

“Oh, come on…” urged Thor, nudging Loki’s foot under the table.

“No chance.”

“Then I’ll do it,” declared Thor.

“You?” Loki looked appalled.

“Why not? I took some lessons, remember? I’m sure I can still play *Holy Night*. How hard can it be?” He started to get up, to make it more believable.

“Don’t you fucking dare. Do you want to cover your father’s house in shame?” said Loki, joking, but only just.

“Then you do it,” said Thor.

“No.”

“Fine.” Thor shook him off and proceeded to make his way to the piano, with a sly smirk.

He heard Loki grumble at his back, some swearing, and then Loki brushed past him. “Jesus fucking Christ,” he was mumbling between gritted teeth.

The guy who was currently tormenting the piano was pushed away to the sound of Ray’s booming “now you’ll hear some proper music!”, and Loki took his spot. He huffed irritably, stretched his fingers, and with a tremendously unhappy expression, he started to play a perky, simple, slightly jazzy accompaniment to *Jingle Bells*. People joined in song from all over the pub. Thor was standing next to Loki, hand on his shoulder, glass of cider in the other, a peaceful, happy expression on his face.

After that, Loki started to take requests. He made it seem so effortless. Thor was quite sure he was improvising on the spot in many cases. They had become surrounded by a small, boisterous crowd, the spirit of Christmas burning high. It was very nice. Even Loki seemed to be having a decent time.

Thor detected some sly stares and some people talking in whispers here and there, and he could guess what they might be talking about. He kept his hand on Loki’s shoulder, as if he could deflect the meanness of the world from his brother like that.

Last requests. Wet eyes all around when Loki sang *Fairytale of New York* with Molly, Ray’s wife,
the whole pub joining in the chorus. They finished with *O Come Ye Faithful* and *All I Want for Christmas is You*, and the applause and the cheers were deafening.

Loki was heartily hand-shaked and back-patted and one-arm-hugged by what, to him, must have felt like the whole village, and he did not escape Molly’s kiss, full on the mouth, and the solid smack to his butt that came with it. He looked imploringly at Thor when they were trying to drag him to the bar for more drinks.

Thor stepped in and rescued him, getting soundly back-slapped himself in the process, and they managed eventually to escape out into the darkened street, with a sigh of relief that puffed white in front of their faces.

“Hey, that was fantastic!” said Thor, an arm around Loki’s shoulders as they walked away.

“Never again,” said Loki, lighting a fag.

Thor laughed. He thought Loki had enjoyed himself, but he also knew that he would need hours of peace, quiet, and isolation to recover.

The street was deserted, the fairy lights on houses and shop-windows blinking merrily. There was a smell of burning wood in the air, and a dry stillness, like before a snowfall.

Thor grabbed his brother’s hand. Loki squeezed fondly, and quickly tried to let go.

“No,” said Thor. “Please.”

Loki threw a hunted look around.

“It’s fine,” said Thor. “It’s fine. Please.”

Loki said nothing. His expression remained pinched with tension, but his grip on his brother’s hand was strong and warm.

* The second time Loki woke up that day, he was alone in bed. So, Thor had gone running, as he had said. He stretched his arms and back lazily, still feeling pleasantly fucked, from the night before and this morning.

He threw on some scruffs, wrapped up warm with one of Thor’s thick knitted jackets, and went downstairs and into the patio with his coffee, the meadow suffused in pale gold, the sun cold and dim in a bright sky of faded blue. He went into the orchard, and walked slowly among the short little trees. Touching delicately the little nubs that would be blossoming into tiny cream flowers come Spring, he made himself a promise, there and then, that he would be here to see it. That he would be back to sort out that bench for his mum’s new rose garden on top of the hill, and that he would get up there often, because there was much left to talk between them. That he would have the hothouse
repaired and filled again with the more delicate plants her mum had once delighted in. That they
would replace the sad, dying trees in the conservatory with new, budding orange and lemon trees,
and make a damn orangery, like she had always said she wanted.

Loki did not make promises lightly.

A couple of days ago (again, Thor was out running), he had finally brought himself to pay a visit to
his old bedroom. He had drawn back the curtains and opened the window, and was inundated by the
memories, just like he had feared. And then, it had passed. It was just a room. The wallpaper was
cute, the books on the shelf he had read a dozen times each —summers were long!— but none
carried any darkness for him. The posters on the walls, from his teenage years, were more loaded
with significance, but nothing he had not long learned to handle. There was a glass wall between
himself and this place. It could not touch him. He had nothing to fear.

When he had sat on the single bed, it creaked. They had fucked on this bed, back in the day. If Thor
so much as sat on it now, it would surely break in half. The thought made him laugh. His big bear of
a brother.

On his way out, he shut the window but not the curtains, and he left the door wide open. Something
should be done with that bedroom, he guessed, but there was no rush. And certainly, no ghosts.

He left a note.


His arse was tender, but he had had worse, and he felt like a nice sweat, so he took one of the bikes.
The road winded between field after field, where cattle grazed. As he was riding by the woods, he
nearly crashed when the biggest bird of prey he had ever fucking seen decided to cross the road just
above his head. Loki stopped, heart in his throat, a feeling of intense exhilaration prickling under his
skin, bursting in his chest. He fucking loved this place.

The village was quiet, only a few people on the street. The newsagents was in business. The doorbell
tinkled and Mrs. Webb, looking exactly as Loki remembered her, appeared from the back of the
store.

“Loki Odinson!” she said, with nothing but delight in her voice. “Look at you! Haven’t you grown!”

Loki smiled, in spite of himself.

“Good morning, Mrs. Webb,” he said, shyly.

She took that as an invitation somehow, and began to tell him all about her Christmas at the in-laws,
and what a pain in the neck her nephews were, not like Loki was as a kid, so well-spoken and so
polite, always said good morning, please and thank you. And how everybody still missed Frigga,
and had Loki heard of the yearly fête they had in her honour, with bake sales and raffles to collect
money for charity in her name, and how was Thor, and how was their father, how much they had
worried over them both in the village, how heartbroken they looked, and how wonderful it was to
see them together again, the Odinson kids, and was Thor still seeing that American girl, and was
Loki seeing any, any boys?

Loki had tried to answer as and when he found a gap, but at this last question, formulated with a
courage that commended her, he stopped and smiled.

“Who has time for boys,” he said. “Now I only bother with men.”

She thought it hilarious, agreed wholeheartedly, and started ranting about her husband.

He escaped eventually, with his fags and two lollies, and a big wet smack on his cheek. He rode home with the fulfilling, warming certainty that he was liked.

That night after dinner, without any prompting on Thor’s part, Loki went to the music room and started playing. He sang for him for a long time. His brother looked at him with more love in his eyes than Loki could endure, and a seamless, no-questions-asked kind of happiness Loki did not think he could ever feel. It did not worry him. Thor seemed to have enough for both of them.

Chapter End Notes

PS: tAngerine, thinking about you on the smut, darling.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

"So this is Sif, Loki was thinking, as he silently appraised the company."

For over-active brains like Loki’s, being left to their own devices is a double edged sword.

Chapter Notes

This got very intense, and was a lot of hard work, so it ended up split in two. Through the biological miracle of mitosis, behold, a new chapter is born!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

December 30th.

They were all sat at the round table in the smaller reception room, drinking beer and playing poker with Thor’s former drama school mates. Sigyn and Bruce would not be arriving until tomorrow. Loki wasn’t happy about that. He was sitting between expansive Volstagg and invisible Hogun (the one never shut his mouth, the other barely ever opened it.) In front of Loki, in a crescent, gorgeous Sif, fetching Fandral, and golden Thor. They were a wildly random group, mismatched in a million ways when you looked at them from the outside, age and background not the least of them. It was a mystery how they got along so well, but they gelled as if they had known each other all their lives. At the moment (for the last four fucking hours, really), they were having a great time catching up with each other’s lives and gossiping about people Loki did not know, while carrying on with old running jokes, which had sprung up at a time when Loki wasn’t around, and therefore had no fucking chance at understanding them now, in their present, umpteenth reincarnation.

They had made half-hearted attempts at including him at the beginning of the evening, asking him questions about the work, life in his corner of London, Thor’s friends in the US, particularities of the industry there, this kind of thing. He had replied mainly with monosyllables and stunted phrases, feeling uptight and unwanted, a glum outsider putting a damper on their happy reunion. Eventually, they had just started to overlook him, which they probably thought was what Loki wanted anyway.

He himself wasn’t sure what he wanted. Making small talk he hated, but being ignored was, hm, unpleasant. Deep down inside, he guessed all he wanted still, to this day, was to fit in with the cool crowd. But it took a lot more to make “fitting in” happen than his brother’s friends condescending to let him sit with them at lunch time, and pretending for a while to be interested in the awkward, shy little brother, and whatever the mysterious ingredient was, Loki didn’t have it. Story of his life.

And now he was bored, bored, bored, and he had been for hours. He thought he should be excused if his mind wandered and drifted at times, straying further and further away into increasingly outlandish reaches, as the night progressed and he became more tired and strained.
So this is Sif, Loki was thinking, as he silently appraised the company. He had seen her from the back of a theatre years ago, that fateful night, and he had not forgotten her (in spite of all the shit he had been pumping, and the near-death experience that followed, his memory of that evening remained sharp). But it was a different story from up close, wasn’t it? She was very beautiful, (when did his brother ever settle for less?), with feline, somewhat childish features, fired up with a sort of boldness so fierce and classy, it made Loki want to rip her massive hazel eyes out in envy. She came across as one of the boys in many ways, and her own person in every other. A lot like Jane, actually. It would appear his brother had a type. What did that say about Loki…

Another little thing Sif had in common with Jane is that she didn’t like Loki. He had noticed the moment they met this morning, from the stiff handshake, the mechanical kiss on the cheek, and the hard, assessing eyes, taking him in from head to toe, and judging. She had come ready not to trust him, ready to take Thor’s side against his brother at the first whiff of conflict. It wasn’t overt, and Thor would accuse him of being paranoid, but Thor never caught these things anyway. He was clueless like that. Sigyn would have picked up on it in an instant.

And the harsh first impression had yet to soften. She just kept them coming, the stream of subtle, minuscule signs she probably did not realise she was giving out. But Loki was the fucking king of micro-expressions, wasn’t he? It was his bloody job to master them, and you don’t get to act the way he did without having an eye for detail in the first place. Her smile was cold when she spoke to him, her eyes shadowed under an almost imperceptible frown, a tightening in her lip when she listened to him talk. It was all about trying to figure him out, about reading him. She sensed something fishy, did she not? She just could not put her finger on it because, frankly, who could. It took a certain kind of imagination, and the fundamental understanding that there ain’t nothing as queer as folk, so expect anything and everything, which only people like Tony and Natasha were blessed with—or cursed, take your pick.

No, Thor’s girlfriends never did like him, either because of a sixth sense that detected unfair competition (‘I was there first, and how’ kind of thing, maybe), or perhaps because there could be no discussion that Loki looked way hotter in a pair of fishnet stockings, high heels, and nothing else. He had an arse they could only dream of, and as for the legs…

Anyway, it’s not like Loki was bursting a gut trying to make them like him, Sif, Jane, or any of them, was he? And it’s not like Loki liked them. Thor had always had a pessimal taste in women (what was Loki going to do with girls whose charms consisted basically of how easily they put out and a big pair of tits) and then, when Thor’s taste had improved and started to include intelligence, decency, curiosity and humour… Well, Loki had learned to fear the small-tittied ones worst of all. Look at what had happened with Jane. Over two years… and who knows, they might still be together today, if circumstances had been different. Whether Loki liked it or not, even he could tell that Jane was a keeper.

And look at Sif. Sif was also very tastefully flat. And infuriatingly gorgeous. And sharp, and clever, and sassy, with a reserve of dignity and pride patent all the way, from her pointed jabs down to her posture, that reminded even Loki himself of someone. His brother had to have noticed too. It gave Loki lots to ponder.

So, a great match for Thor in every way; not to mention that she wasn’t a relative, and that she was of the right gender for a movie star looking to settle, while rising his international fucking profile in the exercise. What a fucking wonderful couple they would make. He could already see her on the red carpet, hanging from Thor’s arm, with a never-ending gown that showed off her elegant shoulders and long neck, and how they would exchange affectionate looks while the flashes blitzkrieged their perfect faces. And think about the amazing babies they would make, so beautiful, so wholesome. God, Odin would be so fucking happy… Oh, Loki, do not sigh like that, will you, he
hasn’t asked her to marry him yet.

Sif threw him a look, as if she had heard her own name in his thoughts. Loki squirmed on his arse, wondering if insecurity and jealousy had a scent, and whether some people could sniff it. He was feeling the same unpleasant churn inside as he had felt that night in Manhattan, under Jane’s cold, unkind stare. They seemed to broadcast it, these girls, loud and clear (‘you are poison, and you know it’), and Loki seemed to be tuned in just right to receive it. He guessed they just looked at his golden, sunshiny brother, so very healthy and normal in every way, or so they thought, and then they looked at Thor’s definitely unhealthy obsession for his (shall we leave it at complicated) little brother, with all the headaches and heartaches Loki had brought him, and perhaps, just perhaps, they all agreed that Thor would be better off if he managed to, oh, I don’t know, put some distance between himself and Loki’s issues, and get on with his life. Basically, if only Thor could care a little less…

That night in Manhattan, the hostile vibes emanating from Jane had gotten under his skin a lot more than Loki would ever let on. She was only trying to stand up for her man, taking his side against the noxious influence of his toxic little brother, and Loki fucking respected that. He had felt like bad, bad news, that night, and he had only gone on to prove her right with his cabaret shenanigans. In his distress (because even a disease-spreading leech can use a friend), Loki had turned to Tony, and had found, unexpectedly, real company and comfort. Here was this guy, deceitfully sunny and frivolous, who kept hidden, inside an ‘extremely-rich, outrageously-successful jerk’ exo-suit, a warm, compassionate heart, some deep-reaching damage of his own and, at the same time, an iron core able to withstand the emotional equivalent of a nuclear attack. So, overall, a pretty extraordinary individual whom Loki admired and felt a strong connection with, then and now. And this guy thought that Loki was the dog’s bollocks, worshipped the ground he trod on, wanted to marry him and have his babies, and would have put the world at his feet, if only Loki had let him. Tony Stark! Who had no illusions in mankind, was nobody's fool, and had refused to get involved all these years, actually fucking loved him! And in another life, in which Loki had not already burned his own heart on somebody else’s altar, long before they crossed each other’s paths, who knows. Loki was not sure he could love many people, but what he felt for Tony was warm, and gentle, and had a tenderness only three or four people in this world were able to stir in him.

Oh, and had Loki needed Tony’s unwavering adoration that night, because he agreed with Jane on all fucking counts. He agreed that his contribution to Thor’s life was rather like that of the nasty habit you can’t get rid of, the itch that makes you scratch until you draw blood, as you moan for how fucking good it feels, although you know it’s a bad idea and you’re going to regret it later. Next to Loki, these girls, Thor’s small-tittied girlfriends, were like a soothing balm —‘Yes, great, thank you, that feels… nice.’

But that was Loki’s winning card, something he knew that they didn’t. To wit, that Thor might appear healthy and wholesome and normal, but even as a rosy, angelic little boy, he had never given a fuck about nice. He could have had nice in spades, if he had wanted it. No, Thor didn’t want nice. He wanted Loki.

Where did that leave him. How does that make you feel.

Where was Tony when you needed him. (“What can I say, I’m smitten… You’re the complete package.”) Where was Sam. (“How is it even fair that someone so beautiful is always so sad? What you need is a good man who will look after you and make you laugh…”)

With a growing swell of anxiety making his heart pump faster, Loki looked with insistence at his insolently handsome brother, as oblivious of this poor mortal’s anguish as a fucking Olympian god, and begged in silence, with all his being, for a little look, a little smile, a little anything telling him I see you, I love you, all is well.
And waited. And waited. And waited.

Oh, for the love of god, Odinson, throw me a fucking bone, I’m drowning here. (“Wait for your brother, Thor!” —“But muuu-uum…! He’s slowing us down…!”)

“Pass,” said Loki, snapping out of himself. And he meant it on so many fucking levels.

He put down the cards he had not even really looked at since they were first dealt, stretched his arms and his back, and pretended to stifle a yawn. He might feel like he was sinking in some very cold, very black waters, but he did not need to look it, did he? Dignity, always dignity.

Out of the tail of his eye, he saw that Fandral was smiling at him -as he had done all night, whenever he caught Loki looking; a crooked, sexy half-a-smile (I give it 8/10), laced with a lingering, unblinking stare. Loki looked away, with a tiny flutter in his stomach. It would appear that he was fifteen again, and the attention of a handsome boy threw him into shambles; maybe because Fandral didn’t fuck about with the looks he was throwing him —that one was at least first base, as far as eye-sex went-, but also because it was only when Loki and Fandral made contact that Thor seemed to remember that Loki existed at all.

A sudden burst of laughter all around him. So Volstagg’s story had been a funny one, then. Loki had been dipping in and out of it, and had obviously missed the joke, but he doubted he would have got it anyway, since it revolved around a teacher at the bloody drama school that to Loki, of course, meant absolutely zip. He smiled vaguely, so as not to look like a complete imbecile, or a standoffish jerk, or both.

He had tried, he really had.

“Excuse me,” he muttered then, now that he had an opening, as he pushed the chair back and got up to his feet.

Toilet break. A splash of water to the face, a moment to gather his thoughts. He could not just disappear into the music room or into Frigga’s studio (his refuge throughout the day), could he? It would come across as if he was trying to make a point. And he did not want to make a point. What he wanted was to get through this awful evening with the minimal possible amount of shit-stirring between his brother and him. So he had to go back to the reception room, didn’t he? Bugger.

Well, he did go back, but he did not sit at the table again; one look at the tightly knit circle of friends having fun around it, and his anxiety went through the roof. He could not have managed to wedge himself between them again if he tried. There could have been a fucking hedge of brambles and a moat with spikes around the group, for how impenetrable the barrier of their closeness and complicity appeared in Loki’s mind.

For an excruciating minute he was frozen, stuck there, trapped between the thought that he had to stay, and the utter and complete incapability of joining them. He felt so ridiculous, so stupid.

A pleasing crackle from the fireplace. The flames were lively and pretty, and the rug in front of it, Loki knew well, was fluffy, warm, and soft. He knew it well because he had been fucked on it three times already. (He had to mention to Thor at some point that smearing ash on the stains of come did help making them blend with the background. So Loki was right, and Thor had been wrong.)

He lied down on the rug, on his back, one arm thrown over his face. He answered “yes, head a bit floaty. The cider, I guess,” when Volstagg asked “Alright, kid?” , and he let the rumble of the conversation soothe him into a light doze. He guessed he was acting rather strangely, but he was sure that everybody at that table had by now pinned him down as a total nutcase anyway.
It was nice in front of the fire but he would end up with a headache. The flames threw so much heat, half his body was burning, the other half was deeply cold. Look at me, I’m a planet. Thor’s thrumming, husky laughter cut through the white noise in Loki’s mind and forced him to open his eyes, briefly. Those jeans Thor was wearing were like a hundred years old, and fitted him like a second skin. He looked so criminally handsome in pale colours, cream and faded blue and soft grey, it was intolerable. Then again, when he wore black it gave Loki fucking palpitations. One would have guessed actually getting him would, I don’t know, ease the craving. Isn’t that how it usually works? Well, apparently not when it comes to his fucking otherworldly, godlike brother.

Oh, the rub burns on the small of his back, the first time they had fucked on the very spot where Loki was lying now. They had got down to it basically on the first warm, flat place they had found, they had been so horny (after that, they had started carrying lube on them all the time, just in case the urge struck.) The sounds of their fucking. Why did Loki have to have such a sensory-attuned memory? He turned onto his side, giving the poker-people his back, to try to get rid of the growing hard-on with some discretion. One arm stretched on the rug, his head resting on his biceps… And a touch of cool air low on his hips, in the sliver of skin that had become uncovered with the rising of his jumper. Those dimples he had there, where the muscles of his arse met the small of his back, must be on show now. Thor didn’t seem to get enough of them. He liked to kiss them, nuzzle at them, lick them, trace them with the tip of his fingers. They were not technically an erogenous zone, except that any part of him that made Thor so wild became an instant new g-spot for Loki (he had dozens of them by now.) Even though the cold was uncomfortable, Loki didn’t rush to tug down the jumper to cover up, just in case Thor was looking.

Sigh. He had got accustomed dangerously soon to get to have his brother as and when the need arose. And now he had this odious feeling, probably unfair and blown out of proportion, but no less compelling because of it, that the honeymoon was over, and it was married life from now on. Starting with Chapter One, ‘I don’t like it when you ignore me in front of your friends’. See Appendix B for Unusual Situations. (For Really Fucked Up Situations, i.e. Incest, Pseudo-Incest, Gay Pseudo-Incest and Bestiality, see Volume Ten of this same collection, ‘You Need Jesus’.)

Well, married life fucking sucked. Loki had not had a kiss, or a hug, or a grope, or a fucking wink from his brother since Sif and Fandral had arrived that morning, way ahead of schedule, interrupting the lovely underwater handjob Thor was giving him, in the bath he had surprised him with.

His big brother had returned from his morning run, had filled the tub and had waited naked by the bathroom door, with the air heater on, until Loki had finished his morning exercises in the eastern conservatory. There had been some lazy kissing, minimal splashing (having to do the mopping yourself sort of takes the fun out of it), extensive, sensual, indecent fondling, and when Loki had been so hard that the angry pink head of his cock broke the surface of the water, his brother’s hand had wrapped around him, his tongue in Loki’s neck and ear. Oh, it had been so decadently hot.

The doorbell had startled his brother and stayed his hand, and Loki had had to finish the job himself, while Thor dried and dressed in a hurry. And let me tell you, Loki had been so shocked and furious, he had almost lost his erection and his oomph, having nothing but his penchant for exhibitionism (and for provoking Thor) to thank for being able to see this one through.

Only slightly more relaxed from quite an intense orgasm (slow, lengthy, sensual build-ups and uneven, suspense-laden progressions tended to have that effect on him), Loki had taken some time to blow-dry his hair. And not out of vanity this time, —he could hardly turn up in front of Thor’s mates looking as if… Well, as if they had just been having a bath together, could he?

Oh, fucking bugger this.
Loki sat up, head floaty for real this time, from the heat and the horizontality. He had promised Thor he would be cutting down, but right now, he was desperate for a fag and some fresh air (and yes, he was perfectly fucking aware of the contradiction, thank you very much.) He got up, fished the pack from the pocket of his knit jacket, hanging off the back of the chair, and stepped out into the patio. As he did, he noticed that Fandral’s head turned to follow him, but Thor’s attention stayed fixed on Sif, and whatever she was saying, as if Loki was fucking invisible. The grimace on Loki’s face, from clenching his jaw in anger, must have shown. Just in case it hadn’t, Loki slammed the door behind him.

He waded through the damp, overgrown lawn, towards the arbor bench where he always used to smoke, back in the day, after Sunday lunch with the family. He had his back to the house, the moonlight glinting here and there on the open meadow, eerie and quiet. The ground seemed to have its own glow. It felt pretty much the same as the night that… The night he had laid his broken heart like a trap for Thor to stomp on it.

“We could be together now” he had told him, although he knew it was absurd. Whatever had possessed him? Oh, knowing himself, all he had wanted was to push Thor to hurt him and reject him one last time. Perhaps he had just wanted to see things burn.

Water under the bridge, and let’s not waste our time on idle thoughts that, old and musty as they were, had not lost all their edge, and were still able to cut. Because Thor’s sarcastic answer, (“Sure, it would spice up our interviews no end”) retained every speck of its cruel relevance. There it was, in a nutshell, the painful truth about Thor and Loki: that they were exactly where they had begun, where they had always been, and that Loki could not see a way out for them.

Oh well.

The door thumped open (it still stuck) and Loki whipped his head around, in hope. But it was Fandral. Sigh. He watched him approach, walking with practised swagger, a consummate flirt (with a very low failure rate, Loki wagered.)

“Loki, can you give me a light?” asked Fandral, his voice polished and rich, his diction fastidiously neat, theatrical. He leaned over with a fag in his lips, expecting Loki to hold the lighter up for him. Smooth. Loki did as politeness required, while Fandral cupped his hands around the flame, touching his fingertips on Loki’s hands as if to still them, and speared Loki with an intent stare while the cigarette caught.

“Thank you,” he said, charming, dashing, the stupid moustache and goatee he sported coming to full effect when he smiled. Loki had overheard that he was in that musical parody of *The Three Musketeers* that was the toast of London, playing Aramis. Most fitting.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance at last, Loki,” he said, white teeth flashing, cigarette smoke smoking. “Thor talks so much about you.”

Loki tipped his head. “Same.”

“I saw you in *The Rocky Horror*, and I confess I’ve been desperately in love ever since.”

Loki blinked quickly, taken aback. Hold your fucking horses there, mate.

“Frank is a very compelling character,” he said.

A wider, more playful smirk from Fandral, sensing deflection, and not daunted in the least.

“That may be so, but Tim Curry never did have that effect on me.”
“I’m a very compelling performer,” said Loki, with a little smile some would describe as modest, others as coquettish. (Loki would say it was simply shy, but nobody ever took his word for anything.)

Fandral took a seat next to him on the arbour bench. Loki slid sideways just a couple of inches, trying to put some air between them, without making it look as if he thought that Fandral had something contagious.

“You know,” said Fandral, who apparently had learned to smoke from Marlene Dietrich, “when Thor said you were back in the circuit, I was hoping so very much that we would bump into each other at some point, either in a play, or at a party, or…”

“I’m not much for parties, and straight after *Rocky* I went to New York, so…”

“Oh, yes, *M.Butterfly*. You left your brother flat on his back with that one, you know? We asked him how it had been, and we’re still waiting for a coherent answer; he was so affected…”

Loki said nothing to this. Because "oh really, and whose fucking fault was that" would have sounded as a conversation teaser, and Loki was not in the teasing business anymore.

“I was desperate to see it myself,” Fandral was saying, “but I was nose deep in *Downton Abbey* most of that year, and in *Sloane* the rest of the time, so I was never able to make it happen.”

“Oh, at the Lyric?”

“Yes.”

“I heard great things,” said Loki, a thin, polite smile.

“Thank you very much, thank you. But you should see what I’m doing now. All singing, all dancing, old-fashioned swashbuckle. It’s hilarious, if I may say so. You should come.”

Loki nodded.

“We’ll try.”

If Fandral was a dog, his ear would have cocked up at that “we”.

“So what’s next up for you, Loki?”

“A holiday,” he said. “The shoot has exhausted me, and the press tour is going to kill me, so I better take it easy for a while. I’ve got some radio lined up, and this girl has been chasing me to do a photoshoot, but apart from that.”

“What photoshoot?”

“Art house stuff. Dancing poses.”

“Oh, right. Yes, Thor said you had been a ballet dancer.”

“Oh no, I just… took some lessons when I was a kid. Never got anywhere with it.”

“Thor says you were incredible, that you could be in the Royal Ballet if you had wanted to.”

Loki looked him up and down, assessing how serious he was. He got an open, candid expression.
“Does Thor ever shut up about me,” he muttered at length.

Fandral laughed.

“I just happen to always be listening whenever your name pops up,” a dazzling, jaw-splitting smile.

And a skittish, tight-lipped grin from Loki. He butted his fag and stood up.

“I better go inside. I’m freezing,” he said.

“It was lovely talking to you,” said Fandral, with an intent squint peering at him through the smoke. Definitely Marlene Dietrich.

“And you,” Loki said.

The first thing he saw when he walked in was Thor’s fixed, wary stare, and that little spiteful twist on his lip, ready to show teeth.

Ok, that was it. Loki was fucking done.

“I think I’m going to bed now,” he announced, up until fucking here with this fucking evening. “Good night everyone.”

He got a nod from Hogun, a tight, fake smile from Sif, a broad and genuine one from Volstagg, and a fulminating glare from Thor. If they had been alone, heavy objects would be flying by now, because how did he bloody dare. But alone, alas, they were not.

Loki walked down the hall and up the stairs without rushing, expecting at any time to hear the stomping of those big cowboy boots behind him. He made it all the way to the landing before they came. He waited up there as his brother climbed the last few steps.

Loki took a deep breath. He was tired. He certainly did not feel like having a big argument in hushed tones in the middle of the corridor. He so wanted to find the words that would get him off the hook. But then again, he had never been one to present the other cheek. Not the upper ones, anyway.

“What the fuck was all that rolling on the rug for?” said Thor, cutting to the chase. He had obviously been brewing this up for some time, and it had now exploded. “Isn’t Fandral’s nose high enough up your arse as it is? Are you trying to rile me up or what?”

“What?” snapped Loki, livid, starting to see red. He took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down. “No, I was not trying to rile you up,” said Loki. If I wanted to rile you up, I’d climb on his fucking lap and give him a dance. Don’t fucking push me or I might still do it, he thought. He thought it, but did not say it, because he was trying to keep this civil, and more than anything, brief. And he did not try to explain the complex thought process that had landed him on the rug either, because he was too fucking pissed off to bother, and because he did not really know how to break it down in chunks his oaf of a brother could understand anyway.

“So?” said Thor.

“You have been ignoring me all fucking day,” he said, opting for countermeasures.

“And is that the only way to get my attention, rolling on the floor like a cat in heat?”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” snapped Loki, barging past his brother, striding in the opposite direction from
Thor's room. "Not everything is always about you!" he shouted as he walked.

"Where the fuck are you going?"

Loki slammed the door of his old bedroom open, and slammed it shut behind his back.

"Hey, we’re not finished," came Thor's muffled voice from behind the thick wood.

"I am!" shouted Loki. "Fuck off!" And that, they had surely heard from downstairs. Which is why Thor was quiet now, finally giving the 'other people in the house' issue some serious thought. Well, he should have remembered before he took on this fucking line of conversation.

They were at an impasse, thought Loki, arms crossed tightly in front of his chest, huffing and puffing in silent rage. All his things were in Thor’s room. How about that, they had not discussed the sleeping arrangements while Thor’s friends were staying (talk about avoidance.) He wagered Thor was thinking the exact same thing behind the door.

Knock knock.

"Baby, let me in."

Oh, so it's baby again, isn’t it.

"Leave me alone," hissed Loki.

A pause, and then the handle was twisting. Apparently, when Thor was upset, basic manners went out the window. He came in and shut the door behind him. Loki avoided facing him.

Thor sighed, a deep and noisy intake of breath, visibly trying to get himself back to a civil state of mind, just as Loki was.

"Listen, you’re right, ok? I have been kind of distant, but I just-…"

"Kind of distant?!" snapped Loki.

Thor raised his hands in surrender.

"I know. He’s very handsome and I’m jealous, ok? I get all worked up and irrational and… and I’m an arsehole, I know. I’m sorry. Can you forgive me?"

"You haven’t even looked at me all day," sulked Loki, not ready to let go of his grievances yet.

"I know," said Thor, massaging his temples, eyes shut tight, obviously spread very thin. “I’m… paranoid. I feel like it’s in my eyes whenever I look at you. And that’s not how I want to break it to them. And I am telling them, I am.” He looked at him then, pleading. “I swear, baby. I’m waiting for the right time. I just can’t find it. It’s not something that crops up in a normal conversation, is it?”

Loki could not help a pout.

"You’ve only been asked a hundred times if you’re with someone,” he protested.

“And I’ve said yes, haven’t I? It’s just a bit hard to…” Thor rubbed his brow exhaustedly.

“I told you, Thor, you don’t have to tell them anything,” said Loki then, taking pity on him, god fucking knows why.
“I want to,” claimed Thor. “This is kind of big, and they’re my best friends in the world… It feels wrong that they don’t know. I don’t want to lie to them. We have to lie too much already.” He gave Loki a weary smile.

And Loki could not stand it, he could not. He wanted to stay mad at him, he had every single fucking reason in the world. He really needed to work on hardening up against those puppy eyes…

“You have nothing to fear from Fandral,” he muttered. Not that Thor deserved his reassurance. “Absolutely nothing. I’m taken, ok? Not interested, not tempted. Not even remotely. Alright?” He decided to push for reconciliation, even if it felt forced. He turned the naughty on. “As long as you’re good to me,” he purred. And he grinned, aiming for wicked. The result might have been a bit weak and lacklustre, but he hoped it would do.

Thor sighed, and went with it, relieved. Although his eyes remained weary, he tried a crooked half-smile (so fucking sexy.)

“I can be very good to you,” he said, low and playful, “but when I’m bad, I’m better.” He winked.

“Oh no, don’t even go there, Mae. Come on, get out. Tend to your guests,” said Loki. They were back to alright, weren’t they?

“Are you staying in this room?” asked Thor.

Loki shrugged.

“What are the options?”

Thor couldn’t come up with any on such short notice. The family wing was full, and the guests wing was freezing.

“Leave me be now. Shoo,” said Loki, waiving him away, without heat.

Thor closed the distance between them in two long strides. Oh no, no no no no… Whatever plans Loki had of spending a nice evening getting reacquainted with his old childhood books, while quietly raging at his brother, went out the window when Thor hooked one big, strong hand around his neck and pulled Loki forcefully towards him for a fierce, greedy, messy kiss that said you’re mine. It turned Loki’s knees into jelly, and his resentment into warm mush. He managed not to whimper, but only just about.

“You’re a pain in the butt, you know,” he whispered against Thor’s mouth.

“I love you too, baby,” smirked Thor, indecently handsome, unbearably smug.

There was still light under Loki’s door when they called it a night. Hogun had got the lion’s share of the winnings (about thirteen pounds, since they played for pennies) and Thor had lost all of his petty cash. Thor hugged Fandral and Sif goodnight in the corridor (Sif lingered), was effusively crushed
and back-patted by Volstagg, and got a rigid but heartfelt one-armed hug from Hogun. He went into his room, gave it fifteen minutes, and padded quietly over to Loki’s door. He did not knock.

Under the narrow puddle of light the small bedside lamp casted, his brother was reading an Asterix comic book. Loki’s feet were crossed at the ankle, poking out under three thick blankets piled on top of him. He was wearing non-slip rainbow-stripe socks way too small for him, and oh my god, were those his Jungle Book pyjamas? Thor burst out laughing. A pillow flew in his direction, and did not miss.

“Oh baby, you’re killing me,” he said, between giggles, coming to a kneel next to his brother. “You know you could have gone to get your stuff at any time, didn’t you?”

Loki shrugged. “It’s cold. Couldn’t be bothered.”

Yeah, right, Thor thought, you just knew what it would do to me, didn’t you? Aw, baby. Thor gazed at him, moony-eyed.

“What is it. Stop it,” Loki grumbled.

“You’re adorable.”

“I’m not adorable. Puppies are adorable. Don’t fucking sit on the bed, you’ll break it!” snapped Loki then, kicking at him.

Thor sat down anyway. There was a loud creak.

“Get off! Where am I supposed to sleep if you break it, genius?” Loki kept kicking.

“Baby, come to bed,” said Thor.

“You’re drunk, aren’t you?”

“I’ve had four beers in over four hours, I’m not drunk.”

“Well, you sound drunk. Now, get off.”

“Come to bed.”

“What are you going to fucking tell them?”

Thor shrugged.

“I don’t know. I don’t care. Just… come to bed. Please?”

Loki glowered at him.

“Do you expect me to sneak out in the morning?”

Thor sighed, deflated, his good humour faltering.

“You haven’t thought this through, have you?” said Loki.

“No, I haven’t,” said Thor. He shook it off. “It doesn’t matter, ok? Just come to bed and we’ll… we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

“You’re randy out of your mind, that’s what it is,” purred Loki.
Thor scratched his nape, possibly flustering.

“You are,” said Loki. His smirk became wider and naughtier. “You’ve been thinking about it all night, haven’t you? It turns you on, fucking me in silence, with your mates just next-door.” His voice had dropped an octave. He looked pretty incongruous with his sex-voice and his sex-eyes on, Mowgli and Baloo on his jumper, and those silly rainbow socks. Thor’s heartbeat was picking up. “You’d risk anything to get inside me right now, wouldn’t you? Like when we were kids, with mum and dad downstairs or in their room, knocking on my door three seconds after their light went off.” He shook his head, feigning disappointment. Tut-tut.

Thor slithered one hand under the blankets, and pushed them to the side. Loki did not stop him. Thor ran his eyes up and down his brother’s lanky frame, the pyjama top riding half-way up his stomach, taut over Loki’s lean muscles. If it wasn’t so fucking hot it would be ridiculous. Perhaps it was both. He gave the headboard a shake, gauging the strength of the frame.

Loki put his comic book to one side, sat up on the bed and put his feet on the floor, knees trapping Thor, their faces two inches apart.

“How are you going to keep me quiet,” whispered Loki. “You know how I am when you get me going…”

Thor shivered, his cock gave a tug. Before he found his voice, Loki cut him off.

“You can’t shut me up with your hand. How are you going to explain the bite marks?” His eyes darted to Thor’s mouth, as his tongue ran a slow course over his top lip. “You could always use your cock. But that’s not what you want tonight, is it? No, tonight you want to fuck me.”

Jesus, the way he made that sound. Thor was panting already.

“How about one of my scarves,” Loki carried on. “Stuff it all in my mouth. But I’m not going to just lie there and let you do whatever you want to me like a good boy, am I? No, I’m going to fucking fight you. You’ll have to restrain me somehow, tie me up…”

Thor gasped, a spike of lust pressing the air out of his lungs, his brother’s eyes unyielding on his.

“You could just take my top off,” said Loki, inching forward to the edge of the mattress, closer to Thor, “leave it around my arms… these sleeves are tight. Give it a twist. There’s no way I can get out of it. But you know I’ll kick and thrash, you’ll have to get between my legs, squash me with your weight. I won’t stop fighting for one fucking second, I’ll be trying to get free and take that scarf out of my mouth, so that I can scream your name as you fuck me, for all the fucking world to hear.” He licked his lips again, with slow deliberation.

Thor’s cock was straining in his jeans, one hand on either side of Loki’s body, but not touching yet. Delayed gratification, they call it. God, his voice…

“You’ll have to rip my pants,” continued Loki. “Can you do that single-handed? With your other hand you’ll be reaching for the lube. Maybe my binds are starting to give by now, you’ll need to hold my wrists and slick yourself at the same time, while I wriggle and twist and writhe under you. You’ll have to be quick about it, because you know the best way to subdue me is to have me impaled on your big, hard cock.” He let the word fill his mouth, the way he knew it would go straight to Thor’s groin. “There’s no fucking escaping that, is there? And you know I’ll never want to. That will take my breath away.” For the next part he took it up one notch, adding some heavy breathing and some dramatics. “You’ll be so heavy on me, I’ll be barely able to breathe, let alone speak, and when you start fucking me I’ll have no voice to…”
Ok that’s it, Thor could fucking hold back no more. He crushed their mouths together, one hand around Loki’s neck to make sure he wasn’t going anywhere, unbuttoning his own jeans single-handedly and fumbling inside to get his cock out. He dragged Loki onto his lap, mouths still avidly chasing each other, a grimace when teeth clacked, Loki’s nails digging in his scalp, gasping and panting. Without breaking the kiss, Loki laid on his back on the rug, eyes fiery, glinting with fever.

Thor pulled down Loki’s too-short cotton pants in three forceful tugs and got immediately trapped in a vice grip between his thighs, Loki’s cock plump and heavy and rising. While Thor got rid of his jacket, which was getting in the way, Loki fished for lube in Thor’s back pocket. Thor snatched the packet from him, tore it open, got it all over the fucking place. Loki laughed, a low, hot, groaning sound Thor wanted to drown in. He propped himself on his arms and watched with a suffering, impatient frown as Loki coated himself with lube, his fingers sliding in and out easily, and gasped when Loki’s cold fingers wrapped around his cock, stroking, to slick it.

“Do I have to gag you?” muttered Thor, lining himself up, raising one of Loki’s ankles over his shoulder, dragging him half onto his lap.

“Probably,” muttered Loki, eyes low down on Thor’s cock.

Thor thrusted in, bottoming out in one strong shove, and Loki’s neck and back arched dramatically with a quick, very nearly silent gasp.

“Are you going to be quiet?” groaned Thor, voice faltering with Loki’s body tightening suddenly around him.

Loki smiled, teasing, feline. Thor was going to wipe that self-control out of his face or fucking die trying. He withdrew almost all out, but for the head, and fucked in deep and hard again. Loki tensed underneath him, his eyes grew heavy, his jaw slack, his fingernails digging into the flesh of Thor’s shoulders. But he was quiet. Perhaps he was feeling shy himself, who would have guessed…

“I’ll make you a deal,” said Thor, his voice thinning with the strain, “if you keep really, really quiet, I’ll fuck you so good and so sweet, you’ll never see a rainbow again without getting a hard-on, for the rest of your life.”

Loki smirked some more, eyes glazed, impaled on his cock, wiggling his toes in those silly stripy socks he still had on.

“But if you make one sound,” groaned Thor, “I’m getting out of here and leaving you high and dry.” He shifted inside him, pressing and prodding and taunting.

“I’ll make you another deal,” Loki whispered, “you get on with it right the fuck now, or I’m going to start talking…”

Thor smirked and got on with it, alright, eyes fixed on his brother’s face, searching his expressions as he snaked his hips, aiming for the spot that made Loki bite his lip and his brow scrunch up. A tiny moan fell from his mouth.

“Shh…” hushed Thor, trying to repeat again and again the exact movement that had forced that sound out of his brother.

Loki’s hands were clawing on the back of Thor’s thighs. Thor was quivering with unreleased tension, the urge to fuck wildly so demanding, the agony of holding back exquisite. He got Loki to hook both legs on his forearms, and held him there, open and elevated, while speeding up a little. He had more range of movements like this, he could pull back further, and thrust in deeper. All that
friction. Loki’s breathing was laboured, irregular with the need to control his voice.

“Not one sound.” whispered Thor, as he started to fuck ever so slightly faster, watching with glee as Loki’s expression turned pained.

“Bastard” whispered Loki in turn, clenching his jaw.

Thor was pistoning in and out quickly and relentlessly, wondering if he could keep up that same exhausting pace until Loki came. He had his motivation right there, though, watching Loki fall to pieces underneath him, mouth hanging open now, licking his lips to wet them, starting to shudder underneath him, that frown of pleasure and agony both. It seemed that he was playing the quiet game more as a bet with himself than for fear of anything Thor could threaten him with. Thor wanted in on this game again. He angled himself more carefully and kept thrusting steadily, not too fast, not too slow, just that little bit harder.

“Oh fffff…” Loki managed to hold the moan in.

Thor rested Loki’s ankle on his shoulder again, spat on his palm and started to stroke his cock. Loki bit his lip, whining muffledly, brow knitted up, his hand on Thor’s hand, the other flying madly here to there, grabbing at this, clawing at that, as if trying to find a distraction, or something to take to his mouth to bite. In the end he just hooked it around Thor’s neck, digging his nails in hard enough to leave a mark that would surely be visible in the morning. God, fuck, I don’t care, fucking mark me, brother, Thor was thinking, biting hard himself, because it fucking hurt.

Loki had to know that there was no way Thor was going to stop now, deal or no deal, but still Loki tried to keep quiet, to keep control even as Thor was tearing him to pieces. Thor just tried to focus on maintaining that same rhythm, constant and ruthless, and for the love of all that is holy, Odinson, don’t fucking come just yet.

A broken whine from Loki, high-pitched, pleading. Thor twisted his fist around his brother’s cock, jacked faster, and Loki moaned desperately, the sound spearing right through Thor’s crotch, and came undone, spending on his stomach, still swayed up and down by Thor’s thrusts like a doll, and seemingly exhausted from the effort of keeping silent.

The drowsy look and the satisfied grin that started spreading on his face was a killer. Thor let himself go, his thrusts fast becoming irregular and frenzied.

“Come on, brother,” whispered Loki, low and hot. “I’m yours… take all you need… take it all…” His eyes were a green fire burning him.

“Oh, fuck, fuuuuck…” groaned Thor, his orgasm ripping through him. He pushed in deep, arse tense, jolting with every spurt of come.

He released Loki’s ankle, which had been still on his shoulder, and collapsed, boneless, on his brother’s chest.

“Jesus fuck, baby,” he said, panting. “I love you so much.”

Loki’s fingers raked gently up and down his back, and rested on his arse. Thor wanted to stay like that forever. He could feel himself starting to melt away into the blessed afterglow. Just then, Loki gave his butt a vicious pinch.

“Ow!” he whined. So much for melting.

“You’re heavy,” said Loki. "Floor’s hard. I’m cold. Shift.”
They scampered to Thor’s room trying not to giggle, Loki stark bollock naked under Thor’s knit jacket (he had left behind in his room the few garments he had still been wearing, including the rainbow socks. Shame.) Loki snuck up into bed as fast as he could, and waited eagerly for Thor to finish slipping out of his clothes and snuggle up behind him. Loki was shivering, Thor was still sweating and overheated from his efforts. Spooning, Thor rubbed his hands on Loki’s thighs and arms, his skin so cold, and hooked their feet together. After a while, Loki started to warm up and become still in Thor’s arms.

Thor thought they were going to sleep, but after some time, just when Thor had begun to think he had gone under, Loki asked, in a shy mutter,

“Thor, what’s the story with Sif?”

“The deal with Sif?” he repeated, like an idiot. What was Loki after? He wished he had more cunning… Don't try to play smart, Odinson. Just answer the fucking question. “We slept together once, a long time ago.”

“You did not date?”

“No.” Thor gave that some thought. “It was just… You know, sharing a flat, things happen.”

“Oh, does that mean you've fucked Fandral as well?” said Loki. The tone was playful. He was joking.

Well, I’ve got some news, brother…

“Oh my god,” gasped Loki, turning to look at him, when Thor said nothing for a bit too long, “you have?”

Thor shrugged. Was there going to be an argument now? Loki was gawking, wide-eyed, his expression amused. Perhaps not an argument then.

“Is there anybody in this house you haven’t fucked, brother?”

Thor laughed, colour on his face.

“Hm, Volstagg’s wife terrifies me, and I think Hogun is ace, but apart from that…”

“You slut,” sniggered Loki, now on his side, facing him, peering at him with an impish expression. Those crinkles on the tail of his eyes would be staying one day. Thor couldn’t wait. "So, how many more men have there been in your life, Odinson?"

Thor harrumphed.

"Half a dozen, give or take. One-night-stands. Fandral is the only one I've, um, been with more than once. Apart from you."

"I see."

“You’re not angry then?”

“That you’ve fucked him?” said Loki.
“And that I... didn’t tell you.”

“I’m not angry that you’ve fucked him. You have some nerve getting jealous though. I do want to know why you never told me.”

“...I didn’t really think about it. It was a long time ago, and it really was... It meant nothing.”

“Hm. Harsh. What would he say about that?”

“Nothing, I think. He was a great comfort when mum died. I mean, they all were, I don’t know what I would have done without them keeping me busy and company. But I found that sex... well, it got me out of my mind. I did not feel like going out looking for it, but Fandral was there and...”

“So was Sif.”

“Yes but... I knew Sif had feelings. It didn’t feel right to, you know.”

“Feed her hopes.”

“...Yeah.” It was weird to speak of this out loud, it sounded so blunt. “But with Fandral there was nothing... uh, romantic, so, no harm done. I didn’t want a relationship. I was in love with someone else.” He gave him a small, meaningful smile.

Loki laid on his back, bedcovers up to his shoulders, his pale face gleaming with a light of its own in the dim clarity of the moonlight. Thor threw an arm and a leg over him and cuddled up. Kisses on his shoulder.

“Why Jane and not Sif?” muttered Loki, his eyes low, his eyelashes long. "Had you stopped being in love with that someone else then?"

Thor gulped. Fuck.

“Never,” he said, with all his conviction.

A brief silence. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“But you did love Jane.”

Another gulp. Fuck, fuck, fuck. The truth, Odinson.

“I did,” he said. Quick, deep breath.

Loki was quiet. Thor felt like it was up to him to fill the silence.

"Sif and Jane... I met them at different times in my life. At the time I slept with Sif, you had left the club months ago, and I didn’t know where you were, but the last time we had seen each other you had told me...”

Loki wriggled in his arms, looking away. Distressful memories. Thor hugged tight, and continued.

“You told me things that were true and that made me think a lot, things I should have faced a long time ago. And you were right, I was no good for you back then. I really did not know what to do about you and me. I would have fucked everything up again.”

He gave Loki a moment, in case he wanted to say anything, but he didn’t.
“The things you said, and the things that had happened to you…” resumed Thor, “it all came crashing down on me. I felt unhinged. I lost my way. If I wasn’t your big brother and your, um, your protector, if I wasn’t chasing you, I did not know what was the point of me, does that make sense? I did not know what to do next. When I met Sif and the rest, things improved, but I was still a wreck. I needed to piece myself and my life back together again. I couldn’t be anybody’s boyfriend. But when I met Jane for the second time-…”

“The second time?” cut Loki.

“Yes. The first time we met was ages ago, while you were still on your quest for Laufey.”

“I didn’t know that.”

(Er, fuck?)

“We did not sleep together or anything, we just talked… I didn’t think I would ever see her again. All I had on my mind back then was that I had to find you. I really wasn’t in the right place to start anything and,” (gulp) “although I liked her very much, or perhaps because of it… She is just not the kind of girl you…”

“(..You fuck and forget,” finished Loki, since Thor was struggling.

“(…Yeah.” Again, so fucking blunt. Moving on. “Anyway, the second time, I knew you were safe and well in London, and that you didn’t want to see me. You were doing what was best for you, and I thought I… I guess I thought it was time to grow up. To do what I should. You know, when grown-ups find a good person they’re good with, they try and settle, don’t they?”

“So I’ve heard.”

“But it would have never worked with Jane. I thought if I tried hard enough… I never tried hard enough, of course. She was great, but she was not who I really wanted.”

Loki had his eyes lost in space, deep in thought.

“I think I tried to do with Sam what you were trying to do with Jane,” he said after some time. "I knew from the press and stuff that you were with her when I met him, and I was doing better, and he was decent, and kind, and centred. He could really handle my stuff very well, the hospital, the therapy, the suicide attempts, the whoring. He wasn’t afraid of it. I told myself I needed to stop living in fairyland and hoping for miracles and just… get a real life, I guess. I really couldn’t do better than him. But when I came to see you in that hotel room after The Rocky Horror, I just… I realised I would never kill this, ever. So I wasn’t being fair to Sam. He was wasting his time with me. I think he knew from the start, but he’s stubborn, what can I say. He’ll always try. He’s a bit like you like that. And the sex was great too. He’s so fit and athletic…” He smirked wickedly, just to elicit a glower from Thor. And he got it, which pleased him. “Anyway. I was aware that I was probably doing a very stupid thing and passing out on a once-in-a-lifetime gift from heaven, but I broke up with him the very next time I saw him.”

Thor gave himself a moment to take that in. He had never asked any questions about Sam, but he had racked his brains for years wondering. He would be lying if he said this was not exactly what he had been hoping to hear. Except for how great the sex was, maybe.

“When I saw you with Tony in that place in Manhattan,” he said then, sharing a confession of his own, “so… domestic, bantering and flirting and synchronised and having fun with each other… I thought I had lost you for good.” After a breath, a dreamy smirk when he added, "Until you started
“Tony made me feel I was alright,” said Loki. “He never made me feel like I had to… I don’t know, put some work here or tone it down a bit there. He liked me outrageous and dramatic and moody. I wasn’t a work in progress for him. And he loved me.”

“…Do I make you feel like you’re a work in progress? Like you have to change for me or something?”

Loki’s silence spoke volumes. It put a bad taste in Thor’s mouth.

“I guess I want you to… to get well.” he mumbled. This felt awful… “I don’t want you to suffer, or be scared, or want to… to hurt yourself. Do you know what I mean? I know your moods and they don’t put me off. God knows, with my temper, I’m not a ride in the park myself. And I don’t mind you being… how did you put it? Outrageous and dramatic? I love that about you, baby, you’re so intense and electric, and more alive than anybody else, and I feel more alive being with you. I don’t want you to change, I just… I wish you felt alright in your own skin.”

“I know, brother,” said Loki, with a brief squeeze. “I am a work in progress. Only with Tony it didn’t matter so much because… well, I never hoped I’d spend the rest of my life with him, that’s all.”

Thor blanked out with the implications in that statement. Oh, Loki, baby... He squeezed tight speechless.

“I want to get better for you,” muttered Loki then. “But with these things, you don’t stay cured forever. And there are lots of things about me that can’t be fixed. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes, baby.” Thor hugged him close to his chest again, kissed his face. “Hey, I can be a real jerk, and that has no cure either, does it?”

“I’m putting my faith in modern medicine.”

Thor smiled, hugged him tight, his eyes shut. How fucking good it felt to have him in his arms like that.

“That morning after The Rocky Horror,” he mused, “I wanted to hug you so badly,” he mumbled. “And it felt like there was a wall between us, or an abyss, I don’t know. And you looked so nervous, so anxious. I was desperate to reach out and… It was just wrong, you know?, that I didn’t even know if you would let me hug you, that I couldn’t fucking reach out for you and touch you. And this is right. This, now. This has always felt right, you, me. I don’t care what anyone says.”

Loki returned the sentiment with a little squeeze, holding his breath in a vibrating, dense silence which Thor knew was full of the things Loki always struggled to express out loud.

"And I am going to tell my friends, I am," Thor said. "I want them to know that I’m finally in a relationship with the love of my life, and that I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. That’s the kind of thing you share with your friends, isn’t it? I don’t even know what I’m so scared of. If they can’t accept this, us, they’re not the people I thought they were, and I don’t want them in our lives.”

Loki kissed his brow, nudged against him.

“It’s up to you, brother. I don’t want to push you because… Well, I know how it feels. I know it’s petrifying. I’ve been there.”
“Have you?”

“Yes, you big oaf. I have friends too, you know? With Sigyn.”

“Right. Of course. And that wasn’t a disaster, was it?” said Thor, hopeful.

“No,” said Loki, softly, “that was the biggest relief I have ever felt in my whole life.”

They laid there in silence for a long time, both awake, both deep in thought.

“I’m all crusty,” grumbled Loki then.

Thor laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo lots of reminiscing in this one. Where you paying attention? I feel like I should test you all.

Ok. Clarifications, then.

1. "The fateful night" when Loki first saw Sif, was at the performance of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof she was starring in with Thor. Later that night, Loki tried to die from exposure. By that time he had been living in the streets for over a year, self-medicating and not taking very good care of himself overall. Chapter 6, was it?

2. "That night in Manhattan" when Loki remembers Jane throwing him the evil eye is the one in chapter (hm, wait a second) 10. It will get mentioned again later, by Thor, when they’re both cosy and warm in bed, having their midnight confessions.


4. "Dignity, always dignity." That's from 'Singing in the rain'.

5. When Loki goes out for a fag, he's thinking of the night in chapter 2.

6. Tim Curry played Frank'n Furter in 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show' and his performance is anthological. Loki was hotter, though. Marlene Dietrich is a Movie Star with capital letters, and she really knew her way around cigarettes.

7. If you don't know what happened when Thor went to see M.Butterfly, I'll be very, very disappointed. Chapter 12, to the corner with you, and don't come back until you've read it!
8. The "Sloane" Fandral mentions is the play "Entertaining Mr. Sloane" by Joe Orton, in which I've decided to cast him. He was great in it. It was at the Lyric theatre, which exists, so Wikipedia says. 'Downton Abbey' you've heard of, haven't you?

8. The musical parody of The Three Musketeers might exist for all I know, but I've made it up. Aramis is just such a great fit for Fandral, isn't it? I imagine it as a blend between the Musketeers with Gene Kelly and some old-fashioned Gilbert and Sullyvan kind of thing. I'd go to see that!

9. You're not supposed to have heard of that photoshoot Loki mentions, or the radio.

10. "When I'm good, I'm very good. But when I'm bad... I'm better." That's Mae West, I think it's from 'I'm no angel' but I'm not sure. She was a comedian in Hollywood and theatres in the 30s, before the Hays Code came into effect (she probably was one of the reasons they got a 'decency code' in movies in the first place.) She was outrageous, so openly sexual, she ate her handsome co-stars for breakfast (including Cary Grant, go get him, girl!) and her comebacks were gold. She wrote most of her own stuff. Goddess.

11. Yes, Loki reads Asterix because the Odinsons are practically continental. (Asterix is a comic book for children by French writer Goscinny and illustrator Uderzo. I love them. They're not so well-known in the UK as far as I know, but are very famous in Catalonia, my country, and a national treasure in France.)

12. Snuggled up in bed, they're talking about chapter 4 and 6 a lot.

13. Loki "came out" (incest-wise) to Sigyn in chapter 11, if you need to refresh your recollection of how that went

Don't let it be heard that I don't work my readers as hard as I work myself.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

New Year's Eve.

Chapter Notes

So this is how it often goes: Bookie is stuck. Bookie knows what should come next, but why? Where's the soul of it, what's the point of it in the story? Bookie doesn't know how. Bookie is blocked.
Bookie runs to Dissie, tugs at her sleeve. Dissie, help. What is it, Bookie. I have this problem, Dissie. Dissie listens, she thinks. She always takes her time. She lets the characters in, and her mind to flow. She sees, she talks. She's got it.
Now Bookie's got it too. The scene is unblocked. It has a heart and a point now. We can carry on. Soon, we'll have a chapter.

This was the tale of every time thebookhunter asks Discontentmadeglorious to get her out of writer's block. She found the heart of the "dance-in-the-conservatory scene through Thor's eyes" AND "Loki reacts to the thing with Fandral" this time, but she's found so many others, so often. I'm sure lots of the stuff you love about this story is down to her.

Yes, I cheat, ok? I have a guardian angel. No, you can't borrow her. Get your own. Boo hoo, suck it bitches!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 31st

Jogging with Sif, following the low dry-wall that encircled the western meadow, mud squelching under their feet. The ground started to slope up the hill. Heavy breathing burning in his throat, chest tight with it.

Sif’s steps became heavier. Colour on her face, breathing hard but under control, expression perfectly composed, and beautiful. They used to run together in Battersea Park and heads would turn to watch them both go by. It seemed her natural state, physical strain. She always looked her best when she was exercised. Or well fucked. Nuts, the memories. Please, not now…

“Wake up!” she said, giving him a shove.

He laughed, he choked and coughed.

“You old man,” she said, panting slightly. Another shove. “Tag! You’re it!” She sprinted down the hill, towards the bridge.
Thor chuckled and raced after her. She was fast, and lighter than him, the mud had less purchase on her soles. He would not catch her. Still, he tried.

They stopped past the bridge, panting, puffing clouds of steam as they paced to cool down.

“This is so beautiful,” said Sif, looking around her.

The house had disappeared behind the hill, at their backs; the woods started ten steps beyond the bridge. The stream still ran, trickling and murmuring under a layer of ice, broken here and there, wherever a rock or a small waterfall, a few inches high, disturbed the quiet course.

Thor felt that stir of ownership inside, and pride —absurd of course, because how was any of that the work of his hands?-. He had always felt it. On Asgard grounds, even as a little boy, he would feel the earth under his feet, and touch the trees, the rocks, the water, listen to the noises of everything living, and he would feel the mutual tug of belonging, this place to him, and him to this place, bonded.

“It must have been so cool to be a kid here,” she said, her eyes drawn to the woods.

“We used to spend so much time exploring, Loki and I. There’s two little streams, a couple of shallow caves, lots of old rotting trees, thickets of fern that used to come up to our necks… the clearings are gorgeous, the beds of dry leaves one foot deep in parts, they suck you in, and when you lie there…” He heard himself, he pretended he had stopped for air, “and that one time a deer came out and got really close… If you’re still, you see badgers, foxes and hedgehogs, and near the water, there’s birds the size of bloody dinosaurs.” He laughed. “Loki always told me off because I couldn’t be still. He’s a fidget himself, but when he wants, he’s still as a lizard. He would leave me behind when he wanted to go bird-spotting, and then come back with photos of some birds I’ve never seen, if not on his guidebooks or on the TV. It’s like he has this affinity with wild animals, they come to him. It’s awesome. He’s awesome.” He realised he had gotten carried away. He felt himself blushing. He took her lead, and started stretching his shoulders.

She had a vague, kind smile, assessing him.

“You sound as happy as a kid who just got his little brother back,” she said. “It’s great to see you like this.”

Thor smiled.

“It’s good to have him back,” he said.

“What were you and Loki fighting about yesterday?” she asked, out of the blue.

That caught him off-guard. He drank some water, to buy himself a couple of seconds. What did Loki always say? Lie with the truth.

“Oh, you know. He was feeling left out, and…”

“Left out?”

“Yes. He said that I was ignoring him.”

“Ignoring him?”

Why did she keep repeating his words?
“Yeah. Which I get, I mean, he doesn’t really know you, and we did sort of talk a lot about school and all that… Well, I wasn’t very sensitive, I suppose, so he told me to go fuck myself.” He shrugged. “Brothers’ stuff. Nothing new. We talked and we sorted it out. We’re good.”

Sif looked pensive. She was stretching her other shoulder now.

“We haven’t seen each other in a long time,” she said, “and he has been seeing you every day for the last couple of months… I’m sure he has a point, but giving you a hard time over it… He could be more understanding.”

“He understands,” countered Thor. “He wasn’t really moaning about me spending time with you, he just… He needs attention. And well, you know, we’re brothers, we have quick tempers. We can get on each other’s tits very easily. It’s fine.” He laughed. “It’s just the way we are. We’ve learned to de-escalate it before crockery starts flying, that’s progress,” he joked.

Sif was smiling too, but it was politeness. She did not look amused.

“Well, anyway, you look good,” she said. “Like a weight has been lifted.”

“I had missed him a lot. He means the world to me.”

“I know,” she said. “Has he, um, changed at all?”

“Changed?”

“Well, from the way you used to talk about him, he was a rather, er, difficult person,” she said. “And your relationship sounded quite complicated.”

Thor realised that a very, very unfriendly squint was forming on his face. He wiped it off as best he could.

“Well,” he said, forcing a smile, ”I’d say we’re both older and wiser.”

“Hm.”

_Hm_, that was annoying, thought Thor.

“What? You don't agree?” he asked.

“Well, he’s a twenty-five-year-old man who gets the hump because his big brother is having _one_ night with his mates…”

“We _were_ ignoring him,” snapped Thor.

“He wasn’t being very sociable himself.”

“He _isn’t_ very sociable. But it’s hard to be anyway, when you don’t know what people are talking about.”

Her tone became softer then, appeasing. She had obviously sensed Thor’s growing irritation.

“Yes, of course. You’re very protective of him, aren’t you?” she observed.

“He’s never had it easy,” he said. “We were all he had, mum and me, for a long time.”

“Hm. And he’s used to you doting on him, isn’t he,” she asked.
Thor turned that over in his mind, quietly. Sif was trying to say something here, wasn’t she. It was not like her to go beating around the bush.

“I’m not sure about that,” he answered. “Growing up, we were either very, very close, or not at all. I don’t know what he’s used to, to be honest. I do know he needs me.”

She accepted that silently, and let it drop, although Thor could tell she had not said her last word on the subject. Not that he was sure what the specific subject was.

To get back to the house, they walked. For a while they were silent.

They had talked about this before, about Loki and him, after her mum’s funeral, on those nights when they would all come together around him, get a bit drunk, and talk for hours. He had been drowning in sorrow, yearning and grief. He had opened up more than he ever had before, to anyone. About Loki, he had lied mostly by omission. Except for the fucking, he had told them pretty much everything there was to know.

Loki was a spiky issue for Thor, and he was a bit too eager to jump to anyone's throat if they attacked him, so perhaps she was just trying to keep it smooth and save herself a headache. He could hardly blame her, but he did wish she would just say what was on her mind already. He guessed she was just being delicate, but since when had Sif been one to sacrifice directness for tact.

The air was crisp, cooling down sharply whenever the breeze picked up, making them burrow in the high collar of their fleecy jackets.

“So,” said Sif after some time, “who is this mystery new girlfriend we don’t even have a name for yet?”

Thor frowned in puzzlement. What on earth was she on about?

“The mystery person you’re dating, Thor,” said Sif. “Who is she?”

“Oh!” he said. And grinned, teasingly. “What makes you think it’s a woman?”

Sif arched both her eyebrows in surprise.

“Oh, wow!” she said. “Really?”

Thor nodded, smiling.

“I see…” she said.

“See what.”

“Why you’re being so discreet about it.”

“Oh, that.” Thor hadn’t even thought about the gay angle. Maybe when Loki and Tony call you a brainless oaf, Odinson, they have a bit of a point.

“So, what does Coulson say?” she asked.

Again, Thor was perplex.

“Coulson? He doesn’t know. Why should he?”

She huffed in exasperation.
“You’re hopeless. You’ve been doing this for how long? Do you really need explaining that, if
you’re going to be dating a bloke, your publicists and your agents will have to be told? To give them
some time to adjust and prepare, and know how to react if…? Well, you know.”

Thor was frowning deeply, still unsure how this had become this type of conversation.

“Unless it’s not serious,” said Sif, misreading his expression.

“Oh, it’s serious,” said Thor quickly.

“Meeting the parents kind of serious?” she asked.

Now Thor only barely managed to stifle a laugh. What a comedy of errors.

“Awww,” she said, misreading him again.

Thor was going to get a headache. Just how many conversations had they going on right now?

“Are you very much in love?” she asked.

Thor’s very expressive face (and skin) spontaneously answered for him once more.

She looked endeared. She also seemed a lot less stiff now that she had learned it was not a girl.

Women, eh?

“But you haven’t been together long, have you?” she said. “I mean, when we spoke a few weeks
ago, you told me you were not seeing anyone.”

“No, we weren’t together yet.”

“Hm.” Ok, back to humming again. And she seemed suddenly very interested in the laces of her
shoes.

“What?” said Thor.

“I don’t know, Thor.”

“Don’t know what?” insisted Thor, bracing himself for some more difficult talk.

“You are impulsive, and it’s always a bit all or nothing with you…” She left that dangling there.

“Aren’t you rushing into it a bit?” she said. “It seems so sudden…”

Ok, fully back into uneasy territory. He turned his stare to the distance again, with a grumpy frown.

The house could be seen in full now, the conservatories and the lead roof planks sparkling like fish
scales with the morning sunlight.

“Look,” said Sif, “I don’t want to piss on your crisps, ok? But you’re a Hollywood star, and deciding
to be with a man is not a minor thing. I can tell you’re in love, and that’s wonderful, and I know it
feels great and that right now you don’t want to think about… well, about anything else but how
happy you are… And all I’m saying here is, make sure you’ve thought this through before you jump
into it head first. Because it will affect you, massively, whether you decide to try and keep it a secret
or whether you want to come out… And I just can’t see you living happily in the closet, Thor. All of
this, over a guy you’ve only just met…”

“Who says I’ve just met him?” he countered.
That gave her eyebrows some more work. She thought about it for a moment.

“Please don’t tell me it’s that Stark bloke.”

Thor burst out laughing, the strain he was under adding to the ridiculousness of that thought, and resulting in a much bigger chuckle than it probably deserved.

“God, no,” he said, wiping a tear, “it’s not Tony.”

“So… who is he?” she asked, cautiously. “Are we meeting him today?”

Thor smiled, still strained, though the laughter had helped.

“Maybe,” he said.

She squinted in suspicion.

“It’s not like you to be so mysterious, Thor. Frankly, I find it a bit…”

“…A bit what.”

“…Worrying.”

Thor took a deep breath. Why was he so scared. It was not rational. It was not even very reasonable. These people loved him. Sif loved him. He had done nothing wrong. Loki would say fear has nothing to do with reason, and neither does courage. You have guts, don’t you, Odinson? More guts than brains, some have said. He flicked quick glances at her, his throat dry. He wanted to say it, right there and then, and fuck it. He really did. It just wasn’t fucking happening…

“Watch it,” he told her, calling her attention to a sudden plunge in the ground in front of them.

He stopped trying, both relieved and disappointed with himself.

“Is that Fandral?” said Sif, pointing to the eastern conservatory, the one Loki wanted to fill with citrus trees.

The sun was just breaking through the clouds, its heavy slant right in their eyes. When they got closer, they saw it was Fandral indeed, perched on the back of a bench, cup of coffee steaming between his hands, looking in through the glass walls.

“Good morning, my dears,” he whispered, a finger to his lips to shush them. He gestured to the conservatory.

Inside, in the wide, empty space, Loki was dancing. Holy mother of fuck, that jump. That drop, that roll. Good God almighty, Thor knew very well how flexible his brother was, but did legs actually part that wide? It was not exactly a choreography, neither were they exercises. It looked as if he was just enjoying himself, letting his body do what felt right. He was so fucking graceful.

Thor was not an expert, but he could tell his posture and his gestures weren’t as rigid and precise as proper classical ballet demanded. He seemed to alternate dancing with capoeira moves, a lot more relaxed and loose, rather like floating. How could I not be fucking crazy about him, Thor thought to himself, thinking it must surely be showing on his face, and not giving a damn about it.
Oh, Loki had always been beautiful when he danced, he had always been graceful, but he also used to be extremely hard on himself. Thor would see him often, repeating the same step or the same pose over and over and over, staring harshly into the mirror, a deep frown, mouth pressed tightly in displeasure, never satisfied.

And will you just look at him now, *smiling*. Loki never used to smile when he danced. And he had just repeated the same pirouette-jump three times already, and he seemed to be aiming higher every time, and try for a neater landing, but it didn’t seem like he was striving obsessively for perfection, but rather taking pleasure in how strong he was, how high he was able to reach, how quickly he could spin. He was not trying to coax and discipline his limbs and muscles into subservience anymore, but relying on them in a harmonious joint effort.

Thor remembered asking him why he kept going to the bleeding ballet lessons, when he didn’t even seem to enjoy himself. Loki never really dignified that with an answer. To Thor, everything was easy, he didn’t really have to try. To Loki, as talented as he was, it seemed like everything was a struggle. Getting up in the morning, stepping out into the street, going to school, being around people, being in his own head. Didn’t he have enough on his plate already? So why add to it? Why not cut himself some slack?

Loki must have known that’s not all Thor was getting at. There was so much he didn’t get about the way his kid brother lived his life. Actually, the ballet Thor could understand. But why the black nail polish and eyeliner? Why prance down the high school halls like a princely supermodel? Why sass and flirt at his bullies instead of running away? Why plaster his notebooks with half-naked male actors and dancers and fucking David Bowie everywhere? Why were his presentations always about Oscar Wilde and Glam Rock and Arthur Bleeding Rimbaud? Just why wouldn’t Loki make things easier for himself?

Thor could see it now, he could feel it, what his mother used to say, and he had not understood back then. Loki’s strength —his joy, his talent, his endurance, his stubbornness, his spirit. Loki could have put on a disguise at any time and turn into whatever he wanted, pretend he was one of the flock. Instead, he had chosen to throw right into the face of the world again and again what he was, who he was, even when the world did its best to crush him for it. But every time Loki had told the world “fuck you, I do what I want!”, the world had a little less power over him. And look at him now, proud, triumphant, fucking indestructible, soaring. Thor had only ever seen that Loki fought and suffered. He had not realised until now that, feeding on that very fight, Loki could fly.

How unworthy he felt of his brother then. Loki had never once lied to make things easier for himself. Thor hadn’t done anything but that, all his fucking life.

He needed air.

He walked away, not giving a fuck what his friends would make of it.
(Earlier that morning.)

They had forgotten to pull the curtains shut last night. Thor could sleep through anything, but even those first feeble rays of light had woken Loki up. And the moment his eyes were open, he couldn’t close them again. His mind could go from nothing to a hundred miles per hour in the blink of an eye, literally. And with so much to think about in the first place, there was no way on earth Loki was going back to sleep.

Right then.

He carefully slithered out of bed. Thor groaned when a flash of cold bit his back, but carried on sleeping. Loki lingered a little, taking in the sight of Thor’s muscled shoulders, his taut neck, those fucking arms.

He fished for his yoga wear and shoes, and stood by the door for some time, with his ear out for any movement or noise outside. When he was as certain as he could be that the coast was clear, he sneaked out quietly out of the bedroom. He felt like the secret lover in the adultery plot line of a silly vaudeville. Should he go all out and just climb out the window.

The kitchen was deserted. Perhaps everyone else was still asleep. Coffee, yoghurt, banana. Peace and quiet. Sometimes getting up early wasn’t all that bad. Yawn.

When he found Hogun in the conservatory, Loki’s first reaction was annoyance. He hated having the house invaded. Then came curiosity. He could not identify the soft, flowing exercise routine Hogun had going on. It had sudden spikes of spritzy vigour and some downright nifty acrobatics. It was quite fascinating.

Loki abandoned the shelter of the musty potted ficus he had been hiding behind, and approached. Hogun spotted him and broke the flow to bow to him, and then resumed his exercises.

Loki kept on watching. One particular movement had gripped Loki’s attention. Hogun must have noticed him unconsciously imitating the drop of his body.

“Would you like to see it again?” he asked. He had that same guttural, hoarse timbre of voice as his old Japanese yoga teacher, almost a grunt in the monosyllables. Loki had liked the old man very much, and had been missing him since he retired.

He nodded. “If you don’t mind.”

He ended up practicing it next to him.

After a while, Loki was showing Hogun his own moves, a blend of capoeira, Acroyoga, and classical ballet he had developed to suit exactly what he needed. Hogun looked very impressed, and he didn’t strike Loki as a man who got impressed easily. He struggled to imagine this quiet, hieratic, hermit-like man partying with Thor, Fandral and Volstagg. Then again, Thor had already managed the… well, maybe not the impossible, but surely the highly unlikely, bringing together —and what’s more, keeping together— this bizarrely diverse group of people. Getting them drunk and making merry was nothing next to that.

Hogun caught up with the capoeira very quickly, but the ballet was another story. His grace was not a dancer’s grace. They ended up trading flying kicks at three heights. It was quite good.

Hogun retired (he said he had been there since daybreak,) and Loki stayed.
He was thrumming with energy. He began to dance to music in his head. Spinning on himself, jump, fall, roll, jump back up. Arms wide open now. Stretch. Full back bend. Mid-air flip. Spin-step, spin-step, spin-step. Jump! Higher. Higher! His heart was pumping hard, the thoughts in his mind reduced to a droning, featureless buzz. Calm. Electricity. Joy.

When he was stretching, done for the day, he caught a disturbance with the tail of his eye, and squinted to sharpen his sight. Sif and Fandral were sitting on the back of the bench outside, looking in. The overgrown hedges and the slanting sun, behind their backs and in Loki’s face, had kept them hidden from him all this time. How long exactly had they been there?

He contemplated his options. He didn’t find “run and hide” among them, and he made sure he looked in his pockets and under the bed. He covered up, both for warmth and for armour, hoodie fully zipped, hood up, and stepped outside.

“That was impressive,” said Sif, before Loki could even say good morning.

“Impressive? That was jaw-dropping, absolutely beautiful,” chimed in Fandral.

Loki smiled modestly.

“You’re both too kind. No, thank you,” he said to Fandral, who was offering him a fag, “I’m trying to cut down.”

“You’re unfairly talented, Loki. Is there anything you’re but mediocre at?” he said.

Sif sighed impatiently. She had no time for Fandral’s drivel.

“I’ll be hitting the shower,” she said. “See you guys later.”

“I’ll be heading back too,” tried Loki.

“Was this for that photo shoot you mentioned yesterday?” asked Fandral as he followed Loki inside.

Loki slowed down.

“I was just… well, trying ideas, really,” he said, coming to a stop when he realised Fandral was going to follow him right to the fucking shower.

“What is it about?”

“Oh, an art gallery commissioned something that, uh, well, that’s easy to sell. I’ve worked with that photographer before, it’s a sort of favour. She thinks I… um.” How does one put this. To him, without it sounding like a tease. “That I would photograph well,” he tried.

“Oh, I’m certain you photograph exquisitely,” said Fandral. “Let me know when this exhibition takes place. Tell her she’s sold a few pieces already…” He beamed.

Loki rolled his eyes, not too scathingly, and made to go.

And then froze, because it had suddenly hit him. He turned to face Fandral.

“You’ve watched the sex tapes,” he said.

Fandral’s eyebrows rose and his eyes widened before he could compose himself again. He did not reply. He did not have to. Loki wasn’t sure what to feel.
“In my defence,” said Fandral, “when I watched them I did not know what they were, or how they had been taken.” Fandral was burning him quietly with his eyes. He was not shy and he did not look ashamed, and he stared at him as if he thought that Loki had nothing to be embarrassed about either.

“But of course, once you knew the circumstances, you never watched them again, out of respect,” said Loki, irony cutting, spitting venom. “And if I was to have a look, there is no chance that I would find them in your phone.”

Fandral’s only answer was a vaguely guilty look.

“At least you’re honest,” hissed Loki.

“My friend sent them to me, saying they were the hottest thing she had ever seen. She undersold them,” declared Fandral.

“The hottest thing?” snapped Loki, disdainful. “A scrawny whore getting gang-banged and giving head in an alley?” Loki’s breathing had become puffy, and his fist was clenching. Now his anxiety was rising. “I had you for a man of more discerning tastes.”

“My taste is extremely discerning,” said Fandral. “They are the hottest thing I have ever seen.”

Loki was scowling.

“Well, it’s nice to have an expert’s opinion. I wish you many happy hours of mutual company, to you and the fucking tapes.” He turned to leave.

“There is this video,” said Fandral. And for some reason, —Fandral’s sheer gall, perhaps,—, Loki stopped. “A group of fifteen or twenty guys, they look like a bunch of jerks on a stag night. They’re rowdy and loud and vulgar. I don’t know what they expected when they gathered there. I guess they’ve just heard rumours of an illegal live sex show on the street. They chant ugly hymns like football fans.”

Yes, he remembered. He had seen some screencaps that had refreshed his memories. He got flashes of that night. They had looked fucking scary. The bouncer that actually liked him had not been there, or he would have not let him outside. Maybe the other bouncers had expected him to get out there and be torn to pieces, and that would be that pesky Loki headache gone for good.

“Enters him,” continued Fandral. “The crowd parts to let him through. At first you only catch glimpses of him through the guys’ heads. He doesn’t say a word. His eyes are fixed. He’s made his choice. And as he walks, the chanting dies, and the noise keeps dimming down, until there is no more cat-calling, no more lewd shouting. By the end, when he is one step away from his mark, there is silence. They are enthralled. Whatever they were expecting, it wasn’t this.” He modulated his voice to a richer, more musical timbre. “‘A stranger come,/ A man of charm and spell, from Lydian seas,/ …A wine-red cheek, and eyes that hold the light/ Of the very Ciprian.’”

Loki turned around, unbelieving. Had Fandral just fucking quoted the bloody Bacchae at him.

Fandral smiled, delighted to have gripped Loki’s attention, and finished his tale.

“He kisses the lucky mortal, the chosen one, the camera shakes trying to get nearer, and as you kneel down, Loki, it catches his face, his eyes. Anyone can tell that kid is thinking ‘me? really?’ When the camera gets to you, and you look straight into it… Bloody hell. Bloody hell.” Fandral shook his head heavily, as if it was all too much. “Oh, his face when you’ve finished him. And yours. You could cut all the cock out and just leave your face and his, before and after, and it would already be the hottest thing. You exude self-confidence and self-awareness. It’s as if you’re saying, ‘yes, I know I’ve
ruined you, and now you’ll never see me again, and if I wasn’t so fucking above and beyond you, I might pity you.’ And when you leave, Loki, head high, that aristocratic pose, the way you walk, bloody hell, you’re a vision. The way they look at you, Loki. They came for a hooker, they got a god. They worship you. You own them. I bet that poor devil is still jerking off to the memory of you to this bloody day.’

Loki was speechless.

“You really take bullshitting to the next level,” he said, when he got his voice back.

“I’m only describing what I saw,” countered Fandral.

Loki stared at him for a long time, assessing him, scanning his posture and expression for clues and signs. If Fandral had kept the playful, nonchalant game on, Loki would have ripped him to shreds. But all he could see in his face was open, quiet admiration, and a flicker of hope. Loki wondered. How far did that shameless nerve of Fandral’s go?

“Would you have wanted to have been there?” he asked, lizard gaze fixed on Fandral’s eyes, unblinking, a predatory tilt in his head. He could make pretty much anyone very, very nervous with that treatment. People started to babble, they blurted out things they had not meant to say.

Fandral was not immune to it, but he weathered it admirably.

“I have fantasised about it,” he said, cautiously, faintly aware that he was being put to a test. “About being that bloke, the one you choose. But in my fantasy, you take me back inside with you, and I do not share you.”

Loki smirked in response. Lizard eyes and that smirk? Fandral gulped, but held his stare.

“Do you rescue me, Fandral? Do you take me away in your arms to a better place? Do you become my saviour?” asked Loki, honey-toned, deadly.

Fandral smiled, his eyes bright, fiery.

“A god does not need rescuing. He is where he wants to be, and he leaves when he wants to leave.”

Loki looked away and finally allowed himself to blink. Bloody good answer. This boy had class.

When he glanced at Fandral again, Fandral met his eye. Perhaps he meant all that crap or perhaps not, but Loki’s internal score panel was already giving him points for a most brave and gallant attempt, plus a generous bonus for Euripides. He found himself surprisingly… hm, not furious.

“Can you keep a secret, Fandral?” he said, with a sly look.

Fandral looked all ears. And glinting eyes.

“It was a rush,” said Loki, his eyes drifting into space as he slipped into his memories. “Sometimes they would hang around for days, hoping I would turn up. The tension, Jesus fuck, the fights to get a better spot in the line, to get a shot at me. The riots when I decided, you know what, boys?, not tonight. God, the chaos I was able to unleash, just by turning up, just by losing my shirt. The bouncers hated me, I made them really work hard for their pay checks… My life was out of my hands, but in that alley, I had power.”

Loki’s eyes regained his focus, and darted a glance at Fandral. He had stars in his eyes.
“Are you seeing anyone, Loki?” he said.

Loki laughed. Cheeky, shameless bugger. He was astounded and amused in equal parts.

“Yes, I am seeing someone.”

Fandral smiled sadly in turn.

“Damn. Why, of course. How could you ever be single. I know because I’ve been trying to catch you in between boyfriends for ages. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve asked Thor for your number… But when it wasn’t that bloke from *The Rocky Horror*, it was that producer, then that actor, then you had fallen out with Thor… I’ve been so bleeding unlucky, I’m beginning to think I’ve offended someone up on high.” A disappointed, deflated sigh. “I know it’s absolutely inexcusable of me to ask but, is it solid, with this person right now?”

Loki kept right on smiling, this time for himself.

“Rock-hard,” he said.

“Forever?”

“I hope so. I want it to be.” And it was none of Fandral’s business, surely, but it felt good to say that out loud.

Another pitiful sigh from Fandral. “In that case, I wish you every joy and every happiness, and the best of luck to the both of you,” he said, with a little bow and a smile that wasn't too bright and took effort, and moved Loki all the more deeply because of it.

“Thank you,” he said, without a dash of irony.

“Just for my peace of mind, Loki… Would I have stood a chance?”

Loki shook his head heavily, exasperated. Did he ever give up?

“You know, at first I would have said not in your lifetime, but you’re growing on me.”

Fandral’s face brightened with a playful grin. He was not going to do wordplays with *growing* and the prepositions, was he?

“If you gave me my chance,” said Fandral, with fervour, "I would steal your heart and I swear to you, you’d never ask for it back.”

Loki rolled his eyes. Give yourself a break, dear. You’ll sprain something.

“So, who is this lucky gentleman?” asked Fandral. “Is he coming later?”

Loki put on an enigmatic smirk, eyes fixed on Fandral, and made no reply.

“He’s not?” deduced Fandral, astonishment liberally applied on his face.

Loki kept right on smirking in silence.

“This favourite of fortune, this one-in-a-billion, this extraordinary creature who has managed to capture your heart and secure your hopes for the future, he’s really *not* going to turn up and be with you on this night of the year, of all times? Just who bloody does that? Who leaves *you* alone, tonight?” That bewildered expression befitted him. The ardour of the expression that followed suited
him even better, overactor that he was. “If you were mine, I could never miss one day with you. I would always…”

“Is that the same sort of rubbish you used on my brother?” cut Loki.

Fandral rose his eyebrows, baffled for one second.

“Oh, right, so he’s told you about that…” Faster at composing himself than a cat turning in mid-air, he was cool as a cucumber, and really quite smooth, when he said, “As I recall, we didn’t talk very much on those occasions. Not one to be wooed through his ears, your brother. A man of action, rather than words.”

Loki grinned at his own internal jokes, dozens of them, and deliberated. To pull that thread or not to pull.

“He said it was not romantic,” he said at length, having decided on pulling.

“It wasn’t,” said Fandral. “We’re friends. Your brother is a bit of a hot-head, and a handsome hot-head at that, and back in the day he found himself in dire need of distraction and solace. There is only so much of that to be found in DVDs, the gym and DIY, and I was there, just down the corridor, a free spirit myself… It was handy, that’s all. Physical comfort, to get his mind off things, get those happy hormones flowing… He was not in the right mind for romance, and neither was I. And even if we were, well, it would not be with each other. It’s just not like that, between Thor and I.”

“What did you get out of it, Fandral? Because it sounds like you just lent him the use of your body out of the kindness of your heart.”

Fandral gave him an impish leer.

“Well, perhaps as a little brother you may not wish to see it, but your big brother is a very attractive man, and very, hmmm..., very good company. Believe me when I say I got out of our dealings as much as I put in.”

Loki laughed. At length. At several things.

“So you don’t think he would have a problem with you… being interested in me now,” he asked. And now he was just being wicked.

“Oh, I’m sure not. Well, I don’t know. Is he one of those big brothers who can’t stomach the thought of their younger siblings in the vicinity of sex?”

Loki burst out laughing, and laughed for a year and a half.

“Oh, dear,” he said, wiping a tear, when he had calmed down somewhat. “I needed that. Right. I’m going for a shower now,” he announced. “And no, I don’t need help scrubbing my back, but thank you. And for the laugh.”

“Loki,” said Fandral. “…I hope this man of yours knows what he’s got. Because the minute, the second he forgets, I’ll be there, showing you what real devotion looks like.”

Loki put his serious face on, within his possibilities at the moment.

“Oh, I’m immensely flattered, but I’m in a happy, committed relationship. I’m out of the market. For good, I hope. So thank you very much, but no, thanks. And now I am going for a wash.” He walked
away. And then he had a thought. “Oh, a word to the wise,” he said, peering over his shoulder, “if you enjoy solid food, and wish to keep on chewing it with your own teeth, don’t ever let Thor know that you’ve watched the tapes. You would not sweet-talk your way out of that one with him. He doesn’t care for Euripides as much as I do.” He winked.

He felt Fandral’s eyes on him as he walked away. Well, he had put some decent work on that arse. It’s nice to be appreciated.

He found Thor in his bedroom, fresh out of the shower, hair still wet. Apparently, he had listened to Loki and he was growing his beard again. Hmmm… New sensations.

“How, someone smells nice. And it can’t be me,” kidded Loki.

Alright, it hadn’t been a great display of wit, but Thor didn’t even crack a polite smile. He was sat on the bed, head low, back slumped, brooding.

“Fandral wants to have my babies,” Loki announced, pretending he hadn’t noticed. “Two girls and two boys.” He kicked off his shoes and rummaged under the hundred layers of clothes hanging behind the door, searching for his bathrobe. He had not been using it much at all before the guests arrived. “He wants a French Riviera honeymoon. I told him it’s Italy or it’s off.”

Thor was looking at him dejectedly with his puppy eyes (more specifically, a Labrador), and saying not one word, and it was getting upsetting now.

“Are you alright, brother?” he asked, when Thor remained in that state.

Thor stretched one arm to him. Loki took his hand, and was immediately dragged towards his brother with a strong tug, until he half-stumbled against the side of the bed, between Thor’s knees. Thereupon Thor proceeded to imprison him in limbs, arms around Loki’s waist, ankles crossed behind his calves, and hug tight, burrowing his face against Loki’s stomach. And still didn’t say a word.

Right.

“Hey,” said Loki. “What’s wrong?”

“I love you so fucking much,” came Thor’s muffled voice.

Right, thought Loki, suspicious. What was that about.

“I know,” he said.

“I want to make you happy,” said Thor. “I want to be good enough for you. I’m trying.”

“Brother, what the fuck have you been drinking,” asked Loki.

Thor looked up to him, such a desolate expression on his handsome face.

“Will you tell me what this is about?” said Loki, now with a note of worry.

Thor buried his face against his belly again. Loki wrapped his arms around his brother’s head, and waited, at a loss about what to do next.
Loki’s shirt was riding up a bit. Thor’s breathing on his skin. Then Thor’s lips, then his hands.

“No bloody time, my dearest,” Loki muttered, wriggling in his brother’s arms, ignoring the tingle in his groin. “We have a house full of guests for you to entertain, and for me to hide from.” And if Thor had wanted to change the subject, he had succeeded, with flying colours. Oh well.

Loki managed to disentangle and get a few steps away, but his brother’s puppy eyes followed him, merciless. Loki made a big irritated huff (he wasn't really). He walked right back, cradled Thor’s upturned face in his hands and took a sloppy, steamy kiss from his brother’s lips.

“Pain in the arse,” he muttered against Thor’s mouth.

He left him looking in higher spirits than he had found him. That’s Loki magic for you.

“Fucking finally!” he said to Sigyn and Bruce when they arrived. He held Sigyn quite tightly and for a bit longer than he usually did. He had bloody missed her. He enjoyed watching Thor hugging Sigyn and Bruce too. It got Loki thinking how Thor might feel seeing Loki not getting along with his friends. Maybe, just maybe, he grudgingly vowed to try a bit harder.

The tour of the house got him so excited. There was so much to show them. Where to bloody start. He realised it was the first fucking time in his life he had some friends of his own staying for a sleepover, how about that. (You’re pathetic, Laufeyson, spat Inner Bastard. Little Loki, meanwhile, was jumping on the bed. Yay, pyjama party!)

They were almost done with the ground floor, and heading upstairs, when Sigyn pulled his sleeve.

“This is beautiful,” she said, “but where’s the Christmas stuff?”

“In a box in the attic, I presume,” answered Loki. He hadn’t even thought about that.

“Take me, right now,” said Sigyn, as if it was a life-or-death situation.

They left Bruce and Thor to meet the others, and he guided her up the increasingly narrower, darker, more crooked, more cobwebby flights of stairs. The dormer windows were caked with dust and splatters of bird shit, and it had not been the brightest of days even when the sun was at its highest point, so it was dark and shady and overall quite Gothic in the attic. And in spite of what his choice of clothing might suggest, severe black head to toe, Loki was not much in the mood for Gothic today.

He had not been up here in yonks. They separated to try and find the bloody boxes, Loki grumbling all the time, not crazy about the dust, the creepy-crawlies, and the work. There was a lot more junk than he remembered, including fresh-looking boxes and clothes-rails packed with plastic-covered garments, so many of them, that had definitely not been there before.

“Oh,” he said, when he realised.

“Did you find it?” came Sigyn’s voice from somewhere.

And then he heard her approach, because if there was someone who could sense a drop of distress in fifty cubic metres of Loki’s bullshit, it was Sigyn.
“What is it, darling?” she asked when she caught up with him, as she scanned around, trying to understand what Loki was seeing.

“They’re her things,” he said, a burn in the back of his throat. “He’s packed her away in boxes and shut her up in the attic.”

Sigyn held his hand, and had a look around in silence. She let go to approach the clothes rails.

“May I?” she asked.

Loki nodded.

She unzipped one of the covers at random. A shimmer or yellow silk peeked out, illuminating Sigyn’s face.

“Wow,” she gasped. She pulled the zip further down, and the glorious gown his mum had worn the day his father won three Oscars was revealed. He recognised it from the photos. Thor and him had been only little back then.

Of course he would want to cry. And he did, quietly, and quite sweetly, not from grief and yearning alone, but love and a gentle melancholy as well. On a scale of 1 to 10, how fucking absurd did he feel stroking the inner side of the fabric, where it would have touched the skin of her shoulder. On the same scale, how many fucks did he not give about being absurd right now.

She saw him cry and smiled at him, briefly holding his hand once more, and went on to unzip more covers.

“Oh, fuck, I hate this one,” laughed Loki after ten or twelve gowns, some gala stuff, some daily wear. They had reached Shoulder Pad Times. “Sometimes I forget that the Eighties happened even to my mum.”

He himself had moved on to the boxes. He wasn’t crying anymore. He opened mostly with indifference the one with the awards and the one with framed photos of mum and dad next to big people, that he remembered, without emotion, from her office and from the mantelpiece in the London flat; Odin must have kept in London only the ones he was fond of.

He called Sigyn when he found the shoes, six boxes worth. Jesus fuck, dad had even kept her sleepers… Why did that make him tear up again.

He proceeded slowly and carefully when a box with personal papers appeared (the annotated scripts! What a treasure trove.) Her handwriting was everywhere. He touched the yellowing pages with a faint smile on his face. It froze when he found her journals, a small stack of them. Apparently, her mum had taken to sharing her thoughts with the paper at times in her life. He perused them idly, with a broad, teary smile, hearing in his mind the words on the page spoken in her voice; her turns of phrase, her humour. Picked up at random like Loki was doing, they were disconnected thoughts relating to a context he did not have, domestic details that brought a day so vividly to life. Even skimming over it, reading one sentence here and there, it was so bloody powerful. Snippets of her mum’s life, of herself, revealed here, fixed for ever, in his hands.

When he stumbled with his and Thor’s names, he shut the notebook like he had been caught red-handed by Frigga herself. He should not be reading these, should he? Oh, but it was tempting.

He sighed deeply, feeling such a muddle of things. Even his bloody face did not even know where to
start with the expressing —eyes tearing, lips tugging up, tugging down, and don’t fucking get him started on the twitches of his brow.

“I think we need some air,” said Sigyn, “don’t you? We’ll try and find the stuff later, or just go to the village and buy some. Yeah?”

He nodded. She smiled so brightly, and kissed his cheek with a loud smack. A hearty, no-nonsense kind of kiss that his mum would have approved of.

“I had not realised he had done that,” said Loki later, as they took a stroll across the grounds. “I should have guessed. It’s so like Odin, just box her up and put her away somewhere, and get on with his life.”

“What would you have him do? Live in a shrine to her memory, with all her things reminding him of her, until the end of his days? What would your mum have wanted?”

Loki clenched his jaw, refusing to see the sense in what she was saying, and not doing a great job of it.

“It’s just… I don’t want her up there in the attic,” he sulked.

“Is she there? Is that where you feel her?”

“I don’t feel her anywhere, I’m not a bloody psychic.”

“You know what I mean.”

He did. They strolled on.

“In her studio, sometimes,” said Loki, a long, long time after she had asked her question. “In the apple orchard. In the conservatory. By the piano.”

She threw an arm around his waist, and squeezed.

“How are things with Thor, darling?” she asked.

He must have bloody blushed, or hearts must have shown in his eyes or something, because he had not answered yet, and she was already laughing.

“His mates don’t know, do they?” she said.

Loki shook his head, carefully appointing his face to express that he was perfectly alright with that, and that the thought was barely ever in his mind, if at all. She nodded, seeing right through it. There were people who might have started to blather on about what Thor should be doing, what Loki deserved and blah blah blah, recycled rubbish from the Cosmopolitan relationship advice section. He was glad she wasn’t. She just took people as they came, didn't she? She seemed able to sympathise with fucking anyone, and able to judge no-one. She was always ready to forgive when sincere regret was offered. She was always ready with another chance, more patience, more time for people to do the right thing, get their shit together, grow, become better versions of themselves. To her, pretty much everybody had the potential to be good and decent, and she was willing to wait while they tried and failed and tried again. Loki would have thought that should have made her easy to prey on,
vulnerable, defenceless even. Instead, Sigyn seemed to him one of the strongest persons he had ever met. He guessed there was a lesson there.

He was glad she wasn't giving him any crap about it all. Just because it was fucked up between Thor and him on a million different levels (and it didn't take a therapist of any kind to get Loki to see that), it didn't mean it was not the best fucking thing he had ever had. He was ready to put up with a lot to be with his brother. If that made him a door-mat, so fucking be it, but it was refreshing to not have to defend himself or his choices to his best friend, and he appreciated it. And he showed it with a sound hug which she may not have known exactly where it was coming from, but she responded to it warmly just the same.

Whoever had the idea of the cheese fondue should both be canonised and shot. It was a mess. A hilarious mess. And you know, for a dinner that guests are supposed to make themselves, it was quite a lot of work. Between Thor and him, they must have done a hundred trips to the kitchen for more of this or that or the other.

One of the times, when Loki said he was going to get some more wine, Thor picked up a couple of empty bottles and dirty plates and followed him to the kitchen, and then all the way down to the cellar. They made out for a bit longer than was easily explained away, under the dimly-lit, musty-smelling vault. They kept the pressure light, trying to avoid going upstairs with puffy red lips.

Thor pressed their foreheads together and let his eyes droop, cupping Loki’s face with both hands. Intense, as if he had been starving for it.

“Are you alright?” he asked then, staring straight into Loki’s eyes from one inch away.

“Hm-hm,” hummed Loki, looking down, overcome. He had not been ready for that surge of emotion.

“Am I doing fine?” asked Thor.

“Hm-hm.”

“Ok,” he heard Thor say.

He kissed him again, a brief but tender, fervent pressing of lips and stroke of tongues that made Loki’s head feel light.

As he followed his brother up the stairs, a bottle in each hand, Loki tried to find his nerve.

“Thor,” he said.

“Yes?”

He wanted to say ‘I love you’. Didn’t quite manage.

Thor smiled at him tenderly anyway, as if he had.
“So how did you children meet?” asked Volstagg, meaning Sigyn and Bruce. They had polished all of the chocolate fondue by then. Nobody had any room left for the mince pies, but they were trying.

“It was through Loki, actually,” answered Bruce. “We had worked in the same place for years, but our paths had never really crossed, until Loki came along. Sigyn was a fan, and they got on like a house on fire.”

“Then I moved in with Loki,” continued Sigyn, “and Bruce used to ask me how he was doing…”

 “…And three hundred years later I set them up, because I was up till here of hearing how sexy Bruce was, and how could it possibly be that Sigyn was not seeing anyone,” finished Loki.

Bruce had such a sweet and easy laughter, thought Loki, right after that resounding pat on the back the good doctor had just dealt him, and right before the stout kiss he planted on his cheek.

“And where is it that you work?” asked Volstagg.

A guarded silence followed, and a criss-cross of quick looks between Thor, Sigyn, Bruce and Sif. Oh, for fuck’s sake. It’s not like there was anybody at that table who did not know, right?

“It’s a mental hospital,” said Loki, abrupt. “Sigyn is a nurse there, Bruce is a social worker, and I was a patient.” There were ways to crank up the tension, and that subject, and the present atmosphere, was making him, hm, playful. “When they found me after I tried to kill myself, I had been living in the streets for a while. Bruce specialises in young people in crisis, don’t you, Doctor Banner?”

Bruce nodded, well aware of the sudden awkwardness and tension in the air, and not at all intimidated by it.

“That’s right,” he said casually, as if Loki had just reported the fucking weather. “And look at you now. Hell, look at me!” he laughed. “Back in the States I suffered several episodes of psychosis, which caused me to hurt two students and lose everything I had. I pretty much hit rock bottom. That’s why I came to England, to turn over a new sheet and start again. I’m not one of these ‘everything happens for a reason’ kind of guy but… Well, here I am, happier than I’ve ever been.” He squeezed Sigyn’s hand and gave her a loving smile. “And you’re not so bad yourself, are you, Loki?”

Ah, clever doctor Banner. Loki had never been one-upped on this topic among polite society before.

“Well,” said Loki, “I’m about to be sick from all the happy, but apart from that.”

The kick Sigyn dealt him under the table made the crockery shake, but she was smiling.

“I’d like to say how grateful I am to you both,” Thor said then, while Loki was already beginning to roll his eyes, “for helping my brother when I was not there for him. Loki might not be here today, had it not been for you. And since you’re going to be sick anyway,” he said to Loki, “I might as well say it now. I’m so bloody proud of you, ba—brother.”

Loki pretended to retch, but still let Thor kiss his face, and melted a little when his big brother held his hand under the table for a moment.

“Happy new year, everyone,” said Volstagg then, raising his glass. He seemed affected, in a good
He was not the only one. Even Sif was looking at Loki warmly when their glasses clinked.

Loki’s eyes lingered on his brother. He may claim to despise sentiment, but he was feeling so fucking full of it right now.

“Happy new year,” he muttered too. It didn't matter at all whether anyone heard him or not.

* *

When Thor was turning the whole evening on and on in his mind that night, unable to sleep, it felt like a dream, as if he had not had control over it.

After even Volstagg said he had had enough mince pies, they had moved it to the music room. Thor had lit the fire while the rest dragged the couch and the armchairs near to the fireplace. Him and Loki and Sigyn and Sif sat on the rug.

The conversation carried on. Fandral had brought out the Cards Against Humanity. Loki was pretty much unbeatable at it, with his wit and the way his mischievous mind worked. They had all laughed so much. Thor wondered now whether his friends, looking back on it, would remember the part where they had been having fun.

When the games turned to conversation again, Loki had had the genius idea of playing music, not too loud, on mum and dad’s beautiful vintage jukebox, stocked up to the brim with soul, blues and classic Rock’n’roll. Seemed like Loki was having an Otis Redding night. Thor would look at him whenever he got up to play a new song. He watched him standing by the jukebox, swaying his hips a bit, just for himself. Loki would smile at him whenever he walked back and caught him watching.

The conversation was flowing over and around Thor’s head. He was not drunk, but he felt detached, withdrawn in his own mind, an observer. Whenever Loki’s voice came through the drone, though, it would wake him up, and his pulse would quicken. He was like a teenager in love.

His brother’s skin was blushing with the heat of the fire. He was so fucking lovely. Thor couldn’t take his eyes off him tonight. They kept trading lingering gazes, their feet connected a few times. And remembering it now, their friends had to have seen it. What the fuck had they made of it? What had they thought it was about? They were fucking flirting under their very noses, for god’s sake. Just what other explanation had they found in their heads for two grown men basically eyefucking each other over the coffee table, giggling and playing fucking footsies?

It was only a few minutes to twelve. Did that have any bearing on Thor’s decision? Loki was by the jukebox, waiting for the tune he had picked to start.

“These arms of mine they are lonely
Lonely and feeling blue

These arms of mine they are yearning

Yearning from wanting you…”

For a moment, his brother moved ever so slightly to the music, hip sway, shoulder roll, as if the tune was trying to drag him to the dance floor, and he was idly resisting — “Not now, my dear, we have guests”. Loki always looked unbearably sexy when he danced to himself, effortlessly gracious and unselfconscious, not trying to impress or delight anyone with his movements, simply doing what felt good. That sensuality came right through, and it was intoxicating. When he met Thor’s eyes, which must have been brazenly showing the thoughts in his mind, Loki smiled, almost shy. Then he started to walk back to the group.

As in a dream, (as if it had been out of his hands, as if he was a little action figure someone was playing with), Thor got up and walked up to meet him, blocking his path. Loki stared into his eyes, interrogating. Thor put his hands on Loki’s waist. Loki held his breath. Thor drew him closer, and encouraged him to rest his head on his shoulder, their bodies now touching from neck to foot. He did not know what was going on behind his back, and maybe it was better if he didn’t. After a moment of hesitation, Loki threw both long arms around his brother’s neck. Thor shut his eyes, held him tight, and they danced.

“These arms of mine, they are burning

Burning from wanting you,

These arms of mine, they are wanting

wanting to hold you…”

Thor’s heart was pounding strong and fast. He wished he could just fucking forget his mates behind his back, god knows doing what. He knew he was crushing Loki in his anxiety, but Loki wasn’t complaining.

Loki’s lips grazed his neck, his hot breath there. His fingers weaving in Thor’s hair, his heat and hardness and the bloody swagger of his body as he danced, swinging to and fro, grinding close to him. He felt so good, and right, and his.

Thor would have to face his mates soon enough, but for now, he would just let himself have this moment. He reared his head and kissed his brother. Loki’s breath stopped, he felt him shiver. Ah, Loki like a burning flame, trembling for him. Now Thor did forget himself. This was such a fucking great song to make out to. So they did, slowly and beautifully.

Thor only barely opened his eyes when he heard some shuffling nearby. Sigyn and Bruce were also dancing now, bless their cunning, kind souls.

The song quieted down and ended. They blinked awake as if from a trance.

When he looked at Loki, all that fire and pride and love in his brother’s eyes hit him like a wave. Loki worshipped him right now, Thor was his hero, his knight in shining armour. No matter what happened, Thor knew there and then, without a doubt, that he had done the right thing for the two of them, and that he would never regret it.

With that strength inside, he held Loki’s hand, and kept it held tight, as he turned to face his mates.
Shock all around. Thor felt his heart pounding, his chest shaking with it. He was terrified.

“Yes, we’re together,” he said, cool enough, his grip on Loki’s hand strong enough to hurt.

There was no reaction from his friends, mouths still gaping, eyes wide. Thor thought he was going to be sick.

The first sweet, mellow chords of a Billie Holiday song started to play. Sigyn *ex machina*, again.

Loki tugged him away by the hand, leading him closer to Sigyn and Bruce and the jukebox, where it was friendly and safe.

“Dance with me,” he whispered, surrounding him with his arms, resting his head on Thor’s shoulder again.

With his eyes shut tight against everything, Thor followed his lead.

And then Loki whispered softly, “I love you so much.”

At the struck of twelve, it was easy to kiss and hug Bruce and Sigyn, but he froze with his own friends, a chorus of silent, expectant, blank faces. Next to him, Loki was standing proud, daring them.

After a very awkward, excruciatingly couple of minutes, Volstagg shook himself out of it, and got up.

“You crazy bugger,” he said, as he cuddled him, patting his back hard enough to break him in half. He gave Loki only a slightly more gentle treatment. He planted one big, firm hand on each of their cheeks, and looked at them as if he wanted to say something. He gave up, and planted a solid kiss on their faces instead.

He turned to Sif, Fandral and Hogun, who were still frozen in a row.

“Happy new year, you cocks. Come over here, give these boys a hug.”

They did, bless them, they all did. Fandral looked stunned, but he kissed and hugged them both, and after that he looked more disarmed than anything else.

“I’ll be damned,” Thor heard him mumble to himself.

Hogun wasn’t an effusive man. True to his style, he gripped both of Thor’s forearms tight and established an intense, meaningful eye contact that had Thor nodding to words that had not been spoken. To Loki, Hogun bowed his head vehemently.

Sif just seemed… God the fuck knows. Thor was not able to decipher her expression. She shook her head, lost for words, and then held him for a long time, tightly. Afterwards, she gave him a long look of… Thor thought it was disappointment, or aggravation, or just concern. She gave Loki a kiss and a hug. She was rigid, but she tried. Perhaps Loki wouldn’t see it, but she had.

The mood had never really recovered after that, even with Sigyn, Bruce’s and Volstagg’s best efforts. They had all gone to bed not much later.
The atmosphere in the corridor upstairs was awkward and quiet. Thor felt every single mind in the house focused on him and Loki when they shut the bedroom door behind their backs, which is probably why they snuggled up together in bed without fucking. Loki didn’t push him, even though Thor could imagine Loki had had plans for tonight. There was much to celebrate, wasn’t there?

Hell, Thor himself had had plans, tonight of all nights. There were things he had wanted to do since last year, when it had been Bucky, instead of him, going away with his brother. He had thought they would be enthusiastically celebrating the happy change in their circumstances all through the night.

Well, so much for that. Did that mean he had officially managed to ruin everybody’s New Year’s Eve, then.

Whatever the fuck it had been on Sif’s face, it wasn’t letting Thor sleep. He went over their conversation early that morning. He should have foreseen that she would not be throwing fireworks, but it had hurt Thor just the same when she didn’t. He went from self-pity to fury in a blink, from ‘but I have done nothing wrong, we harm no-one!’ to ‘fuck you, fucking narrow-minded bigots, fuck all of you!’ and back again, over and over.

He huffed, tossing and turning.

Loki was awake too, he could tell by his breathing.

Thor reached for his brother, stroking his hair tenderly, his neck. Loki whipped around all of a sudden, and pretty much pounced on him. As he had his mouth and his neck plundered and ravished, Thor realised that what was coming off from Loki in waves was relief. Odinson, you fucking dolt. What the fuck had Thor been thinking of? He must have been scaring the shit out of him.

“Hey, hey…” he muttered, cradling Loki’s face in his hands, stilling him, kissing him blindly, the dark so deep. *Calm down, baby, all is well, I’ve got you. I’m here.*

Loki’s pulse, quick like the beat of a bird’s ribcage. Brittle bones you can crush without even meaning to, just by carelessly closing your fist. No matter how strong Loki was, no matter how much stronger he got, Thor would always be able to break him, just like that, just being careless.

Thor rolled them over, held Loki down, and kissed, nibbled and nuzzled his way down his chest. Loki hissed as if it hurt when he started sucking him. Thor had no mind for teasing or playing, he just wanted to feel Loki, and for Loki to feel him. The heart of it, what they were. *This.*

Loki’s fingers weaving gently in his hair. Thor had no mind for gentle either. He wished Loki would pull hard, push up into him. He wanted to lose himself.

“I want you to fuck my mouth,” he said, in a mutter. He had never thought he’d hear himself say something like this.

Loki seemed to need a second to take that in. There was a silence. Thor could not see his face. Panting slightly, Loki pushed him away.

“Kneel on the bed,” he told him, softly. “Back against the headboard.”

Thor could barely make out Loki’s silhouette in the darkness. He obeyed, guessing the soft, peaceful sensation washing over him was due simply to being told what to do. Right now, he wanted everything taken off his hands. The mattress gave in as Loki got up and took position. Thor felt him in front of him, more than saw him, before there was a hand to his head again, stroking gently, guiding him. The cold tip of Loki’s cock brushed his lips. Thor fumbled blindly in the dark, held it in his hand, and took him in his mouth. He licked the head and toyed with it on his tongue for a bit,
until he heard Loki’s sighs begin to break and shudder. Then he closed his lips around the shaft and started to bob his head. And then he stood still, Loki’s cock in his mouth, one wetted hand tight around the base, where his mouth did not reach.

Loki thrusted slowly, the drag of his cock gentle and shallow within the ring of Thor’s lips. Thor held his brother’s hips with both hands and encouraged him to move faster and push deeper. Loki’s breathing seemed to stop for a spell, then he started to move in time with the rhythm Thor’s hands were demanding.

And now Loki was fucking him. His hand on Thor’s hair was gripping tight, keeping him still as he took what he needed. It was still a lot gentler and slower than Thor had done it to him, but Thor wasn’t sure he would be able to keep up if Loki wanted to go much harder. It was enough. He could feel him shiver and tremble, he could hear his moans become more urgent. Loki was losing himself in him, deciding his own pace, deciding how he wanted it, and all Thor had to do was stay still and strong and take it. He had had no idea, no idea it would feel like that.

His lips were sore already, what a wuss, he thought to himself. He had an image of his own face tomorrow, mouth reddened and swollen like Loki’s was at times the next morning, so bloody obvious. That thought, his friends looking at him tomorrow and knowing, fuck, the shot of lust that hit him then. He took one hand to himself, started stripping fast. Loki heard him, and fucked a bit quicker, nudge the back of Thor’s throat often now, not enough to make him gag, but a lot more than Thor was used to. Thor groaned, feeling fucking dizzy.

“Ah, fuck,” he heard Loki hiss, “Ahhh…”

Come in my mouth, thought Thor, pushing Loki close to him, do it…

Loki’s hand clawed in his hair, gripping tight. He went rigid.

“Thor…”

Thor’s hand on his brother’s arse became iron. He wanted him exactly where he had him. He jacked himself furiously as Loki came on his tongue, with tense, sudden jolts, nails in Thor’s scalp, ragged moans. Thor kept him close as he climaxed, his own spunk warm on his hand and balls and thighs.

He wiped his hand on the sheets (fuck it, laundry tomorrow) and held Loki there, forehead against his stomach, panting. Loki’s hands were again gentle on his hair now. He stayed like that until Thor let him go.

“Are you ok?” Loki asked some time later, when they were lying side by side. “Did I hurt you?”

He said that he was fine.

“Thor,” he heard Loki’s voice in the dark.

“Yes, baby,” he muttered.

“It will be alright,” said Loki. “They love you. Give them time.”

Thor wanted to believe that so much.

“It’s up to them,” he said, trying to sound brave and proud and defiant, as he thought he should be feeling, for Loki’s sake. Truth was, he had no idea what he was feeling right now.
Loki wrapped around him and held him tight, big spoon for once.

Chapter End Notes

1. Loki plasters his notebooks at school with gay icons, but not just any gay icons. MY gay icons. Specially dear to my heart are Wilde and Rimbaud.

2. The Bacchae, by Euripides. Even if he did not recognise the lines themselves (although he probably does, because vast, keen memory, ok? Also, he LOVES this one!), Loki would identify the play by the allusions to Lydia and stuff, which are specific to the god Bacchus (or Dyonissos in the play.)

I fucking love this play, ok? I'm a classicist, shoot me. I love the scene from where these lines are lifted from, because there's this king of Thebes, Pentheus, faced with who he thinks is a priest of a religion he hates (it's the god himself, but Pentheus doesn't know that), and he's had this priest brought to him because he's supposed to be spreading this awful cult among the women of Thebes. And he should be threatening him and scolding him and making things very clear to him, and instead he's like

"Marry, a fair shape for a woman's eye,
Sir stranger! And thou seek'st no more, I ween!
Long curls, withal! That shows thou ne'er hast been
A wrestler!—down both cheeks so softly tossed
And winsome! And a white skin! It hath cost
Thee pains, to please thy damsels with this white
And red of cheeks that never face the light!"

(this is the version from The Project Guttenberg, translation by Gilbert Murray.)

And he keeps doing that, bless him. Oh, moral of the play: when talking about Ancient Greek gods, you really don't want to be blasphemous. You really, really don't. Do like the Romans: embrace ALL the gods. You never know which sexy foreign priest is actually born out of Zeus's thigh itself.

3. These Arms of Mine, Otis Redding. *sigh*
Thor muttered something in his sleep and rolled over with a sudden jerk. It was almost dawn already, a wan clarity was trickling through the gaps in the curtains. Loki could make out the shapes of Thor’s face. He saw his eyes twitching, his brow pinching now and then, perhaps dreaming. He pulled the covers up to tuck his brother in, again. All that tossing and turning had transformed the bed into a bowl of whipped meringue. They would struggle to create such a tangle of sheets even in their wildest romps.

Thor usually slept like a log. And it never took him more than three seconds to drop off, from the moment his head hit the pillow, unless he was in bed for reasons other than resting. And so, his brother’s uneasy night’s sleep was telling Loki all he needed to know about how Thor was coping with yesterday. It was frightening to see him so rattled. God, Thor’s face when he had told them “yes, we’re together.” His brother had been scared shitless, it was there in his trembling, crushing grip of Loki’s hand, and yet he had faced them, head high, eyes fierce. Loki’s heart had been beating so hard, as if trying to burst out of his chest. And when Thor had danced with him, when he had kissed him… Jesus, he could not fucking believe his life. He had felt ten feet tall, ready to slay dragons. He could have faced Odin himself in the flesh last night.

So when exactly had that glorious feeling started to transmute into this? Well, probably since the moment they had gone to bed and Thor laid down two feet away from him. Well, ok, not literally, but that’s pretty much how it had felt. What if he can’t handle this?, an inner voice had supplied, his brain always so eager to help, what if he’s having second thoughts? Sex had not done much for Loki’s peace of mind, happy hormones or no. It had been so strange. Thor had needed a lot more than just a fuck from him last night, and Loki wasn’t sure he had been able to provide it. And then of course, whatever traces of serenity and rationality were left in Loki’s brain by that time, insomnia had done away with hours ago. He had been working himself into a right state, little by little, in a downward spiral around circle after circle of hell.

Fear. It was eating him alive. So many appearances of it, so many ways of it, so many shapes and noises of it, seeping into every nook and cranny of his mind, making him look at things with other eyes, making him second-guess and doubt it all. As if lost in a fun house, each turn he took, each corner he doubled, revealed a distorted, deformed version of familiar things, a bit crooked, a bit off. It had become worse and worse as the sleepless hours kept trickling past him, and soon enough, Loki was wishing he could just duck in a hole and stop fucking seeing. He was also hyperventilating, but
that, at least, he could do something about.

How the fuck were they going to make this work. What the fuck had they been thinking. Maybe because Natasha and Tony and Sigyn and Bruce had not batted an eyelid, they had started to believe that it was all fine, run-of-the-mill-even. What’s a bit of incest among Odinsons? Clearly they had chosen their audience well, while conveniently forgetting that what they did was illegal in many parts of the world, and unspeakable all over it. That, should this ever be known, it would destroy them. Destroy-destroy them. We’re not just talking career and reputation here, their family’s good name, their own. We’re talking self-esteem, fucking spiritual peace. Thor was not used to people hating him, he was used to worship, love and praise. Loki knew how it felt to be spat in the face (literally, by the way, and not for money.) Thor did not. It would wreck him. Sure, he would fight back tooth and nail and be proud, and he would never give up, but these things corroded you from the inside out. Thor stood to lose everything. His career first, of course; his friends, maybe; his sense of self-worth soon after. What would he be left with then? Loki, that's all. How was that a fair trade, how could Loki ever begin to compensate for all that Thor could lose over this?

“I would throw it all away, damn it all to hell, in a blink,” he had said once, full of fervour and boldness, but more than anything, full of shit.

“Yes, I know you would,” his brother had replied, his voice so sad, always willing to buy his crap, always refusing to see his baby brother for the bullshit-vending machine he really was. “And after three days you would miss it, and you would start to regret it, and then you would hate me for the rest of our lives.”

Loki detested when people got perceptive on him. He had bitten back, and hard, that night. Thor made it so easy. Oh, the nerve. Had he himself believed his own words, even then? Would he really throw away career, public recognition, the rush when he stepped out onto the stage, the thrill when he killed a performance, the excitement waiting for the reviews to come out, the sweet, sweet validation when they were good, and the sound of applause roaring in his ears, climbing higher when it was him taking the bow? Would he ever be happy being an anonymous (or rather, defamed) hausfrau, simply being Mrs. Odinson? (Or whatever other name they were forced to take…) So what if it was actually Loki the one who, at the moment of truth, after they had both sacrificed everything, realised that he actually liked his acting career better, and started to resent his brother for being the reason he had lost it all? How the fuck could he be sure that it would not happen? Wasn’t he a perfect little shit in every other way? The look of disappointment on Thor’s face, of betrayal…

Loki was struggling to breathe now, a clammy wave of panic soaking him throughout. Air. He wanted out. He needed out.

But you can’t run now, you bastard, not after what he’s done for you. He’s jumped through every hoop you’ve set up for him, he’s stuck his neck out for you, he has fucking told his friends already… This has no turning back. You’re trapped. (Can’t breathe…)

No, fuck, you’re wrong. If you have doubts, now it’s the time t-… to end it. Now. Before it gets any bigger. Just get the fuck out, Loki. Do it. Get up, pack a bag, disappear. He’s strong, he’ll get over it. Sif will pick up the pieces. He’ll never want to see you again, but after tonight, deep down inside, he will know it was for the best.

He imagined it, he visualised it. Sneaking out of bed, opening the drawers slowly, and where was the bloody bag. Unzipping it quietly, stuffing in whatever clothes were at hand, looking longingly at all the stuff he would have to leave behind and lose forever. Tip-toeing to the bathroom for his things. Then downstairs, mind the wooden steps because they creak, and Sigyn is a light sleeper. Borrow the car, you can leave it at the station… (He thought it was Little Loki’s voice chiming in now,
whining, stomping his feet, clinging on to door frames as big Loki dragged him away by force, "But I want Thor! I want to be with Thor!" — "Oh my sweet," replied Inner Bastard, honey-voiced and full of reasons, poison underneath, prising his little chubby fingers off one by one, “I know you do, but think of him. Things are complicated, and sometimes you have to do a bit of harm to do a world of good…”

Then he saw Thor waking up hours later, surprised that for once Loki had gotten up before him. Having a quick look around the house before he goes out jogging, still not panicking that Loki is nowhere to be found. Asking his mates when he comes back from his run, “anyone seen Loki?”, but nobody is worried just yet, except for Sigyn, who knows his flippy side very well. She keeps it to herself, however, always so loyal, hoping he’ll be better than he really is, and be brave, and come home. As hours go by, they start smelling something fishy, and although everybody is insisting that it’s too early for it, Thor just goes ahead and loses his shit. He’s furious, and sick with worry, and furious, and confused, and aching, and furious…

Loki began to cry, big silent tears, muffled sobs. He was feeling bereft and lost and lonely already. The world was a cold and scary place, and he felt like he had seen too much of it. And Thor would not fucking get over it anytime soon—don’t lie to make yourself feel better, Laufeyson. He would be torn apart, and he would feel betrayed, and he would never understand, and he would hate you for this. He would hate you. (And Loki’s heart was breaking, but his brain just kept on pounding him.) He would never forgive you, and if you should ever wish to come crawling, he’d never take you back. He would be forever afraid that you would pull another one of these on him. You would never see him again. You would never get to touch him again. He would hate you, for the rest of his life.

You selfish son of a bitch. Me, me, me. What about him? Thor loses everything if you stay, and in the end he’ll hate you just the same. You have to leave, Loki, for him, and for you, right this fucking minute. Be brave and go. Be brave and stay. Goddammit, Laufeyson, you’re a fucking coward.

Back-breaking sobs now, he tried to stifle them and he could not. He did slip out of bed then, he grabbed the first clothes he could feel in the dark (a pair of lounge pants and a bathrobe), he did tip-toe to the bathroom. He locked himself there, and continued to cry as quietly as he could, curled up in the corner farthest away from the door.

Oh, Loki, you sick, fucked up, messed up piece of shit. Your brother did something amazing for you tonight. He took a step forward and said, “we’re together.” Because he loves so much, he loves you, and himself, and his friends, and his huge heart won’t tolerate secrets and lies, not when it matters. He had been brave and proud for you, and risked his friends’ rejection, and had not backed down, even when he was trembling from fear. Loki should be feeling ecstatic and brimming with love and joy, and will you just look at yourself instead. What the fuck is your problem? What if Thor could see you now, crying in the bathroom in the middle of the night like a fucking lunatic? How would it make him feel?

And that’s why you can’t have nice things. Because you always fucking ruin everything. And you will fuck this up, sooner or later. Even if you get through this night, there’ll be another, and another, and another. No matter how many fucking pills you take, and no matter how many hours of therapy you get, this is who you are in the end, what you will always be. Thor deserves better than this, he deserves better than you. You have no right to ask him to throw his life down the drain for you. You’re not worth it. I don’t want to be you. I hate you. I wish you had never been born.

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

Loki beat his head with closed fists, and cried harder, and cried and cried and cried.
From grey, the light outside was turning white. The tears had stopped some time ago, mainly out of exhaustion, but he was still shaking with deep, sudden sobs. Although the humdrum of voices was still there in his head, tormenting him, the most urgent peak of the crisis seemed behind him. Loki guessed he had his medication to thank for that — without it, there would have been nothing standing between those voices and his will; and in the bathroom he had everything he needed to follow through with the logical conclusion of this particular train of thought he had been crazy-riding on.

He needed to get his shit together before anyone else got up. Hogun was an early riser, he could be here at any minute. He had to drag himself up on his feet, now.

He got up stiffly, muscles rigid from the crying and the cold, and washed his face. His eyes were puffy, injected in red, his face swollen in odd places. He could not possibly go back to Thor’s bed looking like that. What would he say if he woke up and asked him what was wrong? He wouldn’t know where to start explaining, and even if he did, Thor would never understand. His brain simply did not do this, it did not work itself spontaneously into life-ruining meltdowns.

He ached all over, shoulders, neck, back, his arse from having had it pressed on a frozen tile floor for what he calculated had been the best part of an hour. He listened for telling noises in the corridor, poked his nose out. Deserted. He padded to his old bedroom. The sheets were ice cold, everything was cold. He covered up to his eyes, shaking convulsively, muscles attempting to generate body heat. He was spent, and that headache was going to be one for the books. He made a half-arsed attempt at rolling his shoulders and stretching his neck to ease off some of the tension. His heart wasn’t in it.

All those terrible thoughts that had risen and grown to a crushing physical weight, like tons and tons of black water piling on top of him and drowning him, impossible to elude or avoid or negotiate away, had retreated, or rather ebbed — they were not gone, and although there was a harmlessly-looking stretch of sand between them and Loki for now, he could still see them, still hear them, still smell them festering there, waiting for the next bad moon to rise. He could still see their reason and their sense, and they were still fucking terrifying. He did not want Thor to ruin his life over him and regret it. He did not want to look into Thor’s eyes one day with regret either. He did not want to wake up one day and realise all they had left for each other was reproach. The mere idea made him want to run away again, disappear into thin air.

But no matter how compelling, no matter how persuasive, no matter how reasonable and inescapable they appeared, they were still only thoughts and figurations, right? They were not the future, not realities already come to pass, but mere possibilities, that was all. And possibilities could be influenced, and shaped, and controlled, transformed into something radically different, or even avoided altogether, couldn’t they? (He was hearing all of that in Banner’s voice, by the way. It was Banner’s words that were coming to his rescue, from previous panics.) You won’t necessarily be overrun by these things you fear, Loki. They’re not inevitable, and you’re not powerless against them. You can work at this, and you don’t have to do it alone. I’m here, and Sigyn is here, and Nat is here, and we’ll help you, we’ll be right by you. And even if something horrible should happen, we’ll manage, you’ll manage. You’ve done it before and you’ll do it again. It’s reasonable to be afraid, there is nothing crazy about it. Some things are very scary. That’s not defeat, not even a setback, that’s just part one of dealing with it. Now, one foot in front of the other. What’s next?

Next. Sleeping. Stop fucking thinking.

Loki turned on the lamp and picked a book from the shelf by the bed. The Hound of the Baskervilles.
It ticked all the boxes—beloved old friend with pleasant, calming associations, far-removed from his present circumstances, engaging but familiar enough that he wouldn’t obsess over it, and a bloody good read he had not revisited in a long time. He started turning pages.

Even when his lids, heavy as lead, spent more time shut than open, and he was reading the same paragraph over and over again, he kept trying to push sentence after sentence. He didn’t want to leave one moment, one second of conscience to think.

There was some muffled whispering outside, he thought it was Bruce and Sigyn. The room was light. He felt like he had been crushed by a cartoon grand piano. He desperately needed pain killers. There were some in Thor’s room.

Loki dragged himself out of bed, fighting with a tangle of terrycloth from the bathrobe he had slept in, and once he was sure there was nobody out there, he padded to their bedroom. Squinting and with a heavy frown, because every movement made his headache dig its heels in, and we’re talking six-inch stilettos.

Inside, Thor was still asleep, curled on his side in a nest of sheets and blankets bundled around him, like a beast in its lair. A naked, golden beast, bulging with muscles Michelangelo would have sold his soul for, who growled like a beast in his sleep, and fucked like an animal too… Focus, Laufeyson, the headache. He found the tablets, and chased them down with water from the jug on the bedside table. Now, coffee would be nice, but he wasn’t ready to face the world. Not by himself, that’s for sure. He took his clothes off and climbed up into bed next to his brother. He tried to pull some covers over him, carefully. Not carefully enough. Thor stirred awake. He blinked dozily, bright blue eyes sparkling, and crept over to him, arm and leg over Loki, dragging him close. Loki felt both kind of annoyed at the manhandling (who the fuck did Thor have him for? His personal human teddy, shoving and pushing him this way and that?) and instantly comforted at the same time, the heat so bloody nice after being cold for hours. He laid there, warm and soothed and safe and owned, and waited for the throb inside his skull to subside.

Next time your brain wants to go on one, Laufeyson, remember this, this exact sensation, the weight and the glow and the smell, the push of his chest against your body as he breathes, while sweet, blissful oblivion in the form of sleep weighs your eyes down and enfolds you. And keep repeating to yourself that you’re allowed to have this, that you deserve this. Not because there is anything extraordinary about you, but because you’re people, and you deserve to be loved as much as anyone else. (Jesus, how fucking hard it was to say that, even in his own mind —especially in his own mind —, even in Sigyn’s voice.) Repeat it to yourself until it fucking sinks in, like a mantra. Don’t try to reason yourself into this, because you’re much too fucking clever for it, and you’ll always find fucking counterarguments. No, you’ll have to take it on faith. You need no justification. Because it’s there, and Thor wants you to have it, and that has to be good enough for you. No debates, no convoluted argumentations, no discussions about your merits or lack thereof. Just tell it to yourself until it’s law.

You deserve this. You can have this. You already have it. So just fucking have it.

The next time Loki woke up that morning, the watch on the bedside table said it was half past
eleven. He sat up carefully, expecting a hammer strike of pain to his head that, mercifully, did not come. He was tired and his thoughts felt as slow and thick as trickle, but it should be manageable. Only, it was time to face the lions, because coffee, for pity’s sake…

“Thor,” he said, shaking his snoring brother’s shoulder. “Thor, wake up.”

He got a deep rumble in reply. A deep grumble that bypassed his ears and resonated directly in his groin.

“Thor, it’s late, wake up…” Shaking, shaking.

Thor turned onto his stomach, with another tingle-inducing groan.

Loki huffed, not best pleased. He got up and trudged heavily across the room to throw the curtains open. Light poured inside. It was a bright day, mineral blue skies. Thank fuck. After yesterday, it was nice to have the weather lend a hand. His brother grumbled in protest, and with some obscenity or another, he turned on his back and shoved a pillow on his face.

Oh. It seemed that Thor was not totally asleep then. Loki smirked at the sight of the tented bedcovers. And even with the reminders of his headache throbbing bluntly in the back rows, he felt himself getting, hm, bothered. There were things that were not too taxing. He was willing to try one or two. He lied down beside his brother, taking a moment to admire the rise and fall of his chest, and slithered one hand under the covers. With his eyes closed, he brushed down his brother’s chest and stomach, stopping at the pubes. Thor let out a long, heavy breath, but didn’t move.

“Thor…” he whispered, as close to his ear as he could get with that fucking pillow still over Thor’s face, fingers playing with the curls at the base of his brother’s cock. “Brother…”

A groan, and Thor rolled onto his side, back to him. Hm. Loki turned too, and got close, spooning him. His own erection fell neatly at the cleft of Thor’s magnificent, nut-cracking-hard arse.

“Brother, wake up…” He peppered his shoulders with tiny kisses, and rolled his hips idly, getting but a light stroke. Enticing, nothing more yet.

Thor’s breathing had changed. There was a long, long groan as he arched against him, stretching his back. Then one big hand fell on Loki’s hip, with a grope, and Thor’s arse pushed back against him, pressure on Loki’s underbelly. He kissed Thor’s neck, lazily, messily. His brother took the pillow off his face and offered more skin for Loki’s mouth, with a sort of gruff mumble.

“Good morning, brother,” said Loki between kisses.

Thor grunted something back, hoarse, and pressed against him. Oh, he was so fucking horny… He was rutting against Thor’s arse, desperate to get a bit more serious now. If only he could get a better grip… He slithered one hand downwards, between Thor’s thighs, and nudged them apart. Thor got it, and opened them, and Loki positioned himself to better… ah, that’s it. Where the fuck is the lube (he contorted to reach on the bedside table, felt blindly, hit the gold, and ripped a packet with his teeth. He probably got it all over the underside of the bedcover as he reached under it to slick his cock. Shivered —it was cold.) Finally, he was thrusting into a tight, hot, narrow space. Thor was very thoughtfully staying firm for him, and then a bit of a hip roll… Ah. Loki’s hand crept over and downwards, looking for Thor’s cock. They had done this so much when they were kids, but the positions were always reversed. It was making his head light. He closed one slick hand around Thor’s erection, and heard him sigh.

“Are you awake yet?” mumbled Loki breathily, his hand jacking Thor slowly, as he thrusted
between his thighs.

A gruff little chuckle. Thor clenched around him. Ah, god. It was not fucking but… His brother’s hand closed around his own, and Loki remembered he was supposed to be jerking him off as well. Well, excuse me brother, if I’m not as practiced at this as… ah, fuck, hmmm…, as you are. Thor clenched tighter, tensing his thighs. Loki had completely forgotten about his brother’s cock now, and it seemed that Thor had too. Both Thor’s movements and his own were focused on his cock. It was a heady sensation, to have his brother rolling his hips and clench his muscles to better pleasure him. Again, it was always the other way around…

Because it wasn’t proper fucking (and because they were having so much sex, probably) this seemed to be taking forever, and Loki was getting frustrated.

“Ah, shit.” He stopped after a while, panting hard, his headache rising and threatening to spoil the mood. He pulled back and turned onto his back, still breathing hard, seething with dissatisfaction.

Thor rolled over to face him, eyes puffy with the rough night, lips also slightly puffy from a not-rough-at-all little face-fuck.

“Hey,” said Thor, eyes still heavy, voice dry, hoarse from sleep. “Want to come?”

Loki nodded, hoping his headache didn’t notice.

His brother pulled down the covers, Loki gasped with the unexpected cold. Thor felt his cock, found it slick enough, and started stripping him. Loki jolted from the sudden sensation, and felt it coming over quickly. He knew Thor was watching him, but didn’t put on any theatricals for him. He just let go. His hips did thrust up, seeking that clash of Thor’s fist on his crotch that sent tingles up his spine.

“Are you close, baby?” said Thor, just by his ear.

Loki got on the stretch home right then. He went rigid, arse hovering one inch above the mattress.

“Don’t stop… Like that…” His jaw went slack as his brother jerked faster. “Yes… yes… god, yes…”

“Come on, baby…”

“…Ah, fuuuuuck…!”

He shuddered as he came, his brother watching him and stroking him through it. Thor’s hand slowed down as bliss washed over him, loosening all his knots. He felt himself begin to melt into the mattress straight away.

He opened his eyes one sliver, humming a sound of content. Then he saw the frown on Thor’s face.

“Have you been crying?” asked his brother, very much awake all of a sudden.

Fuck. His mind was just too thick and tired to think of an excuse or an explanation. He scrubbed his eyes hard. What a way to come down from that high.

“’S nothing,” he mumbled, from behind closed eyes.

He heard the wheels and cogs of Thor’s brain in the silence that followed.

“Won’t you tell me what it is?” asked his brother kindly, with a note of worry.
"I said it was nothing, forget it." And just because he knew Thor would not let it go just like that, “I felt all emotional last night.” Whatever that meant.

“You were crying in the night? And I didn’t notice?” He sounded so helpless.

“Yes but it’s nothing” he said, too quickly. “Have you seen your lips?”

“My lips?” Thor felt his mouth. “What’s wrong with them?”

“You may want to look in the mirror…”

Thor chuckled, still hoarse, still dry, still looking knackered, bags under his eyes, still unnaturally beautiful.

“Won’t you tell me why you were crying?” asked Thor.

Loki sighed, exasperate.

“I was emotional,” he repeated, knowing it wouldn’t get him anywhere.

“What does that mean?”

“Jesus fuck, Thor,” grumbled Loki, getting up stiffly. “Just… emotional, ok?”

Now Thor looked… unimpressed.

“We need to get our arses in gear,” said Loki, going for the distraction again, “we have guests…”

Thor sighed.

“Can’t I just stay here?” he sulked. Even that expression suited him.

Loki kneeled by the bed, close to him, letting himself gaze at his brother with unreserved adoration, for once.

“I want to get out there with you and brag,” said Loki. “I want to hold your hand, and grab your arse, and kiss you for all our friends to see. I want to rub it in.”

“Rub what in?”

“That you’re mine.”

Thor’s blue eyes locked with his. He grinned with the corner of his mouth. He seemed both pleased and taken aback. Then he remembered himself, or he remembered his predicament.

“We could fuck really, really loud,” he bargained. “You can call me brother as much as you like.”

“Oh, we can do that too, I owe you one,” offered Loki. “In the shower, though.”

Thor sighed.

“Don’t sound so excited,” said Loki, giving him a shove.

Thor smiled half-heartedly. After some time, he dragged himself up to sitting, reluctant, slumped on himself like a giant puppet left on the shelf. Loki decided to cut him some slack and give him a bit of time.
When he bent over to get the bathrobe from the floor, he heard his brother hum appreciatively. He gave him a look over the shoulder, with a smirk.

“In the shower, you say?” grinned Thor.

“Is that what you’re going to wear?” asked Loki, quizzical eyebrow, hair slicked back, one perfect love-bite poking just above the collar of his shirt.

Thor examined the jeans, plain t-shirt and knit jacket he had picked and spread on the bed before the shower.

“Yes?” he said, hesitating. It was pretty much what he always wore around the house. Loki had never seemed to have a problem with it before. “No good?”

Loki assessed the outfit critically, and had a rummage in the wardrobe. Thor ended up in the new-ish black jeans and a deep red shirt, not tight, but rather fitted. He checked himself out in the mirror. He didn’t really look overdressed so much as nicely put together, but still. At least his brother allowed him to wear the weathered boots he had bought in New Mexico while shooting Blood Meridian, even though Thor suspected that Loki believed they reminded him of Jane. Loki himself had also made an effort. Instead of jeans or leather, smart charcoal grey suit trousers that framed his butt so beautifully, in a very, very nice cloth (you could touch the wool in it, and Thor did, lots,) and the deep green shirt he had worn on their first date, instead of a baggy jumper. All in all, they walked out of the room like the rather good-looking couple they were. So, Loki had meant it when he had said he wanted to brag. Just how fucking cute was his baby brother.

Even after the extra few hours of sleep he had scrounged up this morning, Thor was bleeding knackered. He had not managed to sleep for ages, and when he did, he kept waking up. He had all those family therapy sessions to thank for having identified his problem as probably anxiety. He hated that he was being tossed around by unnamed, irrational fears, and he didn’t see a point in just laying there doing nothing about it, so he had decided to try and untangle the knots and brambles in his head—pin down the main sources of his restlessness, narrow them down to something he could work with, and get to fucking work on it. Tidy up and rationalise, Odinson. You have nothing better to do at the moment.

So, what was he so afraid of? He was afraid of the morning, when he would have to go out there and face his friends, d’uh. But why, exactly, goddammit? They’re not going to fucking bite. What are you afraid is going to happen? And be honest. Well, after much deliberation, he had had to accept that, pathetic and ridiculous as they were, it came down to three main things: he was scared of being judged, he was afraid of being looked at funny, and he was afraid of losing them.

So that was that. Eureka, you got it. Good for you. Now, rationalising your fears. First, the judging.
He so, so did not want their friendship to end on a matter of fucking sexual morality. Just… anything else but that, please. But don’t just lose your cool as a pre-emptive measure, Odinson, you don’t really know how they feel about this. They had barely had time to get over the shock last night. Whatever was in their faces or in their heads at that point, Thor shouldn’t really hold them to it, and he did not intend to. Tomorrow was another day. And come on, man, you know these people, they’re just not that type. He had felt nothing but affection and support from Volstagg. There had been a strong pledge of unconditional loyalty in Hogun’s eyes and the grip he had on his arms. Fandral… Well, Thor would have never thought he would ever see Fandral in shock, he had believed him unflappable. Their past history may have a weight in, which Thor was not able to deduce, and Fandral’s present, uh, interest in Loki may also have an influence in his hm, opinion on the whole matter, but Fandral was a fuck and let fuck kind of person. Now, Sif… Well, Sif was bound to have serious difficulties with this, wasn’t she? But still, he could not possibly imagine her plastering a scarlet letter on Thor’s forehead and condemning him to the flames of hell. Whatever she was feeling about this, it would not go down that route. That was simply not Sif.

But anyway, let’s forget it’s your friends now, he thought. If worse comes to the worst, if they are so sickened by this they don’t want anything to do with you anymore… Fuck them. Seriously, fuck them. They did no harm to anyone with this, Loki and him. So what if it was a sin, or taboo, or just plain repulsive to people? Fuck people! Thor was a moral man. He had always had a strong sense of right and wrong, inherent to him, and he trusted it. And there was nothing wrong with this. He had no doubts about that, not one. So what if it freaked people out, what if it horrified them? To hell with all of them. Even his friends, if it came to that.

But how could he feel so certain about this, and still get the jitters about… what? Having them look at him like a weirdo? It was ridiculous, and humiliating, and he objected to himself so fucking strongly over it, and yet there it was, clear as day. Well, (rationalise, Odinson,) he wasn’t fucking used to it, was he? He needed no-one pointing out to him just how mainstream his public life and persona had been until now, and how rarely, if ever, had anything he had done been frowned upon (except by his dad, but that was a completely different story.) So, being the freak, being pointed at and called things, being looked at funny and talked about behind his back. The idea made him uneasy, ok?, he feared it, and denying it wasn’t going to do anyone any good.

So you may come downstairs, and someone, or everyone, might turn and look at you like you’re a fucking freak. It may happen. It’s a possibility. So? Toughen up, Odinson. Hadn’t Loki had much worse all his bloody life? Thor had had it so easy for so long. It was finally time that he stood up and got his fair share of looks for how unorthodox his private life really was, and stop letting Loki be the only one with the “freak” sign hanging from his neck.

And last but certainly not least, he was afraid of losing them. He loved them. He had felt more himself and more at home among them than he had ever felt in his whole life. They were like family. They shared some interests and a particular sense of humour, lots of stories and experiences, but to be honest he could not pin it down to a specific set of reasons. They just came together so bloody nicely, a little world complete in itself, greater than the sum of its parts. He just loved hanging out with them. They made him laugh, and they kept him grounded. He felt that, as long as he had them in his life, he would not lose himself to fame and flattery. In summary, he valued their friendship very, very much, and he was terrified that this might break it.

He was hoping so badly that they would prove to be the kind of people he had always had them for, that they would be able to overcome their prejudices, or their ickiness, or whatever, rise above it, and see Loki and him for what they were, good for each other, better together, and support them. Because what he had told Loki still stood. If they could not accept them, and welcome Loki among them, he did not want them in his and Loki’s life. Because they did not do any harm to anyone, and just as important as that, because Thor did not like people who built opinions on other people based
on who they shared their life and their bed with.

So, his fears, here they were, all spread out, laid bare, examined, analysed, rationalised to the best of his ability. And just as fucking frightening as they had been to begin with. The ball of lead was still in his throat, no matter how much he tried to swallow it down. He had fell asleep from utter nervous exhaustion, but his brain had kept churning them through the night, and here they were again, as he stood in front of the kitchen door, his grip of Loki’s hand a lot tighter than it needed to be.

There were animated voices and some laughter coming from inside (Volstagg’s booming, hearty chuckles were unmistakeable), but it was his heartbeat he was hearing more than anything. And he was so fucking tired as well. Where was he going to get the strength to get in there and… well, stand proud, hold his brother close, and confront them? He had never had a more pressing urge to run and hide. Next to him, Loki gulped. He was not as aloof and self-possessed as he wished to appear, and Thor’s hesitation in front of the door probably wasn’t helping. They would have to fake it. He relaxed his clasp on Loki’s hand, but for a brief squeeze, and smiled at him, with a wink. He’s big brother, he’s got this.

He pushed the door in.

“Morning, everyone,” he said, smiling, making eye contact, walking briskly with Loki in tow. He spotted quick glances dart down to their entwined hands and flick away.

“Afternoon, more like!” said Volstagg, patting his paunch.

Everybody said good morning, everybody met his eye with a nice, friendly expression. Except for Sif, who seemed extremely disapproving of her cup of coffee, between her hands on the table. She seemed weary and tired herself, as if she hadn’t had much sleep either. The conversation resumed naturally enough. There was no sudden, strained silence. They were talking about drama school, for Sigyn and Bruce’s benefit it seemed, since they were asking questions. Thor wondered, was it a good or a bad sign that Loki and him had not walked in on them talking about the elephant in the room? The fact that they weren’t discussing the subject, was it an indication that they weren’t that bothered, or a sign that it was such a sensitive issue that they were steering clear of it? Oh, Odinson, stop right there. Just breathe in, breathe out, and what will be, will be. Right?

“Want eggs, baby?” he asked Loki, who nodded quietly and got on with a fresh pot of coffee and the toasts. They moved around each other effortlessly, having fallen into the easy morning routine they had already built together over the past couple of weeks. Except of course for the making out, the heavy petting and the array of other things that kept happening in that kitchen, or at least starting in it. Thor did not want to make anyone uncomfortable by being that slobbery couple who can’t stop being all over each other, but hell, they were that slobbery couple. It was one thing to be respectful of guests, and it was another to be shy to the point of insincerity, right? So as he walked past Loki with the dishes, he planted a kiss on the back of his neck. His very sensitive, very reactive brother squirmed and flustered, the sexy thing.

When he went to find a chair, Thor realised there was only one left. Sigyn had just vacated it, and was now perched on his boyfriend’s lap. Alright then. Thor took the empty chair, at the head of the table (dad’s chair), and put both plates down in front of him.

Now Loki turned around, a coffee mug in each hand, and swept the room with his eyes. Before he blanked it out, for a brief second, he looked forlorn. Thor knew that face well. Left out again. Pathetic. Loser…

“Loki,” Thor said, patting his thigh with a bright smile.
The expression that dawned on Loki’s face then was a poem, washing over him like a coat of glitter, making him shine. Pride, triumph, a sudden burst of self-confidence, bordering on arrogance, giving an extra smug spring to his swagger as he walked around the table towards him. He took his rightful place on Thor’s lap with an air of nonchalance, as if it was nothing, as if they did this every day, and Thor wrapped a possessive arm around his waist. What a fucking prince, thought Thor, a puddle at his baby brother's feet. He couldn’t take his eyes off him.

He caught his name. Volstagg had been talking to him while Thor was on cloud nine.

“Say that again?”

“I was asking,” Volstagg said, in the tone of a school teacher who’s just caught his favourite student up to no good again, and knows he should be taking him to task, but can't never be hard on him, “if you were still up for that chat we talked about, come March. The kids are so excited about it.”

“Yeah, sure,” said Thor. He had forgotten completely.

“And what about you, Loki?” asked Volstagg. “Would you be willing to give a chat at my seminar? They idolise you there.”

Loki swallowed his mouthful.

“What kind of a chat?” he asked, always so cautious.

“Anything you like, really. You can talk about your method, about the way it works in the circuit, about your experiences…”

Loki frowned, flashed a pointed look at Volstagg.

“Would these kids’ parents be happy to have me come talk about my experiences to their innocent little darlings?”

Volstagg chuckled.

“All my little darlings, both the innocent and the not so much, are over eighteen, so it’s not up their parents anymore.”

Loki had liked that answer, said that smirk. Whether or not he had been swayed by it, it was too soon to tell.

“I’m sure they’re bored of hearing about it anyway,” said Loki, dismissive.

“And I’m sure they would be thrilled,” insisted Volstagg, enthusiastic. “It would be a treat.”

“What’s Thor going to talk about,” asked Loki.

“My own time at school, how it has enriched my acting.”

“Selling them a place they’re already paying for?” said Loki, without real heat.

“Actually, you were going to tell them about the hard time you had of it in the beginning, weren’t you, lad?” chimed in Volstagg.

“You had a hard time?” asked Loki, incredulous.

Thor shrugged, and took a big bite of his eggs on toast, to save himself from having to answer.
“Rotten,” said Volstagg. “The teachers were out to get him because he was an Odinson, and the students all treated him like he had the plague because he was a movie star, the snobbish little shits. He was isolated and getting hate left, right, and centre.”

Loki was frowning, searching his brother's face. Thor was so not looking back right now, his face starting to boil red.

“He almost dropped out, didn’t you Thor?” added Sif. “He was the very picture of misery the first time I saw him at Hogun’s class. You weren’t eating much, were you?”

And then Thor had to sit there and listen to a thorough review of his first months at school, as told in turns by each of his friends, with a lapful of frowning Loki. Even Hogun had stuff to contribute. Thor left them to it, attention on his toasts, and trying not to drop crumbs over his brother’s smart, carefully chosen clothes, which meant a spot of contorting.

“It wasn’t as bad as all that,” he did say, eventually, as the anecdotes kept piling up. Everybody was being so supportive, so compassionate. Poor Thor, boo hoo. And in the meantime, his brother, who had been through real, proper hell and back several times over, listened quietly and thoughtfully, and god only knows what he was feeling.

“So thank god we found you, eh?” said Volstagg, rising his mug of tea in toast. “What would you have done without us.”

Thor nodded in acknowledgement, and clinked his mug with his, with a nervous bite at his lip.

“I didn’t know any of that,” said Loki.

Thor wiped his no doubt oily palms on a napkin, and put both hands around Loki’s waist, looking up. He sought his brother’s face, trying to read him. There was a frown there and a squint, but basically all Thor could see right now was just how fucking lovely he was from that angle, all sharp planes and cutting bones. Loki dipped his head down to kiss him, eyes closed and all, and if his expression was impenetrable to Thor, at least his kiss was not. There might have been a brief, crackling silence in the room, but everybody seemed to decide that they had not noticed.

“Anyway,” said Sigyn, cutting the moment short. “Loki, we need to get our arses in gear if you’re going to show Bruce and me the village. And we need to go shopping if we’re cooking tea. You’re all staying for tea, aren’t you guys?” she asked in general.

There was a round of yesses, and then they all started to pass plates over to Volstagg, who was the one nearest to the sink, and clean up the table. Loki and Thor were still finishing their breakfast. Loki wolfed what was left, and gulped down his milky coffee already standing up. He lingered when he was kissing Thor goodbye, while Sigyn tugged at his sleeve. Thor did not check anyone’s reaction this time either. Loki seemed to want his fill of kissing him in front of everyone, and after all they had been through, Thor wasn’t going to begrudge him that.

Volstagg said something then about going to phone the family (“if they’re up, that is, the lazy buggers!”), Fandral walked out to the kitchen garden with the pack of cigarettes already in hand, and Hogun simply stepped silently out.

And now Thor found himself alone in the kitchen with Sif, and a second cup of black coffee still too hot to drink in front of him. Sif had started to clean the dishes.

“Siffy, don’t bother, I’ll do it,” he said.

“No bother. Got nothing better to do,” she mumbled.
“I’ll rinse then,” he offered, leaving his coffee on the table to cool down.

“If you want.”

They worked stiffly side by side, the silence awkward. He could not remember a more uncomfortable situation with her since the morning after they had slept together. Thor knew he had to bring the subject up somehow, discuss this. He was already wondering why she wasn’t.

“So, Sif…” he tried, hesitant and clunky, “I guess it was a shock, right? About… Loki and me.”

“Hm-mm,” she said, and carried on in silence, posture rigid. So, she wasn’t going to make this easy for him, was she?

“So, what do you… Um, what do you think?” he asked.

She snorted, derisive.

“You don’t want to hear what I think, Thor.”

He swallowed. Right.

“Yes, yes I do,” he said, a massive bluff.

“Alright then,” she said, curtly. “I think you’re out of your bloody mind.”

Thor tensed up, his hands clenched around the towel he was holding. Breathe, Odinson.

“Why,” he asked, calm enough.

She whipped her head around, eyes wide, unbelieving.

“Well, there are so many problematic things about it,” he said, trying to appear light and unfazed, and sounding downright cocky, “I just wondered which one was yours. Or which ones.”

Her mouth was hanging open. Cocky was so not the right approach with Sif, not when it was serious. He could not help himself.

“I don’t even know where to start!” she said, indignation making her voice falter.

“Try,” said Thor.

She squared her jaw, met his challenge.

“Alright,” she said. “My first problem is, how the hell are you going to do this? Are you planning to have facial surgery and move to a quiet place in Siberia, where nobody knows you?”

“No,” said Thor.
“Oh, right, so you're still going to be an actor, is that it?”

“Yes,” said Thor. “If I can.”

She shook her head, a caustic smile.

“So you’re going to keep this a secret, right? In the internet age. Is that the plan?”

Thor pondered his answer. Sif did not wait.

“You don’t even have a plan, do you?” She scoffed. “To hell with you, Odinson!”

Thor inhaled, exhaled.

“Why are you so angry?” he asked.

“Why are you so stupid!” she shouted. “And arrogant, and presumptuous, and… Ugh! Jesus Christ!”

She dropped the plate she had been scrubbing obsessively for a while now, with a loud clatter, and started to pace the kitchen floor.

Thor inhaled, exhaled, decided to give her some time. In the meantime, he would just finish the fucking dishes. Once he had set the last bit of cutlery aside to air dry, he turned to face her, wiping his hands.

“Why am I presumptuous?” he asked.

“Why are you…? A spoilt brat, is what you are!” she snarled. “You think you’re fucking untouchable because the sunshine comes out of your arse! You always get what you want and you always get your way, so you think you can get away with fucking your own brother and still have an acting career! With Oscars, of course! Because Thor Fucking Odinson is invincible and there is nothing he cannot do, and nothing he cannot have!”

“Do you think this is a whim?” he said, cutting. “Do you think I woke up one morning, saw Loki, thought hm, cute butt, I’m gonna tap that, and there you go, incest? Is that what you think?”

She looked at him with a completely different expression then, compassionate, aching, and her voice calm, although still stern.

“No, that’s not how I see it at all.”

“How do you see it then?” he asked.

“Do you really want me to say?”

Jesus fuck. Might as well. How much more hurtful could it be? (Famous last words.) He nodded.

"Please." Sarcasm.

She nodded too, with an expression of resignation, as if she was going to a place that had no turning back.

“I see a lonely, needy, sick little boy who only had his mum and his brother in the whole world, and then one day he found out he was adopted, and it broke him. And then his mum died, and all he’s left with is his brother, who is not his brother anymore. And I see a kind, generous man, protective and caring, loving to a fault, who blames himself for all that’s happened to his kid brother, and would do anything for him, anything.”
"What the fuck are you trying to say, that Loki is my… pity fuck, or something?"

Sif held his stare, defying him. Thor snorted.

"Well, that’s not how it fucking is, at all. You can get that out of your mind right now."

"So how is it, then," asked Sif. “Because then what I see is a man who seemed to have a brain in his head and his life on track and then bang, little brother returns, and suddenly you’re willing to throw out the window everything you've worked so hard for all your life?"

Thor gasped at the fucking bluntness of that. It had hit him right in the solar fucking plexus.

"Do you think he… manipulated me into this somehow?"

"If he had, it’s not like you would know, would you?"

He rubbed his brow, struggling badly now to reign in the urge to start flinging things around and shouting really, really loud.

"Nobody manipulated me into this, ok? This is what I want, what I've always fucking wanted. I love him. Always have. Like a brother, and more than that. Ok? This has been a long time coming."

"What do you mean, always?" she asked, with a squint. "How long?"

She had to ask, of course. Well, he would answer.

"I was fifteen when we slept together for the first time."

She shut her eyes, in despair and exhaustion.

"This just keeps getting better and better!” she said. “For god’s sake, Thor! How… what…? …What are you fucking thinking? How the hell did you get it in your head that this was a good idea? No matter what you feel, you two are a fucking mess as brothers, how on earth do you expect it’s going to be any better as a couple? This is unhealthy, Thor, how the fuck can you not see it! And you’re both insane if you think you can pull this off!"

Thor’s knuckles were white from holding to the side of the worktop so hard. He really wasn’t trusting himself with a civilised answer right now. But he should have tried, because Sif was not fucking finished.

"You’re a smart man, Thor, you can always look after yourself, but for him! You have like a blind spot for him! Don’t you bloody see it? So what more do you have to do? How much more does he need? Tell me! For him to believe that you love him enough? When you wreck your career and your reputation, will that suffice you think? Will he believe you then? Will that satisfy Loki? Or will you still be constantly freaking out that, the moment he suspects you don’t love him like he needs you to, he’s going to try and kill himself again? Is that how it works between you two? Just explain this to me really slowly, Thor, walk me through the whole fucking thought process that turned hooking up with your own little brother into a perfectly reasonable, practicable idea!"

Thor’s stare now was sure to be able to curdle milk, and his muscles were fucking aching from holding back his fury. He forced himself into a long, controlled breath.

But whatever he was going to say died on his tongue when the kitchen door opened, and there Loki was, standing under the threshold. Colour drained from Thor’s face, a deep, cold shudder made his insides turn and his stomach clamp up. Loki’s eyes were burning with a poisonous green fire, spite
and hurt, hatred and self-loathing, and so much more, radiating physical heat. Sif returned his stare, taken aback but standing her ground, and hostile. How had Thor missed that she disliked him so much. He braced himself for whatever was coming from his brother’s sharp tongue, but Loki just smirked sourly, turned around, and walked away.

Thor staggered, caught between a wave of murderous wrath against Sif, and worry over Loki. He barged past her on his way out, not giving her the dignity of one look.

“Baby, wait,” he said, catching up with Loki in the hall, on his way out. “How long have you been there? How much have you heard?”

“Why? Did I miss the part where she listed the positives?” he said, abrasive.

“She was talking out of her arse, Loki, forget everything she’s said, don’t listen to one word.”

“Actually, I think we should listen,” said Loki, still walking. “All she did was look at you, and then look at me, and draw some logical conclusions. It’s what the rest of the world is going to do.”

“I don’t care!” said Thor.

“Hm, but maybe I do,” said Loki.

Thor continued the chase now across the garden.

“Baby, wait! Don’t bloody go like that, we need to talk!”

“Not now,” threw Loki over his shoulder.

“Yes, fucking now! Talk to me!” insisted Thor.

“I said not now,” hissed his brother.

“Don’t go by yourself!” cried Thor behind his back.

That made Loki stop, and turn very slowly.

“Why? Are you afraid of what I’m going to do to myself?” he asked, tone sweet with poisoned deliberation.

When Thor frowned, realising his mistake, Loki’s smirk grew wider, more cruel. Thor hated that face, he hated it with all his heart.

“She’s right, isn’t she?” said Loki. “I really have you wrapped around my little finger with this. I can play you like a fucking fiddle.”

“No, she’s not fucking right,” said Thor, “she’s not right.”

“Repeating it a thousand times won’t make it so, Thor.”

Thor was fucking trembling with all of it now, boiling with it. He still managed to bring himself back.

“Loki, forget about her, ok? Just…” A huff. “Stay with me. Let’s talk. Please.”

“Are you really afraid I’m going to cut my veins or something?” said Loki, tartly. “You still have no idea how this works. You’ve lived with a depressive person half your life. How can you still be so
fucking ignorant about it?”

Thor was about as fucking strained as he could get, and now he snapped.

“How am I to know?!” he shouted. “You never fucking tell me anything! You always just fucking run away!”

“Never?” repeated Loki, affronted. “Always?”

“Since we were kids, you always keep it all to yourself, and I’m the one doing the fucking guesswork! And you blame me now because I don’t always get it right?”

Loki was livid with indignation.

“Are we going to bring up our whole fucking childhoods whenever we have an argument?”

“Don’t fucking change subjects!” roared Thor. “And I’m talking about this argument here, now!”

“No!” snarled Loki. “You’re talking always! And never! I never tell you anything. I always run away!”

“So we’re discussing semantics now?!

“I’m fucking talking about how everything I do every fucking day doesn’t count for dick!” screamed Loki. “You have no idea, no idea how fucking hard I try! Why do I fucking bother!”

“So fucking tell me! Talk to me!” insisted Thor. “It’s all I’m bloody asking!”

“But I don’t want to fucking talk!” shouted Loki.

He looked so vulnerable for an instant, that Thor was thrown off balance. Loki’s chest was heaving agitatedly.

“I want to be alone. Leave me the fuck alone. Don’t fucking follow me,” he said, restrained. The anger was still there, just underneath, simmering low and bitter.

Thor watched him walk away and disappear under the stone arch leading to the meadow. He was suffocating in impotence and fury, nostrils flaring, tears pushing to come out, a roar burning in his throat.

He felt a gentle hand on his arm, and whipped around, startled. It was Sigyn, with a kind smile.

“I’ll go find him,” she said.

Thor remembered how his mum would always tell him to give Loki time and space when he asked for it. He still nodded, and he watched Sigyn follow his brother’s trail with a mixture of gratitude, jealousy and guilt.
Loki wiped two stray tears and no more came. He felt depleted, exhausted, empty, not even furious. He didn’t go far. He found himself a log to sit on without getting a wet arse, and lit up a fag.

The trudge on the grass behind his back alerted him that someone was coming. He huffed, irritated. They couldn't even give him ten bloody minutes? Not even five? Jesus fuck.

“Hey,” said Sigyn.

"Leave me alone," he groaned.

A silence.

"I know what you’re thinking, you know?” she said. “I know what you’re saying in your mind. ‘Here she is now to give me The Chat. And I have to sit here and pretend to listen as she goes on and on about how everything is going to be alright, when I know better. I know the truth. Because I alone know the real Loki, his selfish heart, his sick, twisted brain, and how no matter how hard he tries, he always fucks up. All her words about not giving up apply to other people, people who are worth more than him, stronger and better. It’s not going to be alright for him. And all these nice, stupid people can talk until they’re blue in the face to convince him that he’s wrong, but that’s because he has them all fooled. Out in the real world, it’s full of people like Sif, people who Loki hasn’t managed to trick, who see him for what he really is, and do not love him. And they’re right, and all of these fools are wrong. So she can talk all she wants, but it’s not going to change anything, and I should just give up.’ Isn’t that what you’re thinking?”

Loki scrubbed the tears in his eyes before they could swell and fall, and took a long, long drag. He didn’t even feel like trying for a smart comeback.

Sigyn squeezed next to him on the log. It annoyed him no end.

"Do you know how I know?” she said. “Because that’s how it is inside my head half the time.”

He threw her a look then, but still said nothing.

“I know what Sif said was hard to hear,” she said, “but Thor is right, she doesn’t know anything about you, about your history together.”

“That’s not going to stop anyone before reaching conclusions. It never has before.”


“Oh, yes, very reasonable,” he said, sarcastic, “So how well does that ‘why worry’ shit work for you? And how well does it work for Thor? Of course I’m going to fucking worry. And logic doesn’t fucking help one bit here.”

“Yes, I know,” she said, resigned.

He sighed too.

“I get tired of this,” he said. “So fucking tired. Battling the world, and Thor, and myself. She’s right. This is never going to work.”

“Oh, darling…” she said wrapping an arm around him. “You’re under a lot of stress. These last
couple of days have taken a big toll, haven’t they? You don’t see things clearly. With Thor it will get better, not worse. You’re still adjusting to each other. And with the rest of the world… You’ll get a thicker skin. As you’ve always done. It’s just your nature. You’re unsinkable.”

“You keep saying that, and I’m constantly on the verge of one breakdown or another.”

“You’ve said it yourself. You’re constantly on the verge, and yet here you are.”

Loki huffed.

“That’s a lot of fun for me.”

“That’s just the way it is,” she said. “You’re also extraordinarily talented and clever and full of passion.”

“And hot.”

She laughed.

“And hot. It’s just your lot, sweetheart. Make the best with what you’ve been given.”

Loki drew a long drag and stubbed his fag.

“I’m going to fuck this up,” he said, his tone matter-of-factly, his heart breaking underneath. “I just know I am.”

She hugged him tight, both arms.

“Darling…”

He shed a tear or two in her arms and pushed away as soon as he could, rubbing his eyes.

“There’s nothing special about this fear of fucking up, you know?” she said, after some time. “Why do you think I could not sleep the week after Bruce told me that he loved me?”

“How does that fucking help me.”

“Aren’t you a charmer.”

He gave her a contrite look. She smiled, and patted him square on the back.

“Come on, get up.”

He shook his head no, feeling the knot in his throat tighten. She held his wrist with a strong grip, tugged at it.

“Go to Thor, right now. Remind yourself of why you’re doing this. Don’t just sit here with your thoughts.”

Loki didn’t move.

“Sweetie, don’t stay here by yourself. Go to Thor, and then talk to him, or don’t talk to him, just let him be with you. This thing with Sif hurt you both. You don’t have to deal with it alone. He needs to be a part of it too. Just let him know that you see him.”

Loki shook his head once more, the choke in his throat making it hard to breathe, feeling his feet turn
to lead. He did not want to face him after what had been said. He did not want to fight again. He wanted for things to magically sort themselves out. He wanted to be in Thor's arms.

“Come on, get up, we’re going back,” she urged, pulling him up with strong hands used to lifting, restraining and manhandling uncooperative patients.

He let her drag him up the hill towards the house, content to just trail behind being impossible, while somebody else made the decisions. If said decisions seemed to fall in with his own wishes, undercutting his pride, well, that was just luck.

* 

“JESUS CHRIST!” roared Thor, and kicked some gravel. He was stomping in the drive, with Fandral, Hogun and Volstagg keeping their distance, waiting for him to cool down, their usual approach the couple of times Thor had gone into one of these in their presence before. He was feeling quite ridiculous, to be honest. He was not a fucking five-year-old, and yet the urge to scream “this is unfair!” was pretty fucking difficult to resist right now.

“FUCK!” he barked instead.

Bruce appeared from inside the house and took a few steps towards him. Not a good idea. Thor glowered at him warily. Stay back. Not one more step. Stop right there. No, don’t fucking talk to me…

“Listen, man,” even Thor himself could hear how husky his bottled fury was making him sound, “I know you mean well, but…” But if you like your nose the way it is right now you’ll back the fuck off…

Bruce gave him a bright, open, frank stare against which all of Thor’s anger would always bounce back and never leave a dent. So there you have it, that’s how a man like that would get through to Loki.

“Shall we go find your brother?” said Bruce.

Thor snorted.

“He doesn’t want to see me,” he groaned, hearing the hurt laced in with his anger and his spite.

Bruce took another step.

“Of course he does. I bet he’s petrified that it's you who doesn’t want to see him.”

Thor grimaced, showing teeth. Now he was feeling exactly like when he was a kid, shouting “why does it always have to be me?!” and his mother patiently replying, “because you’re the oldest, my darling”. He prudently shook his head.

“Not now. I just… I can’t right now.”
Bruce nodded, understanding, and just stood there, still with the same frank, compassionate expression, holding Thor’s stare, impassible, all his attention on him.

“I get so fucking fed up of screwing up with him, but I don’t know how to do better,” said Thor, taking himself by surprise. With Bruce listening like that, it had suddenly become so fucking hard not to let it out. “I just… I don’t fucking get him!” he roared, kicking gravel again.

“You get him,” said Bruce. “He's not easy, neither of you are, but you get each other where it matters. You would have killed each other by now if you didn’t,” he smiled.

Thor wasn’t in the mood.

“He’s right though,” he said, bitter. “I’m always afraid of what’s going on in his head. I know I only ever see the tip of the iceberg, and I don’t know where to start with the rest. It scares the ever-living shit out of me. And I know I only see what he lets me see. And it drives me up the fucking wall. I can’t be asking how he’s feeling all the bloody time, can I? Not that he ever fucking tells me…” He was working himself up again, nuts. “And he lies… He says ‘oh it’s nothing’ and it’s bollocks. And I haven’t got the faintest idea what’s really happening underneath because I’m fucking dumb like that and I can’t fucking read him. So what the fuck do I do, eh?”

Bruce nodded.

“You’re completely right,” he said. “Loki needs to be more open.”

Thor nodded vigorously. Finally, someone understood.

“It’s like…” he was on a roll. “With Loki nothing is ever simple. I mean, I get hit by a rock, I get a bruise, maybe I’ll get a scar, maybe it hurts like a motherfucker or maybe it even breaks a bone or something. But that’s it, that’s that. But with Loki, it’s like the stone sinks in, and you only see the ripples on the surface, and no wound, but the fucking rock just sinks and sinks and stays there forever, and ages later it’s still there, and it’s now the size of a fucking bus, and it turns out it has become radioactive and it’s poisoning the whole fucking lake. The things Sif said, they will stay there festering forever, and who’s to say in a few years Loki hasn’t been overthinking it so much that what were her words he now puts them in my mouth? Because he’s done that before. And I’m totally powerless here. It’s all in his fucking head, and I’m not allowed there, and there’s lots going on there that affect me, and what the fuck do I do with that, tell me, what?”

Bruce shrugged, a calm little smile, warm black eyes.

“One day at a time,” he said. “How do you think the rest of us do it?”

Thor sighed, deflated. Bruce risked one hand over Thor’s shoulder.

“He’s the one who needs to hear all of this,” said Banner. “Don’t you think?”

Thor looked away. He wanted to be left alone. He wanted to stay there and sulk.

“Let’s go find Loki,” said Bruce. “Come on.”

Thor made his way back inside the house, guided by the good doctor’s hand on his shoulder. He passed his quiet friends, who had just witnessed a feat of extreme courage, the taming of the wounded beast. You really need to learn to get your shit together before you go off on one of these, Odinson. The fucking shows you put on, at your age, what an embarrassment. What would your mum and dad say.
They found Loki by the kitchen table, with a cup of tea, Sigyn sitting in front of him. When Thor walked in, Loki looked up, sheepish expression, eyes red. Thor’s anger evaporated, an overwhelming need to cuddle him surging up instead. There was a tense silence for a few seconds that felt very long, and then Loki stood up, not meeting his eyes, as if ready for a scolding.

“Do you still want to talk?” he said.

It wasn’t an apology, but then again, Thor wasn’t sure apologies were in order right now, or who owed whom. He nodded.

Loki picked up his mug.

“Then let’s go.”

Walking past him, their arms brushed, their hands. Somehow (Thor would bet his life neither Loki nor him would ever admit first move,) their little fingers hooked, and then the rest of their hand. Thank fuck. Fingers firmly intertwined, they made their way to the music room, and sat stiffly side by side on the couch. Loki untangled their hands to hold the steaming mug with both of his.

“Where’s Sif?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t care,” groaned Thor. Even the mention of her name got his blood boiling.

A long silence. Then Loki sighed deeply.

“Thor, a lot of what goes on in my head…” he began, “it’s not worth bothering with, you know?”

“No,” said Thor, more shortly than he had intended. “What do you mean.”

“I mean… They come up and wreak havoc but… they’re not real. Well, they are but, I mean, they don’t…” He huffed in frustration. “They start in my head and that’s where I want to keep them. I deal with them and they go away. And I need time to make that happen. Not letting it out. Not talking about it. They’re not worth the time. I don’t want to give them any more importance than they have. Ok?”

“Do they, really? Go away,” said Thor, with a pissy note of skepticism.

Loki felt it, and he didn’t like it. He glowered at him.

“I deal with them,” he repeated, curtly. “My mind hoards tons of shit, there’s nothing I can do about that. That doesn’t mean I have to nurse it and pay it attention. I try not to.”

Thor pondered that, chewing on his bottom lip. He felt Loki still tense by his side, waiting for the next point of contention to reveal itself. Well, if he wanted Loki to be open, he had to be open as well.

“I never know what’s in your head,” said Thor.

Loki sighed.

“Do you need to?”
“If I don’t know what the problem really is, how can I _not_ screw up? When I’m not sensitive enough, when I stick my foot in my mouth without even realising?”


Thor snorted, humorously this time.

“You don’t have to know everything that’s in my head every single minute,” said Loki. “You have to… you have to fucking trust me a bit more.”

“I trust you.”

“Like hell you do.”

Thor felt his spikes standing up again.

“I’m just fucking scared, ok? I worry!” He had raised his voice. He saw the tension in that clench in Loki’s jaw. A deep breath, trying to tone it down. “You were crying last night and I didn’t even wake up. If I miss the signs, or I can’t understand them, who’s to say if…? _Fuck._” His voice broke. “How could I forgive myself if…?”

“Brother…” Loki exhaled loudly, rubbing his face, sounding at the end of his tether, “for the last fucking time, it was not your fault! Stop blaming yourself! Mum and dad didn’t see it either! I made sure nobody fucking did! I’m pretty clever, and I did what I had to so that nobody knew!”

“Right,” countered Thor, “first of all, that thought? That you can hide it so well? _Not_ fucking helping. And second… _I did_ know! I saw how fucked up you were, and I didn’t do anything! So how the fuck can you tell me that it was not my fault?”

“It was _nothing_ to do with you, Thor! You didn’t fucking cause it, and you didn’t fucking let it happen! _I_ did the fucking thing, _me_! Stop making it like it’s all about you!” Quick breaths. Furious. “And rest assured that, if I really decide to kill myself, you’re not going to be able to stop me!”

Thor wondered whether they should call in Bruce and Sigyn to mediate, because this talking thing was not fucking working. In fact, things seemed to be getting distinctly worse.

“You were sixteen,” said Loki then, with a softer voice. “You didn’t have a clue. I’m not sure you understand it now, so how could you have understood back then?” He raised one hand in appeasement when Thor was going to protest something. “I don’t mean it as a horrible thing,” said Loki, “this time. The not understanding. I’m-I’m sorry about earlier. You’re fucking right, ok? I do keep a lot to myself, and I don’t explain what I’m feeling, and that’s got to be frustrating, I get that. I’m sorry. I am. But I…” He rubbed his forehead hard, eyes scrunching shut. “A lot of what’s inside, I don’t want you to know, ok? It’s fucking horrible. Ok? And insane. And I hate it. So I’m not going to tell you. It would hurt you, and there’s no need. Because it’s me but it’s not me, it’s the fucking up me, and fucked up me talks with his arse. That’s what I mean when I say it’s not real. Seriously, my mind just goes on one and it turns everything upside down and it messes it all up for a while but… But I handle it, and I can make it so that… so that it’s as if nothing had happened. Except if I told you, you would freak out. And then it becomes real, and _now_ it’s a problem. So I need time and… and for you to keep your head and just let me take care of it.”

Thor shook his head, unconvinced.

“What if I think it’s a… one of these, but it’s the other, one of the really bad ones,” he choked out.
“You’re not sixteen anymore,” answered Loki. “You know what it looks like now, you know what to look for. But anyway, if I go down again, and I get anywhere near that bad, it’s not going to happen overnight, and there is no way I’ll be able to keep it from you. And from Sigyn, and from Bruce and from Nat. This is not just on your shoulders, Thor. Well, it never was. You have to stop worrying so much, and even… if I’m having a strange day, uh, it would help if you did like you don’t notice. Well, you can be extra sweet, that you can do. But don’t freak out, and don’t ask me to tell you what I’m thinking, because it’s not going to help. I really need you to trust me.”

Thor looked at him warily, brooding. That was so not what he fucking wanted to do, turn a blind eye.

“Listen…” Loki sounded on the verge of tears, and so very tired, “I promise, ok? I won’t let it get that bad. If I feel I’m not handling it, I’ll look for help. I promise.”

Ah, Loki’s promises. Always read the fine print. Look for help, but from whom? And where? Thor wondered if what he was going to ask would make it rain shit and grief over his head for a year. He asked anyway.

“Promise you won’t run away on me again,” said Thor.

The way Loki looked at him then, wide, sad, guilty eyes. Thor choked up, an automatic response, an instinct. What the fuck, Loki? He pushed harder and more urgently than before.

“Promise me.” He tried to swallow the burn. He gave it a moment’s thought. Cornering Loki… never a good idea. Wait, escape clauses. “What I mean is… If you’re ever… If you need to leave, you’ll tell me. You won’t just up and disappear on me. You’ll sit down with me and tell me. Swear it. Please.”

Loki’s tears started to fall. Thor waited. Loki sniffed, wiped his eyes, but tears kept coming. He opened his mouth as if he was going to say something, closed it as if he had changed his mind. He nodded.

“I swear,” he said, with a small voice, looking at his hands, which were tearing a paper tissue to long, frayed strips.

Thor raised his hand tentatively. He hesitated before he placed it around Loki’s neck, his thumb stroking under his sharp jaw. Loki leaned into his space, eyes shut, and Thor pulled him closer until their foreheads touched.

“Thor…” muttered Loki, with his eyes still shut, his voice thin as if talking took a huge effort, “promise me that, if this becomes too much for you…” his voice broke. “Don’t stick with this just because you have to,” he choked out.

“What do you mean,” asked Thor.

“I mean leave. Leave me.” Tears started falling. Loki ignored them. “If you think you’re going to regret this. I-I know you love me, I don’t need you to throw it all away to prove it. I don’t.”

Thor crushed him in his arms.

“Oh, baby… I know,” he mumbled close to him. “She’s wrong. She doesn’t know you. I know you. I love you.”

Loki cried harder. Thor wasn’t sure what to do right now. He kissed him, and Loki kissed back hard enough to hurt, before resuming his crying against his chest. Which was fine, that was fine. Thor
knew he still only understood ten words out of every fucking paragraph there was to Loki, and he
guessed that would never change, but as long as he could do that… He held him tight, while Loki’s
crying ran its course, and eventually subsided. Loki pulled back, sniffing, wiping an angry hand on
his face.

“Look at us,” he grumbled, “fucking drama queens.”

Loki’s eyes looked even greener with tears, crystal-sharp, cut emeralds. Loki tolerated his awed gaze
for another three seconds before he gave him a shove.

“This fighting business,” said Loki. Sniffle. “Unless it ends with an angry fuck against the nearest
wall, let’s just not anymore, shall we?”

Thor laughed and drew him close for a kiss again, lazily now, slow tongue, until Loki’s breath
started to sound deeper. Loki pulled back, with a slight yet unmissable fluster.

“What are you going to do about Sif?” asked Loki.

And if he was trying to spoil the mood, he couldn’t have chosen better. Thor’s nostrils flared, fury
bubbling up again.

“What am I going to do?” he repeated. He didn’t have the answer. He would be the first to admit he
was pretty hopeless at introspection in that mood. His decision-making process was not at its finest
either.

“You need to talk to her,” said Loki.

“We’ve said enough,” he hissed. “I don’t want to hear any more.”

“You can’t leave it like this,” said Loki, frowning. “She’s your best friend…”

“She’s not my friend,” snapped Thor, way too fast. It hurt the second it left his mouth.

Loki rolled his eyes.

“She made up her mind,” he said. “Of course she’s your friend. She’s worried sick about you, that’s where
all this is coming from. She doesn’t trust me. Why should she? She doesn’t know me. She just wants
to keep you safe from harm, because she knows just as well as I what a big dumb oaf you are. You
said it yourself, she doesn’t have a clue, right? So, enlighten her.”

“She’s made up her mind,” said Thor, bitter.

Loki scoffed.

“Oh, come on. Give her a chance. If you’re not going to try it with her…”

“I can’t fucking believe you. After what she’s said about you…”

That must have hit a chord, because Loki looked away, with a quick frown.

“I’ve had worse. At least she was talking out of concern for you.”

Thor was clenching his jaws, brooding, refusing to let go of his anger.

“Thor, I’m bored of this now. She loves you. She doesn’t have all the facts. Don’t let your fucking
temper and your stubbornness ruin this. You’ll hate yourself for it later.” A sigh. “For me. Please?”
“When did you become so reasonable,” grumbled Thor.

“You don’t share a flat with Sigyn the Wise for years without her rubbing on you one way or another,” he said.

“She’s put so much sense into you,” said Thor, “you sound just like mum. Except for the swearing.”

Loki smiled, not a lot, eyes sad, looking tired.

“I miss her too,” said Thor, “so much. All the time.”

Loki smiled again, still cheerless, still tired.

“See?” he said, “you read me like an open book.”

Everybody was already there when they walked into the kitchen, holding hands again. This time, all eyes turned to them and a silence did fall, zooming with static, as Thor’s stare zeroed on Sif. Loki squeezed his hand. Thor inhaled, exhaled, and promised himself he would not shout.

“Sif, I’m going to say what I have to say now, and I would prefer it if you didn’t say anything until I’m done.”

She was staring back right into his eyes, but she looked thoughtful and grave, not as if she was making a stand. That helped.

“I know you mean well,” he began. “I know you love me and that you worry about me. I know you only want the best for me. But so does Loki. You may not understand it, and maybe you don’t believe it, but it’s true. And this…” he glanced at Loki now, his brother’s face so pale and tense, “is not an impulsive decision based on Loki pressuring me or manipulating me or playing me up. And this is not me making up for any guilt or responsibility I may feel. I have always loved Loki, and I have always wanted for us to be together, since we were kids. And we’ve both had a long, hard think about this before we decided to do it. Now, although I do fear what might happen if this comes out, nothing matters more to me than Loki. Because I know I can make him happy, and because he makes me happy as well, happier than I’ve ever been or I could ever be with anyone else. I’m finally where I belong. And if this means I can’t be a professional actor anymore because my reputation is ruined, so be it. And if this unleashes all the furies in hell, we’ll face them together. And if you can’t understand that, if you don’t understand why I would put the one I love before fame and glory and reputation, then you don’t know me, and you never have. That’s it. That’s all I have to say right now.”

He turned and left, tense as a bowstring and fearing that, if he stayed another second, he would snap. He walked out the front door, and he faced the open meadow, arms crossed, heart pounding. Soon after, he felt arms surrounding his waist, and Loki’s lips on his neck. Thor turned to hug him back, and saw him about to cry.

“What?”

Loki rolled his eyes, wiped the corner of his eye.

“The things you said in there, you big oaf,” he said, his voice shaky. And he mumbled, still not meeting his eyes, “You should have fucking warned me…”
Thor smirked.

“Ok.” he said. “How much warning do you need?”

“Well that depends, doesn’t it?”

“For your garden variety I love you?”

Loki was already shaking his head in dismay, but he was also trying to contain a smile.

“Hey, Loki,” said Thor.

Loki tried to look exasperate, and braced himself for the sappiness. Thor found himself suddenly not wanting to joke.


Loki looked down, then flicked his eyes up briefly.

“You too,” he mumbled.

“Come here.” Thor hugged him.

“That was not garden variety,” protested Loki, voice muffled against his brother’s neck. And after some time, “We definitely need to time our fights better. You look like fucking sex on legs when you’re angry.”

Thor laughed. If his brother needed the mood to be lighter, he would indulge.

“The moment the last one of our treasured guests walks out that door,” rumbled Loki, still in his arms, “I’m going to make you fucking furious. You’ll be so mad at me, you’ll have no choice but to bend me over your knee and…”

Just then, Sif turned up. Thor saw her over Loki’s shoulder and his good humour just pooffed and vanished.

“Can we speak?” she asked.

Loki pulled apart.

“I’ll go inside,” he said. He gave him one last mischievous look and a wink, maybe trying to lighten his heart and address the present situation with some generosity.

Once his brother was inside, Thor faced Sif. She offered a small, tight-lipped smile. He recognised it for the show of good will that it was, but he was not moved by it yet. He had a huge reserve of anger still to get through.

It would not do to be so uptight.

“Let’s walk,” he said. Perhaps a stroll would help to ease his temper, or at least make the silences less awkward and tense.

They walked around the meadow at the front of the house, not speaking for some time. Then she cleared her throat.

“I’ve talked to Sigyn and Bruce while you were away with Loki,” she said, her steps long and slow,
her words chosen with care, “and I’ve done a lot of thinking. I’ve been thinking about our conversation yesterday morning, and about the way I’ve always thought about Loki, from what you told me in the past. You see, I’ve always believed that what you had with him was a very unhealthy relationship, so extreme, and involved, and so obsessive. I remembered how much you’ve suffered for him through the years, and how guilty you felt about it all, things that I could understand you might feel responsible for, and things I just could not, and it disturbed me. It just didn’t make sense to me how a bloke like you, who seemed so level-headed, and grounded, and rational, with a healthy sense of self-esteem, could lose his sense of proportion and his direction and his balance when it came to his brother, and become such a complete and utter mess.”

He must have glared at her.

“Let me finish, please. Please?” She smiled again, and carried on. “When you and Loki reconciled a while ago, I thought all my worst fears about the two of you were confirmed. I mean, he comes into your life again, and very soon after you break up with Jane, and suddenly all you talk about is him, and you look so glum and dejected all the time… And I blamed Loki. I didn’t know what power he had on you, but to my mind, you seemed to be one way with him and another with everyone else, normal and happy with everyone else, and miserable with him, and you would not, or you could not, take a step back and get yourself away from what to me was obviously a toxic relationship. That’s how it appeared from the outside. And yesterday you tell me you’re together like that and… bloody hell, of course I was going to blow a gasket! It was the apotheosis of fucked up! And how was I going to see it any different? I did not have the whole story. But after talking with Sigyn… I just didn’t realise you had always felt like that for each other. And although at first that made it all sound even worse, it actually makes a world of difference to how I see it now. Because when you look at your relationship with Loki simply as that of two siblings with lots of issues, it all sounds supremely messed up. But when you look at it as the story of two very young kids very much in love with each other, in a very, very complicated situation… Well, it might not be a model relationship, but let’s just say everything suddenly makes a lot more sense. And you make a lot more sense, why you could not settle with Jane, why you just could not move on or get yourself away. Even what you told me yesterday about your fight the other night becomes a lot more reasonable under this light. It felt out of proportion, and bordering on the pathological, that a grown man should complain about his big brother ignoring him all night. But when it’s a boyfriend… That’s another story, isn’t it? And I have to say, you did ignore him, and you are a cock.”

Thor laughed —a quick, nervous burst he could not hold back. She smiled.

“That was only half of the fight,” admitted Thor.

“Let me guess the other half. Fandral?”

Thor snorted.

“That obvious?”

“What can I say, Thor, I did my best to ignore it that night, but yes, I saw the murder in your eyes. I didn’t know you were a jealous man…”

Thor laughed again, although the subject to him wasn’t funny.

“I just didn’t realise how fucking hard it would be to watch people flirt and make passes at my boyfriend under my very nose, while I can’t say or do anything about it. And I guess I’ll have to get used to it. Everybody wants a piece of Loki…”

“It goes both ways, though,” she said. “You get your fair share of attention yourself, don’t you?”
“There’s no competition,” he declared. “To me there’s Loki, and then there’s the rest of the world. It’s always been like that.”

“I’m beginning to see it.” A lightless, knowing smile. “But it’s him you should be telling this, not me.”

“I know. He struggles with… with this kind of thing.”

“You’ll have to get him used to it then… And you shouldn’t worry either. He only has eyes for you,” she said. “Anyone can see it from miles away.”

Thor smiled, maybe blushed a bit, there were definitely butterflies.

“I’m sorry I did not hear you out before I opened my big mouth this morning,” she said. “I’m sorry I jumped to conclusions. And I’m sorry you had trouble with Loki because of me. And please, tell Loki I regret all the things I said about him. Tell him that I was wrong, and that I know that now. And that I want to tell him myself, if he’ll hear me.”

“I’m sorry I lied to you all this time,” said Thor. “I wish I could have told you.”

“You could have,” she said, earnestly. “At any time.”

He nodded, feeling choked up.

“It must have been a heavy burden to carry by yourself,” she added, softly. “I wish I could have helped you.”

“You can,” said Thor. “You are.”

They walked in silence some more.

“You know, a part of me wants to ask you a horrible question,” she said after some time.

Thor didn’t say anything. He did throw a glance at her. She was looking away, eyes drifting.

“It’s the part of me that will always be jealous of him.”

Crap.

“What’s the question,” said Thor, knowing he would probably regret he ever asked.

“I can’t help but wondering, after having met him, and knowing what I know now… Did you…?”

She tried for words. “Us. Was it because I… reminded you of him?”

Thor sighed with exhaustion from the bottom of his soul. Jesus fuck. Really? Now?

“That is a horrible question,” he said, stalling.

“You’re right. Don’t answer it.”

“I wasn’t going to.”

She gave him another of her kind, tight-lipped smiles. It still struck him, how beautiful she was.

“Are you happy, Thor? Is this what you wanted?”

Thor felt like he was about to burst into tears now, elation and relief and pent-up tension released, all
at once. He nodded once more, while he found his voice.

“It’s not easy, because of the way we both are. I mean, temper and all. Issues. Like, shedloads of them, a lifetime’s worth. Well, you’ve seen it. But at least this time I feel like… I feel like I’m doing him good, you know what I mean? That it does him good that we’re together. And that’s…” He sighed, feeling so full of the thing, emotion, as if about to burst with it. “It feels so fucking good. And it does me good. He does. I don't know how to explain this. I feel like everything is finally there, you know what I mean?, all the pieces. I feel alive. Yes, I’m so bloody happy. I want to shout it from the rooftops.”

She smiled so wide, even with that tinge of sadness still in her eyes.

“Come here, you clod,” she said, throwing her arms around him. He hugged back tight. “You do look happy. Hell, you’re glowing…”

She patted him strongly on the back before she let go.

“So what now, Thor? What’s the plan?”

He harrumphed.

“We don’t really have one,” he admitted. “Pressure is, um, not good for Loki. Or for me, really. Adjusting is tricky enough as it is. We’re taking it one day at a time.”

She looked thoughtful then.

“Are you going to tell your father?”

Thor went pale. She smiled, gripped his shoulder, gave it a shake.

“Forget it. Listen,” she blew a stray lock of hair from her eyes, “there may be tough times ahead, but I want you to know that you can count on me, for anything you need. I’ll stand by you. Always. And Loki.”

Thor was moved down to his core. He could not have got a word out if he tried. She seemed to get that.

“I know you don’t want to, but you will have to start thinking about the practicalities,” she said then, cutting the silence short. And then she went on a rampage of questions regarding the nitty-gritty of the immediate future, from Thor’s living arrangements in London to the fate of the apartment in L.A. and the wisdom of keeping it or not, and on to the oncoming public appearances in both their diaries and the press tour for their movie. Soon enough, Thor had a dry throat and a lump of lead in his stomach from all the stuff he hadn’t even realised he was going to have to worry about. Well, that’s Sif for you. She was practical. She wanted to make up for what had happened and she wanted to help, and that was her way, and reality, from the ground up, her domain. And you know what, once Thor got over the vertigo, he would be glad she had brought up all that stuff, and he was sure that her help would prove invaluable. But right now, he just could not think about any of that.

“What?” she said, when she realised he was not listening.

He was grateful. Grateful, and relieved, and worn out. He just hugged her.
“Alright, darling?” asked Sigyn, for what had to be the third time. And once again, Loki nodded.

Around the kitchen table, a tranquil, civilised conversation was taking place that he should be taking an interest in, because it involved himself, and his brother, and Sif. Sigyn seemed to be acting as his mouthpiece in this dialogue, replying (discretely of course) to the questions concerning him in his stead. Volstagg and Fandral (and maybe Hogun too, but it’s not like he was going to tell) wanted to know more about the story with Thor, (delicate questions, just an overlook really, to know what was what) and Sigyn wanted to know more about Thor and Sif (same). He was trying to tune in and listen, but soon enough his mind would just wander away. Even with Sigyn on his lap, physically grounding him, he could not be still.

He had told Thor what he thought he needed to hear about his black thoughts to put him at ease, and hopefully get him off his back. He had made it sound as if he had a lot more control over it than he actually believed he had. But then again, now that he had thought about it some more, he guessed he had not lied. He had handled it last night, hadn’t he? He had not gone into complete meltdown, and he was still here and not on the fucking Eurostar. Did it matter in the end how close to catastrophe he had felt, or how thin his grip on himself, and how far away had he been from asking for help? He was here. He had handled it, and Inner Bastard was back in the fucking pit where he belonged.

And now he was sworn to Thor. Would that help, when push came to shove? Would that ground him even more? Or would it rip him in half? Jesus fuck, he had made him swear. (Yes, but you’re a liar who lies, Loki-boy. Oh, just shut the fuck up.)

They were going back to London very soon. Awards season was upon them, and Thor was presenting at the Globes and at the Oscars, and expected to show his handsome face at a lot of events for the press tour of Master and Commander, Post Captain. The cold six thousand, which had aired while they were shooting Mariners, was up for a bunch of awards, including best actor for Thor. All those red carpets, all those interviews. He had been talking again about Loki taking him shopping for winter clothes, he had been talking about several restaurants and places he wanted them to go to, he had been talking about Loki showing him this and that and the other, he had been talking about how excited he was to be moving back to London.

And Loki was shitting bricks, as was his way, from vertigo, from reality suddenly becoming too real. Because now it starts, doesn’t it?, life together. That was uncharted territory. Loki had a picture in his mind which showed the landmarks of their past (Thor’s old couch in his old room in mum and dad’s house in London; Asgard; Iceland; Thor’s first flat in L.A.; other places Loki did not want to think about;) and their present (Thor’s hotel in London, where they had talked again for the first time in four years; Nat’s house in Manhattan, where Thor had held him for hours in that bone-crushing hug, while he cried his eyes out; Tony’s tower; the streets of Toronto at night; that parking lot of the hotel in Savannah where he had given Thor a birthday kiss; the pickup truck where they had spent so many hours together; the little Indonsien place; his flat; Asgard again.) And then there was a big empty space for the future, unknown, with one single legend, “Here be dragons.” Dragons indeed, some more scary than others. A chat with Natasha. Perhaps a meeting with Coulson. A sit-down with his shrink, because that mood roller-coaster he’d been on these past few days needed looking into, perhaps a tinker with his meds, or perhaps just keeping an eye on. Then house-hunting for Thor. Soirées at Chez Odinson with these people, where he would always remain the outsider. Within a few months, a press tour he was dreading, which would probably include fucking talk-
shows and interviews, double-fucking press conferences, triple-fucking junkets, way too many airports, jet-lag, deadly boredom, punishing anxiety, and lying and deceiving and paranoia on a scale neither Thor nor him had really begun to envisage. He would definitely be needing more pills, wouldn’t he?

But the big surprise was, dread was not his only feeling when he thought about the future, right now. He was already wondering what other landmarks he would be adding to the map, what crazy nights together would make him pinch and treasure a soap bar from a hotel in god knows what country, what memorable evenings would make him hold on to cinema and play tickets and restaurant calling cards, and what other little scraps, material or immaterial, he would be collecting, keeping in a drawer, or in a box in his head, and reviewing them every now and then, with a foolish, dreamy smile on his face. Even bearing in mind all the dangers and all the monsters, he was excited, full of anticipation, and was that bloody optimism he was experiencing? “If this unleashes all the furies in hell, we’ll face them together”, his brother had said, brimming with self-confidence, his determination tangible. And Loki had believed him with all his black little heart. And he was still thrumming with it now, this faith in him. In them. Maybe he had lost his mind and his grip on reality, but he believed that they could do this. They were together now. They could do anything.

“Darling,” Sigyn’s voice. “Ok?”

He focused on her, nodded, meant it. She smiled, kissed his hair. With his eyes shut, he could almost pretend that it was mum. Was that all kinds of fucked up, or was he allowed to, every now and then?

Enter Thor and Sif, at bloody last, and Sigyn almost ended on the floor, bum first, when Loki practically jumped up from his chair. He searched their faces (their harmonious, regal faces, what a king and queen of something they would make,) as they both looked at him. Thor walked over, with an air of tranquility, wrapped an arm around his waist and drew him close for a kiss. When they pulled apart, he saw that Sif was looking on, and smiling fondly. Glory fucking hallelujah and god bless.

They never went to the village that day. Sigyn said that he owed her. They ransacked the pantry instead, and rustled together some sandwiches, chasing them down with wine left over from yesterday. Loki sat on Thor’s lap again to eat, being shaken and stirred every time his brother moved and when he laughed, one arm around Loki’s waist, always. There was a lot of laughing around that table that afternoon, the atmosphere twinkling with relief from the mighty heavy boulder that had lifted from their collective shoulders.

Loki kept taking a mental step back every now and then, looking around, and wanting to pinch himself. Here he was, on his brother’s lap, in a room full of happy people, and not being the topic of conversation. How the fuck was this his life. Thor would press a kiss to his nape every now and then, to that spot just at the top of the spine that made him shiver and get goose-bumps all over his neck (and made his nipples hard as fucking pebbles, that too,) and Loki kept turning to look at his brother’s perfect face, and often enough their eyes would connect and stay locked, and time would fucking stop, and all there was then was the rise and fall of Thor’s chest with his breathing, and his warmth.

“Oh for Christ’s sake,” grumbled Fandral at one point, “are they always like that?”

Sigyn laughed.
“They’re worse.”

“God help us,” said Hogun.

“Kids today! Get a room!” laughed Volstagg.

“Don’t encourage them,” said Sif, but she was smiling.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Awards season.

They do say distance makes the heart grow fonder.

Chapter Notes

It's funny how you can be plodding painfully through a chapter for over a month thinking "meh, I just need to get this out of the way, it's never going to be my best but anyway here's Wonderwall, and we move on to the next", and 4 drafts later, all of a sudden, within a 2-day span, something starts to happen, everything starts to happen, and I think I've written one of my favourites yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(L.A.)

“The Migthy T! Just the man I was looking for,” said Tony Stark, with a back-breaking slap on his shoulder, as he took the armchair opposite him in the VIP lounge of the hotel, deserted at this time of day. He put his drink on the low table, got rid of the jacket, draping it on the backrest of the chair, loosened his tie. Tie and jacket, thought Thor. Meeting with the big guys.

“So, how’s it been, how’re you kids doing?” asked Tony, after taking a medicinally long gulp of scotch.

“We’re good. And Stark Enterprises?”

Tony chuckled.

“Seems like the film division will live to see another opening night,” he said.

“You’re not in trouble, are you?”

“When am I ever not in trouble,” a cute smirk.

“Anything to do with… with Mariners?”

Tony shrugged, another sip of his drink, probably to stall.

“Anything to do with Loki?” insisted Thor.
“They will shut their faces when they see the first rough cut,” said Tony fiercely. “And Heimdall says he can have one in a few weeks. Financially they haven’t got a leg to stand on. I covered for it when we went over budget. Don’t tell Loki,” he warned.

“You’re a good friend, Tony.”

Tony tipped an imaginary hat to him.

“Tell me about your delectable little brother,” he said. “Oh, dear me, look at you, hearts in your eyes. Bless your sinful, forbidden love,” he raised his glass.

Thor gave him a disapproving glower. Tony smirked.

“Ok, seriously now. How are things with the two of you.”

“It’s good,” said Thor, “it’s great. We’re… adjusting.”

“You have your own place in London now, right?”

“Yes. It’s only a few streets away from Loki’s flat.”

“For convenience and discretion.”

“Exactly.”

“And how’s life in the incest closet?”

Thor found himself checking the room again for prying ears, a sort of unconscious reflex by now. One he fucking hated.

“Not a lot of fun at times,” he said. “Like, whenever we’re out of the bloody house.”

“I can guess.”

“The other day, we were at a bar after a concert, and they kept hitting on him. Like, half a dozen blokes in less than an hour. And I got to sit there and watch, and try not to look like a fucking creep, which was not easy, I can assure you, when thosefuckers were actually coming to the table, and then propositioned him, asked him his number or offered theirs, and said things like ‘well, that is, if big bro here doesn’t mind.’ And I was like…” Thor’s fists clenched in frustration. “Don’t people have fucking manners? We were bloody talking! At least the girls that hit on me didn’t come to the table, they waited until I was at the bar or something, instead of barging in while I was engaged in conversation with the person I actually came to the place with. Fucking rude.”

“Men are assholes. What did Loki do?”

“Get grumpier and grumpier, say no thanks a lot, then fuck off. He didn’t enjoy the attention. I think he blamed it all on the tapes. Which he shouldn’t, he looked out-of-this-world beautiful that night. I mean, he always does, right?, but he was all in black and had been laughing and dancing and he looked so fucking sexy…”

Tony nodded thoughtfully, like the fine connoisseur that he was.

“And all I wanted to do is grab him by the neck and shout fuck off, he’s mine! And maybe punch a nose or two. I’m afraid I’m going to do something stupid one of these days.”

“You know Loki only has eyes for you, don’t you?” said Tony.
“That’s not the problem,” said Thor, rushing to clarify, “it’s not like I think he’s going to take anyone on the offer. It’s not that I’m jealous or… Well, you know. I do get a bit… But it’s totally irrational, and I know it. I trust him, I think he’s committed to me and all, and I think that, in his own way, he believes that I trust him. He still gets anxious anyway and gets the urge to defend himself. It’s just…”

“…The way he is.”

“Yeah. No, that’s not the problem. The problem is that… I fear he’ll think less of me because I’m not grabbing him by the scruff of the neck and shouting he’s mine, do you know what I mean? That he’ll resent me, or think that I don’t care enough, because I just sit there and watch it happen, instead of, you know, stating my claim.”

“Yes. Loki likes a possessive streak,” smiled Tony, and was that nostalgia in his tone? “As long as he gets to poke it and watch it flare up.”

Thor nodded, a bit peeved by Tony’s knowing undertones, whether he admitted it or not.

“Yes, well. It’s that but it’s not only that,” he said. “I’m worried because… he struggles with this secrecy thing, he always has. It’s not that he hates lying as much as he… well, he may say he understands why we’re keeping it this way as much as he wants, but I think he believes that for me it’s a convenient excuse, you know? That ultimately, it all comes down to the fact that I’m ashamed of him, of being with him.” Thor sighed. Hitting raw nerve here. “And if I know him half-well, I’m sure he thinks it’s not just about the, you know, incest thing,” (that had been a mutter), “but about him in particular, because of his mental health and his past and… And him in general, because, well, Loki’s self-esteem. I don’t know.” A frustrated huff.

“Sounds… unpleasant,” said Tony, the flippancy finally gone from his tone. “When you said you were doing great…?” he left it dangling there.

“It gets all sorts of fucked up the moment we walk out the door, but at home, Tony…” he sighed, happily this time. “It’s even better than my fucking dreams. We’re… good, really good. He’s… I just…” He laughed at his own inability to formulate coherent sentences. “We’re disgusting Tony, you have no idea. We’re that incredibly annoying couple that can’t take their hands off each other. We start dancing waiting for the kettle to go off. I bring him breakfast in bed. And lunch and dinner and fucking snacks, whatever he wants. He made me a goddamn mixed tape. Well, a playlist. We watch movies we loved as kids. It’s such a simple thing, but it feels so good. We share so many jokes and references that are just ours since we were little. It’s like having the best of both worlds, a person you’ve been married to all your life and you know inside out and share everything with, and that sexy new love that still gives you butterflies. We have fun. I just…” He was bursting with it. “God! In previous relationships, I knew I was missing something, but I just didn’t have a fucking clue how much it really was… I’d never thought I could stay in bed from morning to evening and consider it a day well spent. Not just fucking, I mean…”

“Sleepy sex, breakfast, nap, leftovers lunch, making out, tub sex, naked pizza, movie, sex, whatever’s left of the movie, cuddling,” recited Tony.

Thor’s eyes snapped up, whip-fast, inflamed with anger, body tense, ready to pounce over the table and gut someone. And he might have — so unbearably, so intolerably clear had been the picture Tony’s words put in his mind, burning him like an acid—, had it not been for that fleeting glimpse of melancholy in Tony’s expression. And what the fuck was that, dousing Thor’s rage to an ember, guilt? He often forgot that Tony’s nonchalant façade was just that, a façade.

“Should I not be talking about this with you?” asked Thor, cautiously. His frown was still deep and angry.
“No, it’s fine, I did ask.” said Tony, sounding as light and untroubled as he had one minute ago. “But I may be excessively blunt, insensitive, and inappropriate at times. I’m told it’s a coping mechanism. Sorry about that.”

Right. And now Thor did not know how to feel, let alone what to say.

“You meant a lot to him,” he tried, going on instinct. “You still do. He told me.”

“There’s a before and after The Stark Experience” he beamed. He sounded hollow. More mechanisms.

Thor sighed. Anger was gone, and jealousy was absurd. He had Loki now. And though he may not have known at the time, he had always had Loki.

“Anyway,” said Thor, rubbing his eyes with both hands, “it’s a bit of a roller-coaster. But nobody said it would be easy, right?”

Tony nodded, acquiescing quietly.

“How is he,” he said then.

“He’s fine. Well, he… He had a rough time in Asgard. Mentally.”

“Yes.”

“He had to sort out an appointment with his doctor the moment he set foot in London.”

“What happened?”

“Oh, all sorts,” said Thor, bitterly. “I’m such a twat. I just never thought— What a pair. I don’t think, and he overthinks everything. I just assumed he was doing fine, because he said he was, and because… because it’s what I wanted to hear, right?”

“And what happened?” repeated Tony, because Thor had not even begun to answer the question.

“Just taking him up there was a bad idea to begin with. It was my idea, by the way, and he wasn’t crazy about it, and I should have just listened. He’s supposed to keep away from triggering places and people and situations, and in comes big stupid Thor, and I take him to the very spot where his whole life started to go to hell. Which is also the place where he last saw mum, and the village is still full of the jerks who used to bully him as a kid, and that’s without mentioning… well, our last memories of the place, his and mine together, are kind of sour, and sad, not very happy at all. And I didn’t even think about all of that. I just asked him if he was alright with it, and he said he was, and I just took his word for it. So just being there was already taking a toll on him. But of course, I had invited my friends over for New Year’s Eve. We had been together less than two weeks, Loki and me, but of course I could not just be patient and take our time, I had to see my friends, and I had to have them meet Loki as soon as possible. Again, I didn’t even think about… you know, Loki and new people, not so great, but even worse than that, I never even stopped to think about how it would actually work, to have them all together under the same roof, in this situation we are in. I mean, being with Loki in secret and all. I never took a minute to formulate a plan of action or something. And of course, I had to come out to them without having a clue how they would react. And it was all pretty fucking dramatic, and some seriously hurtful things were said, things that Loki didn’t need to hear. And basically I dropped him into every stressful situation I could, one after the other.”

“Thor…” said Tony, nursing his drink. He was going to say something Thor wasn’t going to like, wasn’t he?
“Tony,” said Thor, already guarded.

“You’re doing it again,” said Tony.

“Beg pardon?”

“You’re doing it again. You’re blaming yourself for everything again. You’re not his nurse, you’re his boyfriend. You don’t have a job description consisting of keeping Loki from stress and protecting his mental stability at all costs. Your job is to make a life with him. Sometimes life gets messy. It’s no-one’s fault. Not even yours.”

“Is it really not my job to not fucking pressure him into things that are not good for him?” countered Thor.

“Ok, first of all… You went to your family house in the country to spend the holidays together, you introduced him to your friends, and shared with them the news about your relationship. It’s not like you tried to push him to do crystal meth. And second of all… pressure him, how? Because this is Loki we’re talking about.”

Thor grappled for examples in his mind.

“Well, I told him it would make me happy.”

A raised, annoyingly patronising eyebrow.

“Doesn’t Loki get to try and make you happy?”

Rhetorical question. Don’t answer that.

“Listen,” groaned Thor, out of counterarguments by now, “he’s my baby brother, ok? I’m wired to want to look after him. I can’t help it.”

“Well, I don’t know who just died and made me Oprah, but looking after him is one thing, and blaming yourself for everything whenever things go pear-shaped is another. Come on, am I wrong? Fight me on this.” A few seconds to make his point, which Thor spent brooding. “If Loki said he was fine with it, he thought he would be fine with it, and perhaps he even was. Yes, even if he had to see his shrink right after. Don’t second-guess him, big brother. And anyway, how is he now? How did it end with your friends?”

“He’s fine.”

“And your friends?”

“Fine,” he admitted, reluctantly. “We talked it over and we’re alright again, no harm done.” A tiny smile. “He loves it when they come over to the house, can you believe that?, because he gets to flaunt it. He becomes a giant barnacle, or the most annoying housecat ever, the minute I sit down he’s all over me. It’s so bloody cute.”

“Lovely. I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so,” said Tony.

“You don’t hate it.”

Tony offered a wink and a smile.

“Why isn’t he here anyway?” asked Tony, downing a solid gulp of his scotch. “I thought we might see him, at least for the Globes.”
Thor grimaced, worked at it, turned it into a passable imitation of a smile.

“Yeah, me too,” he said. (And leave it at that. Water under the bridge, Odinson.) “He says he doesn’t want to be stuck in a hotel room all day while I do my thing. That tired Me and bored Him is a recipe for disaster.”

“He has a point,” said Tony, “but I guess you could have used the support.”

“I was never going to win,” said Thor. “I didn’t expect it. I was fine.”

“Thor, it’s me. It sucked. You should have won. John Hamm was the easy choice.”

Thor looked away, hoping Tony would drop the subject.

“He worries,” he said, “Loki does. He’s told me that, when I come back, we should be seen less often in public together, that he shouldn’t sleep over as much as he does.”

Tony made a gesture with his head that could be agreement or anything else.

“It’s sort of ironic,” mused Thor. “I used to be the paranoid one, back then, and he was the one who wanted to hold hands down the street. Do you think… do you think I believe I’m in fairyland or something? That’s what Loki says. With more swearing.”

“I think it’s easy to get caught up in a feeling of complacency,” said Tony. Whatever the hell that meant.


“How ironic for a professional actor.”

Thor was not amused. Tony nodded, commiserating. Patted his knee.

“Anyway, my dear, away I must go. I have a meeting with Miss Peggy Carter.”

“Oh, the mystery project.”

“Oh, worry not, the mystery will soon be unveiled, when you receive the script.”

“Should I be excited?”

“You should be holding on to your knickers or whatever it is that you do in Ye Olde Kingdom. You’re going to fucking love this. Oh, you can ride, right? Because I told her you can ride. I mean horses.”

Thor chuckled.

“Like the wind,” he beamed, and winked.

Tony smirked. Now a pat to his shoulder as he left, and a kiss on the top of his head.

“Tell Loki I said hi. Tell him I said he is to drag his pert sorry ass here, to keep my biggest star happy and personable with the press. You need to get laid. Doctor’s orders. Because I’m a doctor, ever told you that? Several times over.”

“You have. And I don’t think I will,” smiled Thor. “I appreciate the sentiment, but something tells me that Loki won’t.”
Tony laughed. It made him look thirty years younger.

Up in his room, Thor tried to settle down for a nap, although he wasn’t so much sleepy as he was knackered. When he couldn’t get to sleep, he went for a shower instead, and almost regretted he wasn’t much for baths —not by himself anyway. Then the news, his mail, room service dinner, and an eye permanently set on the little red dot on the laptop screen, next to Loki’s name. The minutes seem to turn into trickle when you’re waiting for someone.

And the time for their cyberdate came and went. Loki was late.

This videochat thing. He had used it with Jane, and had always found it, er, difficult. He preferred the phone. Cam sex had been a definite no. Just… awkward. Feeling shy and self-conscious didn’t make for quality sexy times. With Loki… well, everything was always different with Loki, wasn’t it? He had him sold on it and hooked before the end of their first call. He was a natural. Just put a camera on his face (or…) and watch the magic unfold. Thor’s blood was rushing now just thinking about it. He still felt a bit silly himself, and a bit tense at times, but under the attention of his smooth, über-confident, über-sensual, shameless brother, he was getting the hang of it, and a taste for it too.

They hadn’t done anything last night, because Loki didn’t have time, and Thor was fucking bursting at the seams. And his brother was making him wait, and he had to get up early in the morning, and he was driving himself out of his mind checking the fucking red dot every three seconds. Just where in the almighty fuck was Loki.

Ping! Green dot. He was online.

Thor’s hand hovered. Should he give it a couple of minutes, try not to look so desperate? …What the fuck, Odinson. He hit call. It must have been ten seconds, but it felt so much longer.

There he was. Black eyeliner, hair slicked back, his sharp face softened by the calm, watery light of a London’s winter afternoon.

“Hey,” said Loki, his voice so warm, silken.

“Hey,” said Thor, hearing in his own voice the glow he got just from setting eyes on him. “You’re late,” he said, without reproach; just an observation.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” said Loki. “I wanted to get this thing over and done with. The photoshoot.”

“You’re still wearing make-up.”

“Am I?” Loki turned his face this way and that, eyes somewhere on the top left, checking his face in the viewer. “Hm, so that’s why the cabbie was throwing me funny looks.”

“You look gorgeous,” said Thor. He could not help himself.

Loki lowered his gaze, a demure little smile.

“So are you done with it now?” asked Thor. “The photoshoot.”

“Yes. Four days are more than enough, a lot more than I was planning to do. Woman is a
perfectionist, which is fine by me, but I’m not fifteen anymore.” He stretched his neck with a grimace, for illustration.

Thor laughed.

“I can’t wait to see the result. Any nudes in the end?”

His brother flicked him an impish grin. “Maybe.”

The stab to his groin. Thor doubled over with it.

“Fuck.” He tried to laugh it off. “I’m so fucking horny, baby…”

“So how’s the tour,” asked Loki. *We should do more than just sex*, he had said a few days ago, *what are we, animals?*

Thor replied with a long, heavy puff.

“I see,” said Loki.

“Six hours today, back to back,” said Thor. “You have no idea how much bullshit I have to produce and dish out with a smile on my face, the same recycled babble again and again and again. At least with Ed we have a laugh, but Jesus fuck… I earned my salary today, I can tell you that. Every penny.”

“Oh, boo hoo,” sniggered Loki.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” snapped Thor. "Give me a break. At least let me moan a little.”

“Was this the last day?”

“I bloody wish. One more.”

“And then?”

*Ellen*, the piece for *GQ*, and the photoshoot the day after, a lot of work lunches, press and execs and stuff, three parties, two photocalls, and then the Oscars. And that’s it, free.”

“Until the next one,” said Loki.

“Until the next one,” sighed Thor. He smiled tiredly. He gave the bridge of his nose a good rub. “I’m dying here, baby. I miss you so very much. Every single waking hour…”

Loki looked to the side, towards the window. The way the light hit him then, it took Thor’s breath away.

“I miss you too,” said Loki.

“Come over,” begged Thor.

“No.”

“Please.”

“No.”

“Why not,” sulked Thor, petulant, remorselessly so, crossing his arms in the universal pose of a spoilt
brat in a huff.

“Because you’re busy and tired, and you get cranky when you’re under stress. I don’t have any wishes to go rot in a fucking hotel room for days on end. The paps in L.A. are fucking worse than in London. They would wonder what the fuck I’m doing there, and possibly bring up the tapes shit again, and thanks but no thanks. We’ve talked about this already. Don’t make me repeat myself so much. Do you think I’m enjoying this?”

Thor huffed, still sulking. He knew he was not being reasonable, but he missed his brother, alright? Loki was checking the black polish on his nails, no sympathy for his plight.

“I know you hate L.A., but you could fly to New York,” he suggested. “I could fly over for a day or two, and then we could spend a few days when I’m done here, see everyone, have your birthday party there.”

“No, we couldn’t,” said Loki, cutting. “I don’t celebrate that anymore.”

“You don’t celebrate… your birthday?” repeated Thor. Was he getting that right?

“No. I haven’t for ages.”

Thor had an instinct that he had to tread with caution in this matter. Something in Loki’s voice.

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because it’s not my birthday.”

“I don’t follow.”

Loki let out an annoyed huff and proceeded to explain himself, in a tone that said that it was self-evident and he really had no time for this.

“The date on my birth certificate is not authentic. Nobody really knows the day I was born. So it’s not my birthday. So I don’t celebrate it. I haven’t since I found out about the adoption.”

Thor took a moment to process that. No birthday? But… *Don’t make me repeat myself so much.*

“I-I didn’t know that,” he tried, just to say something.

“Now you know,” replied Loki, checking his nails again.

Thor grappled with the heavy silence.

“I already got you a present,” he said, and he instantly felt like slapping himself, *you idiot.* But if it wasn’t the whisper of a smile there in Loki’s eyes, softening his frown…

They stared at each other through the screen. It was only for a few heartbeats, but it felt like time had stopped. Thor was so very tempted to reach for the flat image of his brother’s face, brush his fingertips on it, and make believe. But he’d never hear the end of that, would he? He abstained.

“Have you written much today?” asked Thor.

“I was fucking dancing all morning, my dear.”

“Right, of course. Is it taking shape?”
“Yes.”

“What shape.”

“A play.”

“Ooooh,” said Thor. “Can’t you tell me what it’s about yet?”

Loki deliberated, biting the inside of his cheeks. Thor wanted to reach for the screen again. Not being able to touch and being forced to just observe instead had its own rewards. Even with the less than perfect definition of the webcam, he noticed more details, things he probably saw just as well when his brother was in front of him, but with the rest of his senses overwhelmed by Loki’s physical presence, they didn’t register. He enjoyed seeing thoughts and emotions touching his face with quick brushstrokes.

“It’s about mum,” said Loki at last.

“Oh,” said Thor, cautious again. “What about her?”

Loki pondered some more. He seemed unsure, wary of how his words might be received.

“I found her journals,” he said after a spell. “In Asgard. In the loft.”

“I didn’t even know she kept any. Have you read them?”

“No. I did have a quick browse. But it felt as if trespassing on her privacy. It was not written for anyone else to read, was it? And she must have written without reserves there, god knows what I would find. Better not. But I… I still took them with me. I’ve got them here.” He looked up anxiously, perhaps expecting a reprimand. Thor didn’t feel the need for one, so Loki carried on. “Anyway, I started thinking about what might be in there. She had a whole secret life, she was a whole secret world all to herself. We all are, of course, but… I’ve been wondering what she was, who she was, besides our mum. And just like that, I started writing conversations with her, things we used to talk about, things that— that we should have talked about and never did. Because I— I talk to her in my head at times, since I was last in hospital. Don’t laugh.”

“I’m not laughing.”

“Well, I started to… How can I put this. To think of all her different facets as if they were different characters. Not just “mum” or “wife” or “actress” but the fury who never took shit from Odin, the ambitious and ultra-driven young woman she must have been in the beginnings of her career, the voice of wisdom when she wanted to comfort us, the more frivolous, almost childish young girl she became with her friends, the woman who still got teary-eyed when she spoke about her mum and grandmother and the summers of her childhood in Norway… I’ve even been wondering about the woman who got the hots for Odin.”

“Loki…” laughed Thor, with a discomfited fluster.

“What? She was sexual too, she must have had other lovers besides him. Don’t you ever wonder?”

“I try not to.”

Loki smiled and raised a dismayed eyebrow at his brother’s squeamishness.

“Well, I have,” he declared. “And then all those aspects of her started talking to each other, as if they were separate characters. So basically I’m writing a play in which a dozen Friggas discuss youth and
“Whoa,” said Thor, always so eloquent. “Sounds ambitious. …No Thors?”

“No, my dear. I did not feel this was the time to explore issues of brotherhood. I’m afraid they would take over the play and leave no room for anything else. Thors tend to do that.”

Thor grinned at the light taunt.

“Well, sounds fascinating, baby. Can’t wait to read it.”

“Yeah, well,” said Loki, lighting a fag. “At times it feels like I’ve bitten more than I can chew.”

“Why?”

“How am I qualified to write about… life, the universe and everything? And in mum’s voice too. Who do I take me for?”

Thor didn’t rush to talk. It took a lot of skill, tact, and opportunity to compliment Loki successfully.

“Well, if someone is qualified, it’s you, brother. You understood her well. And it’s not like you want to write a biography, right?, it’s a… a meditation. It doesn’t have to get the answers, but I’m sure you’ll come up with all the good questions.”

Loki lowered his eyes, with a thoughtful, only moderately displeased expression, and did not call him a brainless oaf. Thor counted that as a win.

“Do I get to read it?”

“Maybe,” said Loki. “Not yet though. It’s too rough.”

Another win. You’re on fire tonight, Odinson.

“Well, I’m looking forwards to it.” Thor tried not to look too smug. Then he noticed the frown on Loki’s face. “What is it?”

“Hm,” Loki bit a nail. “There’s this character, older Loki. I still don’t have a name. Anyway… I’m thinking of… I’m going to offer it to Bucky. If this materialises.”

“You’re not going to play it yourself?”

“No. I want to direct it.”

“Right.”

“So you have no problem with it?”

Thor shrugged.

“Would it change anything if I did?”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

Thor sighed, gave it some thought.

“I’m not worried about Bucky,” he said.
“Ok.”

“Although…”

“Yes?”

“What was it with him? You’ve never really told me. You dated, you fucked, what? You’re always texting…”

Loki reclined in his chair, drew a long drag.

“We fucked on and off for a few months. We were both, um, pining for someone else. As you know well.” A knowing eyebrow rise. “I’m very fond of him. We have stuff in common. He’s a bit broken too. He’s like a kid brother to me. And he’s a wonderful actor that I want to see succeed, in the name of art. Ok?”

“Ok,” said Thor. “A very hot kid brother you used to fuck. Why does that sound familiar.”

Loki laughed. Thor took in the sound, the wrinkles on the corners of his eyes. Even through the screen, even from beyond the bleeding ocean, Loki must have felt Thor’s longing. He stared right into his eyes. And he stared. And he stared. Thor’s heart started to pump faster.

“Do you want to get off?” said Loki.

Thor blinked, startled out of his daydream. He rubbed his face. There was no point in playing it cool, was there?

“Yes,” he admitted, “please.”

“Want to watch or go first?”

Holy fuck. Thor squirmed in his seat, already starting to get hard.

“Watch,” he said.

Loki smirked, and started unbuttoning his shirt, slowly.

“What do you want to see?” he purred, his voice low and whispery.

Thor swallowed.

“What do you want to show me?”

Loki penetrated into his soul with those tremendous eyes of his, as he kept undoing his buttons. He took his shirt off, movements languid, and gave Thor a moment to feast his eyes and stew in the anticipation. He knew what it did to him, there was no shyness and no doubt. He just fucking knew.

Why was that so impossibly sexy.

“More,” said Thor.

Loki’s smile grew wider and naughtier. He stood up, pushed the chair out of his way, rearranged the angle of the cam, and his elegant hands dealt with with his button and flies. Thor unconsciously licked his lips as his eyes followed the happy trail down to where it thickened. Loki began to peel off the black leather trousers. Thor gasped when they started to come down, Loki’s cock, plump and heavy, popping into view, his pretty dark pink balls. Then his thighs appeared, and for a bloody quarter of an hour, they just kept on appearing. Thor’s breathing had turned shallow.
“You’re so fucking beautiful, baby,” he muttered, his hand kneading lazily the bulge in his boxer shorts, already so taut. “You’re not fucking real. You’re a bloody extra-terrestrial.”

Completely naked now, legs slightly splayed, back straight, proud stance, graceful, Loki gave his hardening cock a few leisurely strokes. Thor swallowed again, his throat bone dry.

“I miss you,” said Loki, low and rumbly, tugging and thumbing the head of his cock, now fully erect. “I miss how fucking strong you are, how big inside me. Your weight on top of me, crashing against me. I miss how hot you get, how your breathing feels on my skin when you’re fucking me, the sounds you make.”

Thor shifted in his chair, and fumbled with himself to get some relief from the strain. He got his cock out through the slit of his boxers, and he was careful not to get too enthusiastic stroking and pulling. He wanted this to last.

“I miss you too,” said Thor, husky. “Like you wouldn’t believe.”

Loki turned his back to the camera, and Thor almost whimpered at the sight of his perfect white arse, mirror-smooth. Loki bent over a little, arched his back.

“Jesus,” gasped Thor, his crotch clenching sharply.

“I have this toy,” announced Loki over his shoulder, carelessly running his hands over the sides of his thighs, over his butt, those two dimples at the small of his back that had Thor salivating. “I got it some time ago, when I was pining so hard for you. Do you want to see it?”

Thor swallowed again. He had heard about the kind of toys Loki had experienced with. He was not sure he was ready for some of them, not through a fucking webcam, and not without a bit of forewarning.

“What is it?”

“Only a dildo, nothing kinky,” smiled Loki, sensing his brother’s caution.

Thor laughed, feeling like a prude.

“Alright, show me.”

Loki disappeared from view, there were some noises. When he popped back into frame, he was holding a generously sized, realistic-looking dildo that got Thor blushing for some reason.

“I saw it and I thought of you,” said Loki, with the tone other people would employ to present to someone a pair of earrings or a book. He was running a lazy finger on the rubber thing, base to tip. “It has a base you can stick it to, to ride it.”

“Fuck,” breathed Thor, already getting the picture in his mind, lots of pictures.

“I used to fuck myself on it thinking of you. You were still with Jane. They were angry, angry fucks, I can tell you,” said Loki, with a wicked smile.

Thor’s heart was pounding hard. This thought was both unsettling and pretty fucking arousing.

“Do you want to see?” asked Loki.

They would only find a puddle in the morning, that’s all that would be left of him… He nodded.
“Right, ok,” said Loki, assessing the possibilities with a quick look around. “Ok. Let me see if I can…” He manoeuvred the chair again, got what look like the base strapped to the seat, then clicked the dildo into place.

“You’re going to… fuck the chair?”

“If I fuck the floor you’ll miss the action, dear.” He was already pouring lube on the thing.

“Hey, you’re not going to prep?” asked Thor, alarmed. The thing was, um, girthy. “Don’t hurt yourself.”

Loki winked at him, put a foot on the table. Now Thor had a very good view of Loki’s slicked fingers sliding into his own arse, but not his face while he did it. Which was the suckiest thing about the narrow frame of the webcam. And with Loki being so bloody tall, to get both his face and the rest of the fun in one single space, he had to move half-way across the room, and then you missed the details. Oh well. No-one could accuse his brother of not being resourceful: what Thor was missing in facial expressions, Loki was making up for in sounds, withholding his breath as he went in, then releasing it in short, vibrant hisses as he scissored his fingers, while he kept fisting his cock slowly with the other. Thor’s heartbeat was all over the goddamn place by now, cock leaking, a wet patch in the cotton around the base of it.

Loki pulled out, put his foot down, his face came into view. He had the cutest concentration scrunch on his nose as he adjusted the frame again. Right, all ready. He looked up, playfully wiggled his eyebrows. He straddled the chair, hands propped on the armrests, and wiggled his arse, searching for the right spot, his eyes fixed on his brother. Thor’s heartbeat reached new heights.

Loki lowered himself slowly. Now his eyes rolled back and lids fluttered, his mouth fell open, and Thor gasped as if he had been punched, when he realised what had just happened. Carefully, with a wince now and again, erection flagging, Loki kept lowering himself down onto the chair, until he stopped, his chest heaving quickly, his jaw hanging, his eyes hazy. He licked his lips, and stared at Thor.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” said Thor, out of voice, “you’re the hottest thing I ever… Jesus.”

“It has an on switch,” said Loki, voice choked, “shall I turn it on?”

Thor nodded, his eyes glazed as he followed Loki’s gesture, reaching down. A low buzz was heard, and Loki’s eyes rolled white again, a shiver down his spine, a gentle roll of hips, his erection perking up.

“God,” he muttered, licking his lips, breathing hard now, “It’s not going to take long…”

“Fucking hell, baby…”

Loki started bucking his hips, lifting himself up and down gently, with a strangled whimper. Thor’s cock twitched, he gave the head a twist, more pre-come pearling at the tip. Loki’s expression, scrunched up in exquisite agony, was fucking driving him out of his mind with lust.

“I fucked myself so many times on this… thinking of you and her…” Loki was saying. He was rolling his hips, moving, moving. “I’d go so hard. Like a… god, like a punishment. Because I couldn’t get you out of my head… Because I wanted you and no-one else… And I hated you… God… I hated you… so much…”

He was starting to fuck faster, working his thighs. Thor wasn’t sure he wanted to hear that, but his cock was fucking loving it. His fist was trembling with the effort of holding back. He didn’t want to
miss a blink of what was going on in the screen. Loki was falling hard on the thing, the wet slap, slap, slap.

“I fantasised of coming to you... I had the whole fucking story in my head of... how you’d cheat on her with me... You couldn’t help yourself... and you were so angry with yourself... How hard you would fuck me... You’d make me feel it, how fucking wrong it was...” Fast and frantic now, propped on the armrests, muscles of arms and chest tense and bulging, stomach rippling. God fuck, so beautiful. He wanted to come, and it was costing him. He couldn’t jack himself and keep bouncing up and down at the same time, he needed his hands for support. He was getting tired...

“My fucking thighs...” he laughed breathily and slowed down. And fixing his eyes on Thor again, he stopped humping the thing and started to circle his hips with more deliberation, small, pulsing movements, to get the vibration right where he needed it. Thor was cupping himself strong enough to throb.

“I can’t fucking believe...” said Loki, whispering, short of breath “I’m doing this for you now... with this thing... That you’re watching me like this... that you’re mine...” He threw his head back.

“Ah, Thor... god, fuuuck... Brother, look at me...”

“Baby...” Thor had no fucking breath.

Loki’s breathing spiked, he panted fast, faster, moaning, moaning, and he went still. He started to shake up and shiver and come. He arched his back and neck, jolting suddenly, sharp breaths, the aftershocks running through him. When he stopped, with a soft whimper, he licked his lips. His eyes took a second to refocus.

“Holy fuck, baby,” gasped Thor, as his brother reached down to switch the thing off, his movements sluggish. He remained impaled on that thing for another moment, getting back his breath, still propped up on the armrests. Thor hadn’t missed a detail of his face, not a twitch. Finally, Loki unmounted, with a wince, and cleaned himself up with some wet wipes, which he had been keeping handy on the desk since they had started doing this.

“Are you ok, baby?”

“I’m just relieved I don’t have to dance tomorrow,” said Loki, still short of breath. “My knees are weak.”

Thor laughed. The image on the screen jumped and shook. When it settled, he saw that Loki had relocated to the bed with his laptop, chest heaving, a glint of sweat on his brow. The view wasn’t too dissimilar to what Thor saw beside him in London when he opened his eyes in the morning, a bittersweet thought. He craved for his brother’s touch so badly that he wanted to cry like a little boy.

“You haven’t come,” noted Loki, fuzzy and sated and glowing.

“I want you to tell me what you want to see.”

Loki smirked, a greedy cat stuffed on cream, and still willing to make room for more.

“You like me telling you what to do?”

Thor may have blushed.

“Sometimes.”

“Will you do anything I ask you?”
“Within reason and means,” said Thor.

Loki grinned, both languor and mischief dancing in his eyes.

“Alright,” he said. “Strip.”

That tone of voice did things to Thor he wasn’t yet sure how to classify. He got up just the same, took a step backwards, to get into frame, and took his t-shirt off. He didn’t try for smooth and languid, like Loki had, because he… well, because he still felt self-conscious doing this, and a bit ridiculous. To take his boxers off he had to manoeuvre his very hard, very big erection back through the slit, and be careful not to catch it with the elastic. He felt clumsy, ungraceful, and not sexy in the least.

“Hmmm…” Loki ran his eyes all over him. Apparently, he didn’t agree with Thor. He was lying on his side, head propped on one elbow, still feline and still hungry. “Turn around.”

Thor did, offering his back, not sure what to do with his hands. His breathing was rushed with nerves and arousal. He remembered complaining often about photographers (and early on in his career, directors) making him feel like nothing but a lump of meat. Well, he wasn’t complaining now. There was something about being his brother’s lump of meat that was obviously a big fucking turn on.

“Face me,” said Loki, that tone of voice again, no vacillation, that clench in Thor’s crotch.

Thor did, hands clasped in front of him, shifting on his feet, edgy. Of course Loki could sense his nerves, and hence that self-satisfied grin. It was all part of the fun. His cheeks hollowed around his cigarette, with intent. He left him there for some time, just watching. He didn’t need words to get Thor’s heart beating faster.

“Why don’t you lie down on the bed?” said Loki.

Thor fiddled with the webcam to make sure the bed was in frame.

“On your front,” said Loki, puffing smoke.

Thor obeyed, taking care not to snap his very hard, unyielding cock in half. The pressure made him moan. Now what.

“I want you to fuck the mattress,” said Loki. “I want to see your arse flexing.” And he mused, “I never get to see it from this angle.”

Thor did as he was told. He was so fucking horny, and this was nowhere near fucking enough. He pumped his hips, raising his arse to try and get some friction. He rubbed sideways, pressed on it. No, nowhere near enough, not in the same fucking galaxy, but the thought of Loki watching him like this… He had not done anything like it since he was a horny teenager fantasising about fucking. It felt… private, naughty.

“We’re absolutely going to get a mirror for the ceiling,” purred Loki. “I’m going to order it today. You should see yourself, brother…”

He had realised by now that Loki used ‘brother’ like he used ‘baby’. He fucking loved it. Did that make him a pervert?

“Part your thighs. I want to see your balls and your hole.”
Thor obeyed. He was moaning into the pillow. He had bunched up the bedcovers underneath him, and was bucking into the slightly raised bump they made. The sensation was barely building up, but it was enough to have him panting and whimpering with an even more intense feeling of frustration.

“If I was there right now,” said Loki, a hot whisper, “I’d sit between your legs. I’d want to feel your arse like that, so hard, so smooth… I’d sit closer, and you’d feel the tip of my cock on you…”

Thor’s breathing changed. He humped faster.

“Maybe my tongue… You’re spread and open for me… Would you like to feel my tongue on your hole, brother?”

Thor heard himself, a pleading whimper muffled against the pillow.

“I’d like to slip a finger inside you, to feel you clench around me as you fuck.”

This was definitely getting somewhere now. He’d be skinning himself raw to get there though.

“Fuck your fist, brother,” said Loki. “Reach underneath and fuck your fist.”

Thor spat on his palm, pushed his knees up to get some space beneath him, so that he could move his hand more freely.

“Yes…” purred Loki. “Look at you. If I was there now, brother, I’d have my cock inside you.”

“Ahhh fuck…” Thor was fucking desperately into his hand.

“I’d stay still, I’d be on my knees behind you, and I’d watch you fuck yourself on me, looking for the right angle… I’d be looking at my cock slipping inside your body… How fucking gorgeous you would look, taking pleasure from my cock, desperate for me to start moving, to push you down and fuck you…”

“Ahhhhh…” Thor went rigid with his orgasm. Pumping himself slower now as he spurted on the sheets, face pressed against the pillow, seeing sparks.

After some time, he rolled onto his back, and hazily contemplated the ceiling. That had been as intense as it had been dissatisfying, too slow to build up, too quick when it came, and fucking hell, there was something painfully missing and Thor was flustered thinking of what it was. Loki was quiet, patiently waiting for Thor to recover.

“You should be here,” he muttered, as he sat up, scratched his hair, his pubes. He threw Loki a quick glance. Did he get what he…? Oh, what the fuck had he meant by that, exactly. Didn’t matter, Loki took a drag and faced the window for a spell.

It was Thor’s turn now to fetch the laptop and take it to bed. He rested it on top of the pillow, next to him. After a sip of water, he looked at his quiet, pensive brother with intent.

“Loki, do you ever… I mean, before. Did you use to…?” What’s the fucking word.

“…Top?” guessed Loki.

“Yes.” Blushing like a little boy.

“Yes,” said Loki.

“And did you… do you like it?”
That closed-lip smirk that put dimples on his cheeks. Adorable.

“Very much,” said Loki.


“Alright, brother?” asked Loki.

Thor smiled guiltily, in response to Loki’s smug, knowing look.

“So why haven’t you…” asked Thor. “With me.”

“You get tense whenever I get near the general vicinity,” said Loki. “I just assumed it was not your thing.”

Thor chuckled, flustered,

“Yes. Hm. The couple of times somebody has had a play there… I didn’t like it,” he confessed.

“Tell me,” said Loki.

“They were just… one-night stands. I guess I wasn’t feeling it. Didn’t like it.”

“You didn’t trust them,” said Loki. “And they were obviously not very good at it.”

“I guess,” laughed Thor.

“And no girlfriend has ever…?”

“No.”

“Straight sex is so weird.”

Thor laughed.

“What about Fandral?”

“Fandral,” said Thor, still skittish around that subject. “It wasn’t about experimenting with Fandral. I just wanted to get off. He never really pushed in that direction. So, no. We… never.”

“Did you fuck him?”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Nothing,” grinned Loki, all sweet and innocent. “I just like to imagine the two of you together. I could use some more details.”

“Get out of here,” said Thor.

“It turns me on.”

“Well, we’re not talking about that, ok?” said Thor, heat on his face. “Make up your own details.”

Loki shrugged, put out his fag.

“So, Loki…” Throat dry all of a sudden. “Do you think you would like to…”
“…To fuck you?” completed his helpful brother. “Yes. I would. Immensely. Would you let me?”

“I’m… I’m willing to try whatever you like. Well, you know.”

“Within reason and means,” smiled Loki.

“Yeah. I know I’m kind of… vanilla. I don’t want you to feel like you’re missing out with me. I want you to be, uh, satisfied.” He made himself giggle with how bloody stupid he sounded in his own ears.

“Darling,” grinned Loki, sweetly, “do I seem unsatisfied to you?”

Thor chuckled again.

“Don’t do it for me, brother,” said Loki, “do it for yourself. Is it something you desire? You seemed to enjoy the fantasy…”

Thor reached for the water bottle on the bedside table, to buy himself a couple of seconds.

“Well, I’ve obviously thought about it, since you seem to enjoy it so much. So yeah, I guess I’m definitely, uh, curious.”

“Is that all it is, curiosity?” Loki’s eyes were glinting, his expression intent.

Thor stared. Since they were talking candidly, he might as well…

“I like it when you grab my hair and fuck my face,” he confessed, and it instantly made him feel… bolder. He stared into Loki’s eyes. “I like it when you tie me to the bed and ride me. I like it when you take over. I like to feel… like you’re, uh, using me for your pleasure. Like I’m your toy.”

A pause, in which Loki seemed to have forgotten how to breathe. It made Thor feel quite smug. He was usually the one at the receiving end of these.

“Good answer,” said Loki, husky.

“Must be, look at your pupils,” chuckled Thor.

Loki laughed.

“But I’m… well, I’m also nervous,” confessed Thor. “If we did… I mean, when we do, I’d-I’d need you to be patient.”

“Oh course, brother,” said Loki, all gentle solicitude. “Is it the pain you’re not sure of?”

“Er, yes. I’ve only had fingers in there and it hurt. And it felt so fucking weird too, I don’t see how a cock… Anyway, yes. I guess it’s a factor.”

Loki licked his lips, and got comfortable on the bed, grinning.

“I can prep you so that you’re soft as butter and dying for it,” he whispered, rather kindly.

Thor gulped, he forced out a laugh.

“I have no doubt. Have you…uh, done many virgins?”

“A few. I can give you references. But they all came back for more, if you were wondering how that
went.”

Thor laughed again. His brother’s eyes were going to brand him, they were that hot.

“I’m going to eat you out for half an hour. All of half an hour, you can time it,” whispered Loki, a hot, droning sound Thor could feel inside his ribcage, like a panther’s purr. “You’ll be on your hands and knees, your cock so hard dangling between your thighs. I’ll lick you so, so good while I work your cock with my hand, sucking it now and then. You’ll be so relaxed, so aroused. I’ll slip one finger in, and you won’t even feel the burn. You will only know I’m there because you’re going to feel like you never even fucking imagined, when I start working your prostate. You’ll be sobbing into the pillow, and I’m going to take my time. I’ll make you come like that first, one finger inside you, sucking your cock between your legs, and it will be the most frustrating orgasm of your life. I’ll let you lie down, on your back now, not one solid bone left inside your body, so, so relaxed. I’m going to start going down on you again, until you’re so hard you can’t fucking think, and while I’m swallowing you all the way down, I’m going to open you up. You’ll have my fingers inside you, and your cock in my mouth, and you’ll be fucking gagging to be fucked. And then, only then I will take you. And I’ll be so gentle, I’ll make it last forever, and you’ll beg me to go harder, but I won’t, because after you come, brother, with tears in your eyes, because it will be that good, I’m going to fuck you again, and this time I’ll fuck you hard, and you’ll feel me there, so deep inside you, for days.”

Thor’s mouth had dropped a while ago, and it was still gaping. He was trying to find his voice.

“Ok…” he muttered eventually, thinking that some sort of reply might be expected from him.

“That would be a nice birthday present,” said Loki.

“What.”

“Your cherry.”

Thor laughed, feeling heat on his face.

“I thought you didn’t celebrate that anymore.”

“Well worth making an exception,” rumbled Loki.

“It’s a deal,” said Thor, and sort of smiled, throat dry. “All you have to do is come and get it…”

Odinson, what the fuck. This is a pretty fucking serious carrot to dangle.

“I might just do that,” said Loki, with a playful look in his eye.

Thor held his gaze, wondering if a handful of measly pixels were able to carry his love and his yearning all the way across the ocean.

“Anyway, I better let you go, right?” said Loki. “What time is it over there?”

“Just gone 1 a.m.,” said Thor.

“You need your beauty sleep. I shouldn’t have kept you.”

“It’s ok,” he sighed. “I miss you like crazy, baby. I love you so much.”

“Me too,” said Loki.
Thor stole another few more seconds.

“Have a nice afternoon,” he said then.

It was Loki stalling now, staring in silence for a long time, as if he was trying to work up the courage to say something, or as if he was trying to commit to memory every detail of Thor’s face. Or perhaps both.

“Sleep tight,” he said at last. “I love you. Bye.”

Loki out.

Thor sighed, again. It felt so lonely in that room all of a sudden. Like flipping a switch, and the light was gone, and it had taken with it all the shapes and colours.

He dragged his sorry arse to the bathroom to sort himself out and get ready to go to sleep. When he laid back on the bed, he crossed another day in the calendar in his mind. He tried to convince himself to cheer up, reminded himself they were on the homeward stretch now. Didn’t really work. He was a glass-half-full kind of person, but he had tasted what it felt like to have it brimming and overpouring in his hands. It wasn’t easy to come back to Earth from that high up and not shuffle your feet a little.

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(London)

Loki turned on his back and mapped out the cracks in the ceiling for a while. He was still drowsy from his orgasm, and if you add to it the time of the day and the very little, rather unsatisfying sleep he had been getting, the result was a mighty urge for a nap. For the millionth time that day alone, he toyed with the idea of jumping on a plane, today, right now. With a sigh, he walked himself once more through the reasons why he wasn’t. If you go now, you ass, you’ll be stuck in a hotel room doing nothing all day but pretending you’re not there, and hoard up resentment. No sightseeing, because of laying low, because you hate L.A., and because you hate sightseeing. With luck, Thor would join him up a couple of hours in the daytime, dog tired, stressed out and talked out, and would dash out soon after, on this or that other engagement which Loki would not want to attend, even if he was invited. Thor would be even more exhausted and short-tempered when he came in for the night, only to find Loki climbing up the walls, needy and grumpy and up till fucking here, and whose idea was this, and why the fuck did I even come over for this. So, being apart sucked, but at least they got to tease, flirt and fuck, and talk, and yearn, and ache exquisitely for each other. In conclusion, Laufeyson, you are to stick to the plan. You’ll stay here and endure this, and fly over in time for Oscars night, and it will be a wonderful surprise, and Thor will adore you for it, and everybody happy.

He did hope it would make it up to Thor for his no-show at the Globes. He knew his brother had been sorely disappointed, and Loki had felt like shit. He had used Tapesgate as his excuse — there had been a very unpleasant buzz wafting from the network broadcasting The Cold Six Thousand, to
the effect that they hoped Loki would stay away, to keep the viewers from associating him with his brother. Thor had been furious, Loki had coasted on it to avoid going with him.

Truth was, he did not want to be there. Even from home it had been fucking agony, and at the critical moment of actually calling the Best Actor Award, he had shut himself up in his room and avoided seeing and hearing the fucking thing unfold. He had kept himself away until he was sure they would have moved on to something else. Over there, next to Thor, it would have been unendurable. Loki remembered the three tons of bricks that had landed on his head last year, as Thor lost the Globe, the BAFTA and the bloody Oscar for *Blood Meridian*, one after the other. The lump of lead in his stomach, heavy and corrosive, thinking what Thor must be feeling… So no, Loki could not fucking be there. It was unimaginable. He simply could not fucking stand to watch him lose, not his beautiful, magnificent, glorious brother. Among many other horrible, disturbing feelings, some of them so slight and subtle he couldn’t even grasp them and still them, to try and find out what the fuck they really were, (whatever they were, they took him back to being a little boy and doing better than Thor at school, to watching him struggle at things that were easy to Loki, and how fucking awful that felt for some reason,) what that shit was bringing home, once more, was how much he sucked at comforting and supporting him, and being there for him in any meaningful manner, when Thor was in pain. Because what could he do, what? A consolation blow-job? He didn’t know the words to ease what he knew hurt like a motherfucker, he was shit at cuddling, rigid and awkward and self-conscious, and had you even fucking seen him trying to lift someone’s mood? Geez, no. Loki decided to leave that job to Thor’s friends, which is what they were there for. Loki was there to…

He got up and took himself to the bathroom for a long, hot shower. He had sometimes had good writing ideas in the shower, and at this moment in the process he was in dire need of one. He had the whole thing in his head, a vision of what he wanted, even some scenes and shreds of dialogue that could work, but the fucking structure, the moment in the storyline to call “action!”, was still eluding him. Without that, he felt as if flapping around without sense or direction. Then again, there were too many things he wanted to say in that play. Until he didn’t focus, until he didn’t manage to clear the grounds and unearth the true heart of it, the point of writing it in the first place, the lack of structure was really only a minor glitch. Oh, the woes of creation. You surely like to make life hard for yourself, Loki-boy.

He let the spray hit his shoulders and back. They were knotted and strained from dancing and holding some pretty extreme poses. He was worn out. He didn’t recover as quickly as he once did. Well, whether he blew the candles or not, years just kept fucking passing on him, didn’t they? He’d be turning twenty-six, or thereabouts. So said his birth certificate, that exotic piece of yellowing paper in Cyrillic he kept in a discrete, plain-looking folder, in the back of a drawer, tucked away under a pile of jumpers in several shades of black. Twenty-six years since he had been admitted into that orphanage in a shitty area of Moscow, including the eight months the faceless civil servant who had entered him into the register had decided Loki was upon arrival. The same person who had plucked his official date of birth, first of March, out of thin air. Did it have some sort of significance for that person? Who knows. But he could be older than that, or he could be younger. From what his adoptive parents had told him during that fateful chat, the minders (they could hardly be called nurses) could not agree on whether he had been born prematurely, or whether it was the state of neglect that made him so small. Whichever it was, Loki guessed he should be grateful that his development had not been impaired in any way.

Or perhaps it had been. Was he supposed to have been even taller, or smarter? Not funny, really. Not funny at all. Was he supposed to have been even taller, or smarter? Not funny, really. Not funny at all. Was he supposed to have been a crackpot? Did the conditions of his birth or his first months of life made him this way? Or did he get it all from his biological parents? Where they fucked
up in the head too? Was that why they did not keep him? Had his real mother killed herself in a bout of depression? Or Laufey, right after he dumped him? And why did it matter so much to him who he should have been, who he might have been? It wasn’t just about parallel universes in which his parents kept him, or somebody else adopted him, or nobody adopted him at all. This unknown genetic heritage he carried, it was like living with a stranger that got to make a hell of a lot of decisions for him, without consulting him, who knew all his secrets, even the ones Loki didn’t, who knew him better than himself, because he had been there in the first days, and at his birth, because he had met his parents. A stranger who could see his future. Would everything make more sense to Loki if he knew where it all came from, if he could look at his biological family and see what was theirs and what wasn’t, and where did it lead to. Would it make it any easier.

Whatever. He should bless his luck and be grateful. He had not had a very promising start, and even he could tell he wasn’t doing bad at all. Yes, intellectually, on the rational level, he was capable of being grateful. Really, he was. If his trip to Moscow had accomplished one thing, it was to really drive home for him just how blessed, how lucky he had been, how very different it would have happened for him without Odin’s *ex-machina* intervention. He had seen the orphanage, he had seen those kids. He could have been one of them, one of the ones that don’t get families, who get sent to other, even more fucked-up places when they grow too old, and god knows where they go from there, but he was pretty sure their story did not end in a pretty, warm, red terraced house in Kensington.

In one of his least favourite, most insidious and persuasive twists of mind, Loki felt as if there had been a pre-determined path for him, written in his stars as it were, and this, where he was today, was not it. That this was not supposed to have been his life, and that was why he sucked at living it. As if what Odin had done had been an act of unnatural arrogance that had offended the cosmic equilibrium, and his mind had been pulling all his life to drag him back to who he should have been, to what he had been born for, to his true path. Of course Loki did not truly believe in an imaginary grand scheme of things that actually gave a shit about little old him, but even so, he sometimes looked over his shoulder, afraid of the day somebody somewhere remembered the little Laufeyson runt, and came back to correct that monstrous deviation and drag him to where he really belonged. The reasonably balanced young man he had become knew to count his blessings. He pictured in his head the moment Odin’s eye had landed on him, and was very bloody grateful for whatever that guileless baby had done to make up his father’s mind. He could even picture the little thing’s hand gripping tight one of Odin’s short, stubby fingers, and although Frigga had told him that, by that time, Loki had not yet known how to smile, he might have looked up at the old man’s face, and expressed something that had reached his adoptive father’s heart. After having seen those sad little things in Moscow, left in their cots for hours without any human contact, he wondered what it had been for that forgotten, unwanted creature he once was, to feel cuddled and warm against Odin’s chest, and then put in Frigga’s hands, who would have kissed him and hugged him close; and was it the next morning, perhaps, when they brought in Thor? Had his brother loved him there and then, the very first moment he held him? Oh, make no mistake, Loki was grateful. If he thought he was fucked up now, what could it have been without this? Without them?

But for the perpetually resentful, unquenchably angry, sick creature within, all of that counted for nothing. That creature saw no greys, had no empathy, and could not forgive a wrong. And oh, the wrong done to that creature. It understood only that Loki had been lied to, that he had been told he was one thing, and allowed to build his whole sense of who he was, and what right he had to be in the world, upon that lie, and that they did not have to do that. They could have told him the truth. They had no need to make him feel any better, any more deserving, any more than he was. That it had been heartless to let him believe that he belonged, when the rug was to be pulled out from under his feet sooner or later. That thing within thought that it would have been less painful if Loki had grown knowing, no false illusions, no pointless hopes. *He did not have to say that he loved me.* Oh,
here we go. It’s what we always come down to, isn’t it, you cry baby? Daddy doesn’t like me, daddy doesn’t love me. Grow the fuck up already, Laufeyson, how much longer will you let this get to you like that? Oh, but Loki could not give it up, could he? He just had to wonder how many times Odin had looked at him and regretted. How many times had he wished he had gotten the idea out of his wife’s mind. Did Odin see him as anything else but a big bloody thorn in his side, his greatest mistake, this alien, sick, ungrateful, disagreeable little shit who brought nothing but headaches and heartaches to his house? Loki had been a decision Odin made, it had been in his hands. Everything could have turned out completely different, for all of them. Did he hate himself for it, for the pain it had brought to his wife? Was he making Loki pay for the fucking moment that little baby tricked him into picking him and not another one, was that it?

Deep, deep down inside, at his core, lived a part of him that would never believe he had a right to this life, the life of a son of Odin and Frigga; that would always see himself as a cuckoo in that nest of golden birds, taking the spot of another child who would have been more deserving, with a stronger claim, with a kinder heart. Was that where his permanent feeling of being an impostor came from, his need to keep his walls up? Was that why it was so hard to open up and love people more? Because if it's not yours by right, if you got it by lying and cheating, it can be taken from you at any time, and no-one will shed a tear for you. It's no sin to steal from a thief.

Loki turned off the shower, tried to visualise all that mental diarrhoea running down the drain. His first therapist had told him about that one. It only half worked. He stepped out of the plate, rubbed a circle in the steamed-up mirror, checked his face. No, not for fucking wrinkles, actually, for traces of make-up, thank you very much. Although there were some light wrinkles —on his forehead, on the corners of his eyes. Not that he wanted to have a baby face all his life. He was an actor, dammit. He needed character, not smooth, unblemished skin, right? So if he went through his ablutions with extra insistence on the moisturising routine, it was not because of anxiety about getting old, or losing his looks, or anything of the sort, absolutely not. Just, you know, good housekeeping.

Even as he sat at his desk, he knew that he wouldn’t manage any writing today. He had a quick read of the more recent scenes he had been working on, tweaked the text a bit here and there, but his mind was not in it, or his heart.

He reached under the table to pet Minnie, her little head on his bare right foot. He had kept her locked out of the room during his chat with Thor, (because seriously, impossible to get anything going with the ball of fluff around, least of all a hard-on) and she had followed him in after the shower. Don’t know about you, sweetie, but I think I need to stretch my legs and clear my mind. “Fancy a walk, old girl?” he asked her.

The magic word had been spoken; her ears stood up and her stumpy tail started wagging. She scrambled onto her legs with less of a bounce every day, but she ran for the door just as full of spirit as a three-month-old puppy. There was a lesson there, thought Loki, in how animals live their lives, if only one could learn from it.

It was already dark out in the street, puddles in every crack and hollow, gloom and doom everywhere he looked. Ah, London in the winter. His feet lead him straight to Thor’s door. Nothing special about it, just another Victorian terrace, with a bunch of posh upgrades inside (the thorough soundproofing and the huge jacuzzi sort of worked together there), and a pretty, well kept little patio at the back, with a sleek zen-garden feel, and a totally incongruous red metal BBQ. They had jumped on it after the first viewing. It was comfortable, discreet, and so blessedly close. Perfect.

Loki turned on the lights, fixed himself a cup of tea, and burrowed on the settee with his dog, under a thick afghan. The heating had been off. It was very cold. The place still felt rather empty, only half-
lived in. Furniture wise, it had only the bare minimum (Thor had turned out to be surprisingly picky, and with very clear ideas about what he liked and didn’t like in interior design, can you fucking believe that?) and there was even less in the way of personal touches —no art yet, no plants, only a few books and photos. The photos had come from Thor’s bedroom in their parents’ house in Kensington. Thor had been there one afternoon to gather a couple of boxes. It was stuff Loki had not seen in a long, long time, in a different life, and shook him deep when they started to pop out of the box. They came mainly from the huge cork-board that had been in Thor’s bedroom, where he used to pin photos, concert and theatre tickets and leaflets, press cuts and other mementos. When Thor had moved to L.A. at eighteen, he had taken some of that stuff, but left most of it behind. Loki used to see the board when he walked down the corridor past Thor’s room, and never dared to touch it or disturb it, for some reason. He wouldn’t even get near it. Well, it had that feeling about it, Thor’s room, like an abandoned sanctuary, still holy. Their parents had made it so, preserving it untouched. And all those photos of Iceland. Thor had never taken them down, even after everything had gone to hell. Loki had had questions about that, never spoken them out. How could Thor bear to look at them? Of course, at the time, Loki had just chucked it to Thor being a shallow jerk, who had not cared as much as he had, but that didn’t hold water back then, not really, and it didn’t even hold fucking air right now. He still did not know the answer though, to this day. His brother was such a puzzle sometimes. He felt deeply, Loki saw that, but in a very different way, along patterns pretty much incomprehensible to him. It bugged him. Loki did pride himself after all in his keen insight into people’s thoughts, feelings and motivations, but he often felt like an idiot stumbling in the dark when it came to his own brother. That is, Loki thought he could see into his head just fine and read him clearly, but then that big blond hunk surprised him with something completely different and unexpected, something Loki hadn’t even seen coming, again and again. He probably projected too much, his own assumptions and his own emotions got in the way and made him stupid and blind. He couldn’t help it with Thor, how could he. Just don’t tell anyone.

And now here they were again, all those things Thor had left when he moved out, back on display. Look at them both, a pair of lanky teenagers staring back at him from the past, young Thor cocky, so sure of himself, young Loki shifty, oscillating between his willingly blind faith in his brother, and the warnings of common sense, telling him that these were the last happy days of his life, nevermore, nevermore.

“Jesus, look at your clothes. Did you ever wear anything that wasn’t fluorescent?” Loki had said when Thor started to take the photos out of the box, to break the thick silence. They had laughed.

“How beautiful you were, even then,” Thor had muttered a few minutes later, as he slipped carefully inside a frame a photo of fourteen-year-old Loki, sitting by himself under the never-setting sun, against a backdrop of black volcanic terrain. He was smiling at the camera with a complicit gaze, trying to look sexy for his brother, and managing cute at best, pathetic at worst, depending on who was passing comment (no points for guessing.) The colour was faded and, even in that frame, you could still see the pinprick holes and the wear and tear on the corners. Thor had put it on the mantelpiece, in pride of place. It had touched Loki’s little black heart. He had not said that Thor had never stopped getting handsomer, that he couldn’t even imagine how he would look in ten years time, twenty, and that he almost, almost, could not wait to see it. It might have shown in his eyes anyway, judging from the fervour of the kiss that followed. That one had ended on the bare floorboards. Loki had been fine with it, “as long as I’m on top.”

For all his doubts and his fears, for all his paranoia and anxiety about the future, he had to admit that, so far, it was working. It wasn’t all downhill, of course not. Not a lot of new relationships, he was sure, started with so many arguments. That fight when Thor decided what every room in the house was going to be used for without consulting him, and Loki had complained about it, and Thor had given him the old well whose fucking house is this then? It had gone from there, and quite loudly so.
And two weeks before, it might have been a problem, and it would have required a sit down and a discussion and some other contrived efforts to mend it. Well, they had been moody and avoided each other for the rest of the afternoon, but when the time had come to order take away, they had resumed their bickering and teasing as if nothing had happened. They were making out on the settee soon after, no apologies offered or needed, no need to fucking talk. It was a great place to be. They were becoming more like brothers again, every day. As brothers, they had always been invincible. Nothing could split them apart, no matter what was said, no matter how loud it was said. So much care and negotiation went into keeping a boyfriend, but a brother… You can fucking hate your brother at times and yet you never doubt your love, or his. You don’t get over your brother. It was safe in that place.

Thor appeared to be feeling happy and safe as well, in what they had, and in how they were having it. Too safe, if you asked Loki. Overconfident even, cocky perhaps, and bordering on brazen. The jumpy teenager who once could not even put one arm around his brother on the street, let alone hold hands, was now teasing and flirting in public, just like that. Not that it wasn’t fun. Buying the bed, for example, had been a lark. Oh, the eyefuck Thor had cast his way, as he tested the resilience of a sturdy, solid oak headboard with a good shake. Loki was not impressed with that bed, and he was not to be outdone either. He had returned the stare while running one slow, caressing hand over a black cast iron headboard; he had intentionally let his scarf catch with one of the curlicues, and gave it a good tug, to demonstrate the superior qualities of that particular piece—as in, you could tie things to it. His brother’s eyes had gone wide. That was the bed they had gone for in the end. They had only just barely started to explore its full potential, but already it showed great promise.

Buying clothes had been fun too. All those shop assistants fawning over him, and Thor stepping out of the changing room shirtless to ask for another size, or not bothering to pull the door or the curtain shut as he undressed down to his underwear. And always, always, making sure Loki was looking. Make no mistake, Loki drew an immense, wicked enjoyment out of the double entendres and the private jokes, the flirting in broad daylight, the satisfaction of knowing he would be the one taking home that golden god the whole world sighed for. He wasn’t even getting jealous, no matter how bold and shameless were the women who flirted with his brother, or how much Thor flirted back or basked in it; even Loki with all his fucking issues could see just how supremely uninterested Thor was, how his focus was permanently, unerringly set on little old him. And if Loki was over-enthusiastic and extra-dedicated in their love-making activities later that day, and deployed his finest moves, who was to say it had anything to do with anything.

It was fun. It was naughty. It was spicy and exhilarating, to share that shocking, outrageous secret and walk right on the edge of blowing it up. It’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye. When Loki said they were probably going out on too many dates, and that they should try not to be seen together so often in what could easily (and correctly) be read as romantic settings, Thor got grumpy and called him paranoid. “Nobody would ever believe it, baby,” he said. Loki wasn’t sure whether his oaf of a brother underestimated the real danger they were in, or… Well, he was impulsive, wasn’t he? Hiding and lying would never sit comfortably with him. What if Thor was just pushing it and pushing it, hoping it blew up in their faces? Consciously or unconsciously, maybe that was it. Just fuck fear and precaution both, let the secret out, see what happens, and deal with the consequences as they present themselves. Much better than crouching here waiting, cheating and lying, wondering what might happen, just let it fucking happen already, bring it on. That’s so like you, brother.

Summon up the thunderstorm and have the presumption to assume that you can deal with whatever it brings.
When he got home, Sigyn had just made it back. They reheated leftovers and sprawled on the settee, half on top of each other like the couple of housecats they were at heart, flicking through the channels on mute.

“DVD?” suggested Sigyn, losing hope. “Oh, wait.”

Thor’s beautiful face was on screen. It was yet another piece on him in a celebrity gossip show. There had been dozens since before the Globes. ‘Is it new year, new love for Hollywood’s most desired bachelor?’ read the flashy caption, half superimposed on blurry candid shots of Thor and Sif. ‘With Mystery Brunette around town’. Leaving a restaurant, walking down the street, stage door of the theatre where Fandral’s play was on (and there Loki was too, right behind, in front of Fandral. — And bloody hell Fandral, take it down a notch; the way he was looking at Loki’s arse, geez.) They looked beautiful together, Thor and Sif, the press was loving it. Look at those smiles, Thor’s hand around her waist as he hails a cab. And oh, here we go now, a bit of history: old footage of Thor with previous girlfriends, for comparative purposes, one surmised. There he is with Jane, holding hands crossing a street, and there they are again, on a red carpet or another, Jane in a flowing gown of pink chiffon, delicate as orchid petals, the most beautiful astrophysicist that ever was, just how goddamn gorgeous was that girl. Old story really, both Sigyn and him watched with a mild interest. But wait, what’s this then? Thor and him. Loki’s stomach took a plunge. What the fuck? ‘Full reconciliation with his brother’.

“We never even noticed they were there,” muttered Loki, as he looked at a string of photos of Thor and him together on the street, different clothes, different days. “How do they fucking do that?”

“You don’t seem to be paying much attention to your surroundings,” quipped Sigyn.

Loki threw her a glower, but she was right. His brother and him seemed lost in their own private bubble.

“What a gorgeous couple you make,” mused Sigyn at a photo of the two of them looking intensely at each other like… like two idiots in love.

“How the fuck do they not see it?” said Loki, stunned, a metallic wash of fear in his mouth. “How can they not notice? Is the world bloody blind?” Another one, Thor’s arm around his shoulders, laughing, intimate. “Seriously, I’m beginning to think they could get a photo of us fucking in an alley and the caption would be Formerly Estranged Brothers Making Up For Lost Time.”

Sigyn giggled.

“Well, I’m sure it doesn’t hurt that he’s been seen around with Sif,” she said.

“I guess. Should I get me a beard too? Can I borrow Banner?”

She laughed. Now came the promotional bit, a clip from The Cold Six Thousand, Thor looking unmeasurably sexy in the early 60s characterisation, cream old-fashioned suit, sleek hair, haggard expression (his character had a really tough time in that show.) Thor on the red carpet at the Globes, too hot to live in that tux, his gorgeous, perfect face the moment when John Hamm had a word of commiseration for him, his brother’s warm smile, a small head tilt, absolute gentleman that he was (they really don’t come better bred than the Odinson kids.) Now Thor signing autographs and goofing around with the fans at another red carpet, on opening night of Master and Commander: Post Captain. Laughing and joking with Eddie Redmayne, who played Maturin, and Natalie Dormer, who played the mutual love interest, Diana. And a clip from the movie, Thor in costume, doused in sea spray, in that beautiful, fittingly weathered uniform of the Royal Navy that looked so fucking good on him, the long, blond hair coming undone from its ponytail, eyes fixed on the
horizon, a hungry, fierce look in his eye, all intensity and electricity and raw physical power, coming off the fucking telly in waves. Just how beautiful, how magnificent and extraordinary was that god on the screen, that god in his bed. Loki sighed, a quiver inside. He could not fucking lose him again, he couldn’t.

“It only takes one person,” said Loki. “Doesn’t take a lot of imagination, just the right kind. One person calling it out to the right listening ear, and we’re screwed.”

She listened, didn’t offer anything back but for that worried, sympathetic look.

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(L.A. Oscars night.)

The yearly Oscar party at Chez Stark was a smallish affair, two hundred attendees at best, mostly people who worked for Tony actually making movies, and that he liked. Loki felt as out of place as he always did at these things, but at least there were more familiar faces than usual. It had been even nice to see some members of the Mariners crowd again.

“Everybody shut up, here they come!” Tony grabbed the remote and turned the volume all the way up. A few bars of the theme from Master and Commander played as Thor Odinson and Natalie Dormer took to the stage. He had gentlemanly offered his arm, lest there was an accident with the long train of her deep red gown and those heels. They made their elegant, sliding way to the podium.

Natasha threw him a look. Loki kept his eyes glued to the screen. His brother’s smile was outshining the ten foot tall golden statuette behind his back. Thor was smooth and relaxed and he was an absolute delight. Not that Loki was biased. No, seriously. If he was biased, it was in the other direction: he was the biggest second-hand-embarrassment capacitor in the northern hemisphere. His brother had fucking killed it. With a tiny, nostalgic smile, Loki remembered Thor’s stiff, shaky performance at the Globes almost ten years ago. He remembered too the rush that night, as it became more and more obvious to him that Thor still wanted him. He remembered the churning of anticipation in his stomach, as they drove back to that craphole that was Thor’s first ever apartment. He remembered the pounding of his heart in the kitchen just before they kissed. He remembered Thor nervously preparing him before he fucked him, for the first time in his life, and himself wondering where had he learned to do that, and with whom.

The gorgeous couple left the stage, while at Chez Stark’s there was loud cheering and clapping. Loki checked his watch. He calculated another three good hours at least before Thor finished the ceremony and the party circuit and could make it to Tony’s place. An optimist would say only three more hours, but seriously, fuck optimism. Right now what he really wanted was to sit in a corner, feel sorry for himself and sulk.

Well, he shouldn’t have fucking hired Natasha for an agent. When it came to Loki, she was all for
beating them when they’re down. It’s easier to break in and get under the skin when it’s soft and bruised already…

“I can’t keep ressorting to Sigyn for updates, you know,” she said, not-so-subtly blocking his way with her tiny, perfect body. “You said you would call.”

“I was pretending to be too busy,” said Loki through gritted teeth.

She smirked. “You’re not afraid of me, are you?”

“Of course I am,” he said. ”You’re my agent.”

“Oh Loki, you wound me. Is that all I am to you?”

He held her stare.

“Well, we’re talking now,” he said.

“Yes we are,” she grinned. “So, being realistic, how long do you think you can endure the situation with your brother as it is now?”

Well, if it isn’t Miss Natasha Doesn’t Fuck About Romanova, thought Loki to himself, and stalled.

“What situation.”

Natasha gave him the head tilt. You won’t go far that way, Loki-boy.

“As long as it takes,” he said.

“I said, realistically.”

“What other option do we have?”

Was that actual compassion on her face.

“What are you telling me, that there is no hope?” he said, with a note of hysteria in his voice.

“No, I’m saying that tough choices are ahead,” she sentenced, and this time it was definitely thoughtful compassion there, softening her eyes.

”No,” said Loki. No what. No to everything.

“Are you afraid that, if he’s made to choose, he won’t choose you?”

He winced. Fucking hell, Nat.

“No,” he said. “I’m afraid he’ll choose me and come to regret it later. He must not be made to choose. Ever.”

She considered that.

“Loki, if anything was possible, anything, no restrictions, if it was possible to be rid of this, and for you and Thor to fall in love with someone else and lead normal lives, what would you choose?”

Loki didn’t reply straight away, but not because he didn’t know the answer. It’s not as if he had not asked himself the same all his life.
“What do you want to know, Romanov.”

“I want to know how can I help you, really help you. What do you want? An easier life, or…?”

“Him,” cut Loki. Tell your deepest wish to the sorceress so she can cast her spell, and be true, because the magic will backfire if you’re playing silly buggers. “I want him,” he said.

She nodded thoughtfully.

“Will you help me?” he all but pleaded.

That cunning, strategy-devising crunch in her brow was filling him with hope.

“I’ll do the best I can,” she said. And then, after a sip of her drink (as black as her outfit), “Who is the girl he’s been spotted with?”

“His best friend,” he said. He tried to read her, and tried to fill in the blanks. “She knows. About us. And so do his friends, they all know. He believes we can trust them.” Her sly stare made him clumsy. “I’m fine with it. With… her, I mean. Whatever it takes.” Right, Laufeyson. First, don’t defend yourself if nobody’s accusing you, because it makes you instantly guilty. Second, overly fervent conviction sounds like make-belief, you amateur.

Her gaze was intent, inquisitive, and saw right through him.

“Be careful. With yourself. Don’t overthink.”

He put on a sarcastic expression of relief and joy.

“Oh my god, why didn’t you say that before! I’m cured!”

She tilted her head again, ducky pout, unimpressed.

“Anyway, tell me about that play you’re working on,” she said, with another sip.

A lot of shop was talked that evening. Peggy Carter’s offer was the runaway winner.

“If you really want me, get me to sign before the Mariners junkets start. I’ll be regretting I ever set foot in Hollywood by then. You would not convince me if you were offering the title role in a biopic on David Bowie.”

She laughed that dazzling, jaw-splitting smile of hers.

“Well, Mr. Laufeyson, that’s a thought.” She clinked her glass with his. “We’re going to have so much fun.”

“Really? You sure?” asked Bucky, with a light in his eyes, when Loki mentioned to him his play.

“Of course I am, airhead. I wouldn’t tell you otherwise.”

“Wow, man, I’m so… Wow.”

“I’ll send you what I have when it’s at reading stage, to give you an idea of what I’m on about.”
“Sounds awesome, Loke. Difficult too.”

“If I can fucking write it, you can fucking play it.”

Bucky laughed.

“I don’t know how that works, but yeah, whatever. If you want me so much,” a playful leer.

“I’m not going to fall for that,” said Loki.

Bucky laughed again. It was a good thing to see.

“Steve did great,” said Loki, sweetly. Bucky always brought his softer side to the fore. “He was charming.”

“Yeah, he did good,” beamed Bucky. “He still gets so nervous at these things, and he thinks he’s going to make a mess of it, but he just goes out there anyway and does it. It’s like when we went to all those auditions back then. Sometimes they wouldn’t even let him past the door, and it took guts to just keep trying, but he would always pick himself up and come back again. I swear he must have landed that first part on sheer stubborness.”

“Your eyes are shining,” mused Loki, making him blush. “You’re doing well, the two of you, I could tell from miles away.”

“Yes. It’s so weird though. It’s like we forget, sometimes? That it’s a new game now? Like, I sometimes want to, you know, kiss him or whatever, and my first instinct is still to hold back.” Oh, that blush. “And let me tell you something,” he lowered his voice, “I’m so grateful for… you know, the crash course. Because if it had been all down to him, we’d still be on second base. Lots of enthusiasm, but no fucking clue.”

Loki laughed with delight, and then feigned some hurt.

“A crash course? That’s all it was to you?”

Bucky’s face changed, became grave and intense.

“Joking, Bucky,” and now Loki was in frank retreat.

“I got so much from it, you hear? So much,” he said, fervent, and he hugged him and kissed him full on the mouth. Which felt nice, too nice. It was not because they were bored of each other that they had stopped what they were up to.

“So how’s your situation?” asked Bucky, putting some air between them, with a slight catch in his voice that pleased Loki immensely. “You still owe me a story, I haven’t forgotten.”

Loki smiled.

“Some day.” He tugged a flock of hair behind Bucky’s ear, and basked in the warmth and affection in those huge, dark eyes.

“He’s in the closet or something?” asked Bucky. “Is that what it is? Is he super-famous too?”

Loki looked away.

“It’s complicated,” he conceded. “What happens with you two? Are you going to come out?”
“Steve wanted to. Like, the day after we…” A glorious fluster. “I told him to give us both a moment to pick up our breaths… It’s not even three months yet. I don’t know about him, but I want some space right now, not a swarm of paparazzi following around everywhere we go.”

“But it’s in the horizon.”

“Yeah, totally. Coulson’s aid mentioned keeping it under wraps, with the old ‘why do you need to go public with it? it’s your private life, who cares?’ and Steve nearly blew a gasket. He was shouting at the poor kid ‘if it was a woman you’d be wanting to put signs on the fucking bus!’ It was great. To be honest with you, I do wonder if the aid was just acting on Coulson’s instructions. You know, sounding Steve for reactions.”

“Wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Do you agree?”

“With coming out?”

“Yeah. Because… I don’t know, I’m a nobody, but Steve… I feel almost selfish for letting him do this. Because he may keep on making movies, god knows, the public does love him, but… likely not as a lead, and no more romantic parts for him unless it’s as gay best friend or brother of the bride or… He’s an action hero, and that will be gone. That’s a pretty big sacrifice to make, his whole career for, you know…er, me. But he says he has no choice, that there are not two options here. And he doesn’t say it as a negative, even. He says he is what he is, and he is not going to pretend he is something else, because he couldn’t live with himself or look at me in the eye. He says he stands for something and that, if he was to hide this, that would be finished anyway. Like, what kind of hero hides something that’s so big, something that costs other people lots of pain and suffering. He says that, if we can help make it a little bit safer for other people to come out, or even if it helps people understand what being a bisexual means… Hey, you alright?”

“Yeah. I need to… I need a fag. No, you stay. Please.” Loki made his way to the terrace in a hurry. He heard Bucky’s voice a few steps behind.

“…But give me a shout if you need me, eh?” Though Bucky knew just as well as he that he never would.

Fresh air therapy. Yeah, in Hollywood? No chance, even on the hills. With all that polution, you don’t even need to breathe into a paper bag to get a fix of CO2. So deep breaths it was. Then a fag, with shaky hands. Then three. He had to calculate how many Mississippies he could allow himself before Natasha was on his heels.

Loki was heading back to his group, after a restroom detour, and a refreshed face and neck, when he heard Tony’s voice, somewhere in the room.

“The Mighty T! He returns triumphant!”

Loki’s stomach did a flip. He craned his head and stood on his tip-toes, seeking with his eyes. There he was, there, look at him. Be still my fucking heart, he looked bleeding godly in that tux, breathtaking, and Loki could swear that his brother soaked up the light in the room, because everybody around him looked plain and dull and dim, while he blinded and dazzled. Loki always managed to forget somehow that, as gorgeous as Thor was on screens and photos, he was actually
even more handsome in the flesh.

He was walking and talking with Tony, looking like a man who had had enough. Then his eyes lifted for a cursory, disinterested sweep across the room, and he spotted Loki. And his face, bloody hell, not even Inner Bastard had any power against that. Thor’s eyes were shining so bright that, if someone got in the way, there would be sunburns. Loki stood still, shivering like a leaf, as his brother strode towards him. After the first moment of surprise, would Thor be pissed off at him? As late as this morning, Loki was still maintaining the fiction that he was in London and with no intention of moving, and being quite unpleasant to Thor when he begged him once more to fly over.

His brother closed the last two steps and scooped him up in a bone-grinding hug. Loki would have sighed in relief, if Thor’s arms had not crushed the breath right out of him already.

“You lying bastard,” his brother muttered, his voice so warm. “You completely had me.”

Loki smiled, drunk in Thor’s scent, his brother’s strong arms squeezing out of him every doubt and every fear.

“I can’t breathe, Thor,” he said, eventually.

“How can you talk, then,” whispered Thor.

“Brother, they’re beginning to stare,” he mumbled, starting to push him off.

“Let them,” said Thor, hugging tighter, the beginnings of a boner.

Loki’s gaze found Bucky. That slight frown on his face, as he looked from Loki to Thor, and back again. Loki’s throat went suddenly Gobi desert-dry.

“Hey, my boys! Group hug!” that was Tony’s voice somewhere, and then he entered Loki’s field of vision. He saw him patting Thor determinedly on the back. “Come on, sweetheart, come on, come on. I’ve saved you a chair in the cool kids’ table.”

The cool kids’ table, a pair of long couches and armchairs around a coffee table, covered mainly in beer bottles, was presently accommodating Tony’s girl Pepper, Natasha and Clint, Phil Coulson there in the corner, Peggy Carter and her girl Angie, and Bucky. They all shuffled to make room for the newcomers, including Steve, who had also just arrived from the after-ceremony party circuit.

Steve and Thor exchanged a few words, while they both lost their jackets and bowties and undid the top buttons of their shirts. It was cute how the conversation around the table dropped for a moment, and neither of the two hunks who were the cause even noticed.

Tony was grinning at Loki, patting the spot next to him on the couch. He sat down while his brother kissed and hugged everyone. When Loki dared to meet Bucky’s eyes, he found him staring. There was a question there. When Thor squeezed into the narrow space next to his brother, threw an arm over his shoulder and kissed his face, Loki couldn’t help but look towards Bucky again. Bucky flicked him a little smile.

Well, that was that then.

There was a brief interlude mocking Thor’s presenting skills, which his brother took in stride, with good humour. His laughter sounded so light, like he was treading on air. Loki had not heard him like that for days. And his body so warm against him. They were glued from shoulder to foot. Loki felt him under his skin whenever he talked, laughed, breath. So near, so fucking far.

“So is this going to be explicit or subtext?” he heard Coulson’s voice. Loki tuned back in.
“I’m done with subtext,” said Peggy. “We are just going to go for it!”

“Two gay parts in a row, Odinson?” asked Coulson.

“Technically, Lancelot will be bisexual,” answered Thor, cocky smile. That was not the question, brother, thought Loki with a sip of champagne, and neither was than an answer.

“As if the general public could tell the difference,” mumbled Bucky.

“Well, we’ll enlighten them!” said Steve.

He clinked his beer with Thor’s.

“My king,” said Thor.

Steve laughed.

“My best and hottest knight,” he beamed.

“I told you you would love this, Thor,” said Tony. “Didn’t I tell you? Never you forget ’twas I who suggested your name for Lancelot. Because look at him, for god’s sake. Or should I say, by Merlin’s beard?”

“No beards,” said Peggy. “Our Merlin will be clean shaven, won’t he, Loki?”

Loki felt lots of eyes turning to him, under a matching number of raised eyebrows.

“It’s still a yes, isn’t it?” asked Peggy.

He smiled angelically. Thor’s gaze was also on him, and pretty darned intent at such close range.

“But he has conditions,” said Peggy. “Can I tell them, Loki?”

Loki counted the bubbles in his glass of champagne.

“He will play Merlin as long as he also gets to play Morgan le Fay,” she announced.

“Oh my god!” exclaimed Tony. “Really?”

“Guinevere was taken,” said Loki, with a shrug.

“That’s fucking genius!” said Tony. He grabbed Loki’s face with both hands and planted a solid smacky kiss on his cheek. Annoying. “Can’t you see why I love this guy? I love this guy! You’re a genius! …What’s so funny, Bucks?”

“Steve is going to get it on with both brothers,” said Bucky, chuckling. “The symmetry.”

Thor and Steve burst out laughing over their respective flusters. Loki looked at Bucky, quizzical. Bucky raised his beer in salute. Loki smirked, threw him a wink.

“So… what are we talking about here, then,” said Coulson.

“Just a kiss, Phil, relax,” said Peggy. “Hard as I tried, I could not squeeze in a roll in the hay with Lancelot and Arthur. Timeline didn’t allow it.”

“Awful shame,” said Pepper, with a smirk. There were several responding sniggers. Steve covered his face, Thor laughed it off.
“Are the big guys going to go with this, Tony?” asked Coulson. He had a shitty job sometimes, thought Loki, playing Devil’s advocate.

“Oh, the big guys can kiss my sweet little ass,” said Tony.

“Not that little,” said Loki.

Tony gave him a sarcastic mockery of a smile.

“Definitely sweet,” smirked Loki wickedly. “Isn’t it, Pepper.” And yes, he felt Thor’s glower. But Pepper laughed, reaching around Tony to clink her glass with Loki’s.

“This is not simply a story of gay Camelot,” protested Peggy, lighting up with the passion that had sold Loki into this project. “The love these two men have for each other is a crucial part of who they are, but it’s not all they are. It will be a movie about fealty, about power plays, about crossing lines, about confusing duty and honour for emotion and desire. About flawed heroes that are larger than life, and still intensely human. About their strife for an ideal, failure and redemption. About passion, of many kinds, and love, of many kinds. But yes, I want them to take that last step. I want them to bloody kiss already! I think it’s going to be amazing.”

—

“Not the mouth,” had panted Loki when his brother had jumped him in the back of the limo.

Two bloody hours they had had to stay. Loki had felt Thor’s growing impatience and frustration in his fidgeting and his mood, getting snappier and shorter.

“Let’s fuck off,” his brother had whispered in his ear, and he had very nearly dragged him away when Loki was still saying goodnight to Bucky (with a meaningful, fixed stare that Bucky had returned, followed by a quiet nod.)

The tension as they made their way out of Tony’s mansion side by side, shoulders brushing, arms, hands, waiting for the limo to pick them up. Inside the car, Loki’s heart had been hammering in his chest. He could feel Thor’s eyes locked on him, blistering hot. Jesus fuck, thought Loki, I’m about to be ravished. The limo made its way into the motorway.

“Need to talk to you about dad,” Thor had said.

Loki had almost panicked for a second, his frown of puzzlement completely genuine. Then Thor hit the button that raised the screen between the driver and them, and Loki realised with relief that it had just been an excuse. For each and every one of the three seconds (at best) that it took for the screen to slot into place and block them from view, Loki could feel his own breathing and his own heartbeat.

Then it was a fucking whirlwind. The back of a limo looks huge until one, being over six foot tall, is dragged forcibly onto one’s brother’s lap, also over six foot, and a spot of impromptu, sitting-down dry-humping is attempted.
“Not the mouth,” had begged Loki, neck crooked, head squashed against the roof of the cabin.

“Fuck it,” had said Thor, pulling Loki close to plunder his lips.

Loki may have whimpered before he groaned and shook himself off.

“We can’t fucking walk into the lounge of the Plaza looking like we’ve just mmmmpphhh…” He pushed him away. “I’m fucking serious, Thor…” But then his brother had grabbed two handfuls of Loki’s arse and squashed their groins together, and Loki’s voice was lost in a moan. Thor’s mouth on his neck (oh my fuck, that beard was so fucking soft, he didn’t have a clue!) as he pumped his hips up. Loki was in clear and present danger of coming in his pants.

“Oh, no, fucking stop it right there, mister,” he groaned, a firm grip of Thor’s hands, which were now on Loki’s fly. “We’re not fucking in the back of a limo less than ten minutes away from a fucking hotel room,” he had warned, his voice full of conviction and finality, his force of will teetering right on the edge.

Thor had stopped. He was panting heavily, scorching hot breath against the sensitive skin of Loki’s throat. He reared his head and looked at him as if Loki was the fucking sunrise, through an awed squint. He cradled his jaw and made to kiss him. Loki was going to pull back, but Thor’s grip on his jaw tightened, as his lips touched lightly, safely, on his. He hugged him tight.

“Surprise,” said Loki then, between his arms, still straddling his lap, making Thor chuckle. That deep breath Loki had taken then, it had been just to calm himself down, of course, nothing to do with trying to get as much of Thor’s scent inside him while he could, to make up for a whole fucking month living off the fucking memories.

They had walked out of the limo looking a bit rumpled, but not much worse for wear than any other party-goers at the end of a long day, and an even longer evening. According to plan, they made a, er, date for a late breakfast tomorrow at the restaurant in the attic, publicly and audibly, while they waited for their keys at reception. They said goodnight as the doors of the lift slid in front of Loki’s nose. Thor had his ridiculously luxurious suite on a higher floor, paid for by the studio, where he was to wait for him.

Loki changed into something more comfortable (and less eye-catching) in his own room, made sure he had everything, and after a good twenty minutes, he made his way to Thor’s room.

He found the door unlocked, and his brother sitting nervously on his bed like a lemon. When Thor saw him, he rushed to his feet and barged towards him like a fucking transatlantic. He had not fucked him against the wall, but he had pressed against him and dry humped him quite a lot, and then slipped one hand under Loki’s pants and fingered him open while thoroughly ravishing his ears, mouth and neck, until Loki was seeing double. Loki had escaped when Thor put him down to take his clothes off, and had started losing his own clothes all the way to the bed. The look on Thor’s eyes as he followed him made his heart fucking flutter. He felt the side of the bed against the back of his calves and climbed on the mattress, crawling up, eyes wide when his brother got the last of his clothes off, because Thor looked even fucking larger than normal. He threw him the lube in a nice curve. Loki’s breathing had spiked with anticipation, his arse clenching in need, as Thor was slicking himself off. Then Thor grabbed Loki’s ankle, pulled him down towards him, and flipped him over, in a show of physical strength that would have had Loki creaming his knickers, if he had been wearing any. Loki on his hands and knees on the bed, Thor with his feet firmly planted on the floor. The head of Thor’s cock nudging, cold.
“Oh my fucking god,” had muttered Loki, breathless, when he felt his brother’s hand closing in his hair. Every fucking hair in Loki’s body now on end, fucking shivers.

The head breached him. Thor’s hand raked down his back as he pushed in, in, in. Loki heard himself sob. Thor didn’t give him more than half a second before he started to fuck him, fast and hard, each fucking thump reverberating from the bloody tailbone to his fucking throat. He had had to brace himself on the headboard. Thor’s grip of his hips, unyielding, his thrusts relentless. His gruff huffing and gasping, and no words. Like being fucked by a fucking animal. Loki was trying to be quiet too. He soon fell into almost a trance, in which only his brother’s mindless, silent lust existed.

Then Thor took it up a notch. And Loki was definitely sobbing now. He was going to come from this. He was going to come un-fucking-touched.

One word.

“Harder,” he begged.

Thor obliged. One hand on Loki’s shoulder, another raking deep in his scalp, a handful of hair making Loki throw his head back, arch his neck, and that slight change of angle.

“There… fuck, brother… there…”

Thor’s breathing was growing more laboured and more anxious. He was close too, if not just about.

“Oh fuck, I’m gonna come, I’m gonna come…”

Thor fucked him ruthlessly as he burst on the sheets, to the tune of some pretty embarrassingly desperate sounds.

“Need me to stop?” groaned Thor, husky, slowing down.

Loki shook his head, even though he was pretty fucking sensitive. But oh, he loved this, when Thor’s heavy breaths started to flesh out into moans, his thrusts lost all tempo and coordination, his hands on him tightened even more, and he went stiff with his orgasm, his breathing catching with every spurt of come spilling inside Loki’s body.

Thor had stayed inside, recovering his breath, for a beautifully long time. Loki had been thinking some seriously metaphysical shit relating to heaven and god and all his singing angels.

“That was almost worth one month,” he had mumbled, as he collapsed, boneless, on the mattress.

Thor had chuckled, crumbling down next to him, and grabbed his hand, chest heaving.

When Loki came back from the bathroom, Thor was lying on his front, eyes droopy. It was late afternoon for Loki still, he was abuzz with energy. Thor was clearly on his last mile, but he was fighting to stay awake.

“Hello,” he said, a dozy grin.

Loki smiled faintly, a little eye-roll. Don’t be lame, brother. He began to trace invisible patterns with his fingertips on his brother’s luscious back, alternating with a flat palm from neck to thigh, and everything in between. Thor’s breathing became heavier and regular, his eyes closed.

“You still want to go to New York?” asked Loki, tracing, tracing.
“I want to go home,” mumbled Thor. “I want to go to Asgard.”

Bless him, he sounded so beat.

“We can do that,” he offered, slowly running his hand down his brother’s back, delaying on that glorious rump.

“No we can’t,” grumbled his brother. “I need to start training for Lancelot. Horse riding in armour, fighting with heavy weapons, fucking jousting.”

Loki laughed quietly.

“I guess I need to dust my magic books then. It will be like playing knights and wizards,” he mused, nails softly raking up, on the counterstroke.

Thor laughed, muffled, against the pillow.

"I thought that too," he said, a deep rumbling sound.

Long strokes up and down his brother’s body, from the back of his knees now to his hair. On a brush up his thighs, Thor parted his legs, and Loki found his eyes open then, staring at him from just a few inches away, pretty intent.

“Happy birthday,” mumbled Thor.

Loki’s heart fucking stopped.

“It’s not the first yet,” he said, voice choked. Talk about lame.

“Could be any day,” countered Thor. “Could be today.” And he fucking parted his thighs a little bit wider.

He was fucking joking, right?

Not with the way he was looking at him, he wasn’t.

Right here? Right now? With no fucking warning?

“Come here,” mumbled Thor then, throwing an arm around Loki’s neck and dragging him close for a kiss. When he turned his face to the pillow, and Loki found himself kissing the back of his brother’s neck, it felt pretty fluid. How he ended up laying flush on top of him, draped all over his back, his cock hardening between Thor’s legs, god only knows. Where Loki’s fingertips had been it was now his lips. As Thor’s breathing became shallower, Loki made his way down, kissing and nuzzling, thankfully still floating in a cloud of what the fuck is going on is this happening for real it can’t possibly be can it. His eager brother lifted his hips when he felt him getting near. Loki didn’t think twice. He plunged for it guns blazing, licking and nuzzling and sucking. He wasn’t thinking of proving himself. To be fair, at that point he wasn’t really thinking. He just wanted to fucking taste him. And the sounds he was getting from him. He had never heard Thor so desperate, struggling to keep still so that Loki would not stop what he was doing.

“You know what they called me at the club?” he whispered, just by his brother’s perineum, “Loki Silvertongue.”

And he was working him to the best of his ability even as his brother whimpered,

“Silver? Who the fuck got the gold?”
Loki laughed, and Thor laughed, rolled over.

“Come up here,” he mumbled, blue eyes glinting.

Why was Loki’s throat dry again all of a sudden. He found himself wrapped in arms and mighty thighs. Thor hesitated for half a second before he kissed him. He must have felt how hard Loki was against him.

“How do you want me,” Thor whispered.

Jesus fuck almighty, what the fuck was breathing, his head was going to explode. How do I want you, brother? Let me count the fucking ways…

“You’re more nervous than I am,” chuckled Thor, so warm and strong and so much of him, all around him. He cradled Loki’s face and pulled him close for a kiss.

Calm the fuck down, Laufeyson, you can do this. With his brother’s mouth working his lips to a throbbing, glorious mess, Loki reached blindly for the lube on the bedside table. He saw Thor open his lids one sliver, keeping an eye on things. He buried his face in Loki’s neck as Loki coated his finger in lube and reached down from behind him.

“It will feel weird,” whispered Loki.

Thor nodded silently against his neck.

God bless his silver tongue, Thor was fairly relaxed. His thighs clenched suddenly around Loki’s hips just the same when he breached him. Loki made sure Thor’s cock was not forgotten, or the sensitive shell of his ear, or the crook of his neck, while he worked his way in. He reared his head to watch Thor’s expression when he started to stimulate the knot of nerve endings inside. It took a few deep breaths, and some expertly targeted manipulation, for Thor’s frown to become something else, fluttering eyes, glazing over.

“Yeah?” asked Loki against his brother’s mouth, some time later, as he circled his anus with two fingers. "Alright?"

How Thor’s expression had changed then, when Loki started to push in. It wasn’t yet bliss, but it was something perhaps Thor had never felt before, and it looked a lot like greed.

“Fuck,” he whispered, with a shudder.

Loki’s cock throbbed deeply at that. This was going to happen. It was going to happen tonight.

His brother wouldn’t loosen his grip on him, arms and legs, and Loki’s movements were very restricted. Whatever worked for Thor was fine, he guessed, but finger-fucking was out of the question from that angle. Another time. Three fingers, just burrowing in, widening the passage.

“Breathe,” he said, and Thor chuckled, and kissed him.

After slicking up, Loki held himself and rubbed the head against Thor’s hole. He was rock hard, Thor wasn’t. He rolled his hips within the tight grip of Thor’s thighs, pushing, pushing, not fucking in yet, just… Their bodies were swaying together now, Thor’s mouth insistent on his. It was almost an accident when the head found the spot and on an upward thrust it slipped in. Loki gasped, Thor was holding his breath. Ok, this is not a drill. Don’t stop moving now, slowly, but don’t stop. Careful now, gently, gently. Their hips were rolling together, Thor was whimpering ever so quietly. With his face in Thor’s neck, breathing deeply, Loki kept pushing until he was in. Don’t stop. Keep moving,
keep moving. The burn he’s feeling will soon become a spicy edge if you just keep moving.

“Fuck…” whispered Thor then, as Loki risked broader movements.

“God, fuck…” he moaned. “Thor… ah, fuuuuck…”

Reduced to an inarticulate babboon. He was fucking Thor… And now his brother was tilting his hips and pressing against him, his fingers probably leaving prints on his back where he was clinging for dear life, and his breathing was shuddery, almost like sobbing.

“Loki…” he muttered. “Loki…”

This had to be the most artless fuck in the history of fucking ever, no technique, no sprezzatura, just slow rutting, and this fucking animal need to bury himself ever deeper, to get closer, to get more of their skins to touch. Thor’s hands feeling his arse as if it was a crystal ball, revering and greedy. And his cock was hard again, pressed between their rippling stomachs.

He really had no fucking grip on the situation anymore, if he had ever had it at all. He had lost it when Thor had started to fuck up properly, his hot breath right by his ear as pace picked up, and became more anxious, hips slapping together fast and dirty, the wet slick and slap and their breathing, kissing then, kissing. Loki propped himself up on his hands to fuck faster, and nearly fucking lost it when Thor arched his back, lost in pleasure now, clenching around him, his cock jutting up, hard and demanding. Loki fucked that bit harder, and Thor had a hand to himself, stripping fast. He felt it when Thor came, it was fucking beautiful, and he could let go now, thank fucking god, and down the mountainside he tumbled right after, his brother’s heels kicking the small of his back, his fiery blue eyes fixed on him, his mouth welcoming him when Loki buried himself deep and collapsed on his brother as he spilled.

He thought Thor had fallen asleep. He was on his back next to him, where he had stayed, spread-eagled, after Loki had peeled himself off his body. It was a long time before either of them moved. Now Thor sat up carefully on the edge of the bed, Loki watching him closely, heart pumping hard all of a sudden. That frown on Thor’s face.

“Is it always like that?” his brother asked.

“Like what, what is,” babbled Loki.

“This… sensation. I can still feel you.”

What the fuck does one say to that, with the swarm of rabid bees that used to be in one’s underbelly suddenly crowding in one’s throat.

“You get used to it.”

His brother’s face had never looked more impenetrable. Loki wanted a fucking answer, but he guessed it would come, in time. Thor stood up, pensive still. With verticality came some new sensations. Suddenly his brow scrunched up with confusion and alarm. And Loki burst out laughing, his apprehension turned into a mild fit of hysterics.

“You get used to that too,” he said.
Thor laughed, thank fuck, and made for the bathroom with a, er, distinct rigidity to his step.

Loki could murder for a fag. His addiction was psychological, and he could put the things down for weeks when he pleased, but right now he felt a very physical craving. Fuck L.A. It wasn’t legal even on the bloody balcony. Not that he would ever set foot on Thor’s balcony, where he could be spotted…

His turn in the bathroom. In the mirror he stared at himself. You’ve just fucked Thor Odinson, how are you feeling. Like I should be chucked out of the guild in disgrace, what the fuck was that? Was his brother awfully disappointed? Not exactly what he’d been sold… Jesus fuck. You’ve just popped Thor Odinson’s cherry.

“Hey,” said his brother drowsily from bed when Loki came back. Thor was clearly settling down for sleep, but his eyes opened wide when he saw what Loki was doing.

“What are you doing?” he asked, quite unnecessarily, if you asked Loki.

“What does it look like I’m doing,” said Loki, buttoning up his flies.

“You’re… you’re not leaving are you?”

“It’s half past two, of course I’m fucking leaving. I’m not going to get up at five in the morning to sneak out when I’m awake now.”

Thor was speechless.

“You could not possibly have expected me to spend the night,” said Loki. And rolled his eyes at Thor’s totally busted look.

“Loki, just… We’ll tell them we were drunk celebrating and you passed out.”

“Tell who? The maid? The reception guy? The people we meet in the corridor? They’re not going to ask, they’re just going to wonder, and before you know it they don’t wonder, they suspect. Because what you said would be a perfect explanation, if only we weren’t actually sleeping together.”

“Loki, you can’t fucking leave after…” That look on his face had taken twenty fucking years off him.

Loki sighed. And why the fuck was there a sting in his eyes.

“Don’t fucking do this,” he said, rubbing his face, sitting back down on the bed. “Don’t put me in this position every time.”

“What position.”

“Being the sensible one.”

Thor’s frown, getting pissed off now. Fucking great.

“I can’t bloody stay, you know I can’t. It’s too risky. And no, don’t give me that bleeding let them think whatever they want mumbo-jumbo. We don’t let them think, period, end of. We protect this, ok? We’re brothers. We’re fucking. It has its downsides. We take what we can and we’re grateful for what we get. And don’t fucking sulk at me. It’s as if you think I get a kick out of this. I hate it more than you. Yes I fucking do, don’t look at me like that. I was already hating it at fourteen, I have seniority.”
The sour twist in Thor’s mouth almost broke with a smile. There was a storm of expressions wrinkling his forehead and darkening his eyes, as he possibly fought to refrain himself from keeping the discussion going, when Loki had obviously made up his mind (not to mention that he was right, and Thor fucking knew it.) Loki was grateful for that at least.

“I can’t fucking believe you’re leaving,” said Thor, desolate, with but a thread of voice.

Loki sighed deeply again, wondering if they were OK for a kiss. Perhaps the question was in his eyes. Thor grabbed the neck of his shirt and pulled him down towards him, claiming his mouth, maybe one last attempt at cajoling him to stay.

“See you in the morning,” Loki whispered, an inch away. Thor kept his eyes shut, and his hand on Loki’s neck strong.

“I love you,” he grumbled, “and I hate this.”

Loki’s throat knotted tight.

He cried alone in his room for half an hour.

Chapter End Notes

How about this Lancelot thing. I fucking love it. Petition for this movie to happen for real.

And Loki’s play? Just like Lancelot, more of the kind of magic that flows when brainstorming with Discontentmadeglorious.

Oh, Eddie Redmayne, Natalie Dormer and John Hamm are all real actors.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

A fuck-up is a fuck-up is a fuck-up.

Chapter Notes

Meh. It was necessary, because there were unfinished things from the last one, so I wrote it. Next one should be better. Anyway, here's Wonderwall.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Thor had come to hate the sound of his phone alarm with the strength of a million suns. For the last month, it had been timely buzzing him out of bed to another day of gruelling press circus away from London. When it went off that morning, he had been awake for a long while, lying on his back, brooding, getting himself steadily more riled up. And so, when the bloody thing started with the thrice-accursed tinkle-bell tune, he was clumsy with rage as he fiddled impatiently with the touchscreen to shut it up. Once he finally managed to turn it off, the thing went flying half way across the room (and landed on the thick carpet — luxury suite. Angry, not stupid.)

He had a solid, stable, sour twist on his lip. It had also been there a while. The night before had seeped gently into his conscience as he woke up, the whole suite of emotions replaying in quick succession as it all came back to him, so it had been a smile there at first. It had vanished as the flow of events neared its conclusion. Thor had started to get upset last night already, shortly after his brother had bailed out on him; he had gone to sleep still upset, and he was upset right now, and increasingly more so.

He had a thousand things to say to his brother about last night, and he was, in his mind. Loki had made it sound so unavoidable, so mandatory, but there were many other alternatives to leaving less than thirty fucking minutes after they… Was it even really necessary that they slept in different rooms? Was anybody really paying attention to where Loki Laufeyson spent the night? This hotel was like a tiny city, for god’s sake, and it was jam-packed with celebrities of all categories right now. How famous did Loki think he was, tapes or no tapes? But in spite of that, if Loki really believed he absolutely had to go, was it such a fucking sacrifice to get up early, in exchange for spending a bit more time together, when they hadn’t seen each other in a month and they had just…? Yeah, very thoughtful of you, Loki, thank you. Hey, you’ve only just popped my fucking cherry, no biggie! By all means go and get your sleep.

Deep, huffy breath, the twist in his lip still there, and still twisted.

When he sat up to go to the bathroom, he felt a pinch in his butt and an unexpected urge to cry. He was overcome with fury and self-pity. What the fuck, Odinson, man up. Gritting his teeth, he walked
stiffly to the ensuite, cursing Loki under his breath with every step (and feeling pretty awful for it, but not so much that he really tried to stop). He splashed cold water on his face after he washed his hands, and then some more, and then some more, trying to freshen the fucking crying out of him. Because seriously, what the fuck? He was a grown-ass man, what was that all about? Was it really about the goddamned cherry? Jesus Christ, man, it’s fucking symbolic, ok? That was emphatically not the first time you’ve ever had sex, which is what this cherry thing is really about. You’re getting all softie and teary over a fucking posture.

But it kinda felt like a big deal to him, ok?, so shoot him. He had been anticipating this for weeks, maybe even years, if he was totally honest with himself, and this is not how he had imagined the after-party. He had always, always been there for Loki in the aftermath of these big ones, ok? Always. He’d been there to cuddle and comfort and soothe. Wasn’t that what one did? And yes, alright, they had been younger and all, sure, and the dynamics between them went in the direction they went, and the hugger here was Thor, sure, and Loki wasn’t exactly a lynx when it came to other people’s needs, but… Goddammit, would it have killed him to stay for a fucking cuddle? Fucking hell, brother.

He sat on the bed (that weird, burning throb again) and took yet another deep breath. He didn’t want to be so bloody angry. He wanted to be able to chalk it to Loki being Loki, and not think twice about it, but be glad that his brother was there and put everything else to one side. Because it was not like Thor believed that Loki had done it on purpose, was it? His brother had just balanced his priorities and, Loki being Loki, his paranoia had come on top. And if they were going to get anywhere as a couple, Thor would have to get used to negotiating this kind of disappointments, and not start to build up resentment over them, because Loki was Loki, and he would always be Loki, and Thor could not let it get to him too much and…

…And fuck him, fuck this, fuck everything! He roared out loud, fists clenched tight. Damn!

Well, what he was absolutely not going to do right now, is fucking deal with this in the bleeding Sunroom restaurant, in full view of the fucking crème of the American entertainment industry. He was very much not in the mood to put on a fucking matinee show of platonic brotherhood, alright? Not when he was still rigid from having been incestuously buggered just the night before. Ok? *Fuck.This.*

He went to fetch the phone where it had landed (his tailbone area complained when he bent forward). He got typing.

“Skipping breakfast. Meet me here when you’re done.” There. Civilised enough — no cursing. He furiously pressed send.

He ordered room service, laid back on the bed to wait for it, and sulked.

Rightful indignation, it itched so good. He was not a patient or a tranquil man, but this?, this he could do for hours, stew in acid on a low simmer, and have a lovely time with it. Perhaps he was a bit of a kid like that. So? (“Thor, come right back here and make peace with your brother!” No way! He started it!)
With the noise of the hair dryer, it was a while before Loki realised he had a message. He had achieved a reasonably frizz-free, straight finish, but it had taken him a while. That length was an absolute nightmare. Not his favourite way to employ thirty-seven precious minutes of his life.

So he wasn’t in the best mood to begin with and, upon discovering the handful of words his brother had deigned to address him with, Loki became aware of the physical curling of his top lip as it happened.

He was expecting this. Fearing it, more like. Expecting it, however, as it turned out, didn’t mean being prepared to take it with good grace. Neither did being right, and have his gifts as seer confirmed, contribute to ease his aggravation one single tiny bit. Just this once, he would have preferred to be proven wrong. Because, after the way things had gone down yesterday, Loki was shitting bricks. He had been hoping against hope that he was overreacting, as usual, but with a cold blade of anxiety in his stomach, he was now pretty sure that he was not overreacting, that he should be shitting bricks, and that he was welcome to go ahead and consider the romantic partnership he was a half of as officially past the doors of the realm of Not Okay.

And it was Loki’s fault.

(And it wasn’t bricks, but rather the fucking huge concrete blocks they build wave breakers with.)

Laufeyson, you complete and utter moron, you should have stayed last night. The thought had hit him this morning like the slap of a wet fish across the face, so bleeding obvious, clear as day, and unmissable. Too fucking late of course, always too late. He should have stayed, and he had not, and there was no fixing that now. He always, always did this shit, he was forever fucking up like this. He was a cold, thoughtless prick, self-centred and oblivious. It’s not like he didn’t care for other people’s feelings (he had had enough contact with shrinks that they would have spotted any hypothetic psychopathic tendencies if he had them, yay for science). It was just that he patently sucked at acting in consequence. It was so glaringly self-evident this morning, and yet it had not even crossed his mind last night that his brother might need him there. Or maybe it had, but it surely had not made a dent in his obsession to get out as soon as possible and run to safety. So yeah, not a psychopath, only that his thoughts were not on other people’s feelings, but somewhere else that mattered more to him, as they always were. How many times had he pulled shit like that on Sigyn, how many times had he failed to see that she needed something from him when it mattered. Not an hour later, not days after the fact, but when it mattered. And, of course, by the time the news reached Loki’s thick skull, and until the day they started to build flying DeLoreans, there was nothing Loki could really do to put things right.

Learn from it, Sigyn said at times, when he was in full self-pitying mode. Ever the optimist. And Loki would promise himself that he would (Sigyn’s optimism was catchy. Not that it ever stuck, not with Loki’s immune system anyway), but then, next time, he fucked up all over again. Count on Loki for anything from forgetting her birthday to neglecting to ask about her mother’s health, after only that morning she had mentioned that she was having surgery, with a special mention for Loki’s personal favourite, frequently dumping on her all the contents of his mind and heart, and never finding three bleeding seconds to ask “and how are you, my dear?”

Sigyn had the patience (or the pseudo-masochistic disposition, or both) of a saint. She endured Loki’s fuck-ups, acknowledged and accepted his apologies when he could bring himself to surmount the hill of shame and offer them, and the next time it happened, there was a clean slate for Loki to merrily carry on fucking up again. Furthermore, Sigyn seemed to expect less and less from him in that department every time, and she also seemed to appreciate it even more whenever Loki surprised her (and himself) doing something attentive. And so, Loki rested more or less reassured that what they had with Sigyn could go the distance — even if, for Sigyn’s sake, it might not be entirely fair
that it did.

Now, Thor… Goddammit, if there was someone on this planet who should know not to expect much from Loki, that would be him. But, well, Thor was not Sigyn, was he? And if Loki was wondering how many passes did he get with Thor, before his blunders started counting, here was his answer — not many.

So Loki was a sack of oblivious shit, that was a fact. A fact he faced every day and, not that Thor would believe him, but Loki suffered for it. Yes, he fucking did, ok? He didn’t want to be a bad person. He didn’t want to be a neglectful twat. He wanted to be considerate and caring, and be able to magically anticipate Thor’s emotional needs and provide for them. He wanted Thor to never doubt that he loved him. But of course he would want that — wasn’t Loki after all a selfish little shit? It was in his own interest to keep his golden brother happy, fulfilled, desperately in love with him, and just plain old satisfied.

Being brutally honest now, Loki-boy, but how many chances did he have of that happening, when he was always pulling this shit on him? In Thor’s language (in human language, goddammit), didn’t being a self-centred prick who’s never there when it matters translate into “he doesn’t love me, not that much, not really”? Wasn’t that exactly what he was communicating every time he fucked up like that? And bloody hell, he fucked up like that all the bloody time. Perhaps not in such a big way, but when you’re like Thor, and not a martyred saint like Sigyn (and when you’re a lover, not just a friend), the little things count, they add up, and they nibble at you, eroding the relationship little by little.

Having said that, soul-searching was all good and fair, and Loki may be a sack of shit, but Thor wasn’t a saint either. And Loki had surely fucked up with him but, with one god or another as Loki’s bloody witness, so had Thor. And sure, it’s not like fourteen-year-old Loki forgave and forgot — more like took it, punished Thor for it, and went back for more —, and he very certainly hoarded up his wrongs and reproaches like a greedy little squirrel, all there for the day when he needed to make things worse, but still… He might not have the right to ask his brother for some fucking leeway, but you know what, it wouldn’t kill Thor to offer some, out of the kindness of his heart if nothing else, and just… turn up for bloody breakfast, and give Loki one chance to fucking say sorry at least, or something.

And this breakfast thing was in Thor’s own interest too in the first place, damn him! What did Loki have to do to fucking get that into his head? He was not asking him for a favour! It was not as if Loki enjoyed this either! Couldn’t Thor put aside his grievances for an hour and do what was best for both of them? Oh nay, not I, the son of Odin, I shall not demean myself to put on an act, for I am too high and mighty for that. And if it all goes to hell because I was too proud to lie, well, at least my honour is intact. Right? Right? Wasn’t that it, in a bleeding nutshell? Ah, Loki had his black, mean, self-centred little heart to blame for many of his mistakes, but Thor had his pride and his arrogance and his temper. Even in that, his brother was a radiant prince with shiny, dignified reasons, and Loki the despicable lowlife, but the fuck-up was a fuck-up just the same.

Anyway, fuck you, brother, and fuck your shitty-arse message. And if you expected a reply, well, better luck next time.

Loki went up for breakfast indeed, showed his face amid the industry A-listers from out of town, and even exchanged a few words with a couple of the theatre-loving ones who recognised him and engaged, and from there he went straight out and into a cab to meet with Peggy Carter, who was able to make time for him this morning, even on last minute warning. He didn’t let Thor know. Fuck him.
“Excuse me for one second,” said Loki, as he felt inside his satchel for the phone, which had just pinged with a message alert.

“Where are you”

Well, look who it isn’t! It had only taken Thor five fucking hours to inquire as to Loki’s whereabouts. I could be lying dead in my room, he groused to himself in silence, with a sour expression that made Peggy ask if everything was ok.

“Yes, just a moment,” he said, as he quickly typed, “Meeting. Peggy.” Send. There. “Sorry, what was that again?”

Thor did not text back. And fuck you too very much, Mr. Odinson.

The conversation resumed. It had begun with a quick read of the script, only Loki’s scenes (it would be a long movie), and then a broad summary of their first thoughts. They compared their visions for the characters, see if they met. As it turned out, rather than disagreeing, each had been considering different aspects, and so, now that they were putting their thoughts in common, what they were getting was a richer, more nuanced, more intricate picture than either of them had started with. How very promising. Loki called it a good omen.

From there, they had moved on to technicalities (smoke and mirrors — they discovered that they both delighted in visual magic and camera tricks, and got really excited sharing their mutual enthusiasm for the type of old-school, handcrafted effects Francis Coppola had used in his *Dracula*). After that, it had been crossdressing, androgyny, and Loki’s previous forays into feminine roles. John Boorman’s *Excalibur* came next, Nicol Williamson’s Merlin and Helen Mirren’s Morgana. By then the conversation had a life of its own, and soon after it sailed boldly into Arthurian lore, chivalric virtues, medieval epic, the nature of heroism in different cultures, history, fame, folklore, myth, love and death. They had had lunch brought in so that they wouldn’t have to interrupt it, they were so embroiled in it.

“Why Lancelot?” Loki had asked at one point.

“Oh, I really like the idea of the best knight of them all striving for purity and perfection, and failing so miserably,” she laughed. “His defeat is so human, and underneath all the mythology, Lancelot himself is so human. In a story of kings and lords and divinity and magic, this part is still about three excellent human beings who love each other, and never meant or wished to do any harm, and yet they manage to shatter each other’s hearts, and bring down Camelot with them, this perfect time that had been what they had joined together and striven to bring about; and when it’s all said and done, they still carry on loving and respecting each other. I have always connected with that. And poor dear Lance, he’s powerless against his passions. I can’t help but love him more because of the nature of his flaw. Which is not even really a flaw, is it? It’s just life. They started telling these stories centuries ago, and yet it could have happened this morning.”

Loki had a good look at her, and decided to bite his tongue. Dearest, it’s not Thor you should have cast as Lancelot, he was thinking. But she worshipped Steve so much, she couldn’t even see him as the heartbreaker, but the heartbroken one. Her pure and perfect knight, always trying to do what was right, and make everyone happy, so earnest and good and decent, and he had just gone and dumped her for his childhood friend. And her response? To love him even more for it, and write him an epic to sing his praises to the world. These two, I swear…

They parted shortly after Thor’s message, but not without arranging a future appointment that was to
take place in London (since they would be shooting at Pinewood and on location in Scotland, fucking perfect), and would already be involving the production, costume, make-up, and special effects designers. Loki had even let her kiss him goodbye. He admired her. Passion, brains, courage, conviction, and the well-furnished, perfectly organised, fully confident brain of an army general. No wonder Tony was trusting her with a production of this size, even though she had never directed a movie before. Tony had a good eye for people’s capabilities, and Miss Carter surely came through as a leader able to harness the power of a crew of hundreds, and leading a star-studded cast through literal (if pretend) battle, and into cinematic glory.

Thor’s text, and his silence afterwards, had refreshed in Loki what his conversation with Peggy had succeeded in putting out. From eager to reunite with his brother and excited to share all this great stuff with him, and keep talking 

Lancelot, he was back to a bitter, corrosive miff. And so, it would seem he was not heading back to the hotel just yet, because fuck you, that’s why. And he had promised Bucky a phone call and a chat after all.

“Where? There’s a nice place just opposite…” Bucky was saying.

“Nowhere public,” cut Loki. “Prying ears.”

“Oh, right,” said Bucky. “My motel, then?”

Bucky came to greet him in the lobby, gave him a hug and a kiss, as he always did, cuddly kitten that he was, and led him to his room. The motel was a refurbished, old-fashioned place from the 1950s, only two storeys, horse-shoe shape, a small pool within the crescent. It was busy, mostly people from the industry, Loki wagered, judging from the high occupancy of the rooms and low use of the pool. They made their way under the covered corridor that ran along the inside of the horse-shoe, dodging smokers and talkers, and got into Bucky’s room.

Loki had brought along his tablet with the rough draft of the play. He let Bucky have a quick browse. He pointedly did not tell him his were the first pair of human eyes to see it, besides his own. He didn't want Bucky to make a big deal out of it - or himself, because if he went down that route, he’d start to feel guilty that he had not shown it to Thor and Sigyn first. He didn't want to make a big deal out of it, period, although all that mental jazz probably indicated that he already had. (And specifying “human” because he had written lots with Minnie’s moist nuzzle on his arm.)

“It’s the evening before a big event, an award ceremony,” explained Loki, to give Bucky the context. “There’s this Great Actor who will be receiving a lifetime achievement award. For the time being, we’ll call him Odin, for example. Then there’s this Great Actress who is his wife, we’ll provisionally call her Frigga, getting ready to leave. The curtain rises on their bedroom-cum-closet-cum-boudoir, royal proportions. Odin walks in and out of scene like a headless chicken, needing his wife for everything —what shoes, what shirt, what tie, what cufflinks, what socks, everything. He’s anxious and under pressure, but he’d never admit to it. Instead he just gets cranky and short-tempered. Frigga is even-headed, calm and in control, majestic even. She’s sorting herself out, and her husband, and also handling their little boy, (he’s eight or nine, we’ll call him Loki for now), who just won’t be made to stay in bed, with all the hassle and excitement. His mother is very patient with him, she makes him feel important asking him what he thinks of this dress or these earrings, asks his help to button up or zip up, and keeps answering his questions, even though she’s clearly in a hurry.”

Bucky had a warm look on his face, full of fondness, and perceptive. Loki pushed on ahead, as if he didn't see it.
“Anyway, Odin gets more and more obnoxious, and another Frigga steps in to call him to order. She’s harsher, sterner, the actress that plays her is a bit older than the other, and she’s not dressed to leave. She puts him in his place. Then turns to talk to the first Frigga, and they have a good rant.

“Frigga 1 and Frigga 2.”

“Yes. About Odin, marriage, professional jealousy, yada yada. And at some point, another Frigga turns up, a lot younger, wilder, full of fire. She’s completely overwhelmed by the burden of family, and exasperated. And more Friggas keep appearing.”

“Do they represent like… her different ages, or…?”

“The different voices in her, her *personae*. All that she’s been, all that she is. Actress, mother, immature young fury, mature wise woman, so on. They’re the same person, but have slightly different perspectives and different priorities.”

“Do the other characters see them? Do they interact with them?”

“Yes, mostly just one at a time, although there is one scene where several of them are talking around Odin, and Odin can hear them, and he’s going a bit insane. The idea here is that her complexity baffles him. It’s a bit difficult to explain, it will be clearer in rehearsals. Anyway, that’s the play. Friggas talking, Odin coming in and out, and Little Loki in the middle, who sees them all and understands nothing. Little Loki can only talk to Mother Frigga, and the rest he sees and hears but can’t interact with them, he doesn’t get them. But then, one third into the play, Older Loki comes in. That’s you.”

“Huh-huh.”

“Older Loki can see and hear everything, even the audience. These are Older Loki’s memories, of course, he remembers this night and what comes after — decadence and absence and melancholy — so the tone of the character is bittersweet. What he *is* discovering tonight is all the other Friggas. He’s seeing them for the first time, like an epiphany. So he’s just as puzzled as Little Loki in many ways. Of course, he understands more, and he can translate it for him, and he even tries to protect him from the things that are harder to take for a little boy — like, for example, that he is not the only axis of his mother’s world —, but at several times in the play, he’s just as confused as the rest. You have a few long speeches. Anyway, it goes from there. What do you think?”

Bucky smiled, scrolled down the screen of the tablet, and nodded.

“So cool,” he said. “Can’t wait to get started.”

“It still needs work,” said Loki, retrieving his tablet and exiting the document.

“How much longer?”

“Ugh, I don’t know. Sometimes everything fits and it’s a toboggan slide, other times it’s like wading through the Swamp of Despair. But at least it feels like the structure is solid and it won’t need any major overhauls. It feels locked now, like it won’t crumble on me, and I won’t lose it. It’s just a matter of sharpening the dialogue, cutting off the flab, and there’s a few scenes that need digging deeper, but that’s all.”

“Do you have the finance?”

“Natasha has started to look into it. But I’m fronting the money, so worry not, it will be happening.”
“Are you that rich?” asked Bucky.

“I have my mother’s inheritance. Anyway, your dialogues are not finished, but your longer speeches pretty much are, I’ll send them to you. If I can stop tweaking them, that is, can’t keep my hands off for long. But the meat is all there. I’ve only been working on them my whole life after all.”

Bucky gave him one of his looks, the kind that said, “I see you.”

“You’re putting everything you’ve got into this, aren’t you?” he said.

Loki returned the look, laden with meaning.

“Not everything,” he said, with intent.

Bucky held his stare. What was he waiting for, permission?

“So,” said Loki, looking away now. “Any questions? About not the play,” he said. There, permission granted.

Bucky took a second.

“Just one, really,” he said. “Thor. Is it what I think it is?”

Loki threw him a sideways glance, and nodded. He assessed his reaction out of the corner of his eye. Bucky had a thinking frown. He seemed grave, disarmed rather than shocked, and definitely not repulsed. Soon, his frown was dissolving into a humorous, commiserating grin.

“And I thought the situation with Steve was complicated,” he said.

Loki smiled without joy.

“How long has it been going on?” asked Bucky.

Tricky question, thought Loki. Let’s start with the simple answer.

“After the shoot,” he said.

“I see.”

“Do you.” Loki was not so sure.

Bucky looked at him as if he had something in his gut.

“What,” prompted Loki.

“Uuuuh… Feel free to tell me to mind my own business but, how did you guys…? I mean, it was so hard for me to realise that what I felt for Steve was not, uh, friendship, and you know how difficult it was for us to actually... get it out in the open, and take that step, and we were only best friends. I mean, he’s your brother. How did you even know? Was it when you guys found out you were adopted or…?”

A weary, lightless smile touched Loki’s lips. He really, really didn’t feel like it, not today.

“One day I’ll tell you the whole story,” he said, “I promise.”

“Alright,” conceded Bucky. And after a spell, “Anyway, it figures.”
“What does.”
“I always thought it would take someone pretty special to hook you up right. This… well, it suits you.”
“Does it now,” said Loki, bristly all of a sudden. “Because I’m a freak of nature?”
Bucky gave him a face.
“No, asshole. Because you’re so… out of the ordinary. You don’t play by anyone else's rules, do you?”
“Nobody asked my opinion when they wrote them,” said Loki, subdued now, in spite of the subject matter.
Bucky smiled and ruffled Loki’s hair. Had it been anyone else, he would have bitten their hands off.
“So, anyway, how is it going. The relationship,” asked Bucky.
Loki clenched his jaw.
“Not good?” asked Bucky.
“Today or in general?”
Bucky gave him an eyebrow.
“What’s wrong?”
“Don’t fucking get me started,” Loki grumbled.
“Oh, come on, what is it?”
Loki weighed down for a moment whether talking about it would do any good. He went for it anyway. He was clearly desperate for a good rant.
“We were supposed to meet up for breakfast and he stood me up,” he said. And then he elaborated, because judging by Bucky’s quizzical look, he was clearly not managing to convey just how bright the flame of justice shone on his side of the argument, and how right he was in being upset and up in arms. “I had told him we needed to show up and look brotherly in public, after that hug he gave me yesterday. But no, of course, he can’t be fucking bothered.”
“That’s it?”
“That’s it?” repeated Loki, outraged. “He sends this pissy text this morning, and then it takes him five hours to want to find out why I didn’t reply.”
“…You didn’t reply for five hours?”
“He was basically summoning me up to his chambers when I was finished with my peasant duties, to which he could not debase himself. He didn't even bother explaining or apologising or anything. So no, I don’t fucking reply to this kind of thing.”
Bucky raised his eyebrows.
"So... He's there, you're here, you're both pissed off in your corners, and now what?"
Loki shrugged, petulant. Bucky laughed. Loki went white with affront.

“Sorry,” said Bucky, holding his hands up, still laughing. “It’s just… it sounds like such a brothers thing. Next you’re going to tell me that he started it.”

Loki looked daggers.

“Hey, listen,” said Bucky, more composed now. “I don’t know what this is about, I think I’m not getting the whole picture. I’m not saying you don’t have a cause here, all I’m saying is, you’re not going to patch this up thinking like brothers.”

“What?”

“I mean, guys, you’re a couple. You can’t go to daddy with this.”

“Go to daddy…?” growled Loki.

“Thor’s your man now, right?” challenged Bucky. “You want to win and score points, or you want this fixed?” And he didn’t wait for Loki’s answer. ”Then get off your high horse, get back there and tell him you’re sorry.”

Loki’s mouth gaped wide to utter a deafening protest, probably full of profanities.

“Tell him you’re sorry and can we please talk,” cut Bucky. “Fix this thing, get talking like civilised people, and then you can start airing the dirty laundry, once you’re on good terms again. But don’t just fucking stay here nursing your hump.”

Loki frowned, mouth thin with a pout that seemed unassailable to reason.

“You want to sort this out or not?” insisted Bucky.

Loud, crabby, eloquent silence from Loki.

“So get your ass over there, already!” urged Bucky. ”Fuck your pride!”

“Is that what you do with Steve,” grumbled Loki.

“If we should ever fight, sure, that’s what I’ll do.”

“He lets you win, doesn’t he.”

Bucky smirked, cocky, gorgeous.

“I’m sure he wouldn’t but, you see, he has to. I’m always right.”

“Jesus Mary and Surfing Joseph!” exclaimed Loki, taking a hand dramatically to his chest and all, upon opening the door of his hotel room and finding his brother there, lying on his bed, fiddling with the phone. “How the fuck did you get in here? No, don’t fucking tell me. You sweet-talked a maid, didn’t you?” he snapped. And he looked away, with a wince, because that didn’t sound a lot like I’m sorry or can we please talk, did it? Damn.
His heart was still beating madly from the fright. He looked at Thor’s stormy, sullen expression, and took a deep breath. After putting down his satchel and emptying his pockets, he rubbed his forehead, tried to bring himself up to do what he had spent the last half hour psyching himself up to do.

“Where the fuck have you been all day,” asked Thor, cold, curt, interrupting his brother’s efforts.

Loki flicked him a glare of indignation at that tone, but quickly took it away, and breathed in deep.

“Working,” he said, very short himself. “I had a meeting with Peggy. I told you.”

“Couldn’t it wait?” snapped Thor.

That tone, brother, that bloody tone. And he wasn’t giving him much room to slide so much as a little I’m sorry in edgeways. It was way past starting to annoy Loki.

“Well, since she was here and I’m here,” he said, pissy.

“Yes, and I’m fucking here too, did you forget that?”

“No,” said Loki, and he modestly thought that his own tone was a considerable triumph of will over burgeoning vexation.

“And it was more important than me?” said Thor. “More important than seeing me?”

“You were not exactly tripping over yourself to be with me this morning either,” retorted Loki. “And it was five fucking hours before you even began to fucking wonder where I was.”

Another wince of regret. Shit. First you get on civilised terms, then the dirty laundry.

His brother returned a dark, nasty look, full of spite. It was turning Loki’s stomach.

“So you were making me pay then,” said Thor, cryptically. “Great. Thanks.”

Loki frowned. What was he on about. And more disturbingh than that, why wasn’t he yelling at him yet.

“Is that all you did, meeting Peggy?” asked Thor.

And Loki was now starting to feel a churn of unrest. Why did it sound as if Thor already knew the answer.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you telling me the meeting lasted all day?”

Cold, cold in Loki’s belly.

“What are you getting at, Thor,” he said, warily.

Thor fiddled with his phone and held it up in front of him, screen to his brother. Colour drained from Loki’s face.

“I fucking hate L.A.,” he muttered, with a shudder.

A local online celebrity gossip website. Low quality photos, probably taken with a mobile phone by another guest, of Loki and Bucky in the motel, hugging, kissing, walking all cosy together, going
inside Bucky’s room.

“Anything to say?” said Thor.

Loki suddenly felt almost sick with shock and outrage.

“You don’t fucking believe I-…?” he gasped.

“I didn’t fucking believe anything until you just stood there and lied to me,” cut Thor, very cold.

Loki was nearly speechless for a moment.

“I didn’t even think about it!” protested Loki. “And it wouldn’t be the best fucking time to mention it anyway, since you get the fucking jitters whenever Bucky is concerned!”

“Ex-fucking-cuse me?” barked Thor. “I think I’m pretty damn reasonable, considering you all but fucked him in front of my very eyes just to spite me, only one year ago!” he roared. “And what the fuck am I to think? You disappear all day and don’t say a word for hours, and I know you’re pissed off with me and sulking, and then this? Spending the afternoon in Bucky’s fucking room, Loki?”

“We were bloody talking!” yelled Loki. “He saw the hug you gave me yesterday, as did the rest of L.A., and put two and two together! I had to fucking talk to him and do some damage control, and I couldn’t really fucking do it in a fucking diner for all the bloody parishioners to hear!”

Thor’s expression was contorted with anger. He wasn’t swayed, not one bit.

“Ok,” conceded Loki tiredly, spiteful but very calm — a deceiving calm, controlled fury seething just underneath. “Believe whatever you fucking want. We were fucking all afternoon. Because I was in a huff with you, I went and fucked Bucky. Well, of course I would, right? I mean, I’m Loki. I do these things just to spite you.”

Must have been the flare of self-loathing in his voice that did it. It seemed to quash Thor’s rage. His brother sighed deeply, rubbing his face with both hands.

“Baby, I never really believed that you-…”

“So what the fuck is this about then?” snarled Loki, cutting him, spirit of reconciliation be damned. Because there are fucking limits, and Thor had just stomped on them with both of his big, clumpy feet.

“It’s about you fucking disappearing without a word and spending all day away, when I haven’t seen you in a month and I’m fucking missing you!” yelled Thor.

“You were missing me so much, you couldn’t fucking wait to stand me up at breakfast!” Loki yelled back.

“Oh, for god’s sake, sod the fucking breakfast! Forgive me if I didn’t feel like putting on the brothers act when I’m still fucking limping from yesterday!”

And that quick look of hurt in Thor’s eyes… Loki went pale, his stomach turned again. Fuck, fuck, fuck. This is about that.

It sounded as if Thor had heard himself. He looked almost embarrassed. The silence in the room snapped, crackled and fucking popped, as Loki struggled with the sudden choke of guilt and terror. His throat was sandpaper dry. There was an elephant in the room the size of a fucking whale.
Your move, duh-brain.

“About that. Uh, yesterday,” he said, a thread of voice, about one year later. “I’m, I’m sorry. I should have stayed.”

“Yeah, well, it’s done now,” grumbled Thor, pretty fucking harshly.

“I said I’m fucking sorry!” screamed Loki, whining, panicky under his indignation. “What the fuck do you want from me, a pound of flesh? It’s like you’ve never fucked up in your whole life! Don’t I get some bloody—…”

“Calm the fuck down, Loki!” cut Thor, losing his cool good and proper now, eyes shut tight, hands in his hair. “That’s not what I… Jesus fuck!” A roar. “Fuck’s sake!” Another. Pacing. Definitely stiff at the hip, a slight limp.

Loki checked his hand. It was shivering. He was so bloody anxious, he had not even reacted to being told to calm down, one of the things he hated most in the whole fucking universe when he was in this kind of mood. He plummeted on the bed, head low, shoulders slumped. Thirteen weeks, he thought to himself.

“We’re not going to make it, are we,” he muttered, only a whisper.

“What?” said Thor, turning to him.

“It’s not getting any easier. We fight all the time. Look at you, you’re miserable. You can’t do it, can you?”

Thor had gone pale.

“What?”

“This. Us. The lies, the secret. It’s not going to work out, is it?”

Thor scrubbed his face. He looked flat out exhausted, hanging by a thread. The thought occurred that Loki going on a meltdown was not what his brother needed today, but he could feel himself tumbling down the rabbit-hole already.

“Loki…” Thor seemed to be thinking furiously, but he looked so tired. He was the voice of calm and reason when he spoke next. “It’s been a very long month. We don’t fight all the time back home, do we? And we’re not doing so bad with the secret thing. It’s just that, over here… It’s so fucking infuriating. We don’t only have to hide, we have to put up an act as well? We don’t do any fucking harm!”

“And you think that would make any difference to anyone?” said Loki, fiery again with his own fury. “I don’t know you, but I’m not hiding to protect the fucking public, alright? This is for ourselves! If this ever comes out, it’s not just our jobs we’re going to lose! This world is full of people who think they have every right to tell perfect strangers that the way they live their lives is disgusting, and that they should burn in hell, and lots more things that are not half as nice! Do you understand this, how fucking mean and horrible people are? Of course I fucking hate this, of course I find it humiliating and repulsive that we have to live in fear and hide and pretend, but… fucking hell, Thor, we would get hate, we would be spat at in the street, they would fucking organise campaigns against us! And the press? The press would have a field day with this. It’s not only what they would publish. They would also chase around like bloodhounds, stalk us wherever we went, set up a fucking camp in front of our door, and shout all sorts of shit at us to get a reaction and a photo. How proud and happy to be with me would you feel then? And have you thought what it would do to d-
... to Odin? He’d have a fucking stroke! It’s not just the shock, he would also pop a vein fearing that
his name and his legacy will now be covered in this! Do you think we would survive this kind of shit
storm? You and me, as a... whatever the fuck we are? It would fucking wreck us, Thor! You’d end
up hating the day we...!” his voice broke.

“Yes, yes, I know,” said Thor, shaking his head heavily, rubbing his eyes. “I know all that. You’re
saying exactly what was on my mind all these years. Why did you think I was keeping away? When
I didn’t go through with it the night of M.Butterfly, why do you think it was? I knew this part would
be hard, and that I would struggle. I just thought I could handle it better. But it just makes me so
fucking furious!”

And that was that, then, thought Loki, seeing a black, forbidding wall rising before his very eyes,
unsurmountable. He could see no escape clause, no way around this. Thor would never be ok with
it, it repulsed his nature. And maybe he might learn to manage it, but he would never be happy with
it. He would never be happy. It was impossible. This was impossible, and sooner or later it would fall
apart on its own.

And here come the waterworks. He walked away to one corner. Silly, yeah. Somewhat, locking
himself up in the bathroom sounded even worse.

“Baby...” muttered Thor, stunned. He approached him, one careful step, then another. “Baby, don’t
cry...”

More easily said than done. Would Loki end up in the bathroom after all.

Thor decided it was safe to hug him, or maybe just expedient. He closed the distance between them,
took him in his arms, and held him tight.

“It will work,” he said, as he shushed him. “We’ll make it work. I’ll do anything it takes, anything.
It’s hard but... Fuck it, it’s not hard. We’ve dealt with worse, so much worse, haven’t we? This is
nothing. I’ll try harder. Because it’s worth it. You make me so happy, baby. And you don’t want this
to end, do you? Are you unhappy with me?”

Loki was shaking his head before he could think what was the most useful answer. Instead of
cunning, he was sincere.

“I love you so much, baby,” muttered Thor by Loki’s hair. “I want to be with you, nobody else,
always. I’ll do whatever I have to do. We’ll deal with this, we’ll figure something out. I’m not
miserable at all. You make me so happy, baby, there’s nobody else for me but you. We’re good
together. I’m not going anywhere. We can do this.”

Loki was overwhelmed, the shower of words of love washing through him and soaking him,
dissolving the spiral of anxiety into wet rags. How did his brother do that. Not that Thor planned all
that much, but usually his instincts with Loki served him well. He was rocking him in his arms,
surrounding him, magically dispelling the blackness and keeping it at bay. Loki could still see it
there, and his brain was telling him that all those thoughts were real and reasonable, and that a hug
wasn’t going to change shit, that he should still be feeling panic and despair. And yet... How did
Thor do that?

They had relocated to the bed, and had been lying together on the covers for some time, tangled in
each other. Loki was not sobbing anymore. Thor was still petting his hair in long, slow strokes. Loki
had his face close to Thor’s chest, his brother’s breath hot on his forehead.
Do better, Laufeyson, is what he was thinking. Just because your brother can put up with an unfair amount of your shit, and still come back for more, doesn’t mean he should. Do better. And when you fuck up, you try and mend it too. Actually really fucking try. And then try some more, and try harder.

“Thor,” he muttered, after a shedload of psyching up.

“Yes, baby,” said his brother, one big hand on Loki’s waist, thumb stroking.

Come the fuck on, Laufeyson. Spit it out, now.

"I'm sorry. A-about today. I should not have disappeared like that. I was a brat."

"I'm sorry too," said Thor. "I should have done things differently."

Ok, thought Loki, phase one, completed. Now for phase two. He swallowed.

"And I'm sorry about yesterday,” he all but whispered. “I really am. I should have stayed.”

“…Ok,” said Thor, still petting.

Do Better. Try Harder.

“It was a totally shitty thing to do. Y-you would have never done it to me. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Thor gave him a little squeeze. Perfunctory, thought Loki. Actually Really Fucking Try Harder. Loki pulled away to meet his brother's eyes. Wasn’t easy.

“Are-are you alright?” he asked.

“I’m fine, baby,” said Thor, with a tight, cheerless smile.

“I know it was a big deal.”

Thor smiled wearily again. He didn’t say anything, so Loki did, resisting the mighty urge to bite his nails.

“It was a big deal for me too,” he said. Impossible to meet Thor’s eyes now. Wouldn’t be able to get it out if he did. “Huge. It meant so much to me, that you… That you wanted this with me. That you trusted me.”

When he dared raise his eyes now, he found Thor’s warm gaze on him. It felt unguarded now, soothed, brighter. Loki felt a bit bolder.

“I know it wasn’t… shit, I know it wasn’t what I had advertised. You caught me out cold. I wasn’t expecting it. I got… I was nervous, ok? I was overcome by… well, the situation, and-and you. H-how it felt. I sort of lost track of what it was about. It should have been about you, not me.” And now his tone turned from remorseful to pleading. “But don’t decide you hate it just yet, I swear it can be great, I-…”

“Baby, baby, hey, shh…” cut Thor, “baby, it was amazing,” he said, gently but with conviction.

Loki frowned, baffled.

“It was amazing,” insisted Thor, a warm smile still. “It felt… incredible. It was like… I don’t know,
like a completely different story, like a completely different place we had never been together before. Sounds sappy but, the connection, it was... I fucking loved it.”

Loki had a skeptical squint on.

“You should have seen yourself yesterday the way I saw you, baby,” expanded Thor. “You’re usually so smooth and fierce and in control, and I love it, you know I do, but to see you like a lump of warm butter, melting in my arms... I had never seen you like that. It was fucking wonderful.”

Ok, that didn’t make any fucking sense.

“I thought you wanted to let go and let me take charge,” argued Loki.

“Yeah, I do. But I also enjoy watching you become a total ruin because of me,” Thor smiled brightly, a bit on the cocky side.

Loki was puzzled on so many levels.

“Don’t you know I am always,” is all he could think of saying.

His brother smiled, stroking his face, a thumb over Loki’s lip.

“I can’t wait to do it again,” whispered Thor.

Loki’s eyes opened wide.

“But not right now,” Thor rushed to clarify. “I’m still a bit…”

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” jumped Loki, anxious. “Did I get too rough? To be honest with you, right now I don’t really remember what I did. I got a bit, uh, carried away.”

“No, no, no,” hurried Thor. “No, you were very gentle, nothing hurt, not one bit.” A reassuring smile. “But I just feel... you know (harrumph), weird. Um, stretched. My lower back sort of... throbs?”

A broad smile now spreading over Loki’s mouth. This was kind of adorable. Thor was.

“It got me thinking about, well, the first time,” mumbled Thor. “What a bloody animal I was. I went in like a bulldozer. Sorry.”

“What did we know,” said Loki, faraway eyes for a blink, reminiscing.

“I must have hurt you a lot,” said Thor.

Loki shrugged.

“Well, you are big, and with no prep... But the way I remember it, you were very careful. Not to mention that you lasted, what, three seconds?”

“Oh,” said Thor, giving him a shove. But then the reminiscing bug caught up with him too, and he smiled, dreamy eyes. “God. I remember thinking I’m fucking Loki I’m fucking Loki I’m fucking Loki. The thought was even more overpowering than the sensation. What is it about sticking your cock in that seems so fucking important.”

Loki was grinning too, similar thoughts in his mind. Where his brother had said ‘important’ he would have said ‘earth-shattering’, but that was just a matter of literary styles, and Loki had always been
They looked at each other, an eternity contained between two blinks. Loki found it hard to breathe. Thor put one big hand on his brother’s face, and Loki nudged into it, eyes closed. It was inconceivable that, only half an hour ago, he was convinced that he had to let go of this without a fight, that there was not one shred of hope for them, and no future. Right now, Loki felt as if it would take a crowbar to pry him apart from his brother, and from this. That he would fight tooth and nail for it, and that he could. He wondered with a shudder whether this feeling of certainty was just another sway of his faulty mind, or whether this was his sane self, finally seeing through the anxiety, and appraising the situation as it actually stood.

“So how long does this usually take?” said Thor.

Loki focused. He saw that Thor’s eyes were cast down, shy.

“What?”

“You know. Before we can do it again,” said Thor.

Loki grinned, with a pinch of mischief.

“Depends. Couple of days. Maybe even tomorrow.” He had butterflies, can you believe this? They had been shagging each other’s brains out for weeks, and Loki was getting bloody butterflies over this.

“Look at us, silly schoolgirls,” mused Loki, with a snigger. His tone was dismissive, but there was a fluster there, undeniable.

“Looking forwards to it,” mumbled Thor, rosy cheeks.

“I’ll make it worth the wait,” murmured Loki, suggestive, turning on the naughty, because a schoolgirl he was not, goddammit. Staring intently. “There are so many things I want to do to you…”

Thor swallowed.

“There are so many things I want you to do to me,” he replied, apparently not a schoolgirl either. He sounded a bit short of breath already.

So did Loki.

“I want to ride you,” said Thor, husky. “I’ve fantasised so much about it. Get on top of you and tease you and torment you and tear you to pieces, like you do to me.”

Loki gasped. Bloody hell.

“Who are you and what have you done to my brother…” he said.

“I want to get on my hands and knees and let you take what you want. I want to get on my back again to see your face when you come inside me.”

Loki’s heart was racing, blood pooling south.

“You’re a tease…” he said, admiration in his tone. “I’m impressed.”

“I want you to bend me over dad’s desk in his studio, in Asgard,” whispered Thor, too bloody
naughty to say it any louder.

Loki’s breathing stopped, his heart hammering now.

“Fuck…” he breathed, eyes fixed on Thor’s, burning. “You better not be teasing about that…”

Thor smirked, cockeyed grin, positively lewd.

Their teeth clacked when they simultaneously plunged in for the kiss.

“Ow…” moaned Loki, but his brother was already going to town on his neck, as he fumbled with Loki’s clothes and his own. When they kissed again, they managed to hit the lips.

“Want me to fuck you?” asked Thor, busy with Loki’s flies.

“I want you to suck me,” whispered Loki.

The heat in Thor’s eyes, bloody hell…

“Do you want me on my knees?”

“Fuck, yeah,” panted Loki, “get on your knees.”

Thor tugged strongly at his brother’s trousers, and dragged him down the bed with them. He had to delay for an anti-climatic minute to deal with Loki’s shoes, before he could get it all off him. With his bottom half undressed now and perking up, Loki sat up on the edge of the bed, propped on his stretched arms. Thor kneeled on the carpet between his legs and dived in without giving him a second to catch his breath. He was working him furiously, no teasing now. Wrapping his legs around Thor’s shoulders, Loki held on for dear life on his brother’s hair. Thor groaned around his cock and Loki nearly fucking came right there and then. When he met his brother’s eyes, he almost did again. Thor was sucking him like his life depended on it, jerking him off whenever he needed a breather, and in no bloody time Loki was off, jolting, shuddering.

He whimpered when he saw Thor wipe his mouth. His brother started to open his jeans straight after, still in a frenzy. Loki moved to reciprocate, got Thor’s jeans and pants just halfway down his butt and leaned over to take him in his mouth. Thor barely let him have a taste before he gave him a forceful shove that left him sprawling on the bed, and a fierce, sloppy kiss to make sure he stayed there.

“Lube?” he grunted, already having a roam in the pockets of Loki’s trousers on the floor.

“Bathroom,” panted Loki.

The look on his brother’s face when he returned had him spreading his legs spontaneously, without any prompting. Thor took position, slicking his majestic erection with one hand and Loki with the other. Eager, aren’t we? He grabbed both of Loki’s legs to rest them on his shoulders, lined himself up, and pushed in. He went at it like a dog. Although it wasn’t possible for Loki to get hard again so soon, if there was such a thing as a mind boner, he was getting one. He couldn’t take his eyes off Thor’s face as his brother plundered his body, entirely focused on himself and his own pleasure, his gruff grunts, his shuddery breathing, the whole thing playing on his face. It was almost a shame that nobody else would get to see this. In that starving, unreservedly selfish mode, his sounds and his actions were so raw, artless, so revealing, almost like watching him when he was alone. So fucking sexy. He slowed down as he came, burying his face against Loki’s neck, his breath and the sound of his voice, strangled in climax, making Loki's head swim.
They stayed just as they were until Thor’s softening cock slipped out, his breathing slowing down and becoming deeper. Then he reared his head and stared at Loki with that look he got sometimes, which usually came with a lack of words and Loki’s major, urgent need to hide his face or fly away, overcome with the intensity of it.

“When you look at me like that I don’t know what to do,” he confessed. He caught Thor smile when he briefly looked up.

“This is just fine, baby,” whispered his brother, still short of breath, sweat matting his hair where it touched his face, “just fine.”

Loki shut his eyes for the kiss, a fair compromise.

He had been resting half on top of his brother’s chest, Thor’s arm draped around his neck and down his back, when Thor jerked as if waking up from a dream.


Yes, he did now. Tony had invited them to his place. It would just be him and Pepper.

“Are we going?” mumbled Thor.

Loki sighed. Getting out of bed right now (and away from Thor’s arms) sounded about as appealing as a talkie session with his shrink, but the time had been steadily approaching to begin talks about where his brother was going to spend the night, and Loki had not been looking forwards to that either. This was an out. He was going to take it.

“Yes,” he said, dragging himself upright, rubbing his eyes, stretching his arms, a triumph of mind over matter. He could feel Thor’s gaze over his back. And sure enough, here was his fingertip, tracing the ridge of Loki’s spine, one thumb searching the dimples at the small of his back. He relaxed into it.

“I keep fearing he’ll suggest a foursome,” joked Thor.

“I’m not having anything to do with her,” he warned. “She’s all yours.”

Thor chuckled.

“You’d rip my eyes out if I laid one single finger on her,” he said.

“Along with any other parts of you that had got anywhere near,” said Loki.

Thor chuckled some more, gruff, sexy.

“Not my type, really,” he said.

“No? I thought you were into the flat ones now,” risked Loki. Too far?

Thor poked into the softer flesh just above his hip bone. Loki squirmed. It tickled.

“I don’t like any,” said Thor after a spell. Where he had poked, he was now stroking. Loki’s lids became droopy. “I’m spoiled for the rest of humankind.”

Loki grinned to himself. He thought, I know the feeling.
“Sweethearts, come on in!” beamed Tony, spreading his arms wide open. He was wearing a black apron with the company logo on it. (On the bloody aprons too? Oh, Tony…) He kissed them both, while Pepper hollered "Hello!" and "Just a minute!" from the kitchen.

“Somebody is definitely glowing,” said Tony, with a playful eyebrow wiggle.

Loki noticed his brother’s slight fluster and ached to kiss him. Tony closed the door of the castle behind their backs.

“Somebody is definitely… limping?” said Tony then, a few steps behind.

Loki froze.

“Oh my god, Tony!” came an exasperated, embarrassed shout from Pepper, still in the kitchen.

Loki was checking his brother’s reaction with anxiety. And he nearly melted right there, when Thor threw a glance over his shoulder with a cockeyed grin, looking fucking smug. He put an arm around Loki’s waist, and kept right on walking, without trying to disguise the slight rigidity in his gait.

Loki could not refrain from slipping his hand into the back pocket of Thor’s jeans and help himself to a nice, possessive feel and a squeeze. Tony put on an expression of feigned shock, and then walked right after, laughing.

“Are you alright?” asked Thor softly. He had followed Loki into the terrace when he went out for a fag. “You seem a bit out of it.”

Loki nodded, lighting his cigarette. He enjoyed the night breeze, and the sight of his brother’s hair flowing in it.

“I’m fine,” he said.

“Ok,” said Thor. His tone said he did not believe him.

It had been a nice evening. Pepper knew, so no need to hide. A double date, no tension, no drama, like a soothing balm. Their moods were lighter, their thoughts brighter. They had needed it.

“I told you they were after a foursome,” joked Thor.

Pepper had offered them to spend the night when the subject of the separate hotel rooms had come up.

“So, are we staying?” Thor made some whimpery puppy noises.

Loki scoffed, but it was rather cute, whether he liked it or not.

“All our things are back at the hotel,” he said, without conviction. “And it’s going to look weird if neither of us turns up.”
“Nobody will notice,” said Thor. “And if they do, they won’t make anything of it.” He stole nearer, put his hands on Loki’s waist, kissed him. He mumbled, “And we don’t need much, do we? You’ve got your meds, right? And I’m sure they have a couple of toothbrushes we can borrow. As for the rest, I’m sure we’ll think of something.” He started kissing his neck.

This is an illusion, this evening, mused Loki to himself, as he shivered under his brother’s touch. It’s not real. We keep stealing these moments of normality, but tomorrow we’re back to pretending and lying and hiding. This had not been their last argument about the subject, the pit of despair that gaped in Loki’s heart when he thought about the future had not closed. Thor seemed to believe his own words when he said they could make this work. With Loki, it came and went. At times he felt that every single fucking thing in this world was against them, even Loki himself, his pitiable human skills, his fucking mind. Even in his brother’s arms, Thor’s love and his lust urgent and warm against him, Loki was not having a confident night.

“Pepper, they’re at it again!” said Tony not too far away. “It’s very hot, do something!”

Thor chuckled against his throat. Loki squirmed, beard tickling.

“If it’s popcorn you’re after, you can get it yourself,” came Pepper’s voice from inside the house. She must still be sorting out the projector. “Anything else, you know where to find me.”

Thor laughed, low, husky, holding him tight.

Well, the real world would still be there tomorrow, thought Loki, so where’s the rush. A wise man once said, when having an incestuous relationship with your Hollywood superstar brother, you take what you can and you’re grateful for what you get.

“Tony, we’re staying,” he said, Thor’s hands now on his butt.

“Pepper, where do we keep the popcorn?” called Tony, getting back inside.

Thor laughed some more, pinched his earlobe between his lips. Loki clung on tight, and wished he could stop thinking.

Chapter End Notes

They were not even supposed to fuck in this one. These kids! Oh well, I guess it had been a long month...
John Boorman's Excalibur is a beautiful movie from the eighties that we adore in my house, about King Arthur and Merlin and the Round Table. You know, the works. It has an awesome atmosphere, the medieval setting is gritty and dirty and great, and the armours feel so heavy and clunky, and Merlin is fantastic, at turns funny and domestic, and at times terrifying. I think it's a really awesome adaptation of the Arthurian legend, human when it has to be, and epic and magic when it needs to. I really recommend it. I think it's going to be a huge inspiration for Peggy's version.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

An audience with

Chapter Notes

I felt distinctly uninspired with this one. Disappointed, because I had been looking forwards to it. I even thought of scraping it altogether, but since things happen that are relevant to the plot, and right now I'm out of alternate ideas, and since I'm feeling quite threadbare myself, imma just put it out there, and we move on to the next, which hopefully will be more... true? Organic? Brighter? I don't know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ok, he was not going to lie, Thor was so bloody glad this chat at the drama school was behind them. It had been fun, liberating, and fucking exhausting.

Loki’s sleepy head fell on his shoulder. He had taken one of his pink pills before the show, so he was bound to feel drowsy, now that the adrenaline had stopped flowing. Thor checked in the rearview mirror where the cabbie’s eyes were at. You know what? Fuck it. He threw an arm around his brother, holding him close, and kissed his head.

Loki seemed totally knackered, scoured raw. It had been two very intense hours at the end of an increasingly tricky week. His anxiety had been mounting, short nights, cranky days, two serious crying fits (serious enough that he could not hide them from Thor; there might have been more), and several instances of “please just leave me the fuck alone!” often followed by a door slam. Thor was dearly hoping that, after today, things would start getting back to normal. As normal as they got between them anyway.

It had been Volstagg’s suggestion that they did this Q&A together, and he guessed it had not been a bad idea, although anticipation had ramped up to stratospheric levels, and the buzz in the social media had kept Natasha and Coulson’s people working around the clock. The place was jam-packed, seemed like the whole school was in attendance, including professors, former students, and all the free-loaders who had managed to sneak in. Rocky Horror costumes and Loki’s Army t-shirts abounded. There were kids sitting in the corridors, piling up at the doors. Health and safety regulations were being contravened here, here’s hoping there weren’t any fires, and that nobody got into trouble.

From the wings, where Loki and him were waiting for their entrance, the noise in the auditorium was like an oceanic rumour, with sudden spurts of squealing and chanting, excitement intensifying as the time of truth drew near.
“You ok?” Thor asked his brother.

Loki nodded absently, his eyes looking beyond Thor towards the slice of auditorium visible from where they stood. He was bouncing one leg quickly, nervously.

The kids out there would be treated to the full Laufeyson experience: after fretting all week about what to wear, he had decided to put on his armour. Leather, velvet, silk, and his full length coat, without the furry collar. Kohl around his eyes, hair slicked back. Majestic. Nobody would be able to see past all that and spot the wary little boy shaking underneath.

“You look fucking gorgeous,” muttered Thor, just a whisper, though nobody could have possibly heard him with all that rumpus out there.

A tight grin spread over Loki’s mouth. He threw him a quick-once over, enough to make Thor’s blood run faster.

“And you’re going to give a few fangirls a heatstroke,” said Loki. Thor was in jeans and a t-shirt, long hair in a messy bun. “That top on you should come with health warnings.”

Thor smiled broadly. Yeah, the material was thin and it was, um, fitted, and the neckline could get rather low. So? They were going to stare, might as well give them something to stare at…

Volstagg was addressing a few words to the audience, explaining how this was going to work, and instructing the kids to keep their collective shit together.

“I’ll tell you how this is going to be. You’re going to be reasonable, polite, mature, and respectful, because they don’t owe you a thing, and if you annoy them, they’ll just get up and leave, I can guarantee you that. Please be understanding if there are things they don’t want to talk about. And remember, kids, theatre questions, this is not Jeremy Kyle. You have a once in a lifetime opportunity here, something for which journalists around the world would pay for and still never get, so don’t spoil it for yourselves.”

“Have you seen all the Loki’s Army t-shirts out there?” said Thor. “They’re here for you.”

Loki looked skeptical.

“Wanna bet?” said Thor. “Ok, maybe not all of them, but just have a look out there. I bet you could just bring them to their actual knees if you so much as asked.”

Loki put on half a smile, but his mind was elsewhere. There was a quick flinch in his brow, an apprehensive clench in his jaw. Even with the pink pills, there are no such thing as miracles.

“Baby, look at me,” said Thor. He didn’t say it will all be alright, or I’m here for you or I love you, but Loki looked back intensely, as if he had.

Now Volstagg was saying their names, with the grandiose, theatrical intonation of a seasoned ringmaster.

“Shall we?” said Thor.

Loki took a deep breath, and exhaled slowly. He nodded.

A solid wall of sound and light from a thousand flashes assaulted Thor’s senses as he stepped out on to the stage, making him grimace. Hollering, waves of applause, high-pitched squeals, his name in screams. He stood right by the orchestra, and waved hello. The resounding response almost made
him step back. He was alert, focused, but he did not fear them. There was nothing to fear. This theatre was not so big that he could not see their faces. It was a relatively intimate setting, human-scaled. They would be fine.

But where the fuck was Loki, he had not followed him. He turned, and saw his brother still lurking in the wings. When the hysteria of Thor’s entrance abated, that’s when Loki showed his face. Jesus Christ, that was loud. Loki walked slowly to the centre of the proscenium, while Thor took a seat and let him get his due.

It was pretty fucking amazing, how Loki could go from skittish, shaky little pudding, to big black scary alpha wolf, in about two seconds flat. He was standing there, arrogant, cutting a tremendous figure in that coat, staring the audience down, taking their worship. He either kept his head high and proud, or tilted it down to a predatory angle. Every single eye in that place was on him. He radiated something, power, presence. He was Odin’s son through and through tonight, blood or no blood.

After a good few minutes of sustained applause, whistling and shouting, Loki lifted a finger to his lips. And there was silence. Thor had never seen anything cooler, or hotter, in his whole life.

“My brother says you’re here for me,” said Loki, self-possessed, in control, projecting his voice, his Shakespearean training serving him well. “Is that so?”

A burst of sound responded, unintelligible. He lifted one hand and silence was made again.

“Is that so?” he repeated.

Clapping, whistling, screaming, “Loki! I love you! Looookiiiii…”

One gesture, they shut up again. Loki began to pace.

“If you’re here for me, say my name,” he instructed.

Uncoordinated screams of Loki! Loki! climbing on top of each other.

“Say my name,” urged Loki with a gesture, pacing, pacing.

“Loki!” hollered the audience.

“Say my name!” demanded Loki, a roar now.

“Loki!!”

He planted his feet, opened arms to full wingspan, threw his head back.

“Say my name!”

“LOKI!”

An explosion of applause, screaming and whistling. With every phone in the room flashing now, Loki rewarded his minions with a pleased, wolfish grin.

And if they had not been here for him before, they surely were now. Thor was looking up to his brother like a teenage fanboy, dumbstruck, with a solid boner. He had never experienced in his life such a strong, overpowering urge to bend the fuck over and spread his legs for anyone.

As Loki took his seat, which was now a throne, he must have smelled it on him. He winked, and Thor’s stomach took a plunge. Damn.
Volstagg was delighted with the display, laughing and clapping enthusiastically from his seat. Now, on with the show. There was a few volunteers in the stalls with mikes, and they would be granting the right to speak to those who could come up with the decent questions. Volstagg would moderate.

“What are you guys working on right now?” came a shaky voice from the back of the house.

“Loki?” invited Volstagg.

“I have two small parts in a movie, which I can’t talk about yet, and I’m writing a play, which I also intend to direct.”

“What is it about?” burst someone from the boxes.

“What’s it called?” jumped another.

“Children,” admonished Volstagg, “respect the turns.”

“My play will be called Sonder, I think, and you’ll know about the plot in due time,” said Loki.

“Thor, what are you working on?” asked Volstagg.

“I’m training for a movie. Can’t say much yet, but it’s set in medieval times and I play a knight, so I’m learning to ride in armour and preparing battle and jousting sequences. Peggy Carter will be directing, and I’m heading the bill with Angie Martinelli and Steve Rogers.”

A small explosion of yelling and cheering.

“Would you guys say that Thor is the intuitive actor, and Loki the technical actor?”

They looked at each other. Thor gestured for Loki to take that one first.

“Thor has always been of the James Cagney school of acting,” said Loki, and modified his voice, accent, tilt, “you stand on your mark, look the guy in the eyes and tell the truth’. You used to hate directors that did a dozen takes, didn’t you? They messed up with the spontaneity of it. I think you’re doing better with that now. Anyway, there’s a raw authenticity to the way he approaches the work. I’m not like that. I’m more inhibited, I hide more. I build the character around me layer by layer and I wear it like armour. Thor summons in himself the feelings his character is supposed to feel, and he’s honest like that, but I wouldn’t say it all happens by magic, he does work one hell of a lot.”

“There is that,” said Thor, “but Loki is every bit as natural as me. He’s always had a bigger eye on the method, and he always prepares very thoroughly, but if you watch us when we were children, like in The Secret Garden, for instance, Loki was immensely superior, long before either of us took one hour of acting school. He’s so expressive, he has so much nuance. He is also like that in real life. I mean, you people only tend to see his poker face, which is the one he shows, but in private he’s… Well, he’s something else.”

Loki had colour on his cheeks. He looked fucking adorable. Thor looked away, fearing hearts would pop up in his eyes if he didn’t.

“Next question?” invited Volstagg.

“How was it working together?”

“Fun, so much fun,” said Thor, with a broad smile. “We read each other’s minds, don’t we? We get each other so well. We were playing brothers, and I think we got that part down pat.” He laughed,
the audience too. “And he ups my game. I mean, it’s a bit daunting too, Loki can express several
different emotions at once, and at times it made me stop and think, as the character and as a
performer even, just all the things that were going on there, and how should I respond to them. And
he makes it look so easy… So like I say, it can be daunting, but at one point we were really… It was
like dancing, a bit, wouldn’t you say, Loki? When you know your partner so well you can anticipate
their moves. And he’s so generous—”

Loki burst out laughing.

“…As an actor,” completed Thor. “I mean that he will do whatever is needed so that everyone can
give their all, to get the best possible scene. He's not a diva who wants the focus permanently on him,
even if that ruins the interaction with the characters. He always keeps the whole picture in his mind.
It’s going to be awesome, I can’t wait to see this movie.”

Applause. Attention turned to Loki.

“How is it to work with my brother, hm… Quite electrifying, really. He has raw physical presence, if
he’s there you have to look at him. Bobby is such a difficult part, it's a character who bottles his
emotions and his thoughts. An inferior performer would have played him as a brick wall. But with
my brother, you can see it all, every thought and every feeling, breaking through the mask. Do you
people know how hard that is? To play a hieratic, reserved, tightly self-controlled guy, and actually
get the audience to know what’s going on inside every single minute? He deserves every bloody
award there is for this performance. …Apart from that, and considering our past history together, it
was a relatively painless shoot. Not a lot of bloodshed,” he joked.

“And we’ve hidden the bodies well,” grinned Thor.

Laughter, more applause. Thor was grateful for it. Praise from Loki was like praise from his father -
pretty fucking overwhelming. He did not take it lightly. He couldn't if he tried.

“A question for Thor. There is a sex scene in this movie that’s supposed to be very steamy, with
another man. Is it a worry for you, how this character will affect how your fans see you?”

Thor took a moment to locate the kid asking the question in the auditorium, and look at him directly.

“It’s not a worry. I’m looking forwards to the audience seeing me as capable of playing the widest
range of characters possible. I mean, I’m hardly a chameleon actor, there are only so many
characters I can make believable with the way I look, but within that range, I want to be able to play
anything. Having said that, I get that is eye-catching, but I have to say that I would be disappointed if
the sex scene is all the audience is left with when the credits roll. I mean, I’m perfectly aware that
same sex scenes are not common, least of all in Hollywood, so it’s bound to draw attention. And it is
a focal point, crucial in the plot, and I think Bucky and I got the chemistry right, but hopefully with
this performance I’ve achieved a lot more than just… convincingly faking an orgasm.”

Laughter, and possibly several pairs of weak knees as well, judging from the squeals when Thor said
‘orgasm’.

“Was it weird to shoot?” asked someone on the first row, out of turn. Thor answered anyway.

“No, not at all. Bucky and I were very comfortable and at ease with each other by then. We had
rehearsed it, and talked about it, and we get along very well, he’s a great guy, a good friend to both
of us.” (He ignored the isolated sniggers and the whistles. Obviously, they had all seen the photos in
that motel in L.A., and drawn their conclusions. Loki by his side had not flinched.) “Anyway, I’ve
never really struggled with these scenes. I don't make a big deal out of them. It does depend to some
extent on your partner, the atmosphere in the set, all that, but I just… I don’t know, a bit of sense of humour goes a long way. In the end it’s not such a big deal. But if what you mean is, was it weird to shoot because we’re two blokes, I don’t know what to tell you. I’m bisexual, so to me there’s really no difference.”

Loki’s eyes snapped up, he stared at him with laser beams for eyes. For a breath, the silence in the theatre became solid.

“My fucking brother, ladies and gentlemen,” said Loki, with admiration.

The clapping and cheering took Thor by surprise. So, he had just come out. He looked around, taken aback. Loki leaned closer, mike covered.

“You have some balls on you,” he muttered. “Had you planned this?”

Thor gave him a wink. Loki’s eyes were dazzling bright, love unbound. He kissed his temple hard, eyes shut, and the theatre nearly fell on their heads.

“I love you,” said Loki, for the whole house to hear.

“I love you too,” said Thor, and the applause grew even louder, people standing on the chairs and cheering.

“You ballsy, crazy bugger,” said Volstagg, as he came for a hug.

Loki had no intention of using his taming powers to cut that ovation short. He sat in his chair, and let the kids run riot. Thor nodded every now and again, in acknowledgement, but otherwise he had no clue what to do. Did they expect anything else from him? Should he take a bow, do a curtsey? The reaction felt kind of over the top at one point, almost irritating. Refraining a scoff, he thought about the fucking charmed life he led. There had been no standing ovations for Loki back in the day.

Volstagg called the auditorium to order after a couple more minutes. He had to insist, and then get stern. He gave permission for the questions to resume.

“Thor! Thor! Over here!” said a voice from somewhere around the right hand side of the stalls. “You were already a very successful actor, what made you drop everything and join this school?”

Thor located the speaker in the sea of faces, while he organised his thoughts.

“I had had one job after another since I was sixteen, and I had not really stopped to think where I was going, or what I wanted to do, what I wanted from this job. Your priorities at sixteen and at twenty-something are very different. I got to a point where I had to re-think where my current path was leading me, because I realised I did not have a great respect for the job—…”

“Bollocks,” deadpanned Loki. His long legs were crossed, he was checking his nails, the very picture of nonchalance.

Thor chuckled. “Ok, well, but in any case, it did not reflect in the parts I was picking,” he continued. “I was building up a career based on box office and popularity and—…”

“Somebody was scared shitless of being compared with somebody’s dad,” pointed Loki.

“You bastard,” Thor said. (There was some laughter, while Loki smirked, showing teeth.) "Listen, I’m not a very introspective person. Maybe I was trying to put some distance between my father and me, I don't know. Apart from making it big somehow, I didn't really have a plan. Anyway, I got to a
point where I was not enjoying myself, and I decided to go back to basics, try something different, and see where that led.”

“You joined the school after you and Loki had that big fallout. Did that have anything to do with it?”

They both turned to stare at the brave soul on row two (the balls on that kid), then at each other. There was a murmuring silence, Volstagg tense, waiting to intervene.

“Yeah,” said Thor, after a spell, because why not, dammit. “Losing Loki turned my whole world upside down. It was a big shake-up. Lots of things that had seemed vital before, didn’t seem very important after that. Things that had satisfied me before, did nothing for me then. I needed time out. I found it in this place, and some true friends who got me through the worst times when our mother died. I had to work hard to get respect and opportunities, probably for the first time in my life. I think I left this place a better person than I had been when I went in. And then I got my baby brother back, and that was the best thing that could have happened to me.”

Loki stared intensely at his nails while the whole theatre went “Awww…”

“Loki, can I ask you a question about stripping?” said a kid from one of the boxes.

“If you dare,” said Loki, with a grin that managed sweetness and intimidation at the same time.

“Did it affect your acting?”

“Everything affects your acting,” answered Loki. “You draw from every experience in your life. But that’s not the answer you’re after, is it?” He bit his cheeks in, gave it some thought. “Alright. There are many things I’m not going to go into right now, because I don’t bloody feel like it, but this I can say. Stripping changed the way I saw myself. I had never had the impression that I gave the vibe of a particularly sexual person. I saw myself as... I don't know. I was too skinny and bony and not at all what I like in a man. I held back, I kept people away, I struggled meeting people, I struggled getting intimate. I had never dated much at all. So, I was never the most popular kid in class, and that sort of affects how you see yourself, right?, it makes you compare yourself unfavourably with the cool kids, and notice all the ways in which you're different from them, all the ways in which you're lacking. I thought my appeal in this area was rather… niche, if you will, and definitely not something that came through on first impressions. I mean, look who I had to compare myself with growing up,” he gestured to Thor, who flustered and laughed it off. "Honestly, I had no chance."

There was some wolf-whistling that earned a severe finger-wagging from Volstagg. The noises calmed down, and Loki resumed his answer. He avoided looking at Thor while he spoke.

“Stripping I discovered that strangers wanted me, not because of my personality or my conversation or my piano playing skills or what have you, but because of my body. That was a revelation. And it did have a direct impact in my acting. When I played Frank in *The Rocky Horror*, for example. I don't think I would have had the gall, the self-confidence, the sass it takes, without it. Not to mention the experience I got singing and dancing all by myself, with nowhere to hide, every night in front of a live audience, with that cabaret vibe, the interactions. I’m a shy person, nobody bloody believes me but it’s true, and I’m not going to say stripping cured me, but it gave me lots of tools to negotiate it. And I’m a better actor for it.”

Loki took in a breath, contemplated all the things hanging in the air, unspoken. “It was liberating in some ways. Even my dancing changed. When I did ballet, it was all tightly controlled, an intellectual exercise, carefully measured, carefully performed. Nobody gave a fuck how perfect or precise my movements were at the club, and what a bloody relief that was... It was like breaking out of a very tight mould, and finding things that felt right instead, intuitively. But I wouldn't recommend it as part of your training. Because liberating it may be, but also pretty fucking seedy, and there are lots of things about it you carry with you, that you wish you didn't have to. As
you all know, stripping was not the only thing I did in that place, and this kind of thing changes you. The way I did it, at least.”

“What do you mean?” asked Volstagg, gently.

“I mean this is a thing you can do with a healthy or an unhealthy attitude. I’m talking about prostitution. My attitude wasn’t healthy, because I wasn’t healthy. At the time, to me this was not just a job, it was a way of punishing myself, and others. People I loved, who loved me, and because of how I felt, because of my illness and my-my issues, I took it upon myself to shame them and hurt them by doing this. And make no mistake, they were shamed, and they were hurt, and so was I. It’s left scars, and it’s taken me a long time, and some serious soul-searching, to be able to look back on those days with a bit of… balance. To put it in its place, and leave it there, not drag it with me where it does not belong. Anyway, even with the scars, whatever damage I was trying to cause, to myself or to anyone else, it wasn’t permanent. We're dealing with it.”

Warm applause, cheering, shrilling expressions of love and support. Thor held his brother’s hand, and gave it a squeeze. Loki returned a tight smile.

“What job are you guys most proud of?”

Thor didn’t have to think.

“Bobby in Mariners.”

Loki considered that question as it deserved.

“Hm. Hamlet, maybe. It was my first big professional job, and it’s so iconic, has so much gravitas. It meant a lot to me at the time, the mental health angle, which as I’m sure you all know, hits me very close. It also built a reputation for me on which I was able to rely on when I started to put my life back together again, and take up my career where I had left it. People who had noticed me thanks to this part, now believed I could do more. Not sure that would have happened without Hamlet. It was momentous as well in that it brought people into my life who were touched by it, and are now very, very important to me. This sort of gave me a… something to lean back on, to judge my own worth by, and find myself worthwhile, at a point in my life when I was needing it badly. You know, we’re just actors here, we don’t cure cancer. There’s so much frivolity, so much hot air to this profession, that sometimes you do wonder if what you’re doing, all the effort you’re putting into it, is worth anything at all, whether it is all nothing but vanity. But I happen to know someone for whom that Hamlet actually made a difference, and I’m proud of that.”

Applause, lots of applause.

Volstagg decided it was a good point to finish, to the great dismay and disappointment of the audience. Thor and Loki took theatrical bows as the auditorium all but crashed on their heads, thundering with applause. The relief on Loki’s face was almost tangible, but there was also a gentle expression of satisfaction that made Thor sigh with relief himself.

They signed autographs on their way out. Volstagg took them to a side exit where they would expect a taxi that was already on its way to whisk them away towards safety, peace and quiet.

“Loki!”

They both turned. Thor saw his brother’s expression open up like the bloody sunlight through parting clouds. Sam Wilson was rushing at them from the stage door to hug Loki tight. In his arms, Loki closed his eyes, blissful smile on his face. The taxi parked next to them but they paid it no mind.
Thor gestured the cabbie to give them a minute.

“How are you, babe. You look fantastic,” said Sam, his eyes so warm.

Every bristle on Thor’s body stood on end. *Babe?*

“I’m fine,” said Loki. “Have you met my brother? Thor, this is Sam.”

“Man, what an honour!” Sam shook hands with him. “I’m a huge fan!”

“Thank you,” said Thor, making an effort not to sound too stiff. “It’s a pleasure.”

“You were there all the bloody time?” asked Loki. “And you didn’t tell me?”

“Didn’t want to get in the way,” beamed Sam. “You were awesome, guys.”

Thor bowed his head. Loki seemed to be gathering the courage to say something.

“I never got to thank you properly for your letter,” he said, after a moment. “It meant so much.”

*Letter? What letter?*

“That’s alright,” said Sam. “You must have had a lot on you plate. How’s that thing going anyway? You dealing fine?”

“I’m... ignoring it, more than anything,” shrugged Loki.

Sam smiled, a knowing look in his eye, full of tenderness. He stroked Loki’s face, cupped his jaw. Loki didn’t recoil or stiffen up. He didn’t even flinch. He seemed comfortable.

“You’ll be fine, babe,” said Sam. “You’re hard as nails, and much, much bigger than all of that crap put together. It will be fine.”

There was a fucking moment, as they held each other’s gaze. Emotion rose to Loki’s face, and he nodded.

“Anyway, I’ll leave you to it, guys, you must have had enough today. But you still owe me a coffee and a talk, yeah?” said Sam. Loki nodded again. “Take care for me, babe, won’t you? And great to meet you, man.” He shook hands with Thor again, gave Loki a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Bye Sam,” said Loki.

His ex-boyfriend turned to flash him a smile.“See ya, Loki. Call me.”

“What letter?” asked Thor, as the taxi drove them away.

Loki tensed up by his side.

“Oh. When the Sextapsgate affair, he wrote me a letter.”

“Oh,” said Thor. “How come you never told me?”

“We weren’t on speaking terms at the time,” replied Loki, and he offered a tight little grin, which
Thor duly returned.

There was a noisy, bustling silence as the taxi made its stuttering way through the London streets.

“He just…” said Loki after a while. “The letter was just to, you know, to say he was there for me if I needed him, as a friend.”

Thor nodded.

“Did you keep in contact after the break-up?”

“No. The occasional text. He asked me to, but I just… I’m no good at this. I don’t know what’s, uh, acceptable. I don’t know.”

“He seems like a great guy,” said Thor, because it was sort of expected.

“He is,” said Loki, quickly. “You’d like him.”

Thor smiled to that, and hoped it had not come through too fake.

The silence that followed ended at the door of Thor’s house, and only to talk to the cabbie.

“I’m running a bath,” informed Thor. “Will you be joining me?”

“Hmm…,” mumbled Loki to the cushion. He was sprawled face down on the settee. He had been pretty much since they got home, fifteen minutes ago. It was too early to go to sleep, it would mess up his already fragile cycles. Just a couple more hours, Loki-boy, you can do it. Bath. Thor. Nice.

“Hmmmyeah, ok,” he said, and he gathered all his willpower to push himself up to a sitting position, otherwise he would be snoring by the time the bath was ready. He rubbed his eyes, stretched his back and arms.

This heavy drowsiness was the anxiolytic’s doing. So was the hazy curtain between his current worries and his emotions. He felt calm, at ease, his mind coolly reflecting on the evening’s events, and contemplating the elements of danger they contained. Sam. Thor coming out. Flirting and acting like a couple of loved-up idiots in front of a whole theatre armed with recording devices. He sighed, his mind pleasantly sedated, able for once to shrug it all off and tell itself whatever it is, it is, it’s done now, why worry. It seemed so frigging easy, didn’t it? He was stretched very thin nonetheless, threadbare in places. Whose bloody idea was this, and why had he gone along with it. Interviews were hard, tiresome and annoying, but to spend two hours just spilling your thoughts and points of view and feelings and memories and opinions to a full auditorium of greedy ears, which kept drinking their words like cool fresh water, sucking and sucking and sucking — they would drain you to the bone if you’d let them, and then suck the marrow —, that had been a soul-wrenching exercise he would not be looking forwad to in the future. How ironic was that? At fifteen, he would have given an arm and a leg for one single soul to sit there and ask him what he thought, what were his opinions and hopes and dreams. Was it maturity or something else, the fact that he felt less and less like talking about himself? Having said that, he had spilled the beans good and proper, hadn’t he?
God knows how they would be cutting up their words, taking them out of context, blowing them out of all proportion, and defining and judging them by these headlines alone.

It’s done, said the pink pill-induced haze. Nothing to do about it now. The back of his mind was as good a place as any to sweep it all away until a later date.

“Baby, it’s ready,” came his brother’s voice from the bathroom.

Thor was already soaking when Loki got there, with his eyes closed, water just below his chest. Loki smirked, imagined that ballsy kid in the fourth row at the Q&A: "Loki, how does it feel to have an actual living god for a boyfriend?” Ah, my dear, he would reply, if there are words for it, I do not have them.

He undressed and slipped in. His brother welcomed him in the space between his legs, and wrapped his arms around his waist. Loki rested his head on his brother’s shoulder. Thor took a deep breath, and his glorious chest pushed against Loki’s back as it rose, and then fell. There was a drip drip drip, their breathing, and nothing else. After the all-out attack on the senses of this afternoon, this was heaven.

“You ok,” whispered Thor, as if unwilling to disturb that spell of calm they had conjured.

“Hm. You?”

“Hm.”

He was stroking Thor’s forearms, Thor’s hands were brushing his sides. It was very nice. And they were both going to fall asleep and drown, and the police would find them there, and... and frankly, not even that managed to stir anything in Loki, except a vague impulse to snigger.

“Did you remain friends? With Sam,” said Thor, out of the blue.

So much for drowsiness. Loki’s shoulders tensed up.

“Yeah,” he said. “We still had a few weeks to go. Working together I mean. We sort of had to get along, whether we liked it or not. But we would have anyway, he’s— Well, he’s a proper grown-up. And a gentleman. And he’s kind.”

A long silence followed his words. Where was Thor going with this. They could not possibly be in trouble, could they? Surely not over Sam? Gracious, Odinson, don't tell me this is going to end up in tears, or screaming, or both, please... Loki’s shoulders were getting tenser and tenser.

“Was it painful. The break-up,” asked Thor.

He wished he knew what Thor wanted to hear, what he was ready to hear. There are many ways to tell the truth, not lying as such, but perhaps, uh, package it appropriately, pad it up, even, to obtain a certain effect, or, hm, soften a reaction. Loki was totally ready to use whatever padding this matter needed - he really was not looking forward to argue over Sam -, but he simply could not read Thor’s toneless voice, his lack of inflections. Then again, he was a little bit high, the barrier between his usual fears and preventions and his mouth, dissolved into a nice haze of easiness.

“I’m not sure,” he said, sincerely. “He’s so mature, so serene, and with me at the time he was very
generous, very gracious. He never blamed me or made me feel guilty about it. But I felt guilty anyway, and stupid for passing on him.” Words spilled out of his mouth without any pruning. God, he was lit.

“Are you going to call him?” asked Thor, after a spell.

Again, what’s the right answer to that.

“I don’t know,” he tried. “I did promise.”

Thor was very quiet behind him, probably thinking that Loki was avoiding giving a clear answer, and being very fucking right about it too. Sorry, brother. Anyway, they do say the best defence is a good attack. After lagging behind since they started talking, Loki decided to move this conversation forward with a yank.

“Where are you going with this, Thor?” And he may be intellectually afraid of the answer, but he sure wasn’t feeling it.

“I just… I know he… Jesus,” stuttered Thor. “I know he meant a lot to you. That he was important.” A pause. Loki let it flow. “I don’t know where I’m going with this. I don’t know what I want to know, ok?”

Loki remained quiet, waiting for inspiration to strike, his brother or himself. Thor’s breathing was a bit faster, huffier. Loki’s own heart was thumping harder. Drip, drip, drip. It was a long time before Thor spoke again, or so it felt.

“You were so relaxed around him. You’re always… jumpy around people who try to touch you. Even Sigyn. And I remember you both at the stage door after the play. You looked up to him. Leaned on him.”

“Leaned?”

“Yeah. You trusted him, you relied on him. The way I see it, with Tony you were like, I don’t know, Benedick and Beatrice, you were on the same level—…”

Loki couldn’t help a snort. His brother ignored him.

“With Bucky, he looks up to you, he’s like a kid brother, you said yourself. But with Sam, you… What am I trying to say here. I got the impression that with Sam you were a bit like you are with… with me.”

Loki focused on the tips of his toes, popping out of the water. Breathe.

What was it Thor needed? Reassurance? What did he want to hear? Where was Sigyn when you needed her?”

“Does it bother you?”

Drip, drip, drip.

“It’s nothing you’ve done,” said Thor.

“Is that a yes?”

Thor sighed.
“It’s not bother. That’s not what it is. I’m not even… I don’t even think it’s jealousy. I don’t know what it is. I just… I wasn’t ready for it.”

Drip, drip, drip.

Perhaps what Loki had to do was just be open and honest. Perhaps that’s what his brother needed right now.

“He helped me feel comfortable fucking again. I was feeling so… dry, so hollow. I felt no desire and no lust and I felt so off. It was the-the prostitution and the depression and my self-loathing and all of that, and terror of opening up I guess. I felt that, after loving you, I had nothing left to give. No matter how common or how normal my therapists said it was, the lack of libido or whatever they call it, I was fucking petrified. I thought I would never have sex again, that I would never want to again. It scared me. Sam, he… he asked for nothing, he offered whatever I wanted to take, nothing, or everything, or anything in between. He made it seem simple and… He was there for me. And there was so much shit going around in my brain, and Sam got me out of it. I don’t know how he did it. He's smooth as fuck... He really cared for me. And he made me feel it, he made it get through my thick skull. And I guess I-I loved him too, in my way. Which felt good. Made me feel, I don't know, a bit normal again. Not normal, that's not the right word. With him I felt that I could just be me, and still be alright. That yeah, I may be fucked up, and I may never be fixed, but that it wasn't such a terrible thing anyway. That I was still someone worth a good, kind, solid guy like him.” Drip, drip, drip. "He reminded me of you. The ways that count.”

Thor’s chest pushing against his back, his breathing controlled, his arms crossed enfolding Loki’s waist, his hold unquestionable. It felt good. Should he mention that.

“You should call him,” said Thor, after an age.

Loki half-turned to face his brother, not sure what he was looking for there. He found a small, warm smile, not too bright, but honest.

“I mean it,” said Thor. “Sounds like a great guy you should have in your life.”

Loki returned the smile. He reclined back on his broad, welcoming chest. His brother’s hold tightened around him.

The mattress seemed to suck him in when he laid down on it. They had had leftovers for dinner with the news on, practically on mute, and dragged themselves upstairs like zombies. The movie star life, eh? He burrowed against Thor’s body, may have gratuitously crushed his romp against his brother’s groin. He thought they were settling down to sleep.

“The thing you did at the start, your grand entrance,” said Thor after a while, whispering as if mum and dad were down the corridor. “Fucking hell, baby.”

Loki was grinning now, eyes closed.

“I saw you had enjoyed that,” he teased, words slurred.

“You have no idea,” purred Thor, the rumble of his voice so pleasant.

“Oh, I can imagine,” he said. “I may lay it thicker with the pageantry, but I’m not the only one here
who faces an audience as if he fucking owns them.”

Thor laughed.

“You win this one,” he said, and he definitely did a little hip roll, no doubt this time. “Had you planned it?”

“I improvised.”

“You’re incredible.”

“Had you planned it?” asked Loki. “The smoothest, most casual coming out I have ever seen, I mean.”

Thor laughed some more, so warm and gruff.

“I had thought about it. I thought that, if the right opportunity should present itself, this was a good place to do it.”

“When did you decide you were going to come out?”

“Don’t know. Been thinking about it for some time.”

“You didn’t say.”

Thor shrugged.

“It’s all over the internet, did you see?” said Loki.

“Yup.”

“Are you worried?”

Thor sighed.

“I’m not. Coulson, on the other hand…”

“Oh?”

“Been texting. I told him to calm his tits, that’s what’s done is done, and we’ll talk on monday.”

Loki smiled to himself.

“I was bursting with pride. I could have snogged you right there and then. I very nearly did.”

Thor laughed softly.

“You would have, just to do one better. Nobody steals your show.”

Loki chuckled.

“After than entrance of yours,” said Thor, nuzzling against the back of his neck, “you could have had me right there on that bloody armchair. Hell, me and anyone else in that place.”

Loki chuckled. He pictured it. Hmmm...

“On a scale from one to ten, how sleepy are you?” asked Thor, a hot grumble.
“Twelve.”

Thor chuckled, then pressed against him, held him closer.

“Same scale, how randy.”

Loki’s turn to chuckle softly, mischievously. They hadn’t fucked in four entire days. Although it was probably just what Loki would have needed, he had been too cranky to let him near.

Thor was humping him slowly, getting hard. Loki’s cock was responding, hot, electric tingles radiating from his crotch all through his body.

“Off the charts. But I am tired.” He sighed. The fucking pink pills.

“Then, allow me…” purred his brother, low and husky, kissing his neck, breathing by his ear.

Loki turned his face, then the rest of him, for Thor’s deep, slow kiss. He hummed into it. Without breaking the gentle, unhurried, sweet love he was making to Loki’s mouth, Thor’s hand palmed him through the bed sheets, stroking and brushing as Loki got hard. The light, teasing touch tickled his balls, the sensitive inner side of his thighs. A single wet spot appeared at the cusp of the tent he was making.

Loki winced when clarity hit his lids. Thor had turned on the light.

“Don’t fall asleep on me,” he said.

Loki opened his eyes, drowsily.

“Then I guess it’s not a day for extended foreplay. Sorry.”

Thor laughed.

“Not a problem.”

He turned to get the lube from the bedside table. Loki spread his legs.

“Nuh-huh,” said Thor. He got on his knees, straddling him, and with his fingers coated in lube, he reached behind himself.

Loki’s cock twitched at the sight, his brother’s expression tensing up as he fingered himself open. Ever the fast-learner, Thor had got the gist of that very quickly. Loki took the lube from him to slick himself up, long, lazy strokes, milking the head as he watched.

Thor wiped his hands and leaned over to kiss him, then wiggled his butt as Loki held his cock in place. They both sucked in a breath when they found the spot, and then Thor sat upright and pushed down, with a bite on his lower lip and his eyes closed. Loki didn’t want to miss a beat, he fought to keep his eyes open against the sleepiness and the heat clamped tight around him. His brother circled his hips and shifted, as if he could take him deeper like that. He began to rock and sway, hands on Loki’s chest, leaning over him, his hair framing his face. He tried to hold it back with one hand and he looked like a fucking pin-up, so fucking hot.

“Are you awake yet,” he said, working his thighs.

Loki ran his hands on his brother’s chest, his straining muscles. Then his cock. Thor threw his head back, he clenched tight around him.
“Jesus fucking Christ, Thor…” said Loki, in awe. He gripped his brother’s hips and he tried to hold him up, so that he could fuck up into him. Thor’s pace was much too leisurely and too gentle, and Loki was going to fucking implode.

“Easy…” whispered Thor.

“If we go any easier I’m going to fall asleep,” he groaned. Liar liar your pants are on fire…

Thor laughed, and kept fucking himself like they had all night.

“You want it your way?” he cocked a smile. “Then take over.”

“You bloody cheat…” said Loki, shocked at his brother’s cunning and his own fucking stupidity. A honey-trap if he ever saw one. He was panting with frustrated want, his brother not even pretending to fuck anymore, just rolling and teasing, that indecent smirk, that wolfish stare.

“Fuck’s sakes,” grumbled Loki. He sat up, toppling Thor on his back with a good shove, though Thor was more than happy to oblige. He clenched his thighs around Loki’s hips as he entered him again. He fucked him fast, snaking his hips. And how Thor’s expression rewarded him, as he lifted his hips to meet his thrusts.

“Fuck,” grunted Thor, Loki ramming into him. “Fuck, Loki…”

It was ‘baby’ when Thor was fucking him, and his name when it was Loki topping, mused Loki, as he took it up a notch. A psychoanalyst would have a field day with this, even without the incest.

The moans out of that fucking perfect mouth, in time with his thrusts, the slap of flesh on flesh.

“I’m close,” panted Loki, “touch yourself.”

“No, you finish,” said Thor, husky, “I want to come inside you. We’ll flip.”

Fine by him. Loki went faster, shallower, to serve his own need.

“Come on, baby,” said Thor. “Yeah, that’s it. That’s it. Come on.” He was digging his nails in his buttocks, there would be perfect fucking red fingerprints there in the morning.

The pressure was mounting, all of Loki’s focus now on coming. His brother’s moans, so gruff and dark, were driving him fucking nuts.

“That’s it, brother… fuck me… fuck me…”

Jesus Christ! He kept fucking as he came, and when he thought he was all spent, he rolled his hips, wringing it out, shuddering, until he let himself melt in his brother’s arms. His sex talk was not innovative, he thought, panting against Thor’s chest, but bloody hell, it was effective. He laid there recovering his breath, blissed out.

“Hey, don’t fall asleep yet,” said Thor, poking his side, where he was ticklish. “Come on, I’m about to burst.”

Loki slid off Thor on to the mattress.

“Mmmhow do you want me,” he mumbled against the pillow, on his front, still boneless.

“Just lift,” said Thor, and he slipped that roll cushion under his hips when Loki did as he was bid. (They had bought that cushion in that shape for this exact purpose, giggling like idiots when they
were paying for it.) Butt in the air, hand-warmed lube in his hole, and then the blunt head of his brother’s cock opening him, those big hands stroking his butt, anchoring on his hips. The fullness was very fucking pleasant. And there was heat in his underbelly when Thor started to fuck him. He liked the pillow. There was something about this posture. He was rocking to and fro under his thrusts. He loved to play blow-up doll for Thor.

“You’re mine,” groaned Thor, all of a sudden, slamming hard against his arse. “You’re mine…”

“Jesus fuuuuck…” moaned Loki. Thor had to keep that for after he had come?

“Say you’re mine…” grunted his brother, as he pounded him into the mattress.

“Goddammit, Thor…” said Loki. “I’m yours. God, I’m fucking yours…”

“Yes, fuck…” grunted his brother, choked up. He sounded right on the edge. He was going very fast now.


“Fuck, baby, fuck…!” he groaned as he came, another hard thrust, another, another, Loki shivering with Thor’s shivers, the heat of his body when he draped himself all over him, scorching hot breath on the back of his neck, so heavy. He tangled their fingers together.

Loki mouthed yours.

“Were we too obvious, today, at the Q & A thing,” came Thor’s voice then, in the dark.

They had cleaned up, Loki had been served a glass of mineral water his brother had gone to fetch for him downstairs, naked, and he was spooning him again.

And Loki huffed, because that was it, he was scraped to the bone now, he needed to fucking sleep already.

“Naw. Probably. I don't know,” he said. Wasn’t it fun, surreal even, how little interest he was feeling, how little apprehension.

“Are you concerned,” said his brother.

Was he?

"We can think about it tomorrow.” Pretty please.

His brother hugged him tight. He muttered I love you. Loki burrowed into him. He may have said I love you back before he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.
Chapter End Notes

Sam. When I started to plan his reappearance, I realised I had not thought through just how important he would have been in Loki’s life. So I went back to chapter 9 and made some additions, in case you’re interested.

Jeremy Kyle is the host in one of those awful reality TV shows in which people come to air their dirty laundry and get publicly humiliated and tongue-lashed by the audience and the host, as they get judged harshly for their past mistakes, poor life choices, and lifestyle in general. Jezza started in the UK, his move to the US was a matter of time.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Thor is not happy. Loki is shitting bricks.

Chapter Notes

This just keeps getting harder and harder. I become hyperaware of all my tics as a writer and UGH. Anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

With his eyes closed, Thor returned his brother’s lazy, languorous kisses. He felt drowsy and delightfully heavy, lying there, enjoying the light press of lips, the hot flashes of tongue, and the blind touch of Loki’s skin, how his brother’s flesh yielded under his hands. His hips were pumping mindlessly, as Loki’s hands stroked up and down his body, no rush, knuckles and nails. He shivered when a fingertip barely brushed his side, where he was ticklish. Loki’s low chuckle made him smile. He felt a thigh sliding between his own and pressing. Thor pumped up again, with a hum. He wove his fingers in Loki’s hair and arched his neck, leading his brother’s mouth to his throat. His cock was tugging as it got hard, trapped between their stomachs.

“Oh my fucking god, Thor, again?” rumbled Loki. “So soon? You need to see a doctor…”

Thor laughed and palmed him, his brother’s cock twitching too, filling.

“Look who’s talking,” he whispered.

“I’m shocked,” muttered his brother, playful, and nibbled a pinch of skin off his neck, as he pressed up with his thigh. “You’re randier now than at fifteen.”

“I had not seen you in a whole week. What do you expect.”

He winced as his dry cock refused to slide between their bodies. Loki wetted his palm and reached down. His fist closed around Thor’s cock, making him groan. He stroked and squeezed gently, their lips coming together, his tongue so fucking hot.

“Give me your mouth,” murmured Thor.

“Hmmm… Definitely a case for medical science,” Loki purred, climbing down his body, delaying on a stiff nipple, one hand still on him.

He settled between his thighs and took him in his mouth. Thor was more than half hard already. A few more minutes of this, and he’d be ready to take his brother for a ride. He let his eyes close,
focusing on the feeling of Loki’s touch. Tongue, strong and slick, hot, nimble and playful. Lips covering teeth, smooth and hard, taking him in, tugging at him as he sucked, his fist keeping him in place, squeezing and twisting. The soft, slick noises, the hums and groans, Loki’s hair between his fingers. Pressure building up in the base of his cock, in his underbelly.

Keys at the door. Sigyn’s voice.

“Sorry, boys! It’s started to rain! Minnie is getting soaked!”

“Damn,” said Loki, raising his head, mouth red and wet, eyes hazy, ravished and gorgeous. He smiled weakly at him.

Thor sighed, disappointed, one last slow run through his brother’s hair.

“I’ll hit the shower,” said Loki, getting up.

“Come here,” said Thor, gripping him by the wrist, pulling him down to him.

“No,” protested Loki, but he still yielded. “I need to leave in…” he eyed the clock on the bedside table, “less than two hours. Fuck.”

He let Thor kiss him anyway, and Thor was not in a hurry. He stole a good feel of Loki’s arse and heard him sigh. Then a good smack, and he let him go, because if he knew him a bit, Loki would be starting to get unpleasant in a minute. No point.

His eyes followed as Loki made his way out, stark bollock naked and shameless, his cock still plump and quite obvious, a pink flush where he had just been smacked. He heard him and Sigyn out there. Thor surmised Loki must parade around naked a lot, because she did not sound like she had so much as batted an eyelid at the spectacle.

The shower started running soon after, and Loki’s voice came through, mellow, raspy, with a hot, slurred drag.

“Honey, baby, won’t you cuddle near,
Let sweet mama whisper in your ear,
I’m wild about that thing, it makes me laugh and sing,
Give it to me, papa, I’m wild about that thing…”

Thor stretched his back, arms, legs, sprawling all over the bed, his erection forgotten and softening, his sight drifting on the ceiling, out of focus. So, that was his lot. He should not expect to get any more quality time with his brother perhaps for another week, not with the way things had been going lately. Their daytime schedule was full: The rehearsals for Lancelot had started for real, and Thor was still putting in hours in the gym every day, and training for the fighting and jousting sequences. Loki’s parts were smaller, but there were two of them, and technically very challenging. If that wasn’t enough, the production for his play Sonder had begun. Nat had delivered, finding him finance and a venue; a crew was coming together, and Loki was now busy with the casting. Which at the moment meant wining and dining his potential Friggas as and when they became available (they were all very busy, Loki aimed for the best), armed with his charm, his very excellent play, and an extensive knowledge of the actresses’ biographies and careers (he prepared very thoroughly), to flatter their vanities and sweeten their dispositions towards this new, untried young author.

So Loki and him were busy. Fair enough, and long may it last. They could hardly spend their lives
glued at the hip. That was not the problem. The problem was that, since the Q&A, Loki had decided he would not be staying overnight so often at Thor’s place. Not so often had turned out to be fucking never. “I’m too tired to fuck anyway,” he had been saying whenever he turned Thor down, adding insult to injury. That was not the reason, of course, but Loki’s paranoia, rearing its ugly head once again. He was terrified that the neighbours would start noticing, and wondering. Nothing Thor had offered so far, no reasoning and no bribe, had made a dent in Loki’s resolve, or in his fears.

So every now and then, they would steal a couple of hours in the daytime for lunch or a cuppa or, circumstances allowing, they would make a mad dash for Thor’s place for a quick romp. That regime, needless to say, didn’t even begin to satisfy Thor’s hunger for his brother, and we’re not just talking fucking here.

And so, that morning, even though he knew Loki had a work lunch with one of his intended Friggas, and wanted to spend the morning revising her life and deeds, Thor had turned up at the flat, a man on a mission. Sigyn, always so perceptive, immediately announced she was taking Minnie for an extra-long walk, and they had fucked like dogs right against the front door. That had taken all of fifteen minutes. Laughing and panting, they had collapsed on Loki’s bed, and soon enough they were ready for round two. His brother had eaten him out until Thor was begging for his cock, and Loki had fucked him slowly and lazily, draped all over his back. And yes, he had been very much ready for another go, before they had been so rudely interrupted, damn the London spring.

“Do it easy, honey, don’t get rough,

From you, papa, I can’t get enough, hmmm…

I’m wild about that thing…”

Even after that thoroughly good seeing to, Thor’s good mood did not last. He was sick of spending his nights alone in his stupid bed, with his brother alone in his, only three streets away.

And Loki did have a point, he did, it’s not that Thor believed he was being unreasonable. Thor tried as hard as he could to see it his way, and just take it one day at a time, not look too far ahead, grin and bear it. He told himself that this was all temporary, that they would not always be so busy, that the kind of job they did would put stress on the most mainstream, most orthodox of couples. It was not working, because he was constantly feeling like bashing in things and sinking fists into walls. His fighting instructor had to remind him often to save some of that energy for the shoot.

“If you want to satisfy my soul,

Come and rock me, baby, with a steady roll, hmmm…”

His mind turned now to that day back in L.A., what Loki had told him, with that vacant, hopeless expression, “You can’t do this, can you. The lying, the secret. It’s not going to work, is it?” Thor had reassured his brother that day, and he had believed every word, with his whole heart. Yes, they would make it. Everything would be fine. Because they would fight and they would win. Because their cause was fair and right. And because Thor willed it so, and the universe had a weakness for the heir of Asgard House, right? Just like in Iceland. He was fifteen again, and he was going to make this work against all odds. (Hear me out, brother.) He was going to overcome every obstacle, love would win the day in the end, and they would live happily every after. Wouldn’t they?

Shit.

“What’s the matter papa, please don’t stop,
Don’t you know I love it and want it all, hmmm…”

He had made a promise. “Yes, it will, it will work. I’ll do anything it takes. It’s worth it.” He shut his eyes, but he could still see the abyss opening under his feet whenever he looked too far ahead. Because if this was going to be their life as a couple, if this was what their relationship was going to be like… Shit, shit, shit, he could not even begin to think about it. He was choking.

“*Come on and make me feel it, I’m wild about that thing…”*

It’s not that he did not understand the situation. He called Loki paranoid in his head, but he didn’t mean it. He even agreed, on an intellectual level if nothing else, that they lived under a great risk, and that he should be grateful for what they had. That wanting to have it all came at a price. They had to pretend, dissimulate and lie to protect this, simple as that. Because all hell would break lose if this should ever come out, right? The skies would crumble and fall, the earth would stop turning, the seas would boil, natural order would turn into chaos, and life as we know it would be over. Right? Such high stakes, for such an insignificant, harmless thing as two people who wanted to be together. Such finality.

“I’m wild about it when you hold me tight,

*Let me linger in your arms all night, hmmm…”*

Protecting this, he thought, the choke in his throat burning. Protecting this? Loki, baby, we’re killing it.

“*Come on, hear me cryin’, I’m wild about that thing…”*

The shower stopped. Loki was still humming and singing, and soon the hair dryer came on. Thor rubbed both hands on his face vigorously, trying to wipe the choke away. He got himself up, threw some clothes on, and focused solely on the thought of putting one foot in front of the other and making himself a cup of tea.

Sigyn was at the dining table with her laptop, a Minnie-and-terrycloth burrito on her lap.

“Hey,” she said, turning with a commiserating smile. “Sorry.”

He returned the smile, leaned over to kiss her head.

His eyes drifted to the screen, and became glued to it, and snapped wide open. She noticed something had caught his attention, and then she realised what.

“Oh, bollocks,” she was blushing bright red. “‘God, I’m so, so sorry. I didn’t think. I don’t reblog these, but some people I follow do, and…”

“Shh,” he hushed her, a reassuring squeeze on her shoulder. “What the hell am I seeing?”

She explained, to which he frowned, to which she offered to do a quick search, for illustration purposes, with due warnings. Her Tumblr dashboard became awash with images.

“Oh, my…” he scrolled down, baffled. “Awww, that’s cute. … Oh, good god… Holy shit…!”

“I know,” she said, with a nervous giggle, her ears red.

“Oh… Oh…” Thor was pretty sure his own ears must be in flames, and that his cheeks were not so much pink right now as deep cerise. He tried to laugh it off. “Look at that, is this even anatomically
“possible?” he joked, pointing.

“Oh, I don’t know. For a couple of fit lads like you?”

He laughed again.

“Nobody is that fit.” A noise somewhere in the flat reminded him that they were not alone. He sobered up. “Shut this off, don’t let Loki see it.”

“Don’t let Loki see what?” said his brother, all suited and booted, neat and trim and hot as hell in black jeans and shirt, that messy bun, and that glow on his skin that could just as well mean “hot shower” as “just orgasmed”. He had been gifted with a talent for opportunity, hadn’t he?

Thor watched impotently as Loki approached The Screen of Doom, mentally adopting the brace position.

“What the…” said Loki, opening his eyes wide. He crowded Sigyn and took control of the touchpad, scrolling quickly down, his face a mask of horror. “What the fuck am I looking at?”

“Thorki fanart,” said Sigyn.

“Thorki?” repeated Loki.

“We should try this one here,” said Thor pointing, wagging eyebrows, an ill-disguised attempt to make light of the situation.

“Oh my god, don't,” laughed Sigyn, hiding her face, all ruffled.

“You think this is funny?” said Loki, pale, his expression set, eyes fixed under a deep, furious frown. “People are drawing pictures of us fucking, and putting it up for the whole bloody world to find, and you think it’s funny?”

“It’s been going on for ages,” said Sigyn. “And there’s fanfiction too, manips, the works. I thought you guys knew. Although it has escalated quite a lot since the Q&A.”

Loki’s jaw fell. He was aghast.

“Baby, don’t freak out,” said Thor. “It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just kids. They like to imagine things and… fap to it, I suppose. They’ve done it with almost every guy I worked with, and many that I haven’t even met. Nobody believes it’s real.”

“Oh,” said Loki, eyes fixed on him, sardonic. “So all is well, then. Because all these guys they drew you with, were you actually sleeping with them in secret, and were you trying to keep it that way as well? How did that work out for you? Were they also a close relation?”

Thor sighed, conceding that point, and tried a different angle.

“It’s been going on for ages, hasn’t it, Sigyn? And we’ve only just heard about it. This is, like, the furthest reaches of the internet. Nobody from the real world actually sees this.”

Loki drew his eyebrows up, in that look that said “oh my god, just when I think my brother can’t get more colossally idiotic, he goes and outdoes himself.” It used to infuriate him as kids, but Thor guessed he had it coming this time, for trying to play his brother for a fool.

“Nobody sees this?” scoffed Loki. “Oh, no, of course, silly me. Nobody sees this. Except maybe for the people at Buzzfeed, but nobody notices them either, right? Oh, and perhaps every single fucking
interviewer you’ll ever sit down with at a junket. And talk-show hosts, but who ever watches those? And it’s not like they would ever whip this kind of thing out to get a few cheap laughs making their guests uncomfortable. That never fucking happens, does it?”

Thor had his mouth shut now, scolded, but Loki was not satisfied.

“So, my dear brother, what happens when you’re on Graham Norton next, and he asks your opinion on this one?” Loki pointed at a particular illustration, involving their naked selves, red heels and fishnets and not much else, some bondage gear, and several painstakingly rendered drops of assorted bodily fluids, not excluding tears. Thor averted his eyes, because it was very fucking weird to look at. Even in manga style, the likenesses were uncanny.

“I’ll say that the art is astounding and the subject whimsical,” he attempted a smile.

Loki’s responding sneer cut like a knife. He changed his tone, the lilt of his voice and his accent to say,

“So, Thor, is it still incest if he’s adopted? Ha ha, only joking.”

Thor’s mouth tightened in indignation without his permission when he heard that, and Loki’s point was made.

“So what do you want to do about it, Loki?” he said. “Send mass ‘cease and desist’ letters? Write to each and every kid who makes or circulates this kind of thing and tell them to stop it immediately? Seriously, Loki, what can we do about it?”

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do,” said his brother, “I’m getting a beard, that’s what I’ll do.”

Thor laughed. Loki didn’t.

“You’re joking,” said Thor.

Loki’s expression turned softer with a concerned frown. No, he was not fucking joking. Thor would have expected by now this conversation would have evolved into screaming and yelling and things flying, not this. He would have preferred the screaming.

“No,” he said.

Loki sighed, taking patience. And again, could Thor just have some screaming instead.

“It makes sense, Thor. I’ve been thinking about it for some time.”

“You’ve what?”

Loki sighed again.

“Let’s sit down.” He led them both to the settee. If that was supposed to calm Thor down, it was achieving pretty much the opposite.

“Listen to me, please,” said Loki. “When photos of Sif and you began to appear, I felt a bit safer. Didn’t you? And when the candids with Bucky came out. I sort of felt like, if you give them an answer, they don’t have to look for them themselves. It gives them a bone to gnaw at. So, if I start showing up with somebody consistently, instead of trying to guess what I am actually doing, they get busy trying to get a photo of me and that guy kissing or holding hands or wearing coordinated tuxes or whatever. It might keep them from asking too many questions.”
Thor looked from Loki to Sigyn, who was still sitting quietly at the dining table, by the laptop. But she wasn’t paying attention to the screen, and from her lack of reaction to Loki’s words, she had already heard about it.

“Do you agree with this?” asked Thor. Or rather, challenged her to take up a side.

“It’s got nothing to do with me,” she said. “It doesn’t matter what I think.”

Which left both him and Loki unhappy.

Thor’s breathing had turned huffy. He could not put his objections into words right now, they were coming pure and raw from the gut. And he could give no reasons, certainly not civilised ones. All he could think was hell, no, not that.

There was a moment in which nobody talked. Thor’s anger was on a low simmer. Then he had a thought.

“Not that I’m agreeing to this,” said Thor, “but hypothetically, who would you ask?”

Loki cast his eyes down and cleared his throat. Oh dear.

“Well, I thought,” harrumph, “uh, Fandral.”

Like a paper cut, it took a moment for the blood to rise. Thor’s eyes shut heavily, a caustic, very fucked up smile twisted his mouth.

“This just keeps getting better and better,” he said.

“Who would you have me ask?” said Loki, tone edging on whiny. “Who else is there that we trust and knows about this? Would you prefer Tony or Bucky? I mean, not that I ever would, because of Pepper and Steve, but… Volstagg is married, and who would believe me and Hogun? Shall I ask Bruce? Who is there that’s single and believable?”

“Believable,” repeated Thor, cutting.

“Yes, believable. Tall, blonde, my type,” said Loki, wanting to sound dispassionate and matter of fact, and coming out rather meek.

“Tall, blonde and hot, you mean.”

“Well, you tell me, you liked him well enough once,” taunted Loki.

That pissed Thor off.

“Fuck’s sakes, he’s not even a natural blonde,” he grumbled.

And Loki pursed his mouth, trying not to laugh. What Thor had just said reached his own brain, and he had to smile, against his will.

“Goddammit,” he said, as his brother started laughing.

“That’s the kind of detail that will really come in handy,” said Loki, his anxiousness coming out in a fit of giggles. “Anything else I should know? Birthmarks? Tattoos? Shaved or natural? Cut or uncut?”

That last one made Thor throw him a fresh scowl, and Loki sobered up, chastised. He bit his lips in.
“Sorry. But Thor, think,” he begged, “just think. When the press for Mariners begins, there’ll be so many eyes on us all the time, and lots of people with hours and hours of airtime to fill, desperate for something to talk about. It’s a matter of time before they get to this kind of thing,” he gestured to the general direction of Sigyn’s laptop, “and if our movements up and down have not done so already, the rumours will start. They will. And parts like Bobby, with a script like this, and a director like Heimdall, they come once in a lifetime, Thor, just once. This is what you want to have people talking about, not…” He did not finish that thought. “You could get an Oscar for this. Dammit, you should. It would be unfair that you didn’t because a bunch of middle-aged, bigoted academics have heard some wild shit about your private life, and are getting their knickers in a twist, fearing that it might end up tainting the holiness of their bloody statuette, or whatever goes on in these people’s minds when they’re deciding who they vote for…”

“If that’s how this works, they can stuff their fucking Oscar,” said Thor.

“You know this is how it works,” said Loki. “I know you’re proud, and stubborn, and I know you mean what you say, and I fucking love you for it, but… Hell, Thor, think about… If you didn’t get it because of this. Of me.”

The edge in his voice, Thor didn’t miss it. He resented the guilt trip, but he also knew this was not an idle threat, but Loki knowing himself all too well.

“I’m not saying we lie,” said Loki. “I’m not saying we take our beards on holidays, or announce a fake engagement, or do a press release or something. All I’m saying is, we show together at a couple of events, go on a couple of dates, we get papped, and when people draw their wrong conclusions, we don’t correct them. That’s all I’m saying. Is that so different from what you’ve already done with the photos with Sif, or me with those candids with Bucky? It would be just until the Oscars.”

Thor threw his head back against the recliner. He did not want to see the sense of it. He refused to. He reminded himself that his brother could talk an eskimo into buying a fridge, and yet that did not make it sensible.

“Loki…” he rubbed his brow. A headache was setting in. “After the Oscars, there’ll be something else. There will always be a premiere, or a press tour, or some awards. And no matter how much spin you throw at it, if there’s going to be rumours, there’s nothing you can do to stop them. What happens in a year? What happens after that?”

And that was as close as Thor had got to broaching The Wider Issues. And he had not wanted to broach The Wider Issues today. This was a conversation that terrified him.

“After the Oscars we think about it again,” said his brother, in a murmur, willingly ignoring the ramifications of what Thor had just said. “We take it one day at a time.”

“I don’t like this,” he groaned. And he meant a lot by ‘this’.

“Do you think I do?” muttered Loki.

He rarely could beat his brother with arguments, even when he had them. He just knew he hated the idea, and that they could talk about this until they were blue in the face, and Loki would not have moved an inch, and he would still be hating it.

“And I guess you’d want me to ask Sif to be my beard,” he said, resignation setting in.

Loki shrugged one shoulder.

“Whoever you think is best.”
“And you’re telling me you’re ok with that. With everybody assuming I’m with her. With dad assuming I’m with her.”

Loki shrugged again.

“I’ve been until now, haven’t I?”

I don’t bloody know, brother, have you? Would you tell me if you were not? Dammit, Loki.

“I just want to buy us some peace of mind,” muttered his brother. “I could use it.”

Thor could not see any peace of mind coming from this, but right now he had nothing to counter Loki’s reasonings. He sighed, very fucking unhappy about his life at the moment, but relented. He even agreed to call Fandral and Sif to invite them over for dinner next Friday, to broach the subject in a calm, controlled environment.

“Thank you, brother,” said Loki, still subdued, unusually docile. And he hesitated for a second before he leaned down for a kiss, as if he was afraid that Thor would snap at him or turn his face away or something.

“A dinner on Friday and a party on Saturday?” asked Sigyn within Thor’s earshot, when Loki was gathering his things to go out. “Will you be alright?”

“I will. I have to be,” Loki said, putting his jacket on. “It’s too late to call off the party, isn’t it?

The party, remembered Thor miserably. Great. A few weeks ago, when his mood was brighter, he had realised all their friends would be in London at the same time for once. We should have a party, have them all meet, he had said. We could even invite Sam. Well, he was not up to much frolic and merriment anymore, but Loki was right, too late to call it off. He would have to grin and bear it. He should have that on his fucking coat of arms, it was fast becoming his fucking life motto. Thor realised he had spaced out when the tapping of Sigyn’s quick fingers on the laptop’s keyboard drew him out of it.

“I best be off, then,” he said. “Get myself out of your way.”

“You’re not in my way,” she said, tapping away.

He guessed it would be rather rude to just take off straight after he got what he had come for. He made two cups of tea and sat at the table with her.

“How are you, Sigyn? Loki told me you’re going on a holiday.”

“Yeah, we’re going to the US to meet Bruce’s family.”

“That’s brilliant. So it’s going well for you, guys.”

She gave him a meaningful look, and a tight smile.

“Yes, it is. It’s going great.”

“I’m happy for you,” he said, trying for a nice, warm grin. He wasn't a petty man. “Can I ask you something, Sigyn?” he asked. “What do you really think about the beards idea?”
She didn’t reply straight away, but Thor was willing to bet it was not because she didn’t have her mind made up about it. She was choosing her words, either to protect Loki’s confidence, or to keep the peace between them.

“I told Loki I don’t think it’s the solution, and that you would not take it well. But he challenged me to come up with something better, and of course I couldn’t, so.”

A silence. With Loki being as reserved and cautious with his words as he was, Thor was often tempted to go to Sigyn for the things Loki kept from him. He usually resisted, because it wasn’t fair to put her on a tight spot, and Loki could easily freak out if he thought Sigyn was tattling and revealing his secrets behind his back, even to his own brother (or specially to his own brother, perhaps). But, hell, he had seen Loki only twice in two weeks, and talked but sparingly on the phone (they still hated small talk, and they struggled to make time or find energy for the other kind), and he felt disconnected from him, kept out of the loop precisely at a time when there seemed to be a hell of a lot going on in his brother’s life. She would understand and take pity on his conundrum, wouldn’t she? It's not like he wanted to pry...

“How is he with you?” he asked. “What does he tell you?”

Again, she weighed down her words carefully before she spoke them.

“He’s both very excited and very stressed out about the play. Massive mood swings, you know, one day he’s a ball of energy and positivity, the next day he’s dispirited and anxious and wants to quit, and move to a desert island.” She smiled because Thor had smiled. She looked intently at him. “And he knows you’re not happy. He’s worried.”

Oh.

“How is he with you?”

“About what.”

“About everything, you know him.”

Thor laughed, without humour.

“He’s terrified of what would happen to you if you were discovered.”

Thor raised an eyebrow.

“To me? What about him?”

“He thinks he already has a reputation for depravity and immorality as it is,” she grinned. “And he thinks he can take whatever the world throws at him.”

“Well, he’s sort of proven that already. Does he think I can’t?”

“He says you don’t know how it really feels to be universally hated and despised. That it would destroy you, and you’d blame him for it, and end up hating him.”

Thor gasped, wounded deep.

“Jesus. How can he think I…?”

“Anxiety disorder logic.”

He felt like crying.
“For the record,” he said, “I would never blame him, if the worst should happen. For anything. And I could never hate him if I tried, ok?”

She smiled kindly.

“And I’m not as soft and tender as he thinks,” he added. "I’m my father’s son, and I worked in fucking soaps and made dinosaur movies. Believe you me, I know what it is to feel despised and to face severe disapproval for my choices.”

It was only half a joke, so Sigyn only half smiled.

“I don’t give a shit what the world thinks,” he blurted out. “Oh, I don’t know. Am I being arrogant?”

“Yes.”

He laughed. He sighed.

“It’s this hiding and pretending that does my head in, as if I should be ashamed of this. It’s just… Lying to spare someone’s feelings? Sure, that’s fine with me, no problem. But looking people in the eye and pretend I’m not in love with Loki? That just turns my stomach. It’s wrong. I feel like I’m hurting him and betraying us both every time I do, it makes me feel like the worst kind of coward. Every time we’re walking down the street and I’m not holding his hand, every time I want to kiss him and I don’t, just in case someone might see. And you know what I don’t get? That this same thing used to drive him up the wall when we were kids, he could not stand it. The tongue-lashings I got for it, well, you can imagine. Why is he alright with it now?”

“He thinks he’s being mature and sensible. He thinks he’s protecting what you have.”

“He thinks? What do you think?”

“I think living in fear all the time sucks, and it wears a relationship down. But I’m not a movie star, and my father is not Odin Borson. I have privileges you guys don’t. And you know what, I appreciate that, I really do. I appreciate how important your job is to you both. Because it’s not just work, it’s your mother, your childhoods, and it’s a calling, and it’s the pressure you’ve both grown under, and it’s doing something you both are simply really good at, and the joy this brings. Pretending that all that doesn’t count and should not matter is unfair and unhelpful. A person’s life is made of many things, and being able to do the work you love is one of them. You guys don’t have it easy. Don’t think for a moment that anyone who knows you and loves you thinks it is.”

Thor sighed. Those were arguments he had not let himself hear in a long time. On top of everything else, he had been taking things for granted that he shouldn’t.

“This is not what I wanted for us,” he murmured. “Sometimes I even think I… That I should not have…” He struggled, that burn in his throat. “I don’t think things through sometimes. Or I’m not honest enough with myself. I get carried away by… I was going to say optimism, but I guess very often it’s nothing but wishful thinking. And others end up paying for it. Loki. Loki pays for it.”

She mulled his words.

“You did not drag him into this against his will,” she said.

“I know, but… I did push him. He literally told me he wanted to try and be brothers and I…”

“Would you have managed that, you think? Being just brothers.”
“Perhaps. In time. Perhaps if we had stopped seeing each other long enough, got older, met other people, perhaps the fire would have died down… Maybe we should have been stronger, I don’t know.”

Sigyn stared at him quietly, lots of thoughts dancing in her eyes, things she would not say.

“Do you regret it?” she asked at last.

Thor felt a sharp choke.

“I can’t. I owe him that at least. But I wish I knew what to do.”

She reached over to hold his hand and gave it a squeeze. Thor’s eyes were stinging and he would start to cry very soon.

“Why don’t you stay over for dinner? I feel like something that takes forever to cook. What say you?”

Thor smiled.

“Fine by me.”

“Would you be an angel and do the onions?” she said, getting up, making for the kitchen.

“Sure. I’m already crying anyway.”

“Oh, sweetie… Apple crumble for pudding? With custard made from scratch?”

“Cures all woes,” he said.

“Doesn’t it just.”

Another long, lonely week, exhausting himself in the gym, until his coach had to tell him not to overdo it. Grumpy and sour even through texts with his brother, laconic on the phone. He was pretty sure Loki was just pretending he wasn’t noticing anything, that all was fine. Thor always put the phone down thinking he’d try to do better next time, but by the next call, he had already worked himself into another huff.

Friday. Costume fittings. When he finished with his own, Peggy let him have a look at photos of the rest of the cast.

“Steve dirties down beautifully,” he joked.

“Doesn’t he just,” she said, with that luminous smile of hers.

Steve had grown a bushy, messy beard, and longer hair. It aged him somewhat, gave him lots of
Gravitas. Angie looked ethereal and magnificent as Guinevere the queen, in white, blue and gold, and powerful and carnal as Guinevere the woman, in earthy, warm colours. Thor himself didn’t look half bad, he thought. Quite a striking figure he cut in those clothes, not to mention in full armour. It almost made it worth the pain of putting it on. And wearing it. And taking it off.

But Loki’s Merlin…

“Wow,” said Thor, bringing the photos closer to appreciate the details. “Wow.”

“Amazing, isn’t it?” said Peggy. “He came up with the main design himself. And there’s a reason behind every single thing he’s wearing, down to the last bone bead. He’s thought up a whole theory of magic for Merlin, based on modern archaeological and anthropological studies and books of sorcery, medicine, and natural philosophy, dating from Antiquity to Early Medieval times. And you know he made the face and body paint himself, with period-accurate materials found and used around the year one thousand? Your brother doesn’t do anything by halves!”

“That, he doesn’t,” said Thor, bursting with pride, and re-examining Loki’s costume with even keener eyes. No pointy hats for him, but trousers of rough leather and coarse woollen felt, a hooded cape made from animal hides and furs. Underneath, a helmet that seemed composed of a primitive celtic helm and the skull of a horned beast, painted in pigments that certainly looked ‘historical’. On his face and his naked chest, painted dusky blue, strange lines and patterns, some resembling tattoos and ritual scars, and an array of esoteric-looking amulets. And a wooden staff topped with a large, blue, gem-like stone. He looked primitive, and wild, and ginger. He wore a long, straggly, rust-red wig, a few braids woven with leather thongs and gemstone beads.

“Incredible,” said Thor, fascinated. This movie was going to look amazing. “What about Morgan Le Fay? I haven’t seen any photos.”

“Oh,” laughed Peggy, “that’s because he does not allow us to take any until the costume is completely finished, and Morgan has four gowns, and he keeps having them tweaked.”

“Yeah, he’s hard to please like that,” said Thor, smirking at his own private jokes.

“He’s trying on the court dress right now, and it should be the last fitting. Maybe he’ll let you see it. Would you like to?”

Would he like to?

“Hell, yeah,” he said.

He followed her with a hot churn in his stomach. The last time he had seen Loki as a woman… Well.

“Loki, are you decent?” she knocked.

The door opened to a messy room, full of rolls of fabric and trimmings and mysterious tools of a craft Thor knew nothing about. There was a mirror all along the one wall, and in front of it, a curvy red-head in a deep green gown of velvet and brocade, and black, gold and ermine-fur trimmings, with an exotic-looking headpiece, between a turban and a hat, finished with a sheer veil and a barely-there golden chainmaille. You could not tell it was not a woman from the back, and it was only that smirk in the mirror that betrayed her.
“Mother of f… Wow,” gasped Thor. That was one fucking hot early medieval female courtier his brother made, with a glorious pair of tits, nice and generous to balance his broad shoulders, that realer-than-real creamy white, freckle-dusted, cosy cleavage, where Thor wanted to bury his face in right the fuck now.

Loki’s grin in the mirror became wider, his green eyes playful and smug, made greener with the mahogany red hair, and the crystals of his jewelry, in an array of shades of emerald and peridot. A very skilled makeup artist had been there to soften the sharp bones of his face and smooth out his skin, as well as giving it the delicate translucence that often comes with red hair, adding a smattering of freckles on his nose and cheeks that was nothing short of adorable on him. They had also dusted his eyelashes and brows with gold or something, they had become nearly invisible… His brother was grinning with delight, his lips made ever so subtly thicker and fleshier with a clever, slight touch of pink, but he was keeping still for the seamstress, who was doing something around the waist of the gown with needle and thread. He seemed amused by the fact that Thor could not get his eyes off those tits.

“So what do you say, Thor, convincing?” asked Peggy.

Thor opened his mouth but could not find the breath to speak.

“There,” said the seamstress, saving the day. She broke the thread and took a step back to examine her work.

“Is it finished now?” said Peggy.

“It’s only basted at the waist,” said the seamstress. “Otherwise, it is. But you need to stop losing weight now, love,” she told Loki.

Loki hummed vaguely in agreement, checking himself in the mirror, turning his face and body this way and that. There was some engineering at work in how they had cut that dress, using the natural bulge of his butt to enhance his waist and give him round hips.

“Give us a spin,” asked Peggy.

Loki did, and he did it in character — that dainty wrist, the way he held his head, even the posture of his back and shoulders. Exquisitely subtle, but oh so feminine.

“You look ravishing, brother,” joked Thor, but the joke never reached his eyes. He hoped he wasn’t being too obvious.

Loki’s responding grin was also only two parts humour; the rest was something else entirely.

“So, Loki, what do you say? Can we call this one finished and take some photos?”

Loki pursed his mouth in mild displeasure, still checking the costume.

“Hm, I guess,” he said.

Yep, that was Loki, alright. Satisfaction? Not his thing.

“It’s alright, Thor can lend me a hand, can’t you, brother?” said Loki after the photos had been taken. They had sent for the seamstress to help Loki out of his dress, but word was sent back that she was busy right now seeing to some extras, so she’d be there as soon as possible. Peggy was also needed
elsewhere.

Alone in the room now, the fabric over Loki’s fake breasts getting taut with his slightly accelerated breathing — could be that corset cinching his waist in, or it could be something else —, and Thor’s eyes not being able to lift from them.

“Do you like it?” said Loki, the rasp from his voice smoothed out. It was his *M.Butterfly* voice, a hot, rich *mezzo soprano*.

Thor looked him up and down. When Loki had played Song in *M.Butterfly*, the costume and makeup had been so exotic, so overpowering, his brother got a bit lost underneath it, and all you saw was the character. Not so this time. This time Loki was there, and how, just a different incarnation of him, one that had his brother’s mind reeling.

“Very much,” he said, a tad husky. “You’ll make a killing. I don't know how you do it.”

That pleased Loki. He smiled, delighted.

“Help me,” he said, turning his back to him and dragging the veils and the cascade of red hair away from the laces that ran down the back of the bodice.

“I have no idea how to do this,” said Thor, approaching. He met Loki’s eyes in the mirror.

“From the top down,” said Loki softly. “You’ll work it out.”

Thor felt all thumbs as he tugged and pulled. Loki was staring at him through the mirror.


Thor reached the end of the laces, and undid the buttons on the skirt too, the gown now open to a point well below the buttocks. There was nothing but a semi-transparent linen shift under there. Nothing.

“Fuck,” he said, throat dry.

When he looked up at Loki in the mirror, his brother raised his hands to touch his fake breasts through the bodice.

“They’re incredible,” he said, a soft murmur, “some sort of next generation silicon, with a layer of skin over the cleavage. They even have a nipple.” A calculated pause. “But of course, you're the expert. Do you want to feel them, tell me if they pass muster?”

Thor took a step back. Loki’s eyes on his were searing.

"Would you like to know what it would have been like to have a sister instead?" said Loki, still that whispery, softer voice, his woman's voice.

Thor swallowed dry, closed his fists by his sides.

“What the fuck are you doing.”

Loki rolled the fake tits in his hands.

“I dare you.”

“You dare me,” repeated Thor, caustic. “*You dare me.*” He snorted. “You won’t go on dates with
me just in case someone suspects. You won’t stay overnight, because neighbours might notice. You’re making us get fucking beards, because you need to set your mind at ease. And now you dare me to fuck you in a changing room, with two hundred people outside that door, and a seamstress that will be here at any second? You’ve got to be fucking kidding me. Make up your goddamn mind, brother.”

Loki looked indignant, baffled, and hurt. Thor picked up his jacket and went to the door.

“Remember we’re having dinner with Fandral and Sif. See you later.”

He would carry Loki’s face with him the rest of the day. He looked like he had just been slapped.

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“What are you making?” said Loki. He was just in from the street. They had not talked since the changing room situation, except for a text from Loki asking if anything was needed, and Thor’s dry reply, "No."

Thor didn’t lift his eyes from the worktop, where he was chopping onion and chillies. He was not done sulking.

“*Kerak telor*, Javanese egg-crust rice.”

“Hm, sounds lovely,” said his brother pleasantly.

“A favourite of Sif’s,” said he, tersely.

Loki’s silence in response to that was heavy and thick.

“I brought pudding,” announced his brother, making an effort at sounding light, lifting the grocery bag for him to see. “Everything we need to make Eton mess.”

“Put it in the fridge,” said Thor, without looking.

Now he heard his brother mumble something under his breath. He didn’t ask what.

“Need any help?” asked Loki. His tone was showing strain.

“Nope.” Thor kept chopping.

Loki may have made a sound, and may have even whispered, “well fuck you, then”. Thor kept right on chopping.

They had just finished their puddings, and now they had turned to Loki’s extra-sweet Tunisian style mint tea, which apparently he had learned from Bruce Banner, who seemed to have done a lot of travelling between forsaking his career in the US and settling down in the UK.

“So what’s this about, then,” said Sif, brusquely. “This, tonight. Why are we really here?”
“Yeah, tell us why we’re really here, Loki,” jabbed Thor. Because even though Fandral had made him laugh all through dinner with anecdotes and gossip, dramatising conversations in his flamboyant style and impersonating voices, and the banter between all of them had come almost as easy as ever, Thor was still in a pretty rank mood underneath it all.

Loki returned a resentful leer to him. To Sif, a meeker expression. He still did not entirely manage to relax around her.

“Ok, alright. So, as you both know, the junkets for the movie will be starting soon. There is going to be a lot of attention on us both, and we thought—"’

“Loki thought,” corrected Thor.

His brother threw him a nasty squint.

“…And Thor agreed,” he said, cutting, “that we need some sort of distraction, to prevent rumours from…”

“Beards,” cut Sif, abrupt. “You need beards, and you want us to be your beards.” Shooting from the hip, as was her way.

It was hard to read her when she spoke like that. Could be hostility, or she could be simply being direct. In spite of the day they had had, Loki turned to his brother for support.

“Yes, that’s right,” said Thor, because he was still not immune to those helpless month-old kitten eyes.

Sif and Fandral shared a look.

“Well,” said Fandral, reclining in his chair. “I certainly wasn’t expecting that.”

“You don’t have to do this,” said Thor. “And it would only be temporary. After the Oscars, we’re done. Or at any point before that, whenever you say so.”

Loki had nothing to add to that.

“What would it entail?” asked Sif.

Thor let his brother take this one.

“Just showing up together at a couple of events, maybe dinner every now and then, where we can be spotted. No need to answer any questions and no need to lie. If they ask, we’re just friends. They will be busier if we keep them guessing.”

Fandral had a thoughtful, yet amused expression. He had a sip of tea, and made an appreciative sound.

“And Thor says you’ll be offended, but you’ll be compensated if you wish,” added Loki, anxious. “Anything within our power.”

“Thor’s right, I’m offended,” said Sif. Then she tempered her words with a smile, because Loki had flinched. He did not know her as well as Thor, and with the way his brother processed things, there was no way he’d be taking that as a show of humour.

“Well, I’ll be happy to let you pay for dinner and take me out dancing,” said Fandral. “That’s all the compensation I shall need,” a broad, flashy smile. “I accept, of course. It will be my pleasure and my
privilege. Sif?”

Sif was staring intently at Thor. Thor was keeping his eyes low.

“Not if this is going to cause a rift between you two, or with us,” she said.

“There should be no problem, should it, Thor?” said Loki, between his teeth. “Since we had already discussed this and agreed it was the best way to go, and we were alright with it. Weren’t we, Thor?”

Thor's jaw showed his tension, his eyes still low.

“Right. Come on, you,” Sif said to him, standing up and patting his arm. “I want to talk to you. Alone.”

Upstairs, because they could hardly take this to the back garden, where neighbours might overhear. They took the room that doubled up as studio and small, makeshift gym. They closed the door.

“Ok, what’s the problem,” said Sif.

“Where do I start,” he grumbled.

“Let’s have an overview, a quick summary.”

Thor exhaled noisily, like an angry, puffing bull.

“Everything about this sucks. Everything.”

Sif had eyebrows to say to that.

“I’m going to need you to be more specific,” she said.

Thor had still not worked through his gut feelings. All he had were impressions. He blurted them out as they came.

“He’s insecure enough as it is,” he said, “and he overthinks everything. And now he wants me to believe he will be perfectly fine with everyone thinking I’m officially dating someone else?” He did not add ‘you especially’, but he was pretty sure she could fill this in herself. “And he knows how I get with him and other people. And I’m not saying I’ll be getting weird, but I can so see him getting defensive and worked up and… And all I can see coming from this is fighting and aggravation and fucking headaches, and I’m stretched thin enough as it is.”

Her open, attentive expression urged him on.

“I’m up till fucking here with this bloody double agent life,” he confessed. A storm of every single thing that had been annoying him lately was mounting up and about to break out. If he started, he would never bloody stop. “I’m not fucking happy, Sif. I’m just… Fuck.” Too much. Too much.

“You guys need to talk,” she said.

Thor snorted again. As if.

“Why not?” she asked.
“He’ll freak out. He’ll panic and go into meltdown. And right now, I… I’m not sure I’d have the words to talk him out of it.”

They both sat in silence for a moment, the direness of the situation heavy in the air between them.

“Why are you doing this, then? The beards thing. Are you just going along with it because you don’t want to upset Loki? Do you see any positives in it at all?”

Thor took a deep breath, and confessed.

“I think he has a point that giving people something to think about might stop them thinking too much. And I know that people are interested. It’s not that I think it’s a stupid idea, or even unnecessary, I just… I fucking hate it. I hate it. It turns my fucking stomach to have to do all this. We do no fucking harm, and we should not have to hide, it’s as simple as that. But it is what it is, right?”

A bitter smirk that broke when his lip trembled. “It’s just, I can’t see me doing this for the rest of our lives, Sif. I can’t do it.” There, he had said it. It was out.

He was taken aback when she got up to give him a quick hug. She was not demonstrative or affectionate. He returned it with some awkwardness.

“Listen, Thor, I said I’d do whatever you guys needed to help you both, and I meant it. I can do this, no problem, no worries on my part, if you think that it will help. But I won’t if you think it’s going to do more harm than good.”

“Frankly, I don’t know,” he said.

“You need to talk to him, Thor.”

“Yeah, I know.”

She patted his thigh.

“Come on, let’s go downstairs.”

They found them both smoking in the back garden.

“I said yes, under some conditions,” announced Sif, without ado. “First, I want you guys to have a proper conversation about it, discuss all the implications candidly, and then decide if you want to go ahead with it. If you say yes, I’m in. But the moment I get an inkling that this is stirring crap between you two, or between you and us, I’m out. Is that acceptable to you?”

Loki looked from Sif to Thor, and back to Sif. He nodded with big, worried, vulnerable eyes. Thor just wanted to cuddle the hell out of him right now, and that annoyed him.

“Thank you, guys,” said Loki. “Thank you, Sif.”

Sif had started the bike. Thor was holding the helmet for Fandral while he put on his jacket.
“Are you really alright with this, man?” asked Thor.


“Well, you know, with… with what there was between us, and, uh, I knew you really had it for Loki, so…”

“Hm,” Fandral pursed his mouth in thought. “The question should be, are you alright with this?”

Thor sighed. He was so fucking tired right now.

“Oh, dear,” said his friend, smiling. “You do know I have no bloody chance in hell with him as long as you draw breath, don’t you? And even if the unthinkable should happen, I’m sure I’m not even top of his list.”

“It’s not that,” said Thor.

Sif revved up the engine.

“What is it, then,” said Fandral.

Thor shook his head heavily. Too fucking much.

Fandral put two warm hands on Thor’s shoulders, and gave them a firm squeeze, with a bright, affectionate smile.

“Fair enough,” he said. “Anytime you feel like talking. Or sitting down, drinking and looking into space and not talking, but with a friend.”

Thor nodded.

“Hey,” he said, spur of the moment thing. “Have I ever told you how grateful I am? About, you know, you being there for me when my mum died.”

“You have,” said his friend, a twinkle of amusement and mischief in his eye. “Many, many times, in your own wonderful way.”

Thor tried for a smile.

“You did me a lot of good.”

“I know, I was there,” grinned Fandral. “I’ll take your words of gratitude, since you offer them in good grace, but it’s not necessary, you know that. It’s not like I was not, hm, gratified, shall we say, and many times over, at the time,” he winked.

Thor offered a weak smile which troubled and dimmed Fandral’s own.

“Anyway, I’m sure Sif had words of wisdom for you. Consider them co-signed.” Fandral wagged a finger at him, mocking a severe gesture. “Think about it, young man.”

He smacked a kiss on his cheek before he left.

“Good night, love,” he said, climbing on the bike behind Sif, “see you tomorrow. It’s still on, isn’t it?”

He waved good-bye as they rode away.
He found Loki in the kitchen. He had finished loading up the dishwasher and was now piling the bigger pots for scrubbing. Thor noticed how thin his arms looked.

“How come you’ve lost weight? Is it for the part?” asked Thor.

Loki didn’t look at him.

“Hm-hm.”

Oh, aren’t you full of rubbish, brother.

“Are you not eating well?” insisted Thor.

“I eat very well.”

“Just not enough, then.”

“I’m busy.”

Thor sighed, frustrated with Loki’s lack of cooperation. One fucking worry at the time, for pity’s sake. Loki had finished what he was doing. He leaned on the worktop drying his hands absentely, an unhappy frown on his forehead, his mouth thin and tight, his eyes low.

“What does she want us to talk about?” he asked.

“Do we have to do this now?” said Thor.

There was a flash of something in Loki’s eyes that troubled him. Alarm. Hurt.

“I see,” said his brother. “Excuse me.” He brushed past him without looking.

“Fuck,” muttered Thor to himself.

He gave himself a couple of minutes. When he did follow after, he found him in the back garden, smoking, withdrawn. He should have gone. He would have gone. But he had nothing to say right now that would make it any better. Which was pretty damned fucked up in and of itself. He plummeted on the settee and closed his eyes.

He heard the doors slide open and shut, then nothing. He opened his eyes to Loki’s silhouette, hazily cut against the artificial twilight of the London night. He could not see his face. Nobody said a word for a while.

Fuck. This was not what… Damn it all to hell. He extended an arm, a peace offering. Once Loki would have been too proud and stubborn to take it, but he guessed they were growing up, because he did. Thor dragged him closer, closer, until Loki was sitting on his lap, and his face buried in the crook of Thor’s neck. He hugged him tight, breathing in deep. This was what it was all about. This, now.

“Are we this fucked up?” murmured Loki weakly after some time.

Thor had to force his words out.
“No, baby,” he said, “no.” But that was all he had, so he just hugged him tighter.

They fucked almost in silence. Too dark, he could not see Loki’s eyes. It felt lonely somehow. After, his brother cuddled up under his arm. That was something at least.

“Listen,” said Thor after a while. “If we do this beard thing, I’ve got conditions too, ok?”

A silence.

“Ok.”

“First, the minute, the second your mind starts spinning out of control and going to ugly places, you speak out, and we deal with it. We don’t let this mess us up, ok?”

Loki was quiet. It’s not like Thor did not know this was a hard promise to keep, even with the best intentions. Loki’s head worked the way it worked, and if he could magically sort it out by force of will, he would have done it by now, wouldn’t he? But Thor still asked, and after a while, Loki agreed. What else could he do.

“Second, it’s not so much a condition as…”

Loki waited for it, his breathing on Thor’s neck, his heat against his side in the dark.

“We have to be together more. I can’t survive on…” Damn, it was hard. “I miss you, ok? And if we do this, we need to be solid as a rock. I need to see you, I need to be with you, I need to…” his voice faltered. *I need you to remind me what is it we’re fighting for.*

Loki hugged him tight and nuzzled into his neck. Thor tightened his arm around him.

“I’ll try,” said his brother.

So it was a night for wishful thinking then. Well, fair enough. He breathed him in, hair tickling his lips.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“Me too,” Loki whispered back.

Loki’s head was raising and falling with the heave of Thor’s own breathing.

“And you’re going to eat properly, alright?” Thor said, sternly.

“I’m not very hungry lately,” said Loki. “Working so much. I guess I’m stressed out.”

“Doesn’t matter,” he said. “You make yourself eat. Yeah? Or I’m going to start chasing after you with a fucking lunch box.”

Loki chuckled.

“Yes, mum.”

Thor kissed his hair, stroked it.

It did not constitute ‘a proper talk’ by anyone’s standards, and they both knew it.
“Honey, baby, won’t you cuddle near,
Let sweet mama whisper in your ear,
I’m wild about that thing, sweet joy it always brings.
Give it to me, papa, I’m wild about that thing…”

Thor took a long gulp of his beer, watching his brother across the room. He was singing and playing at the piano, with Fandral sitting nearby with a glass of wine and Sigyn on his lap, and Sam Wilson accompanying him on the blues guitar. Sam and Loki were keeping the rhythm with their bodies, communicating with nods and smiles, beautifully synchronised, and clearly having a lot of fun. Sam adored Loki, it was plain to see. As a friend or something else, or perhaps just as a musician at this point, who knew. Did it matter? He teased him without mercy, but seemed to know how far he could push. Loki seemed comfortable with Sam pushing him further than anyone else, except maybe Sigyn. Was Thor jealous, or upset, or suspicious, or did he feel threatened? He would like to say of course not. Who the fuck knows. He was discomfited somewhat, puzzled. He was not used to this Loki, that shy fluster he carried around Sam, that softness. This Loki felt at home with this other man, his walls were down with him. A few months ago, Thor would definitely have felt jealous and threatened. Tonight he was feeling mostly listless, apathetic, and overall pretty damn low.

They were not out to everyone there, and it would not do to just drop it on their friends like that, so they were keeping their hands off each other. It had not seemed such a big deal before the fact, or no worse than usual, anyway. But, of course, Thor had not really thought it through, had he? Because this was not the street, or a restaurant, or the sodding Pinewood Studios. This was their home, and these were their friends. Pretending was grating on him to an unanticipated degree, which added to the already crushing pile of aggravation he was under because of this situation. So he finished his beer, much too quickly, and went to the kitchen to get himself another.

He found Volstagg and Hilde, Pepper and Tony there. They were having an animated conversation about producing, and getting on like a house on fire. They let him through to the fridge without paying him much mind. Volstagg ruffled his hair warmly before Thor left.

In the living room, Clint and Hogun, Nat and Sif had taken over the dining table, and they were playing cards with olives, nuts, and shots of tequila. Keeping a straight face seemed to be an important part of the game, and Clint kept losing. If Thor had to bet, his olives would be between Hogun and Nat.

The settees were taken by Steve, Bruce, Peggy and Angie, who half climbed on her girlfriend’s lap to make room for Thor. They were talking and laughing. He looked around — Bucky was in the back garden, having a fag. All accounted for, all seemingly having a good time, and getting along. Thor was trying to keep his attitude light, at least, but he must not be doing a great job of it, because whenever someone got hold of him one-on-one, they would ask him if something was the matter. Tired, was his go-to explanation. Which may not have been the whole truth, but at least it was not a
Bucky returned from his nicotine break and sat on the armchair. The pat Steve gave his shoulder was more a pal touch than a lover’s. Were they keeping it clean for Peggy, or were they just following through with the habits of a lifetime? He almost resented them for a moment, because they could touch as much as they wanted to, and they weren’t.

He turned to his brother, and caught him looking, but Loki didn’t hold his stare.

He suddenly thought about Jane. He remembered being at parties with her, being the gentleman, getting her drinks, having her sit on her lap, people complimenting him on his taste and his good luck, and teasing her about hers. She would turn to look at him with humour in her huge hazel eyes, so much love there, and he would tell himself, you are a lucky bugger, but he didn’t feel it.

Loki was laughing now, teeth flashing, and his ex-boyfriend was laughing with him.

There were a few empty glasses and bottles scattered around. Thor picked them up, and went through the kitchen and the utility room to put them in the bins in the covered alleyway, one by one, taking as long as he could, relishing the quiet. It smelled damp out there. There was some moon glow coming from each end of the alley, but the little light there was spilled from the little porthole in the door.

He fell into a daze, so he was startled when he heard Tony’s voice.

“Mighty T, you look crestfallen. Talk to me.” His friend stepped into the alley and closed the door behind him.

“I’m tired,” Thor said. “The fighting instructor is working me very hard.” Again, the truth, but far from the whole truth.

Tony’s face was half in shadows.

“So your lack of spirits has absolutely nothing to do with that fine prize of a man currently singing raunchy Bessie Smith classics with your brother.”

A spike of irritation made Thor huff.

“I’m not having a jealous fit, if that’s what you mean.”

“Is that what I mean?” Tony asked himself. “Not necessarily, no.” He sipped at the drink in his hand, something rummy. The rim of the glass twinkled when it caught some light from the house. Thor realised Tony was giving him time.

There was so much on Thor’s mind, not least of all beer.

“They were fine together, back in the day,” he said. “Loki and Sam. He was trying to make himself a life with a good man.”

“I know,” said Tony. “He told me.”

“You know what he told me? That he had broken up with Sam the first chance he got, after I went to see him after The Rocky Horror.”

“I don’t know where that leaves me, since I came in right after Sam, but anyway. What of it?”

The first part did register with Thor. He always stuck his foot in with Tony, didn’t he?
“I can’t help but think, is this fucking worth it? Is this why he dropped everything for? This?” he pointed at himself, the air in front of him.

“You’re making a big deal out of a guy’s guitar playing skills,” said Tony. “Take some lessons or something.”

Thor chuckled miserably. He leaned against the wall.

“What are we doing, Tony,” he said, after a while.

“What do you mean?”

“Hiding and sneaking and lying. Barely seeing each other, just in case someone suspects. Getting ourselves beards, for heaven’s sake. How the fuck is this a life. For him or for me.”

Even with half his face in the dark, Thor could see Tony’s expression, the raised eyebrows and wide eyes and ducky pout he thought of as Tony’s facial exclamation mark.

“If I could see this as temporary. Because of work or whatever. But there is always going to be a movie, a play, a premiere, some awards coming. I thought we would work something out, but… When does it fucking end? When do we start living?”

“Life isn’t perfect,” said Tony. “Actually, most of the time, it downright sucks. But at least you boys get to suck it up with the love of your lives. Is it such a bad deal?”

Thor let out another sour chuckle. He shook his head heavily.

“This isn’t fair. No, that’s not it. It’s not right, that’s what gets to me. And it’s getting to him. And we can’t go on like this indefinitely, Tony. Or I can’t.”

They both went very quiet for a while.

“What are you saying, my good man,” asked Tony, cautiously.

“I don’t know what I’m saying.”

Another long silence.

“Where are your words of comfort and wisdom, Tony? I could use some now.”

“Talk to Nat. It’s all I’ve got.”

Thor chuckled darkly. He made sure the lids were secure on the bins, and made to go back inside.

“No, wait, I’ve got something,” said Tony. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

Thor snorted.

By the piano, there was a little chorus singing.

“We will run and scream, you will dance with me,

We’ll fulfil our dreams and we’ll be free,

We will be who we are, and they’ll heal, our scars,
Sadness will be far away…”

Thor watched Sigyn lovingly wipe a tear off his brother’s eye and kiss him. Loki must have seen him walk in, but he didn’t turn.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of people (like, two) said they would have read more of the Q&A in the last chapter, and a couple more said it would be a fun idea for people to submit questions and for me to answer them as Thor and/or Loki. If anyone’s up to it, I’m all for it too, sounds fun. If I get enough questions, I’ll publish them as a separate chapter.

Ah, we had not had one of these in a while, had we? "I'm wild about that thing" is a song by pianist Clarence Williams sung by Bessie Smith, guitar by Edie Lang, included in the record Empty Bed Blues. My musician brother introduced me to all these incredible people, and then some. Bessie Smith is a force of nature, this song is amazing, and y'all need to go find it and listen to it because they don't make them like that anymore. So much joy and fun and cheekiness and lack of shame or guilt. I like to imagine Loki purring to this and I get palpitations.

OH! I was forgetting a thing. The other song they sing at the end, that's Mumford & Sons "Not with haste."
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Loki has a date.

(Do you like your angst well done, medium or rare.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki jumped one foot in the air when the phone in his hand went off. He’d been halfway through typing the accursed text he’d been trying to compose for a whole fucking hour.

It was Thor, of course. Loki’s heart was hammering in terror. He should have called him, he should have made himself call. Now it was too late. He had fucked up. Laufeyson, this time you’re well and truly rogered.

Jesus, it would go to voice mail. Do not let it go to fucking voicemail, you doofus, he’ll think that, on top of everything else, you’re avoiding him. With a shaky hand, he pushed ‘answer call’.

“Hey,” he said, and forced a cough to clear that choke in his throat.

“Hey, baby. How are you.”


“Fine.”

Nobody said anything for several, very frigging long seconds. Oh, shit.

“Fandral told me you’re going out together tonight,” said Thor.

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit. Loki swallowed, paralysed in fear. He couldn’t reply, he couldn’t come up with anything that didn’t seem to dig him up into a deeper hole.

“You didn’t tell me,” said Thor. His voice was calm, casual even. Should that be freaking him out as much as it was?

“I w-was going to, I mean, I just…”

He fucking was going to. He had been making himself pick up the phone, and his finger had hovered over the fucking call button at least two dozen times, and that was just today. He just couldn’t fucking do it, afraid of Thor’s reaction. There was always later and tomorrow, until there fucking wasn’t. He opened his mouth to explain, but it sounded like a cheap excuse. It cannot be so hard to simply pick up the phone, can it? He was aware of how ridiculous it all was, how childish and irrational, and that only made it harder. And now all hell was going to break loose.

“It’s ok,” said Thor.

“Is it?” said he, baffled.
“Yeah. It’s fine. No worries.”

Now Loki was disarmed. What was his brother on tonight?

“Alright,” he said, deciding to just take the money and run.

“What’s the plan?” asked his brother. “What are you guys doing?”

Loki gulped again. Because to finish it all up, this was so bloody weird.

“Opening night of the new Shrew, then dinner. Maybe clubbing.”

A moment of silence that Loki’s panic filled with all sorts of scary potential outcomes.

“Sounds fun,” said his brother. “Have a nice time.”

Thor had to be lit. There was no other explanation. Sif had dosed him with tranquilisers. She had seen Thor charging like a mad rhino towards Loki’s place after Fandral had given him the news, and she had shot a dart into his shapely butt.

And what to say to that, ‘I wish it was you, not him’? He did, he so, so wished it was Thor he was going out with. But he could not say that, it sounded like he was fishing. He did not have the gall.

“I’m nervous,” he confessed instead.

“Are you?”

“I don’t know him that much.” It was only reason number thirty-eight why Loki was nervous about tonight, but hey ho, his brother surely could surmise the other three hundred.

Thor laughed.

“You’ll be alright. You know him enough. He’s fun.”

Will he look after me? (Don’t ask that.)

“Thor.”

Thor gave him a moment, then urged, “Yeah?”

“Thanks,” said Loki, hesitant.

“…What for?”

“For not… not going berserk on me or freaking out or… You know. I-I should… I mean, it should have been me, the one to tell you. I just… I didn’t know how to… How you would—…”

“Ok,” cut Thor, softly.

Loki gulped again.

“Yeah?” he said.

“Yes.”

“Ok.”
And he was out of things to say again.

“*Have fun, baby,*” said Thor, just like that. “*Enjoy the play.*”

“Thank you, brother.” And then, in a natural enough voice, “I love you, Thor.”

“I love you, baby.”

And that was that.

Well, so that was that hurdle conquered. Loki still did not know which drug or deity had granted his brother that peace of mind, but he’d take it gratefully, and go back to fretting over… well, just about everything else about tonight.

Right now, the most urgent of all his worries was the bloody outfit. Just what the fuck should he wear. There were so many things to bear in mind. This was not so much a date as a photo opportunity. They were there to get papped, and he was Loki Laufeyson, Public Enemy of Decency Number 1, Corruptor in Charge of the Youth of Britain, and he had a public image, and a legend to live up to. Or he would disappoint fans and foes alike.

But, this was supposed to be a real, private date. If he turned up in clothes that screamed “Look at me and this relationship I’m so very publicly involved in all of a sudden”, with his leather and velvet and kohl and feather boa, would people suspect it was a sham?

And there were even more things, things he didn’t even want to acknowledge to himself, because it was beyond ridiculous and he knew it, but it wouldn’t stop nagging at him. It happened when he was buttoning up the velvet trousers (usual date attire as of late, they were so lush), and was checking his butt out of habit: if he looked *too pretty*, would Fandral think that he… he meant it? Would Thor? And then he had quickly slipped those trousers off, thoughts of all the things that had happened with Thor while in them (or fresh out of them, or halfway into them).

Then again, he had to fucking try a little. It had to look like a fun, romantic night out for a new courting couple, and he had to dress accordingly.

God, what a mind-fuck. When he was debating with himself the pros and cons of this bearding business, he had thought it might cause Thor some heartburn, but he had not foreseen how much it would mess up with his own head. Oh, for fuck’s sakes, where was Sigyn when you needed her. Oh, right, in the fucking US of A for three weeks, on a special mission to charm the in-laws. Dammit, Gyn, we can’t all have lives at the same time. We should take fucking turns. You’ve had a whole fortnight now, get your arse back here and help me out with mine!

Ok, so, what would Sigyn say if she was here? She would probably remark on what a pain he was, and moan that he’d be the death of her, and then perhaps… Yeah, she’d say he didn’t need to go to extremes. *Middle terms:* Look pretty, look *Loki*, but don’t put a red light on your head. Right? That would totally be her advice. She was kinda boring and sensible like that, and oh so wise.

Door bell. *Fuck fuck fuck fuck, fuckity fuck shitty-ass fucked-up fuck.*

“One minute!” he bellowed, hoping his voice would carry through the open window of his bedroom all the way to the street.

He hurried into a pair of tight jeans, a silk shirt, the leather bomber jacket, all in black, plus a green and gold silk scarf (he always carried something to protect his voice), and half-stumbled downstairs
with the motorist boots in his hand. He unbolted the street door with his heart pounding, from the rush and from le daily panic.

“A very good evening to you,” said Fandral, with a bow and a wide smile. He looked dapper in a charcoal grey three-piece suit.

“Hello,” said Loki, weakly, crouching to put on his boots. “Sorry, I’m running a bit late.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said Fandral. And gave him a second. “You look very nice.”

“Uh, thank you. …Nice shoes,” replied Loki. God, he sounded like somebody was squeezing his balls.

He stood up, his breathing still rushed. Fandral leaned in to kiss his cheek, and Loki sprung back, startled.

“Oh, dear,” said Fandral. “I am sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“No, uh, I wasn’t expecting it, that’s all,” said Loki, donning that deer-caught-in-the-headlights look that was so fashionable this season.

“Well, I hope I can help you relax,” said Fandral.

“What?” squeaked he.

Fandral laughed and shook his head, as if Loki had made a joke.

“Ready?” he said.

No, not even remotely.

“We’re not going on the bike, are we?” said Loki, alarmed. He had spent forty fucking minutes on his hair!

Fandral laughed again, amiably.

“Of course not. We cannot risk helmet-hair tonight of all nights, can we?”

They took a taxi. Fandral offered his hand to help him off it, to which Loki frowned. Ok, this was a date, but did he look like fucking Cinderella? Once at the theatre, in the foyer, they came across a few familiar faces, and many double-takes occurred. It was rather strange to think that people were at that very moment drawing conclusions about them. It was nowhere near as fun as he would have thought.

When the lights went off, and Fandral gave him a friendly (a third party would probably say “loving”) look, Loki got the jitters again. It really didn’t make any sense. This was not really a date, he wasn’t really trying to impress or seduce anybody, nothing was going to happen at the end of it, and he should just fucking be able to psych himself into finding some fucking chill. He focused on the play. The production was a bit bland, but Kate was quite good. Fandral would elbow him amiably to share a laugh. Loki tried his best to just roll with it.

The lounge at the theatre during half-time was packed with personalities, and a photographer was doing the rounds for the Twitter feed. A flash went off a scarce three feet away from them, leaving Loki half-blinded.
“Thanks!” said the photographer, one thumb up.

Fandral gave him a playful eyebrow wiggle. They were photographed again as they left the theatre, this time by fans with mobiles too. When they were getting into the taxi, Fandral gave his butt what in other conditions would have been nothing but a friendly slap. It would read completely different in that context. And so the rumours start… (Could Loki please go home now.)

Over dinner, as they chatted, Fandral kept throwing him lingering, intent, obvious looks, and smiling one hell of a lot. Flirting, basically. Loki struggled to so much as look at his face, like a shrinking violet at her first debutante’s ball. He had not fucking thought about this. He had been visualising the finished product, the premiere photos in shiny tuxes and the fuzzy candids, in which just having two people in the same frame already makes it look like they’re a thing. He had not thought about how they would actually have to be out and about together to make those photos happen, and what the fuck would they be doing in between the flashes. It had not even crossed his mind when he was trying to sell it to Thor, that once they were out there trying to pass for a couple, they would have to… to fucking try to pass for a couple. Fandral may have thought about it, because he was doing a very fine job of it, eye fucking and smiling and listening like Loki’s words were honeyed gospel. He was dancing through the act, smoother than a pair of velvet panties. It was so bloody weird to have someone who wasn’t Thor staring at him like that, and to be expected to fucking respond to it in turn. And how he sucked at it. Jesus Mortimer Christ, Laufeyson, weren’t you supposed to be a professional actor of some talent? So get your shit together and act! But his will kept getting snarled around his mind, which reminded him that Thor would be hearing these rumours and seeing those photos too. This was not just fucking acting. And it felt so goddamn wrong.

He really, really wasn’t looking forwards to the club. They had chosen it because it was popular with celebrities, and paparazzi would be stalking the doors, hoping to catch a drunken WAG as she climbed on a taxi, flashing her knickers, or lack thereof. The kind of media who were interested in this shite may also be interested in the story of outrageous actor former prostitute and pole dancer son of British Entertainment Royalty with his hot new boyfriend out on the town.

And so, here they were now, in the kind of place Loki abhorred and usually tried to avoid like the bubonic plague. It was claustrophobic and overbearing, the music loud enough to crush brain cells dead, the patrons of the footballer, city wanker and celebrity Big Brother participant variety, and their notion of a fine night out, getting hammered, do coke in the toilets, and rub their crotches against models’ and celebrity wannabes’ twerking bums. Loki holed up in a booth while Fandral went to get them some drinks (just a glass of champagne for Loki, he was on the pink pills tonight).

This place brought up all sorts of iffy memories for him. Moscow. The first time he had…

“Are you ok?” asked Fandral when he returned, trying to make himself heard above the hammering thud-thud-thud that was messing up with Loki’s heartbeat.

“I have a headache,” yelled Loki.

“We won’t stay long then,” replied Fandral by his ear.

They sipped at their drinks for some time. Loki was worrying obsessively at an imaginary spot on the base of his long-stem glass. It was impossible to have a conversation, they didn’t even try. They observed the people dancing, the garish outfits, the ugly blatant flirting, people in and out of the restrooms and making out all over the place. The decadence of the Western Empire, thought Loki, with distaste.

“So,” said Fandral after some time, as he took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves.
Loki looked on, alarmed.

“So?” he said.

“Shall we make a show of it?” Fandral gestured to the dance floor.

Loki must have paled or something. He had a look around. They could hardly spend another half an hour, or whatever it was, just sitting there. They had come here to be seen. They had to give people something to fucking look at.

He drank down the rest of his champagne in one gulp, hoping for some bubbly courage to come his way. Fandral took his hand and it shocked him — if felt hot and dry, bit sticky perhaps from that purple thing he had been drinking, and it just was not Thor’s hand.

“Relax,” Fandral said.

Loki went rigid as a board. The mightiest, ugliest flashback had just hit him — the noise, the people, the shady atmosphere, his mind telling him “you need to pretend to like it,” and a voice he did not trust whispering in his ear “relax.”

“Hey, are you ok?” said Fandral.

Loki’s stomach was turning. Deep breaths. Fandral jerked his head, gesturing for the restrooms, saying something Loki didn’t hear but could surmise. But he wouldn’t be fucking caught dead in those restrooms, and his face probably said it loud and clear. Fandral’s expression was saying "so what now."

He began to dance, at a distance, without touching him. He had moves. Well, of course he had them, what did you expect. He beamed at Loki’s appreciative look, and took it up one notch, swaying unselfconsciously and joyfully, having fun. Loki began to move, tentatively, and Fandral’s smile shone even brighter. And then Fandral started to fucking moonwalk. Loki was horrified, but he hadn’t seen anything yet, because next came the fucking robot. Loki wanted to find a hole to hide in. By the time Fandral started to do the Egyptian, all Loki could do was laugh, disarmed. Which seemed to have been Fandral’s intentions all along. He took a giggling, embarrassed Loki by the hand, and pulled him in for a quick spin, Fred and Ginger style, which got him giggling even more. He let himself be pushed and dragged and bent backwards for a lovely, elegant fall. When Fandral lead him for a step-perfect tango promenade, he followed happily. When they turned, Loki grabbed his shoulders, did a couple of feline, sexy crossed-steps, wrapped one leg around him, and arched his back from the waist, almost folding in half, making all the action around them both freeze still. Fandral’s jaw had dropped, there were hearts in his eyes.

And they danced. They had both received training in ballroom dancing, apparently, and were keen to brush up their skills. Still laughing, they carried on with a tango that would have made Gomez and Morticia proud, and went on to dance to their own music and have fun. Loki forgot himself. Ballroom dancing is like acting anyway. That spark of humour always there in Fandral’s eyes, which was kind of infuriating a lot of the time, because one could never fucking tell when he was being serious or not, tonight was helping Loki to play along. Although they kept it scrupulously clean, hands never straying from backs, shoulders or hips, a lot can be done with just the eyes. At some point, he thought he’d ask Fandral if it was a .38 in his pocket. He had not been wined, dined and romanced like this in a while, and in spite of it all, he was having fun.

And then, a whole two hours had passed somehow, and it was that time of the night when a couple on a date that was going swimmingly would usually make their move. Fandral yelled in his ear, “Shall we go?”
They jumped on the taxi together, and they spotted some flashes then as well. Loki was exhausted, his hearing dull, his head full of white noise. He let Fandral take charge, and didn’t think anything at all as they made their way through town. His date very thoughtfully just looked out the window and gave him some peace and quiet. By the time they got to the flat, Loki was feeling relieved and calm.

And then he was slipping the keys in the lock, and Fandral was right beside him, and Loki realised he was coming up with him to the flat. Kiss your fucking chill goodbye, and try to make light of it when he dropped the keys twice, because his hands were shaking so badly again.

The flat was very quiet, and very empty. Not even Minnie was there — Sigyn had left her with her mum while she was abroad, since Loki’s days were so long. Loki’s heart was racing as Fandral hanged his jacket next to his, his stomach dived when he saw him loosen his tie and unbutton the top of his shirt. He might have just taken his pants off, for what it did to Loki’s pulse.

“Do-do you want anything?” asked Loki. He instantly blushed deep red, his cheeks burning. “Uh, to drink,” he specified. And since when there was a fucking echo in this flat?

Fandral smiled luminously, untroubled, that spark of fun in his eye. As if he was reading Loki’s mind, and found it awfully entertaining.

“Well, since you offer,” he said, “I could murder a cup of tea.”

“It went well, don’t you think?” said Fandral, from the settee. “I bet there will be some gossip online before the morning.”

“Uh, yeah,” said Loki, when he returned with Fandral’s cuppa. He had poured himself some fizzy water.

“You’re still nervous,” noted Fandral, always with a smile, as Loki sat down rigidly on the armchair. “How come? Haven’t I convinced you yet that I am not the big bad wolf out to eat you?”

Loki smiled weakly.

“That’s exactly what the big bad wolf would say.” He tried for a bigger smile. “I’m alright. It was more fun than I expected.”

“Why, thank you very much, I guess,” said Fandral. Even his sarcasm sounded splendid, devoid of nastiness.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” said Loki.

“I know,” said Fandral sweetly. “So? Why the nerves?”

Loki took a moment.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he gave up. “This is all so…”


Loki smiled, not too brightly.
“Well, I myself had a lovely time,” said Fandral. "Thank you very much."

“I-I enjoyed it too,” said Loki. "But I kept thinking, what will Thor…? He gets a bit… you know,” he confessed.

“Hah!” exclaimed Fandral. “If Thor gets a bit you know about this, please send him my way for a thorough spot of ear-pulling.”

Loki found the visual amusing.

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, after I've pulled his ears, I'm also going to bloody flatten out that pretty nose of his. I consider myself a good friend of Thor’s, one of the best, I take our friendship very seriously, and I bloody well expect him, after all those years, to have put this notion through that thick skull of his. You are indeed utterly seductive and enticing, and surely one of the sexiest creatures I’ve ever come across, and you are indecently fun to be around, but,” and he paused for emphasis, “you are with Thor. This overrides whatever my basest leanings might suggest. To make it completely clear, if you were to throw yourself at me right now, I would have to decline. You can even test me on that. Try me.” His tone was firm, almost solemn, but that bloody spark of humour in his eye.

“I will not, if that’s all the same to you,” smiled Loki, demure. And he gave Fandral a long, assessing look. Had he misjudged Fandral even more than he thought.

“You look baffled, and more than one bit skeptical,” said Fandral, with a chuckle. “Oh dear, oh dear, the impression I must give.”

That made Loki laugh. Oh, you have no idea.

“I believe you,” said Loki. "If nothing else, because he seems to attract decent people. And he manages to hold on to them once he has."

“He is quite an extraordinary man, isn’t he?” said Fandral. “When one is around Thor, one finds oneself thinking in terms of old-fashioned, bright coloured emotions, values even, not one shade of grey to be seen, like bravery, sincerity, honour, and loyalty. I don’t claim to be a highly moral or principled person — I don’t claim to take anything very seriously at all, frankly —, but I sometimes think, in a different time, I would have followed him into battle or some such nonsense.” He chuckled at himself.

“So he’s not just my knight in shining armour alone, then,” said Loki.

“You worship the floor he treads on, don’t you? It's very moving.”

Loki blushed and looked away.


Fandral laughed.

“It must be quite a thing, to fall in love with one’s own brother,” he mused.

“I don’t know anything else,” muttered Loki. And then, because courage and sincerity, “Yeah, it is. Even at the worst of times, I feel fortunate for…” He tried to find the words. “The older I get, the more I realise not a lot of people get to experience what we have. I did not know that as a kid. I thought being in love was always like this, for everyone.”
"It takes a certain kind of person to experience things in a certain way," said Fandral. "You have to be wired like that."

"Are you wired like that?"

"I'll give you three guesses," beamed Fandral.

Loki laughed.

"Righty-ho,” said Fandral, slapping his thighs and standing up, making Loki startle. "What do you think? Shall we call it a night?"

Loki had not thought about that part either.

"Oh, right. Yeah. I guess."

"It’s been a pleasure, my dear,” said Fandral at the door. “Looking forwards to next time. Hopefully we’ll get to go to a nicer place for dancing. Can you do the swing?"

Loki liked that idea. Thor’s moves were pretty much restricted to jumping up and down for the quick ones, and clinging like an octopus for the slow ones.

“Wait,” he said then. He hesitated a second, but he went for it: he quickly ruffled Fandral’s hair, messing it up. It felt rather intimate. Fandral raised an eyebrow, and Loki explained. “I-I put out on the first date.”

Fandral smiled, and Loki was pretty sure he had flustered.

“Oh, Loki,” he sighed, as he made a show of fanning his face, “the fun we could have had.” He kissed Loki’s cheek, and then pinched it.

Loki watched from the front window as Fandral climbed on his motorbike and left. He checked the slight tremor in his hands. He was wired, and well beyond that point of exhaustion where he would not be managing to bat an eyelid if he went to bed. And he was feeling lonely and anxious, and he was aching for…

What time was it? Too late, of course, Thor would be asleep. Tomorrow was a Saturday, they had a breakfast date, he should just let his brother rest.

Fandral’s words circled in his head, like leaves caught in a little whirl. *Courage, sincerity, honour, loyalty.* Loki’s breathing was becoming laboured and wet. Courage. Sincerity. Honour. How the fuck does that fit with faking relationships and lying to their fucking friends, and to the whole world. Of course Thor was fucking chafing, of course he was unhappy. Hell, Loki didn’t know how he had not been torn in half by now. Perhaps because his brother had been keeping his head down, one day after another, and he hadn’t dared to look far enough ahead so far. The things Thor was willing to put up with to be with your sorry humble servant.

Anyway, judging from Thor’s behaviour lately, subdued, deflated, resigned perhaps, he had now. Looked far enough ahead, that is. And he wasn’t too chuffed about what he had seen. Had he thrown the towel in yet, is that where Thor’s calm reaction earlier was coming from? Had he just accepted this wasn’t going to work, and had he stopped… god, had he stopped caring?

*The moment your mind starts to go to ugly places,* Thor had said, and he had made him promise. But
he had probably meant if Loki got all worked up or jealous over Sif, right? Although this place Loki's mind was right now was an ugly place indeed. He was mouthing, anxiety choking him, gasping for air like a fish out of water.

Wouldn't Thor worry if he suddenly burst into the flat in the middle of the night? Should he just leave him alone and talk about this at a reasonable time, tomorrow? Wouldn't he try to keep his shit together for just a few more hours?

Oh, Sigyn, what would Sigyn say? *You’re always overthinking things, you lemon. Take a step back, and tell me what feels right.* What would Thor prefer, what would make his brother feel better, to carry on sleeping obliviously and find Loki in a right state by breakfast time tomorrow, or for Loki to wake him up and ask him for a hug right now?

Loki went to put on his hoodie and his sports slacks (his *incest ninja outfit*, he called it). He was feeling very fucking pleased with himself. For once, he could see the answer so clearly, and did it feel good or what. Keys, mobile, skulking by the back door, through the back garden, to the alleyway route over to Thor’s. Some would say he was making progress, perhaps even himself.

* Thor had not been asleep, dozing at best. He jerked alert when he heard noises downstairs, until he heard the fridge door open and close. It had to be Loki, of course, using the alleyway entrance, helping himself to a glass of milk. Then nimble steps up the stairs, the wood that creaked in the landing, and finally the bedroom door. Thor stayed still and quiet, listening, trying to make out the blacker than black silhouette of his brother undressing in the dark, very carefully and slowly, and slipping into bed in slow motion, his breath held. He was taking every pain not to wake him up, how cute.

“Hey,” he said, in a normal tone of voice.

“Jesus!” jumped Loki, as Thor chuckled. “You bastard!”

“Yeah, need to work on those ninja moves, babe,” he teased.

And he found himself suddenly covered in Loki, wrapped in arms and legs, ankles tangled, his brother’s face burrowing in the crook of his neck. Once the rustle of the bed clothes had quieted, Loki let out a deep sigh of content. Thor hugged him tight and kissed his forehead.

“Ok, baby?” he asked.

Loki scooted even closer for an answer. Thor chuckled.

“Sorry I woke you up,” muttered his brother.

“I wasn’t asleep.”

Loki’s shoulders became tense.
“Were you… were you thinking about…?”

“I was thinking about work,” said Thor. And yeah, about the date, but it wasn’t anything awful, just a vague worry about Loki and paparazzi, and importune, upsetting questions, and the goddamn tapes (the trial was happening later that same month). But he kept all that to himself. “I’m looking forwards to next week. Can’t wait to work with you again.”

“You mean, in the general proximity of one another,” jabbed Loki.

It was finally Merlin and Morgan’s sessions. Lancelot did not have any dialogue with them, but they did share a couple of group scenes.

“Whatever,” said Thor. “I can’t wait to see Merlin in the flesh. Morgan I’ve met, but I wouldn’t mind seeing her again…” His voice had lowered to a playful purr, to which Loki did not respond. Ok, so not in the mood then. “Steve says that Bucky speaks wonders about you. Uh, as a director.”

Loki laughed at the specification.

“What exactly does he say?”

“That you’re very patient, that you listen to everyone’s opinions and thoughts and ideas, that you are a great motivator, and you really know how to make yourself heard and understood. That you’re really good at setting up an open, buzzing and creative atmosphere. And that you’re managing your girls very cleverly.”

“Managing, that’s a word for it,” laughed Loki, the vibrations of his chuckles thrumming against Thor’s chest. “Remember that spat between Moira and Louise early on in the week? Well, because we were focusing on that scene again, in the morning there was some tension. So over the coffee break, I started talking about mum. I told them about when I was little and I was sick so often, and she would take me to rehearsals with her. So before they know it, all the veterans are sharing their own memories about working with her, or having met her, this anecdote, this conversation. Not one single dry eye left in the room, Bucky with the worst of them. No more rehearsing for the rest of the morning. We break for lunch. When we come back, not a peep. I got Moira to say the bleeding lines exactly the way I wanted, and Louise didn’t make another sound except to say her own lines.”

Thor had chuckled here and there while Loki spoke.

“I mean, I’m glad for their input, and I do listen to everyone. I have a bazillion years of theatrical experience in that room, and I intend to squeeze it down to the last drop. But some things I’m not going to budge on. It’s my bloody play after all. It’s my mum.”

Thor gave him a squeeze.

“The things they said, about her,” added Loki after a while, “it was so… odd. They surprised me, or got me thinking. And I got this feeling all over again, I get it all the time, that there’s so much I don’t know, and I’ll never know. Even if I was to sit down with every person who so much as crossed paths with her and grilled them for all they could remember, she would still escape me. And I get this void in my stomach. I hate that… that… that she will always escape me. I don’t want her to…” his voice faltered. "I wish I could pin her down and be able to…"

Thor hugged him tight.

“I miss her too,” he said. "I miss touching her. Her movies help in a way, because it's her voice and her facial expressions, and I love hearing her laugh so much, and it is as if she is alive again for a while, but in so many other ways, it's just... She's bottled there, and I crave for new things... I miss
not knowing what comes next."

A silence while Loki’s breathing quieted.

“I almost could not fucking look at the script in the afternoon,” he said. “It felt just wrong, or... fake, I don't know. Those new things I had learned today, those new impressions, I had not counted on them when I wrote the play, and now it’s all... It's not true enough. I felt it crumbling in my hands. It always feels about to crumble, ten times a day. But I need to just get a grip. You can never really know anyone.”

“I don’t agree,” said Thor, softly. “I think you can. You did. You do know her. The core of it, the things that matter. Those details, those anecdotes, they don’t really change who she was. You can’t put everything a person is into a play, but that doesn’t mean you have not written the truth. She is there, brother, I feel her there, I hear her. It’s very... it’s overpowering. When I first read it, I cried so much. Her voice and her humour and her turns of phrase, things I had forgotten... You know what I've said about craving new things from her? That's how it felt, like you had brought her back to life and had her talking and saying things I had never heard her say, but rang so true to who she was. It's so beautiful, baby, it's a wonderful work of art you've made. And she would be so proud... And in a way, I believe she is. I mean... I don’t know.” He laughed at his own words.

Loki stayed in silence for a long time after that, but felt blindly to grab his brother's hand.

“Unna said something,” he said mutedly. “He knows what I’m doing. Odin, I mean. Did... did you tell him?”

“He asked me how you were doing and what you were up to. Yes, I told him.”

A silence.

“Has he read it?” Loki asked.

“Not that I know of. Not through me.”

“Did he ask to?”

“He said he would like to, but didn’t ask directly.”

“Should... should I let him?”

“It’s up to you, baby. You don’t owe it to him, though. It’s not like he shares his work with us before it comes out.”

“But this is different, Thor, he’s actually in it.”

“There is a character called Richard in your play with echoes of Odin Borson, and also Richard Burton and Larry Olivier.”

“But it’s him. He’ll know it’s him.”

“Are you scared?”

“I don’t know. Should I be? I’m not too kind to the husband in the play.”

“You’re not cruel either. He appears as a bit of a git at times, but mainly what you get is a man who loves his wife deeply, admires her, and is baffled by all she is. I don’t see how that could upset him. Anyway, does it matter so much to you if he does get upset?”
“I guess I should say no. But to be honest… I’m not sure.

They went quiet. Loki’s breathing was now regular and peaceful. Thor was stroking gentle circles on his back.

“Did the date go well?”

Loki’s shoulders became stiff again.

“It was ok,” said Loki. “It was weird. We started kind of uptight, or I did, but in the end we relaxed a bit. I had more fun than I was anticipating.”

A pause.

“More fun than you were anticipating?” repeated Thor.

Loki’s breath caught as he replayed his own words in his mind.

“No! That’s not what I…!”

Thor began to laugh.

“You bastard!” Loki kicked him, and then pinched him too.

“Ow…” He was still laughing. He calmed down a bit. “Did you get papped?”

“Yes.”

“Mission accomplished, then.”

“I guess.”

The air became thick with the many things they were both afraid to bring up. Thor decided to change subjects.

“Can’t wait to see you in that green dress again,” he said, in what he hoped was a sexy whisper. “God, those tits… I wanted to lift your skirts and fuck you right there in that changing room…”

He had hoped Loki would come back with some sexy noises about Lancelot and his armour.

“You have a hell of a way of showing it,” his brother murmured instead.

Fuck. The hell had he been thinking…

“Sorry,” said Thor. “I was so harsh that day. I’m sorry.”

“No, you were right,” said Loki, a meek whisper. “I had it coming.”

“Oh, baby, don’t say that,” said Thor, squeezing him tight. “That was no way to talk to you, brother. Even if… Shit. I-I meant what I said, I guess, but I never wanted to be horrible to you. I should treat you right always, even when I’m upset. You don’t deserve me being an unpleasant arsehole…”

“I’m horrible to you all the time,” murmured Loki.

“That’s bollocks, Loki, stop that now,” said Thor, severely. “And I know you’re trying, and I see it, ok? I appreciate it. A lot. You’re doing great. Yeah?”
A long silence. Thor felt strangely, disturbingly aware of his own breathing.

Loki nuzzled closer against his neck, sending pleasant shivers down Thor’s spine.

“What would you have done to me in that dress?” he whispered.

Thor chuckled. Well, it seemed like Loki had decided it was a good idea to fuck themselves out of these muddles. Fine by him.

“I would have bent you over that worktop,” he whispered, as he tangled their legs together even more closely. “I would have mounted you from behind, I would have grabbed those tits and fucked you like a dog.”

Loki pumped his hips against him. He was getting hard.

“Is that all?” he said.

“Baby, it had been a week. Do you think stamina grows on trees.”

Loki laughed. Thor went for his butt to pull him closer.

“How would you have wanted me?” he whispered right into Loki’s ear, his finger tracing the cleft of his arse.

“Sit on your lap, skirt around my waist, your face in my tits…” he rumbled. “Put your cock between them. Watch you fuck them.”

Thor pressed even closer, their cocks rubbing, finger circling Loki’s hole.

“How would you have had me…?” whispered Loki.

“I’d put my head under that skirt…”

“Would you have eaten my pussy?”

“I would have fingered you…” He licked his finger and pressed it in.

“Ah…” Loki sighed and stood still for him. “Lube…”

Thor reached behind him, slicked his fingers, and passed it over. Loki slicked the palm of his hands and their cocks, and rubbed the heads together. Thor kept fingering.

“Would you like me to have a pussy…” muttered Loki, voice breathy, wanking them both.

“You have a pussy…” He fingered him faster, harder. Loki tightened his hold around their cocks, but the rhythm of his stroke kept faltering.

“Fuck…” He untangled and pushed off, rolled on his front, face in the pillow. “Fuck me…”

Thor got on top of him, lined up and inched it in. He began slow, covering Loki with his body, letting him feel his breathing on the back of his neck. He tangled their fingers together, and worked his hips gently, feeling the drag of his cock inside and out of Loki’s body. His brother was breathing deeply. He was so quiet.

“Hey, are you alright?” asked Thor.
“Hmmm yeah, don’t stop…”

But he was so goddamn quiet. Thor pulled out after a while and asked him to face him. Loki clung onto him with arms and legs, and hid his face in his brother’s neck. Thor kissed him gently as he came. He finished Loki while still inside him. Took longer than usual, as if Loki’s mind wasn’t really in it.

“You ok?” he asked after they had cleaned up and were settling down to sleep.

Loki said “fine” and turned for Thor to spoon him. Thor began to pet his hair. There was a lot in Loki's head, obviously, but he obviously didn't want to talk about it. Fair enough, he wouldn’t push it. Perhaps they’d try tomorrow, more rested and awake, over a nice cooked breakfast, or some fresh pastries, or both. He wanted to treat his brother, because Loki had been trying.

Things had changed somewhat after their rather fraught chat about the terms and conditions of acquiring beards. Loki was making a point of staying overnight several times a week. He would cover up with a hoodie and indistinct clothes and take the alleyways to get there, which irritated Thor for some reason, but he was coming. He was also phoning more often, and if he didn’t feel like talking, he would send a photo, of himself or something that had caught his eye, just to show he cared and was thinking about him. He had even agreed to go out on a date, dinner and a show. Just one, you say? Yeah, and they wouldn’t be doing that again anytime soon. It had been depressing to be reminded at every turn of all the things normal couples on a date took for granted that they couldn’t have. They both were using work as an excuse to not go out again, but Thor was quite sure neither was fooling the other. So many subjects were becoming conversational minefields as of late.

And so, they had been having their quiet evenings at home, they watched a movie or a show if they were up to it, they fucked if they were not too tired, they laughed, they bickered, sometimes they screamed at each other, but overall he guessed it was not so different from many other couples’ daily routine.

So what’s your fucking problem, Odinson. What was keeping him up at nights, what was sapping the life out of him. A few months ago, if Loki had gone out with his best friend, would Thor have taken it like this? With this apathy, this indifference? Was he maturing, or was he drying out, withering to a fucking chunk of dead wood?

The best hours of his day were at the studios. He loved Lancelot, he loved what they were doing, the elegant tension between the epic and the intimate, the melancholy and the vigorous elements in the story. He fucking loved working with Steve. They laughed, they fooled around, and then Peggy would call action and it all felt intense and important. Thor could not wait to go to Scotland for the exterior shots and the bigger battles. He was so excited. He fucking loved this job. And sometimes, very often actually, he took it for granted. His position in the business, the opportunities he was offered, the parts he opted to. And he should not do it. His success had always come so easy, it felt like a natural, direct, unavoidable consequence of his efforts. He seldom remembered to be humble, to factor in accident, chance and good luck. He held a position of privilege in the industry, but that was far from secure or guaranteed, and it could all end tomorrow, through no fault of his own, for reasons beyond his control. And he would bloody miss it if it did.

He had the best job in the world, and the most beautiful creature in existence bending himself backwards to try to please him, and here he was, unable to sleep, dissatisfied, unhappy, permanently irritated. And feeling very fucking guilty about it, because he knew Loki was worried. Worried, what a way to put it. He had a haunted look at times, he sunk into an absent silence. It reminded Thor of some very, very fucked up days, the months after Iceland leading up to that February in which Thor's whole fucking life had knotted into a black hole of fear and despair, affording him a glimpse of what
true fucking hell could be like.

Loki in his arms was breathing peacefully, but he was not asleep. Thor pressed his lips on that smooth shoulder, lingering there. Loki did not stir. If he had been asleep, he would have.

“Baby,” Thor whispered.

“Hm?”

He tightened his embrace.

“I just want you to know... I can see what you’re doing, and I appreciate it. It means a lot. Thank you.”

“Ok,” said Loki.

Thor felt he should say more.

“I know things are not great right now, but I love you very, very much.” A moment for courage.

“When we were younger, and things weren’t going well, you…” Loki tensed. “You struggled,” said Thor. “Loki, if you were… if you were, you know, struggling, you’d tell me, right?”

It seemed to take for fucking ever until Loki replied. It was a shy mutter when it came.

“I’m not suicidal.”

Thor’s breathing stopped. Well, that wasn’t exactly reassuring.

“I am struggling,” said Loki. “A bit.”

Thor couldn’t think of what to say for some time. He had been expecting that answer, had he not? Why did it feel like a fucking bucket of ice water?

“What can we do?” he tried, after some time.

“We can sleep,” said Loki.

Thor petted his hair.

“We can try.”

Try he did. As Loki’s breathing quieted down and became heavy with slumber, Thor felt like he was walking alone in the dark and leaving his brother behind, thoughts circling obsessively inside his head. He was unhappy, and Loki’s illness was rearing its ugly head, and all the fears that had once warned him from trying to pursue a relationship with his brother were becoming a reality. He was scared, and angry, and very fucking sad, and he just did not know what to fucking do. It was all nice and well to tell himself to sit tight, try not to think too far ahead, carefully focus on the day to day, ignore the bigger issues, and... wait for a miracle, he guessed, but at some point, somebody was going to have to grab the bull by the horns and fucking do something. He just wished he knew what.
The "Shrew" Loki and Fandral go to see is Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare, no particular production.

The actresses working with Loki are not intended to refer to anyone in particular.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

A very busy, momentous few weeks

Chapter Notes

Unusually short, I know. I struggled with this so much, again. It was a monster, and it didn't work. So I got cutting, and it got better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Press cuts from the Mariners publicity tour.)

Question: This is your second assault on Hollywood. Are you here to stay this time?
Loki: We shall see. I do have another movie coming out some time next year. But I don’t have any specific designs to make a career in Hollywood. I just want to do what interests me, be in the West End, Off Broadway, or even Bollywood, if they’ll have me. I’m open to suggestions.

Q: What attracted you to this part?
Loki: It was more the whole project, really, from the moment I read the script. I could see so clearly what Heimdall wanted to do, and it was exciting. I then read the book and learned the story behind it, and it just gripped me. I knew it was going to be special. I just had to do it. I had to be in it.

Q: You and your brother were not on friendly terms when you were both initially cast, is that right?
Loki: We were not speaking to each other, no.

Q: Was having your brother in this project a deterrent to you, or a further stimulus to take it up?
Loki: I would say neither. I agreed that Thor was the right choice for the part, and I knew he’d be a perfect professional. I don’t know, I suppose it was an interrogation sign.

Q: Were you hoping this project would bring you back together?
Loki: No.

(awkward silence)

Q: Did it come as a surprise when it did?
Loki: No.
Q: You have said before this is a very personal project for you. Do you feel you have a lot in common with this character and his story?

Thor: No, not really (laughs). Oh, I don’t know. In some ways. In many other ways, however, not at all. And people are trying to draw parallels between Bobby and me that I personally don’t see. The character of the father, for example. Bobby’s and Johnny’s father is a tyrannical figure who casts a heavy shadow over both of his sons, even after his death, and has almost succeeded in crushing his eldest son’s spirit. When people compare this to my life and my father, frankly, I’m offended. My father’s name, achievements and reputation are indeed a tough act to follow, even a burden at times, but the man himself has never tried to thwart me or limit me or crush me. If anything, my father has always pushed me to try for more and aim higher. At some point, you could say he believed in my talent as an actor more than I did myself. He’s a man famously hard to please, that’s true, but he’ll be the first to tell you when he’s proud of you.

Q: This is the story of two estranged brothers who reconcile…

Thor: (laughs) It’s the story of two brothers who haven’t seen each other in a long time and reunite.

Q: (laughs) Right.

Thor: The funny thing is that, when they do reunite, they feel like strangers, and they have to get to know each other again. Johnny’s worldview has changed completely, and there’s a big secret killing Bobby from the inside. Now, my brother and I, well, we had issues we needed to work through, and bridges to mend, and a lot of catching up to do, sure, but he never felt like a stranger. I can’t say it was as easy as sitting down together and bam, best friends again, but in many ways it felt a bit as if we were picking up where we had left it.

Q: What about the subject of sexual identity, how do you relate to that? Because you recently came out as bisexual.

Thor: Yes.

Q: Congratulations.

(Audience claps and cheers. Thor nods in acknowledgement.)

Thor: I can relate with the feeling of what lying about who you really are can do to your self-esteem. But I’m lucky that I never suffered as much as Bobby over it. We live in different times, we come from completely different backgrounds.

Q: Is it a relief, being out?

Thor: I don’t think I was ever ‘in the closet’ like that. I mean, it was never a big problem for me, I didn’t live it as an oppression. I lived this part of my life with the same discretion as I try to live the rest of it, and I was never questioned or harassed about it, so it didn’t feel like I was hiding anything.
Perhaps that’s why I never felt the need to make it public.

Q: What has changed? Why did you decide to go public?

Thor: It felt like the right thing to do. My perspective is what has changed. It’s a bit broader now. For a long time, I used to believe that my sexual orientation was my own business, nobody else’s. That it should not matter at all. And I stick to that, it absolutely shouldn’t. But we’re not in that world yet, this is not the reality we live in. The fact is that, to a lot of people, it matters, and it matters a lot, in a very real way. People who are either in the closet because they don’t feel safe or comfortable coming out, or people who are out but face homophobia and discrimination every day, who may have been rejected by family and friends and, all too often, may even have been physically threatened and even harmed for trying to live their lives in the open. People get killed over their sexual orientation, some people kill themselves. I realised that, for these people, hearing a person like me, who has nothing to fear, say that this doesn’t matter, it must only add insult to injury. So it does matter. I have a position of privilege, I have the public projection, and even though I can’t change the world on my own, I do believe that, every time somebody somewhere comes out, another pair of eyebrows stops rising, and perhaps one more kid somewhere gets to feel a bit safer and a bit less alone. It felt like a responsibility I could not shirk. It felt right, so I did it.

(Audience claps, some people stand up.)

Q: You say you have nothing to fear. You’re not concerned about how this revelation might affect your career?

Thor: I don’t fear for my physical safety, my financial position is perfectly safe. Everything else is really first world problems. Besides, I’m impenitently optimistic. Who knows, this may broaden the range of characters the audience is ready to see me in. But if it should kill my Hollywood career, so be it. The world doesn’t end when you leave America.

Q: Do you feel safer coming out while you’re in a relationship with a woman?

Thor: (pause) That has nothing to do with anything. This is the private part of my personal life I was talking about, the part that really doesn’t matter. And it’s not something I’m going to discuss right now.

Q: Jealousy?

Loki: In a family of actors? Of course not, where do you get that (laughs). Seriously though. With Thor and me, I think we’re just so different, from how we look to how we work, that this has pretty much dealt with the direct competition issues between us. I could not have played Bobby or the boy in Blood Meridian, or Kirk in Dinosaur Island, for that matter, and I doubt that Thor could pull off Frank in Rocky or Song in Butterfly, although he is very talented, and more versatile than he’s been allowed to show so far. We could not compete for the same roles if we wanted to, or for the same careers, for that matter. So that’s that. And I would not want to, to be honest. I enjoy too much the work I do, and I’m not sure I would enjoy a lot of the kind of work that a career in Hollywood entails.

Q: Like gargantuan publicity tours.
Loki: Precisely.

Q: Like this interview.

Loki: (grins)

Q: But in this movie, the really eye-catching character is Bobby…

Loki: His journey leads the narrative. He’s the more mainstream character in many ways, the one many people in the audience might feel closer to when the journey begins. But we see the story through Johnny’s eyes, and Johnny is an outsider, he’s a bit broken, a bit off. My job was to make the audience connect with that feeling and empathise with Johnny. I think we all feel a bit wrong and a bit off sometimes. I know I do. I wanted to tap into that feeling in the audience, make them walk in his shoes. To make what was alien and other, familiar and understandable. To alter a few perspectives, even after the movie ends, if I’ve done it well. Might not be as eye-catching, but I enjoyed the challenge.

Q: You say you sometimes feel a bit broken and a bit wrong. Do you want to expand on that?

Loki: I’ve done it so many times already.

Q: You’ve endured terrible hardship in your life.

Loki: I don’t look back if I can help it.

Q: But you have been forced to look back on some of it recently, precisely while making this film.

Loki: (long pause) Do you have a question?

Q: What has it meant to you, to be reminded of certain times of your life, and to see them thrust under the public eye like that?

Loki: (long pause) It’s been hard, but I’m doing better now. Next question?

_______

Q: How much has finding out about the adoption changed things between your brother and you?

Thor: It hasn’t.

Q: But your relationship must have changed.

Thor: What are you asking me here? Has our relationship changed, since he was, what, nineteen, and I was twenty-one? Yes, of course it has. Life has happened to both of us. We’ve lived more, we’re older. So have things changed? Well, how could they not?

Q: Do you see each other differently?

Thor: (long silence) What do you want from me? (pause) You know what? No, actually, I don’t. He remains the most important person in my life, just like before. Alright?
Q: Has the news about your adoption changed anything between Thor and you?

Loki: You don’t expect me to start dissecting my relationship with my brother in a ten minute space in a talk show, do you?

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(Reviewer shows Thor slashy fanart of Johnny and Bobby)

Thor: Astounding. People are so talented.

Q: Why do you think people make this kind of thing?

Thor: I assume they enjoy it. There’s no account for taste.

Q: Is this not uncomfortable for you?

Thor: This has nothing to do with me. This is not me, it’s a character. This has happened with most of the characters I’ve played, paired with my male and female co-stars alike, and even with people, men and women, I’ve never even met. It was weird to begin with, but I’ve had years to get used to it. It’s fiction. It has its own rules. So no, it’s not uncomfortable.

Q: But this is your brother.

Thor: (pause) So you thought it might make me uncomfortable, and you decided to show it to me anyway.

(change of subject follows.)

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Q: Quite a year you’ve had.

Loki: Yes.

Q: What would you say it was the highlight of your year?

Loki: I’ve been so busy, and working in really fascinating things, but I suppose I would have to say writing and putting together my first play, that only happens once in a lifetime.

Q: What about the highlight of your personal life?

Loki: (in good humour, but caustic) Why do I feel you’re asking questions you think you already know the answer to? Am I even needed in this interview?
Q: *(laughs)*

Loki: Reconciling with my brother was the highlight of my year. There, you have your soundbite. What else.

Q: The trial over the tapes from your past concluded a few weeks ago.

Loki: You can say ‘the sex tapes’, it’s not like we don't know what we're talking about.

Q: Do you consider the matter settled? Has justice been done, so to speak?

Loki: *(pause)* I still don’t know how far and how much these tapes have affected my career. What I do know is that, if other people had been in charge of *Mariners*, I would surely have been fired. I only stayed because Tony Stark and Heimdall, and Thor of course, stood up for me, at great risk to this movie, which may still sink because I’m in it. So does a fine and some knuckle rapping make up for this? Ask me again in a few years time, but from where I stand, I kind of doubt it.

Q: What about you as a person? Is there any way to get you justice and retribution?

Loki: *(long pause)* The rational part of me tells me I did nothing wrong, that it’s only sex, and that it shouldn’t embarrass me or make me feel ashamed in any way. But there are less rational parts of me that don’t see it quite like this, and know that the world is full of people who don’t see it like this either, and they all make me feel quite *(—)* humiliated about these *(—)* tapes. I know that, if somebody some day writes a book about my life, this is going to be in it. That it’s going to chase me for the rest of my life. They’re still out there, and they’re going to pop up now and again, probably when I’m only just managing to forget about them. So how do I get retribution for that? Anyway, it’s what it is. It’s what I chose at the time, and now I have to live with it. All I want is to put this behind me, not that they’ll ever let me. I try not to think about it much. It’s all I can do.

Q: Thank you so much for being so open and so honest with us.

Loki: Don’t *(—)* mention it.

Q: Your name is mentioned very insistently in the polls for the Oscar nominations. Are you optimistic?

Thor: Oh, who knows. There’s been so many really strong performances this year, the competition is fierce. It would be a great honour.

Q: You’ve had to deal with some disappointment in that area recently. Do you think this is the part that will break the unlucky streak?

Thor: Could be. I try not to make a big deal of it. It’s not my priority. Awards are great, but you know what my father says? *(impersonates)* ‘Nobody remembers who won the Oscar last year. But your performance, that’s what they won’t forget.’

Q: Fair point. But your father has, what, six Oscars?
Thor: (laughs) Ouch. Touché.

Q: Your first play Sonder is going to open very close in date to the world premiere of Mariners in London. Is this intended?

Loki: How I wish I could say that it is. I wish I could say that it’s all been carefully engineered by a world-class team of expert publicists, and that the success of the play is guaranteed because of it. I’m afraid that the truth is a lot more banal. It’s entirely accidental. It was very, very hard to find an opening in the schedules of my outstandingly talented, and outstandingly busy cast, and get it to fit with the availability of the theatre. So we’re opening and running pretty much when we’ve been able to. I haven’t even asked any publicists if this is going to help or hinder us. I don’t want to know. What will be, will be.

Q: How confident are you feeling?

Loki: I’m confident that I’ve done all that I was able to do within my ability. Same for the cast and crew. I think it’s a good play, I think it’s worth the price of the ticket and the trip to the theatre. Confident that it will succeed? I don’t know. I’m hopeful.

Q: We wish you good l-…

Loki: (interrupts) Don’t bloody say that!

Q: Oh my god, so sorry. I meant, break a leg.

Loki: Better. Thank you.

Q: So what’s next up for you, Thor?

Thor: We finished shooting Lancelot a few weeks ago. I do have a few things lined up, but nothing is set in stone yet. What I’m really looking forwards to, right now, is a holiday.

Q: Christmas at home or somewhere warm?

Thor: Home, always.

Q: Thank you very much, Thor.

Thor: Very welcome.
(December. Asgard Hall)

The pile of blankets and quilts on the bed was so high, it reminded Thor of the story about the Princess and the Pea. This particular princess, however, seemed able to sleep not only through a pea under twenty mattresses, but also his brother’s nudges, kisses, whispers, having every single curtain in the bedroom drawn open, and perhaps a hurricane, judging from those snores. Although to be honest the light out there, even at the peak of noon, was nothing to shout about. It was a bleak winter day, with a broken white sky. Thor carefully pushed the hair out of Loki’s face and tugged it behind his ear. His brother didn’t even stir.

“Loki…” he whispered, “baby…"

His brother turned his face away, with a groan. God knows how many blankets he had on, and he had managed to get his shoulder uncovered. In spite of spending a good couple of hours last evening lighting half a dozen fireplaces, and it spite of Thor’s efforts this morning to rekindle the embers and keep them burning high, it would take days before the central heating began to dispel the chill in the air. They had gone to bed in sweatshirts, sweatpants and socks, but Loki’s ballet sweatshirt, while very sexy with that wide boatneck, was perhaps not the most practical thing for warmth. It had fallen off his shoulder, again. Thor tucked him in and stroked his hair.

Should he let him sleep? The last few weeks had been very intense and utterly exhausting, between the premieres of Mariners (five cities in two weeks), with the associated press insanity (interviews, photo shoots, photo calls, red carpets, TV and radio appearances…) and the opening night of Loki’s play, with the craze of the last minute changes, dress rehearsals, and test runs. It was a miracle poor Loki had not completely imploded.

He had looked very damn near to collapsing on opening night, standing there, at the front of the proscenium, while a standing ovation from a full theatre thundered around him. He looked so pale and wan, so tired. He had taken his bows, then let the cast hug and kiss him, he had accepted the bouquet of flowers when they handed it to him, and continued to acknowledge the applause raining on his head. And then, finally, he had turned to Odín on the second row. Their father had not stood up to applaud the cast, but he had got to his feet when the author came on stage. He was still applauding. Loki took a deep bow, from the waist. Their father returned it. Not one dry eye in the whole theatre. Or so Thor would swear, he was crying a fucking river by then himself, sobbing like a little boy, while Sigyn by his side kept handing him tissues. It had been quite a night.

“Dad’s here,” Thor had said, backstage, after hugging his brother breathless.

“I don’t want to see him,” Loki had said, looking alarmed.

Thor’s disappointment must have shown in his face.

“I mean, I can’t,” Loki had said, and tried for a little smile, “Not right now.”
The play was doing great. Award talks were rife. And sadly, all that Loki seemed to be able to feel right now about it was relief.

It had been their first anniversary during the Berlin premiere. Thor had had a present ready for months, the fanciest pocket watch he ever did see, solid silver, carved with an intricate, art-noveau leaf design on one side, mirror-smooth on the other, over one hundred years old, perfect working condition. He had had the underside of the lid inscribed with their initials and the date. He had given it to Loki on the limo on the way there.

“You couldn’t wait until after I had to show my face to the whole of fucking Berlin?” had said Loki, wiping his eye. “Good job I decided to pass on the goddamn mascara tonight…”

That had been worth it at least.

“I got you something too, but I need a piano. I’ll give it to you in Asgard. If I survive until then.”

Well, it turns out, they had both made it. Barely.


“Mmmh… whatimezit,” mumbled his brother.

“Half past twelve,” said Thor, still kissing.

Loki rolled over, and with a long groan, he stretched his arms and his back in a feline arch. He gave him a drowsy smile when he half opened his eyes and saw the hungry, adoring look on Thor’s face.

“You made me breakfast,” said Loki, his words slurred. “How sweet.”

Coffee, toasts, jam and orange juice. Nothing fancy, but Loki seemed delighted. He clutched Thor’s jumper to pull him close for a kiss. Close-mouthed, because Loki was self-conscious of morning breath (although he shouldn’t. He always tasted like fresh dew and mountain snow to Thor, smoker or not). Then Loki dragged himself upright, sluggish movements, piled up the cushions, and reclined against the regal, carved wood headboard of that fourposter bed, which they had been talking about only yesterday, on the drive over to the house. Loki seemed to have plenty of ideas involving those posts and a variety of bindings.

“When did you get up?” asked Loki, mouth pouting to blow on his coffee. His voice was still hoarse from sleep.

Thor had made himself a cup of tea. He took a sip.

“About eight. I went out for a run.”

“Reconnoitring the grounds?”

“Yeah,” said Thor. “Everything in order.”

Thor had had every intention of letting Loki have his breakfast in peace. He was going to wait at
least until his head was clearer before attempting conversation of any kind. But something must have been showing on his face, his anticipation perhaps, some concern, and Loki caught it. His sharp green eyes were fixed on him over the rim of his mug.

“What is it?” he asked.

Always so perceptive, so observant. He read him like an open book. And then he proceeded to misconstrue everything he read, but that was another story.

“What’s wrong? Spit it out,” urged Loki, since it was taking Thor more than two seconds to reply.

“Nothing is wrong,” said Thor. “At least, I don’t think so. Don’t panic.”

“Don’t tell me not to panic. Now I’m panicking,” snapped his brother, putting down his mug and sitting up in bed, rigid.

Thor chuckled and held his hand. He stroked it gently.

“I just want to ask you something, but I’m not sure how it’s going to go down, that’s all.”

“Let’s fucking have it, Thor,” said Loki. “Put me out of my misery, already.”

“Ok, ok…” said Thor, appeasing. “I wanted to ask you…” Crap, he didn’t dare.

“Thor!” snarled his brother, on edge.

“Come to the Oscars with me,” he said, finally. “I mean, let’s go together. No Fandral, no Sif. Just you and me.”

A quick succession of emotions flickered across Loki’s face, dominated by alarm, and a deepening frown. And then, all of a sudden, his brow crumpled up and he broke down in tears. Big, fat ones, deep sobs that shook him whole. Thor had no idea where that was coming from.

“Baby,” he said, rubbing slow circles on his brother’s slumped back. “Loki, baby, hey… What-what did I say?”

“It’s nothing,” said his brother, face buried in his hands, shoulders shaking. “It’s nothing.” He straightened his back and forced his chin up, wiped his tears. He was making a visible effort to pull himself together, even though he was clearly not finished with this.

Thor handed him a tissue. Loki blew his nose, ever so delicately. He was still sobbing.

“Yeah, ok,” he said. “We’ll go.”

Thor wanted to be as ecstatic as he thought he would be, but that broken smile and those red eyes, still wet, didn’t exactly fill him with joy.

“I’m fine,” said Loki, responding to the worry in his brother’s expression. “I’m just… It’s been a long month. Lots of stress, lots of anxiety, and I’m so tired. My emotions are all over the place.” He forced a smile, wiping the tears as they kept coming.

It was a reasonable explanation. It should satisfy him. He wished it did. But to Thor, Loki looked more than tired or stressed out right now, he looked forlorn. And this thing right now, it didn’t strike him as a sudden surge of random emotion. For a moment, Thor had thought he saw Loki’s heart breaking, and he did not understand what that was about.
“Hey,” he said, holding his hand. He just didn’t know what to ask, or how, to get through to his brother, and get a sincere, clear answer he could make sense out of.

“Please,” said Loki, wiping his eyes, “I just need some space, ok? Some time.”

Thor nodded, but he was not happy.

“Your meds are… You’re up to date and all that, aren’t you?” He was willing to risk Loki’s indignation to quell at least that one doubt.

“Yeah,” said Loki, not furious, “it’s all under control. Don’t… don’t worry about that.”

Thor would just have to accept this answer.

“Do you… do you want me to leave you alone?” he offered.

Loki thought about it for a moment, then he nodded. Thor’s own heart sunk a little. Which was unfair, especially since he had offered, but there you go. He went to kiss Loki’s hair, but Loki met him with his mouth instead, his eyes shut tight, latching onto him intensely, and sod morning breath. It gave Thor both a pleasant shiver, and a very uneasy feeling in his stomach, all at once.

“I love you baby,” said Thor, staring into his eyes.

Loki’s lips began to tremble again, and he nodded, but he didn’t reply, a fresh fit of crying surging. Thor left him to it.

* 

After Loki had cried his fill, his eyes drifted, unseeing, to the whirl of liquid in his mug as he stirred it absentely. He had a headache, and he had lost his appetite. He still downed his coffee and made himself take as many bites of his toast as he could down, chewing and chewing before he could swallow, as if they were made of rubber. It was not like an empty stomach was going to make this easier on anyone, right?

He had been forcing food down for a while now, since this whole circus started. Well, he had to face the facts, he didn’t have the constitution for Hollywood. It had not been completely awful, it had even been fun at times, but it was simply too fucking much. After each encounter with the crowds, after every interview, he would have needed days to recharge and regroup, by himself, somewhere quiet. Instead, all there was after one long day of public exposure, was another long day of the same, full of people who wanted a piece of him and expected him to be unfailingly gracious, charming, loquacious, endlessly patient, and able to deliver fresh and insightful replies to questions he had only been asked thirty times that very day alone. And if he was made to face another sea of flashing objectives, having his name called here there and everyfuckingwhere, this one wanting a smoulder, that one wanting a smile, he was going to fucking scream. There had to be some truth to that old superstition about photos stealing your soul, because that was pretty much how he felt right now, empty, drained, scraped bare, sagging. And he still had the BAFTAs and the Globes and then the fucking Oscars coming up. He really didn’t know how he was going to fucking make it.
The Oscars. He should be looking forwards to that, shouldn’t he? No public appearances programmed after that. A holiday. Yay! So why was Loki fucking dreading every day that got him closer to that, instead of crossing it out of his calendar with relish? Well, you see, after the Oscars, Thor was going to dump him.

Why was Loki so convinced about that? Were things miserable between them? Well, no, surprisingly. They had been appearing with their beards a lot as of late. Had that been a problem? Depending on how you look at it. The press loved both couples. Sif and Thor looked like royals, so classy and tall and composed and so frigging gorgeous. And himself and Fandral, if he may say so himself, did not lag behind. Even Fandral’s most innocent smile looked flirtatious, and how could Loki help himself, with such a keen audience, now that the ice had been broken between them? When the press cheered them on, the tabloids already had them looking at rings and venues (as if) and Thor got so delightfully territorial? The sex they had been having lately, hot damn.

So no, they were not miserable. They were too busy, and too horny. They had so much fun together, and Thor acted so loved up, that there would be days when Loki would wonder why he was so convinced that his brother intended to break up with him after the Oscars. But then they would get a couple of days off, and they would spend them cooped up in Thor’s house, Loki hiding when the delivery guy came in with their takeout, and there it was, there, that sour gesture in Thor’s mouth, that black thundercloud over his head. And Loki would remember that this strange month they were living was a honeymoon, a fantasy, and that real life was always there, lurking around the corner. And that even in their best times, Thor would look ahead, and see this as their future, and he would think that this was not the life he wanted for them both. That this was not what he had signed up for.

Perhaps Loki was being extra-paranoid, but it may have started when Thor met Sam. His bullheaded brother, his knight in shining armour, he would not walk back on his promises, and he had promised this was for good. Loki had no doubts that, if it had been just down to Thor and his own dissatisfaction, his brother would continue to lock horns with this situation, until it broke him. But this was not about Thor, in Thor’s own mind, was it? Oh no, this was about Loki’s depression too. This was about Thor thinking he wasn’t good for Loki. This was Thor thinking Loki would be better off with somebody else.

So, this crazy month they were having, this folly of lust, escaping in the middle of an after party to fuck in broom closets (ok, the once; usually they were in the convention hall of a hotel and they managed to find a room), and this shit about wanting to go to the Oscars like a fucking couple, that was his brother making the most of their last weeks together. Because he was not going to break up in the middle of a press tour that forced them to see each other every day, of course not. He would wait until the public commitments were over, so that they could both go lick their wounds with some measure of privacy and peace. Loki wagered Thor planned to move back to L.A., to give them both some space, give Loki his city back, and let him piece his heart and his life together again, with Sam, probably, if Thor had his way. And if anyone had thoughts about the two of them because of the Oscars, who cared? By the next day, there would be nothing to hide.

He broke down crying again. It didn’t last. He felt sospent.

He had even begun to wonder, if Thor’s courage should waiver, if he hesitated because he feared hurting him, should Loki do it himself? Because what kind of a person clings on to someone they know to be so deeply unhappy? A good person would not let this drag out of selfishness. A good person would not leave to Thor the responsibility, the burden, and the awful guilt, of making the final call.

So, yeah, this last month had been a fucking bitch, and the next one wasn’t going to be all that great either, but to Loki, the approach of the finish line was no light at the end of a tunnel, unless it was the
light of an oncoming train.

He wished he was able to put it all to the back of his mind, and make the best of what was left, he really wished he was. Instead, all he wanted to do was curl up in bed and cry.

He took a deep breath, and dragged himself from underneath the pile of blankets and quilts, the sudden chill sinking its claws in, and shaking the last dregs of sleep out of him. He needed painkillers, he needed liquids, he needed a shower, he needed his brother. They didn’t have that much time left. He should spend as much of it as possible with his eyes wide open, right?

*

They were sitting together at the piano, on the little bench. Loki’s fingers were dancing on the keys. It was a simple, sunny, almost childish theme that played over a more complex, more melancholy background. Every now and then, a few notes would echo a fragment of a song they both loved. It was so fucking beautiful. Thor was speechless when it concluded. Loki kept his eyes on the keys.

“Happy anniversary,” muttered Loki.

“That was… Baby, I’m…” Emotion wouldn’t let Thor get his bloody words out. He just hugged his brother tight. Tight. Tighter.

“I can’t breathe, Thor,” whispered Loki after a while.

“I don’t give a toss,” he laughed, still hugging, feeling teary. “That was the most beautiful… Damn.”

“Ok, I get it. You liked it.”

“Liked it? You arsehole. Come here.” He kissed his brother with all he had, and he felt him soften in his arms.

When he pulled apart, Loki opened his eyes as if from a sleep, with a blink.

“You’re unreal, you know that?” said Thor, still overwhelmed. “I fucking love you, baby, so so much.”

“I know,” whispered Loki.

Thor laughed and gave him a playful shove.

“Fuck you, Han. Hey, what about that song you sing sometimes with Sigyn?”

“You’re going to have to narrow it down,” said his brother.

Thor hummed the tune. Loki lifted his eyes, and what the hell was that look, resentment? Thor didn’t really have time to examine it properly before it was blanked out. Loki played, but he didn’t sing. Thor did mumble the chorus. In a mutter, because he felt a little shy. Loki could sing so well.
“We will run and sing,
You will dance with me,
We’ll fulfill our dreams and we’ll be free
We will be who we are
And they’ll heal, our scars,
Sadness will be far away…”

“We will run and sing,
You will dance with me,
We’ll fulfill our dreams and we’ll be free
We will be who we are
And they’ll heal, our scars,
Sadness will be far away…”

“Scream,” said Loki, after the last notes of the long, anthemic finale that Thor absolutely loved to watch him play, his fingers so nimble, flying over the keys, his upper body swaying as if he needed his all to push that powerful melody along.

“Pardon me?”

“It’s ‘We will run and scream’” he said.

“Right,” said Thor.

The fire was crackling pleasantly. It smelled nice. Loki turned to face him, with a strange expression, intense. Thor thought he saw a note of despair in there. Again, it was gone too quick, and he lost the thread anyway when Loki grabbed his face and plunged in for a deep, urgent kiss. Thor gave in to it without a thought. Soon, Loki was climbing onto his lap, little whimpery noises as their mouths went desperately at each other.

“We’re going to break the bench,” muttered Thor, when Loki gave him a breather.

“On the rug, then,” whispered his brother.

“I’ve got nothing on me,” said Thor, firmly trapped between Loki’s thighs in front of the fire, on the rug.

“Try the jar on the mantelpiece,” said Loki. “Maybe there’s still some from last year.”

There was, there fucking was. Better not check the date on the packet. Thor fucked him slow and deep, the clothes they had not wanted to take off because of the cold getting in the way, in the most erotically frustrating manner, everything pulling and tugging and crushing, movements restricted, only inches of skin to touch and feel. Loki’s ice cold hands shook him whenever they slipped under his clothes and met his flesh.

“No one has a body like yours,” muttered Loki, melancholy rather than praising. “No one.”

“Baby, look at me,” said Thor, as he got on the home stretch.

Their eyes connected. It was an unusually loaded moment, even for them. Thor came thinking he would remember this fuck in the future. Why exactly, or what for, he could not tell.
They had had a nice, quiet day. They had had a walk around the grounds, they had sorted through the mail, they had been in the attic looking for the Christmas decorations, they had been to the village to buy a tree. They had cooked. It had been fucking lovely, just perfect. And yet, Loki had looked so sad.

Curled in bed together, settling down to sleep, Thor hugged his brother and kissed him.

“We’ll get some gardeners in, come Spring,” he said. “We’ll get those roses in the ground, ready for the summer.”

“Shut up,” whispered Loki, with a little shudder. “Please.”

Chapter End Notes

The song, again, is "Not with haste" by Mumford & Sons. I keep hearing Thorki in so much of what they write, (White Blank Page is actually Thorki musical fanfiction, fight me on this!) although the song by M&S that really reminds me of the Dog is Lover's Eyes. I feel teenage Loki would have seen himself so much in that one, poor baby.
Thor woke up with a start. Where was he? Oh, right, on a plane, flying home. He had fallen asleep pretty much when the engines started. He had been so knackered, he stood no chance against that low, soothing humdrum, the perfect temperature, that cushy seat.

He stretched his arms, with a groan.

“Um, sorry,” he said, yawning, when he realised he had invaded his brother’s air space.

Loki was looking out the window, towards the Atlantic Ocean expanding in all directions, patched here and there with towering white clouds. He was swaddled in a blanket — the good stuff, first class issue, because what’s the point of being a movie star if not traveling first class on transoceanic flights, goddammit — and he was quiet. Come to think of it, he had not been saying much for the last couple of days, after the Oscars. His expression too was hard to read, mostly blank, but not quite. Thor didn’t know what to make of it.

He didn’t have a clue about what was on Loki’s mind these days, but whatever it was, it had made Loki’s reactions even harder to predict than usual, and it was keeping Thor on his toes and constantly baffled. For example, when Tony had suggested they fly up to New York after the Oscars and spend a few days in the tower there, to see everyone. Thor had taken a look at his brother, who seemed exhausted beyond words, depleted of energy and spirit, and said, “Thanks, Tony, but…” Loki had turned to him with a look of alarm and dejection. What had that been about? "Do you want to go?" Thor had asked. Loki had shaken his head, and let his eyes drift into space, expression gloomy. Thor didn’t understand. He would have bet his life that all Loki would have wanted now, after two soul-wrenching months of hard labour on the publicity treadmill, was to shut himself up somewhere quiet and isolated, maybe Asgard, and forget about the world for a while.

He had been speaking very little, and smiling even less. He didn’t act angry or annoyed, he just… he seemed to have lost all his fire. It was very fucking worrying. Whenever Thor asked if there was a problem, Loki’s reply was always “tired” and/or “stressed out.” Perhaps it was him Loki did not want to talk to? Was Thor the problem here? He had to mention it to Sigyn and Bruce, and quickly. Somebody had to try to get something out of him, before the therapists had to get involved. Or was it too late for that already?
“Stop staring,” muttered Loki, face still turned to the window.

Thor leaned closer and stole an impulsive kiss off his brother’s head. Loki didn’t react in any way, and the smile faded from Thor’s lips.

Perhaps all Loki needed was to recharge his batteries. He had been giving and giving and giving for weeks on end. Whatever he had left, he had mustered and burned it on Oscars night, in a dazzling, climactic bonfire. What a day it had been, Loki had been abuzz with energy, unstoppable, bouncing off the walls, bordering on manic. He had been hilarious too, expansively, luminously camp, chatting up everyone they came across, enchanting assistants of different strands, hair stylists, hotel concierges, ushers, cleaning ladies, limo drivers, the fans. He dipped in and out of all these people’s lives in a whirl of charm, glamour, joy, and class, the kind of celebrity encounter grandkids end up hearing about — the night I met Loki Laufeyson. But as delightful as it was, Thor struggled to take real joy in it, because he knew it was an act. Only the day before, he had caught Loki in the middle of his nth crying fit that week. On Oscars day, Loki had made one last colossal effort, he had pulled himself together, he had dressed up, and he had played his part.

The performance was also for Thor’s benefit. He had realised in the limo, where it was just the two of them, blocked from the driver, seated facing each other. If there was a moment for Loki to relax and drop the act, rest for a moment, gather his breath, it was then. Instead, Loki began to run one foot up and down the back of Thor’s calf.

“How long till we get there?” he had purred, a mischievous glint in his eye.

“Not bloody long enough, so don’t even think about it,” warned Thor, already flustered. He had been wired all day, you understand. He was also smiling, could not hold it back.

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Loki. “Doesn’t look like it would take long…” A wicked grin, as his shoe caressed the back of Thor’s knees.

“I’m going to have to walk the red carpet with a massive boner if you don’t stop right now,” said Thor, hoarse.

“Is that supposed to dissuade me, or encourage me?”

Thor laughed. Loki smirked.

“Come here,” murmured Thor, leaning across.

Loki scooted over for a kiss.

“We should just fucking do it,” said Thor then, a whisper, eyes blazing. “We should just get out there hand in hand, and fuck it.”

Loki didn’t even dignify that with an answer. An eye-roll would do. They made the rest of the short drive in silence.

Thor’s heart-rate went steadily up as they approached, catching on from the excitement that was mounting outside, even with their windows up. The streets were getting crowded, the noise was rising from a rumour to a roar, and there was a small lightning storm ahead where the photographers were clustered to greet the celebrities as they arrived. No other red carpet they had walked the last few weeks, whether for a premiere or an awards ceremony, really prepared you for the scale of this one. The Academy still did glamour and spectacle like no-one else, without a hint of self-consciousness or humility. And Thor was not here to present, or to attend, he was a guest of honour, a nominee. Yes, fuck, he was a little nervous, alright? If the whole set-up did not make your knees
wobble a bit, thought Thor to himself, you had better check out if you have a pulse, mate.

He never wanted to make a big deal out of his own nomination, but it seemed like everybody else did. He felt so many eyes on him, with so many expectations. It reminded him of that fateful MTV Awards night many years ago. Judging from the talk he got from agents, publicists, and press, it seemed like his whole life was going to begin, or end, based upon one measly award. Well, his life did suffer a dramatic turn that night, but the award only had a cameo appearance in that particular plot twist. Because that’s Loki for you, and in any show he took part in, and certainly in Thor's life, he was never going to be anything but the star. Thor could never think about that night without an uneasy churn in his stomach. And he was feeling it now again. He hoped it was an echo, not an omen.

The limo came to a stop. Loki had one hand on the handle.

“Hey.” Thor stopped him. One more second, just one more. He hooked one hand around the back of Loki’s neck to draw him near, and kissed him.

Loki smiled, mostly with his eyes.

“Nervous?” he said.

Thor nodded. Loki stroked his face tenderly, and let his eyes roam on it, wide and adoring.

“Go on, son of Odin,” he whispered. “Go claim your crown.”

Thor smiled in turn.

“Does that make you my queen?” he asked.

“Why should I be the queen? You’re the long-haired blondie with the big tits,” jabbed Loki. He gave him a shove. “Come on. They’re waiting.”

The screaming when they stepped out of the car, fucking hell. So this is how it sounds, and how it looks, and how it feels, to be on top of the world. The crowd’s attention was like a twister, swaying this way and that, ebbing and flowing, and the moment Thor appeared, it turned to him, it gathered around him, it roared, and it submitted. Thor waved, smiled, flashes sparkled. He fell into step with the dance and led it with ease, without hesitation or self-doubt, supremely unselfconscious. A perfect professional and a gentleman, and it all came as naturally to him as breathing.

He only snapped out of the zone to keep checking on Loki, although his brother seemed to have it all under control. Where he had once affected a relaxed, casual attitude, that night he held himself like a prince. Gracious, smooth, and regal, there was nothing easy or approachable about him tonight. He was happy to let himself be admired from a safe distance. How much Thor ached to stand there beside him, and tell the fucking world that this remote, unearthly creature belonged to him.

Mariners was nominated tonight for five awards: Photography, Adapted Screenplay, Best Actor, Director, and Motion Picture. The big ones. The ones that came at the end, so their group — Heimdall and his wife on Thor’s right, Loki on his left, Tony and Pepper right behind them, with Bucky — had a long wait before they needed to start getting nervous. They had done great at the BAFTAs, not so great at the Globes. Thor himself, however, had lost the BAFTA to Daniel Day-Lewis, who could not put a foot wrong if his life depended on it, and the Globe to Leo DiCaprio,
who was now the bookies’ favourite. The buzz was that the Academy considered that Thor had a long career ahead of him, and that Leo was long overdue, even if this was not his finest performance. And since this was not really a contest of merit, but a popularity one, like his father wisely said, and decisions about whom to vote for were made upon this kind of considerations, Thor was not holding his breath.

Loki was. He was thrumming with anticipation, and not in a nice way. They were sitting side by side, and Thor was able to feel the tension in his brother’s whole demeanour and posture as it coiled and built up inside.

“Stop fucking staring like that,” Loki had murmured at one point, somewhere between Sound Effects and Costume Design. “The camera is right fucking there.”

The clip to introduce *Mariners* for Best Picture was a scene from inside the cabin of the pickup truck with Johnny and Bobby remembering their dad, conflicting feelings playing up in both their faces and their voices: nostalgia for their childhood days; yearning for a father whose love came in brief, brusque outbursts, and then, just as abruptly, was withheld, and all but vanished for weeks or months; pain from looking back to those days when these two men, two strangers now, had been everything to each other. And seeping into the conversation, both in the words and the silences, a feeling of near impropriety, as if that intimacy that had ended should not be disturbed. No fucking wonder the slash-prone fans shipped Johnny and Bobby, goddammit. There were so many things simmering just under the skin, perhaps even a melancholy old-lovers feel among them.

He remembered shooting that scene. He remembered a long break between takes, their silence not as tense as it had been, but still far from comfortable. Impossible to make small talk when it seemed to Thor that any wrong word, any wrong step, was going to thrust them into a conversation Loki was at that point still refusing to have, and send him into a fit of panic-induced rage. Thor remembered Loki’s hands on the leather of the seat, noticing they had taken on some colour. He remembered thinking he had not seen Loki’s skin with a tan since Iceland. He had been burning for his brother that day, fucking burning, so near and so far. A bit like right now, really.

Loki kicked his shin, without dropping the charming, yet fake smile.

“Cut it out,” he muttered between grinning teeth.

Thor woke up from his reverie and saw his own face, larger than life, on the screen. It had shown him to the world looking at his brother with the fondest expression. And if people knew what they were seeing, they would recognise it for what it was — the face of an adoring husband, bursting at the seams with love.

Bucky presented an award. The look of pride on all their faces made Thor smile. Loki’s especially — it could have been his son there. The boy was going places. But why, wondered Thor, was he going without Steve? They had been talking about coming out for a while, hadn’t they? Thor had asked Loki about it a few days ago. “Bucky is putting him off,” Loki had told him. “He doesn’t want Steve fucking up his career over him.” That had given Thor some pause. “And what does Steve have to say about that?” he had asked. And Loki had been the one lost in thought then.

They lost Best Photography to the Coen Brothers’ film, but they snatched Adapted Screenplay from right under their noses. It could have gone either way, to be fair. Heimdall remembered the real Johnny and Bobby in his speech, he thanked the author of the novel and her family. Tony wondered out loud during an ad break whether that award meant Heimdall was not getting Best Director.

The clip they chose to present Thor’s performance was the scene immediately after the fuck, when Johnny walks into the restroom, catches on to the strange vibe between the hustler and Bobby, and
just knows. Thor had felt completely in character while shooting it, and an echo of that feeling was coming back to him as he watched the scene unfold. He was not desensitised to it yet - he was not used to seeing himself as Bobby and Loki as Johnny. Bobby was backed against the wall, and Thor could feel again the cold, hard tiles and the terror, his character falling apart because the worst thing that could have possibly happened to him has happened: his awful, shameful secret is out, and his brother knows. The counter-shot showed him a close-up of what Thor was actually seeing while they were shooting, Loki/Johnny’s frown of passing confusion lifting and resolving into realisation, and then relief flooding his face. And at that moment, Bobby doesn’t understand what’s happening, but Thor did. The best thing that could have possibly happened to Johnny has happened. Yes, he knows. He finally knows what has been killing his brother, and thank god, he can tell him to stop suffering now, he can tell him it will be fine, and it will be the truth.

“Who the hell are you?” grunts Bucky/The hustler on the screen, protective of Bobby. It rang true; the sex scene had established the connection, the empathy. It was his only line in the whole film; the rest he did with his body and his eyes.

Loki/Johnny said softly, eyes on Bobby, “I’m his brother.”

Bobby is still wary, still doesn’t understand why there’s no disgust and contempt in his brother’s eyes. When Johnny moves forward, he hesitates between flight and fight. Johnny moves slowly, as if trying not to startle a cornered animal, and in his eyes there’s fucking everything, his love, his acceptance, his pleading, and his hope — you don’t have to hide anymore, you don’t have to run. Don’t push me away this time, brother… A whole string of emotions, confusion, self-loathing, shame, and a lifetime of regret, are flickering on Thor/Bobby’s face. Another shot of Loki’s eyes, so green, as open and sincere as they could get, and then, on the counter-shot, Bobby’s walls, cracking. It’s subtle. He’s a stoic, reserved man, military, mid-20th-century, who’s been hiding and repressing his emotions all his life. It was a very powerful moment. It came after about an hour and a half of both brothers getting more and more deeply entrenched in their mutual lack of understanding, their reproach and mistrust, their desolation and their disappointment, which by then had them both convinced that they had lost each other for good, and feeling lonelier than ever. Now, Johnny is reaching for Bobby, putting his arms around him, awkwardly, with caution. After a moment, Bobby responds, and after yet another moment, they hold tight. They were playing two 1950s guys with a serious problem with notions of masculinity, so the hug had to be as clunky and stiff as they came, but it also had to show all the love these two brothers had for each other, their joy at being properly, really reunited at long last. When they were rehearsing, Thor had told Loki he was channeling the quick hugs between Odin and Bor, their granddad, and they had gone for that. It worked. Wooden, rusty, and strong enough to hurt, that embrace marked the turning point in the story, the moment both these characters’ lives are changed forever, and if Thor was allowed to say so himself, they had pulled it off, with flying colours. Yes, fucking hell, Oscar or no Oscar, he was very damn proud of that performance. And Loki, who had asked not to have his name submitted for any award, should be bloody well proud too.

The roar of applause took him by surprise. The whoops and whistles even more. The audience had not reacted so warmly for any other candidate’s clip. He turned to Loki, who for that one instant could not conceal a thing. If there was ever a perfect moment for a kiss.

Ok, it was time.

“And the Academy Award goes to…”

Loki’s nails sunk into his wrist. He looked pale, his mouth a thin, faded, tense line. Thor stroked his hand, and gave him a look of reassurance. It will be fine, baby.
Chiwetel Ejiofor was taking for fucking ever to open that bloody envelope, and even Thor was nervous now.

An explosion of white noise.

No, not white noise, applause. A solid, bordering on painful back pat from Heimdall shook Thor out of it. People around him were getting up on their feet. It was his name on the screen. He stood up.

He turned to Loki, also standing now, fire and triumph in his eyes. Thor was in a dream. He hooked his hand around Loki’s neck to pull him close. Their foreheads touched. At the very last fucking second, Loki turned his head, and the kiss fell on his cheek instead. His arms wrapped around Thor. He whispered in his ear, *I love you.* Thor squeezed tight. *I can’t breathe, Thor,* said Loki, as he pushed him off.

Thor was getting jostled, shaken, patted, shoved, and hugged. Tony smacked his butt, Bucky kissed him, Heimdall hugged him. Their lips were moving, Thor couldn’t hear.

As he walked down the aisle towards the stage, friends, acquaintances, and strangers alike reached to him to shake his hand or pat his back.

With the thing finally in his hand, he faced the auditorium, who had given him a partial, yet pretty fucking impressive standing ovation. They were sitting down now, the applause dying, and they were waiting. Damn, the speech. *I want to thank the Academy…*

“I wish our mother was here,” he said.

He gathered his wits, and he thanked Tony, he thanked Bucky, he thanked Heimdall, he thanked the crew, he cracked a joke about being *only* five down on his dad. Then he searched for Loki in the sea of faces.

“With this in my hands, I can now say for sure that the best thing to come out of this project was getting you back. I love you, Loki.”

The music swelled, and they whisked him away for press and photos. Last he saw of him, Bucky was holding Loki in his arms, and Loki was crying a river. And he was far away, and the spotlights were on Thor’s face, but it seemed to him that Loki didn’t look so much moved or bursting with emotion as he looked distraught, and just plain sad.

*

On the plane. There was a patch of land way below. The screen said it was Greenland. Thor had fallen asleep again, slumped against him. He looked placid and childish and beautiful. The hostess was not paying them any mind, or pretending not to. She had flirted with Thor during the half an hour he’d stayed awake. Loki guessed she might have been Thor’s type, once upon a time.
Well, then, Laufeyson, you’ve made it. You’ve made it to the Oscars. You’ve made it past the Oscars, even, how about that. There had been many times when he had not been sure. He had thought he would be needing to call the whole thing off, and wait it out in London, with Sigyn, maybe even book a room in her establishment.

There was a golden statuette in Thor’s bag, with his name on it. Dad would be so proud. Thor said he didn’t know where he was going to put it. When Loki asked Tony where he was going to put his, Tony had wiggled his eyebrows: “The metal cabinet,” he told him. Loki knew he meant the cupboard in which he kept his sleek collection of metal sex toys, but Thor didn’t. “What do you mean?” said the sweet golden oaf. “Come over to New York for a few days and I’ll show you,” said Tony. Bucky had said “oh my god, yes!”, very excited. Thor said he would rather just go home. And Loki’s heart had shrunk.

He had not feared that his brother would dump him the days immediately after the ceremony, while they were still on a high. But in Stark Tower, among their friends, they could have prolonged the honeymoon a bit longer. They would have been among people who knew, and they could have made believe for a few more days that they were normal. It was a pleasant fiction. Back in London, back to routine, restricted to their apartments and the petty daily miseries of trying to keep their secret from the world, keeping it clean in restaurants, at the theatre, at the movies, walking down the street with their hands stuffed in their pockets, while surrounded by couples holding hands, Thor would be remembering soon enough that they were not happy, that Loki’s health was a worry, that being with the one you love shouldn’t feel like this. And sooner rather than later, he would tell him sit down, we need to talk, and that would be it.

There was a whole lot of blue sky out there, but below them, the clouds were closing in. The metaphor would be complete when they began their descent, leaving the sunshine behind to face the rain and the gloom of the English winter. Loki was singing in his head, “They’re writing songs of love, but not for me, / There are lucky stars above, but not for me…” A bitter scoff, which went unheard under the roar of the plane. Time was ticking.

Chapter End Notes

"They're writing songs of love / But not for me./ There are lucky stars above/ but not for me. / With love to lead the way / I've found more clouds of grey / Than any Russian play could guarantee. / I was a fool to fall and get that way / Hi ho alas and also lackaday / And though I can't dismiss / The memory of her kiss / I guess she's not for me...

(One by the Gershwins, Ira and George.)

The Coen Bros usual cinematographer is Richard Deakins. I was mixed up, I thought they did it themselves and used a pseudonym, but that's what they do with the editing. My wonderful beta Thorctopus got me out of that mix up.
I'm sure Mariners would have been nominated for the editing as well.

And yes, Heimdall won Best Director, and himself, Tony and Pepper got up there to get their Oscar for Best Picture, because fuck you, that's why.
"It had been almost two weeks since the Oscars, and still nothing. Today, Loki’s mind was somewhere else. He had not been expecting it anymore.

“Loki, I… I need to talk to you,” said his brother.

I have to thank my beta Thorctopus very... uh, muchly this time. You probably should thank her too. She didn't only save me from embarrassing spelling mistakes (and hilarious ones), helped bring clarity where there was a jumble, and improved punctuation and grammar and bad English, but she also suggested a retake on the final scene which I believe improved it massively. Basically, if you find yourself jumping up and down a little by the time you finish reading this chapter, it's largely thanks to her.

Thank you for your hard work, gurl, you're awesome!

(The past)

“Are you sure I can’t stay?” pleaded Thor, already with his satchel slung over his shoulder, school uniform peeking from under the hem of that leather bomber jacket he was favouring these days. “I won’t bother him.”

“You have to go to school, darling,” said Frigga, gently nudging him along. “Come on, you’ll see him when you get back.”

“I just… Won’t he be mad that I’m not here to greet him?”

Frigga smiled warmly, tugging a stray lock of hair behind his son’s ear, and taking the chance to stroke his face.

“He needs peace and quiet. It’s a big step already coming home. He’s… afraid, he’s dreading that he won’t cope, that he’s not ready yet, that he’ll relapse. He’s afraid of what coming back here will make him feel. We’re trying to ease his way, remove all the pressures and expectations as much as possible. Your dad will be leaving too, and I’ll go and pick him up by myself, so he’ll have a few hours to get used to being in this house again, without anyone asking anything from him. He doesn’t need a reception band. What he really needs is that we try not to make a big deal of it. I know it is, but he doesn’t need to have it thrust in his face while he’s facing some very big concerns of his own already. But he’ll be here when you get back, I promise. And he’ll have had some time to himself, and he’ll be more ready to see you.”
Thor’s eyes had filled with tears. “Won’t he think I don’t care?”

“Oh, darling…” Frigga hugged him. He was already taller than her by a couple of inches, and much wider, but whenever she held him like this, he felt like a little boy again. He wished he could curl up on her lap. “He knows you care.”

Loki was coming home from the clinic today. He had been away more than four months.

Thor sniffled all the way to school, didn’t give a damn what people he crossed on the street made of it. In class, he was distracted at best, completely withdrawn at worst, head in a cloud. The teachers didn’t make as many allowances for him as they did right after the event, but since he was usually a cheerful, energetic, boisterous teenager who paid attention, and although rowdy, was not disrespectful or mischievous, when they saw him like this, they assumed it was about his brother, and they let him be.

Four months.

Thor had been to visit at least twice a week. He had found his brother subdued, quiet, listless. He wouldn’t say Loki was a zombie, but he didn’t have much life in him at all.

“What do you do here all day?” Thor had asked early on, when Loki first moved to the clinic.


“Do you play? They have a piano downstairs, don’t they?”

“I don’t play.”

“Don’t you miss it?”

“No.”

“What about dancing?”

Loki had huffed, irritated.

“Stop grilling me.” And it was the biggest show of energy he got from him that day.

They struggled to find things to talk about. They sucked at small talk (they were brothers, they had never fucking needed any small talk) and the bigger issues were verboten. Thor had been instructed not to bring up the suicide attempt, not to ask for explanations or reasons, not to ask Loki to open up about that. He was told the whole thing was being tackled at therapy, and that Loki would address the subject in his own time, when he was ready. And of course, Thor was terrified of bringing up… well, the other thing. Even if they had been in a more private setting, which they were not… what was there to say? Or what was there to say that he dared mention? If it was a sore issue for him, how sore must it be for Loki? What kind of awful damage could Thor cause if he tried to talk about that? So he kept the chatter to new videogames, school gossip, mum and dad’s work, and little else.

Loki never seemed happy to see him, and he didn't really cooperate to make things run more smoothly. He was quiet and distant on his best days, and a snooty, petulant child on the bad ones. Their mother said it was a defensive strategy.

"He thinks you don't really want to see him, that you hate going there. That you're angry with him
for what he did, and only show up out of duty, because we make you."

That had felt like a stab in the fucking heart. Thor learned one thing that day: to wit, that believing that Loki had stopped loving him didn’t hurt as badly as Loki believing Thor had stopped loving him.

"Look, I'll fuck off if you don't want me here, ok?" snapped Thor one afternoon, when Loki was being particularly impossible. “I'll fuck off and never come back, if that’s what you want.”

"We'd never fucking hear the end of it," said Loki tonelessly. "We'd be nagged to death." His face was turned to the window, with a view to the garden in the small courtyard (the “sensory garden,” with aromatic plants to smell, and fleshy and prickly ones to touch, a fruit and vegetable orchard to taste, flower patches arranged by colour... Therapeutic, you see?).

"So that's why you put up with me, then? Because you can't be bothered with the fuss of asking me to stop?"

Loki shrugged. "Isn't that why you keep coming? Because they don’t leave you alone otherwise?"

"I fucking miss you, arsehole!" Thor had snapped.

Loki had looked away, lips tight, brow scrunching. Thor didn't know what to say now. He reached for Loki's hand and gave it a quick squeeze. Save for a couple of awkward hugs in their parents' presence, it might very well have been the first time he touched him in fucking months.

"I miss you too," Loki had muttered, with nothing but a wisp of voice, as he pulled his hand away.

They hadn't felt close for a while before Loki… The big scare. By the end of September they were already arguing like cat and dog. October was bleak, the sex was angry. In November, Thor got that part in the Channel 4 soap, while Loki buried his nose in school work, music and singing. They barely saw each other, and they sneak out to be together less and less. December had been dismal. Loki wouldn’t even look at him. Thor stopped knocking on his door. In January, Thor thought they were getting over it, or at least used to it. He felt quite numb. Then February came.

When Loki did it, it had been weeks since the last time they had been together. It had come rather out of nowhere during the Christmas break, in Asgard, once their visiting relatives had left. After ignoring each other all of December, coexisting in silence, their paths seldom crossing even while living in the same house, Loki had begun to give him the long looks again. Thor had felt that hot rush of blood pumping in his veins, and the electric tingles of anticipation and desire, as fresh and powerful as ever. Nothing was dead there, just buried, and all it took was a sign of intent from his brother for Thor to find himself burning for Loki again.

Thor could not remember how it had actually been. They had slipped together into a guest room, and they had sex, but he couldn’t remember much besides. Had it been anything special? Had it been a good shag? Had it been tender and loving, or rushed and wild? No fucking idea, like it never happened. A blur. But Loki had been deeply depressed by then, and when he wasn’t a quiet, furtive shadow, he was a snarky, unpleasant, moody jerk. Thor, meanwhile, had taken to either ignoring him or being snarky in return (which in retrospect had been awfully insensitive of him, but he didn’t fucking know). Considering all of this, it didn’t sound like the recipe for a great fuck. Which was pretty fucking sad. He wished he had known it would be the last time.

The sudden fear hit him like a bloody transatlantic: was Loki saying goodbye that day, was that what it had been about? Dear fucking god, was that Loki wanting to be with him one last time before he…?
“It was not an impulsive decision,” one of the therapists had explained to Thor. Everybody was so invested in helping him understand, so that he did not fuck up with his brother. “He had meditated his options thoroughly, always within the logic of his depressive thinking, and had arrived at the conclusion that it was the best for everyone. He planned it carefully, and he executed it coolly.”

“But why that day? Why?” insisted Thor. “What happened that made him decide to do it on that particular bloody day?”

The doctor had repeated the “depressive logic” argument, with different words, since Thor had clearly not understood the first time. And Thor nodded and dropped the subject, but he did not let it go. It felt like such a silly, inconsequential, meaningless day, that fucking Tuesday. He had been planning it for weeks, hadn’t he? So they had told Thor. There had to be something that tipped Loki over the edge, something that helped him make up his mind… Was it something Thor did? Something he did not do? Didn’t they understand? If they did not identify that trigger, how could they be sure that they would not accidentally activate it again?

“It’s nothing you did, Thor - it has nothing to do with you,” mum would explain again and again. “It’s nobody’s fault. Loki was ill. His illness affected the way he felt and the way his thoughts worked and operated. He was in despair, he was experiencing a lot of pain, and he had no hope that the situation would ever improve or change. That’s what his illness does. In the end, the only solution his brain allowed him to believe in was dying. Again, that’s his illness. Do you understand?”

No. “Yes.”

“It’s not your fault, not my fault, not Loki’s fault, it’s nobody’s fault. If he had cancer instead, would you blame yourself?”

He usually ended these conversations crying himself into a puddle. He felt so fucking guilty, and her words did not console him, they did not bring him any relief, because she did not know. She didn’t know about them. Thor could not be sure that she would still say the same thing if she knew the whole extent of Thor's part in this.

“Do you think he’ll let me hug him?”

“Oh, she didn’t have a clue. He had been so close to telling her a few times, so close to confessing it all. He was so desperate for comfort, for guidance. He was desperate for a true hug from someone who knew, and still was willing to offer. Without that, it all felt null and void, both advice and gestures of comfort, and he struggled to accept them or find solace in them.

But he could never tell, of course, certainly not without discussing it with Loki first, at a point in time when Loki was in the position of making this kind of decisions. If nothing else - even if Thor delivered the most graceful “post-incest-and-early-teen-sex” confession he could conjure up in his head - he would bet his ass that, even in the most positive and accepting scenarios, therapy and counselling would end up featuring somewhere. And Loki had enough on his plate as it was.

And so, Thor swallowed his true doubts, and he listened to advice and guidance about how to deal with Loki which only half applied to them and their reality. He felt as if he was stumbling in the mist, afraid of breaking things that could not be mended, by saying the wrong word, or doing the wrong thing. Once he had felt there was nobody closer to his brother than him, that nobody could read Loki or understand him better than Thor. Now he seemed to him like a closed book. Or even worse, a book for more mature readers, people a lot smarter and more sophisticated than him. He had been all along, and Thor only realised that now. He had been handling this delicate object, this mechanism of
precision that was his brother's mind, his emotions and his thoughts, as if it was a preschool toy. Nobody would ever convince him that it had not been him, being immature, clumsy and careless, that had broken Loki.

“Loki doesn’t blame you,” the one family therapist kept saying.

“How do you know?”

“He’s told me.”

(So you don’t know, Thor had thought.)

He was supposed to know Loki better than anyone. He was supposed to look after him. Instead, he had been blind, and careless, and oblivious. He had shrugged off the burden that belonged to both of them and moved on, leaving Loki behind to carry it all alone. It didn’t even fucking matter whether Loki blamed him or not. It was his fault. He should have been there and he wasn’t. He should have seen it coming, and he hadn’t. And you people can cling on to your medical books and your list of symptoms and your bow-tied diagnoses all you want, but the fact is that you just don’t know.

When he got home that afternoon, it was quiet. It wasn’t strange to come back to a quiet, empty house when his parents were working, but Thor knew they were in today, so it felt eerie. He found mum and dad in the living room reading quietly, a Richard Attenborough documentary on the telly on mute.

“Hello, my darling, how was your day?” asked his mum when he gave her a kiss. “Your brother is in his room.”

Just like that.

“May I?” he asked.

“Yes, of course.”

Could he? Loki’s room was at the end of the corridor, which at this moment seemed to stretch on for miles. Thor had been to that room often while Loki was away, but he always felt like he was trespassing. Loki had always been jealous of his private space. You went in by invitation only. Without it, Thor felt unwelcome. He tried not to disturb anything, but still. Their mother had kept it open and ventilated, had had it dusted and vacuumed, had moved a couple of plants in, and visited every day. She did not want it to become a shrine, so whenever she found Thor there, she would walk in and talk with him, as if their presence and their chat could bring some life to the room. But it looked so tidy, so lifeless. Loki wasn’t there, the organised chaos he liked to keep around himself wasn’t there. Frigga had moved a number of things little by little to Loki’s room in the clinic, so there were big gaps on the shelves. In spite of Frigga's best efforts, the place felt abandoned, or haunted. And Thor always left the room in a rush, as if an invisible presence (an absence, rather) was chasing him.

Now he hesitated at the door, hand up, ready to knock, undecided.

He heard the sound of paper rustling as a page was turned. It came as a great relief, for some reason. He knocked.
There was no "come on in". Instead, a brush of clothes, bed creaking, the pat pat pat pat of bare feet on wood.

There he was, in comfy, loose clothes, baggy on his slimmer frame. Not as skinny as he had got at one point in hospital, but still reduced in a way, diminished, smaller. It made his eyes look bigger, gave his face a childish air. And he was still the most beautiful boy Thor had ever seen. But there was no rush of blood, no pull of lust, no impulse to reach and touch. They had gone back to the time before puberty hit Thor, when he had admired his brother like one admires something precious, fascinating, a miraculous work of handicraft, meant to be looked at, not held. Thor guessed it should be a relief, but it felt like loss. The physical part of his love for Loki had been such a overpowering force, intense and confusing and exhilarating. Now that it was gone, Thor felt empty, bereft, and he mourned it.

He had been staring in silence for ages. Loki had waited patiently enough.

“Yes?” he urged.

Thor swallowed. He should have fucking thought about what he was going to say. He was making this more tense and awkward than it needed to be. He remembered something.

“Hey,” he said. “I got you… Sorry, they gave me these.” He searched inside his satchel for the stack of notes and homework Loki’s teachers had entrusted to him a few days ago.

Loki had a quick, disinterested look.

“Ta,” he said.

Thor was still there, feeling stupid. He guessed Loki was nervous too, and that’s why he was being so laconic, but he didn’t look nervous, and it was making Thor very very uncomfortable. But he didn’t want to leave yet. He was not finished.

“They don’t need it anytime soon or anything,” he said, to fill the silence. "It’s just for you to… to keep up with what they’re doing."

“Ok.”

“Do… Do you need help with any of it?”

Loki quirked an eyebrow.

“With schoolwork? From you?” And there it was, just there, the faintest tug in the corner of his lip. The little shit.

Thor smiled irrepressibly. Loki smiled too. Not so brightly, but a proper smile, his eyes warm with it. He guessed that was what they call a moment.

“Jesus, sorry,” said Thor, sniffling. He had begun to cry. “I’m sorry.”

“It will not make him feel loved or cared for. In a
way, he’ll feel you’re attacking him and blaming him for your pain, which he cannot help. Even now that he’s doing better, he doesn’t feel that he is worth all that suffering in the first place. He already feels very guilty about causing us so much pain, he loathes himself for it. Let’s not give him any more sticks to beat himself up with, ok?” — Oh, Thor had been well lectured about what he should not be saying, alright. He just wished he had got some orientation too about what he should say.

Loki was stroking his back, the stack of papers still in his hand. It was a clumsy touch. A shy, teenage kid brother’s touch. What had they fucking come to.

“I can’t breathe, Thor,” Loki said at last, when Thor couldn’t stop squeezing.

Thor sniffed, snorted a chuckle.

“How can you talk, then,” he said, as he released him. He wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

“Gross,” said Loki. But he gave him a small smile. “Thanks for these,” he raised the papers, and he went back inside. He pushed the door closed.

Thor, too, retreated into his room to cry his eyes out.

It would become normal again to have Loki home. In time, their interactions would become a little less strained, a little less clunky. They never got easy or smooth again. They wouldn’t until years later. It felt like a whole lifetime, almost. And if Thor had known that, he would have sunk into a pit of despair. As it was, he lived day to day, celebrated every small victory, tried to not dwell on the little steps back. After a certain point, there was very little to no improvement, but Thor would only be able to see that in hindsight. Back then, he just hoped tomorrow would be better.

Loki did not return to high school that year. By the time he got out of the clinic, the course was almost over anyway. He worked on his own, got some private tutoring, and passed his exams without much trouble. Meanwhile, to make sure he wasn’t cooped up in the house all his waking hours, mum would take him to the movies, to the theatre, sometimes to a museum. Odin took him on day trips on the train and in the Jag, to the seaside or to a monument or to some nice town. Thor was kind of jealous. Sometimes he’d get back from school to find Loki and Odin on the settee watching a film together, huddled close, dad’s arm around Loki’s shoulders, the same black and white light of the screen dancing on their faces. It always made him stop and look on, as if some kind of rare cosmic event was unfolding in his parents’ very living room.

When he did come back to school, Loki was as lonely as ever, but now he took to hanging around with Thor and his friends. He didn’t really interact much with them. He used them as a screen, to pretend he was not a complete social outcast. Which he was. People said things behind his back. People said things to his face. And Loki didn’t hold his chin up, proud and haughty, as he once had, and he never responded.

Thor did instead. And what a huge relief it was to see clearly for once what he could do for his brother, and just go ahead and do it. Big, strong Thor, who had been told so many times he had to be mindful of his own strength and his physical advantage, that he had to be gentle (with Loki, sure, and with the other kids, both in the playground and on the playfield), he saw no fucking reason to be
careful and restrain himself this time. Heartless bastards, bullies, mean, cruel shits, all of them. If they
could do that to a suffering boy who had tried to commit suicide, they were fucking scum and didn’t
deserve his mercy. They had had it coming. He got into fights, he caused some black eyes, he
bloodied a few noses. And he was being careful, believe you him. He could have bashed in some
heads and broken a few bones. The school was lenient on him, because they were aware of the
bullying, and knew where Thor’s rage was coming from, and what caused it. Odin and Frigga
weren’t. Thor had ended up having to pull out of the Channel 4 soap as a punishment. Odin had
been looking for an excuse anyway, so Thor thought.

Worst of it all? Loki did not look up to him anymore as if Thor was made of sunshine and gold for
fighting in his name. He acted like it had nothing to do with him.

His brother was a shadow. He was apathetic, disinterested, vaguely bored. He had no fire and no
fury. It seemed to Thor that he only went through the motions of living, because he had to. For his
family perhaps, out of responsibility, because he had seen the devastation in Frigga’s face when he
woke up in hospital, the terror in his dad’s. Thor could not know what Loki had seen in his own
face. Mum told him something like this comes with its own sequelae. As if he had been in a terrible
car crash, it would take time for Loki to recover, to build up his mental and emotional muscles again.

“He will get better, I promise,” his mum said.

But when, when? Thor was afraid that if Loki didn’t improve and get strong again soon, he would
become depressed again. He was still so lonely, and people could be so cruel.

Drama school. Frigga started to nudge Loki about it, more and more often.

“Why don’t you give it a try?”

Loki would say maybe, but kept putting it off.

Over the dinner table one evening, Thor found out that Loki had decided to join. Some time later,
Frigga was asking them both about their day. Loki got talking about drama school, and there was a
spark in his eye.

“I’m so glad you’re enjoying it, darling,” said their mum.

Enjoying it?, thought Thor, Loki looked alive.

And during that year, whenever they went to watch him in a play or a sketch, which the school put
on regularly, Thor wanted to sink down on his knees and give thanks. There he was, his brother. He
was back. He was rage and humour and electricity, he was gracious and poised, he controlled every
muscle of his body with precision, and wielded them well, and he stood head and shoulders above
each and every other pupil in the school, and probably his teachers too. What a feeling it must be for
him, after all that isolation, all that rejection, all that contempt, to revel in the worship and applause of
an enraptured audience. Whenever he was on stage, all eyes were focused on him. On a stage, Loki
the outcast was a god.

He was just so bloody good at this; he had a future in this, he could become great, really fucking
great, and make not just a living, but a name for himself. Loki’s whole life stretched before him
again, and for the first time, it seemed that he was looking forwards to it.
The Work had saved Loki’s life, it had given it meaning and purpose, when their love had nearly ended it. This was the essence of it, the distilled wisdom Thor had learned from that time of their lives. And so, during all those years that followed, Thor had denied himself and Loki what they both wanted, because of the scandal, sure, because of Thor’s career, and also, ultimately, because of this.

What he had learned in the last few months, however, was that nothing is ever as simple as that. That their love was not just death and illness to Loki. That he too could help make him happy and whole.

But not like this.

Thor was passionate, and impulsive, and had a romantic streak, but he was also a realist. He did not fool himself with the belief that love can overcome everything. He did not believe it was the answer to every question. He had learned the hard way that, just because two people are crazy about each other, that doesn’t mean they’re good for each other, or that they belonged together, or that they were entitled to a happy ending. Even if they deserved it, even if they had worked so hard for it and earned it. Sometimes life just isn’t fair.

He had told himself that he had thought long and hard about it all before jumping into this. He hadn’t. He had simply put all his fears aside and gone with his gut.

They could not go on like this. He was unhappy. It was making Loki unhappy, it was making him ill. Because Thor had been so afraid and so full of doubts and confusion, and because their lives had been so intense and complicated for so much of last year, he had had to sit and watch how things deteriorated, without being able to do much about it. Now there was no excuse anymore. Putting it off would be procrastinating.

Yes, he was afraid, he was uncertain, he was terrified. Loki seemed so fragile to him still, so complicated. Thor could pull or push too hard and break him. But somebody had to do something, and Loki would never do it. It came down to him. He had to be brave, the knight in shining armour his brother had once had him for. For himself, and for Loki.

“New kink?” said Loki as he finished loading up the dishwasher and turned it on, while his brother watched from the door. “Shall I wear a French maid costume next time?”

Thor put on a vague, dim smile. He looked concerned, a serious frown on his beautiful face. He had something on his mind, it was pretty obvious. It had been there for a few days, since they came back from Hollywood.
Loki knew what it was. He knew what was eating his brother up. The first few days, he had spent them expecting the “we need to talk” to pop up at any moment, from the minute he woke up to the time he went to bed. When it hadn’t, and then another day had passed, and another, and another, and still nothing… Well, he had not forgotten about it, but he had put it a bit further to the back of his mind, and sort of… relaxed. Thor clearly couldn’t bring himself to do it yet, not while things were still ok.

Now and then, the bloody suspense got on Loki’s nerves. It made him irritable and short-tempered. Oh, grow a fucking pair, he almost snapped several times, when a silence between them would stretch too long, and there was clearly something Thor was trying to say and didn’t. Just fucking do it already.

Thor was awfully clingy too, like he was trying to make the best of it until the last minute. Plenty of sex, very feelsy, lots of long stares, lots of deep, passionate kissing. Too feelsy at times, even. His brother could get very intense. Loki sometimes felt overwhelmed. But for all of Loki’s eye-rolling and his very colourful put-downs, no matter how annoyed he pretended to be (and how very anxious he was really feeling), none of Thor’s shenanigans was making it any easier for Loki to accept the end of things. It was too bloody nice, frankly, feeling that his brother couldn’t get enough of him. It was so easy to get his hopes up...

So it had been almost two weeks since the Oscars, and still nothing. Today, Loki’s mind was somewhere else. He had not been expecting it anymore.

“Loki, I… I need to talk to you,” said his brother.

Loki felt a sudden, breathless void in his stomach, the blood leaving his face. Details began to register for some reason. The cables on Thor’s jumper, spots on the apples in the fruit basket, crumbs by the toaster, asymmetrical laces on his brother’s shoes. So, this was it. Today. Deep breaths, deep breaths.

Thor had that frown still, a thinking one. He did not look like he was distraught or in terrible pain. Instead he seemed focused, reflective. Was he trying to put up a front in preparation for Loki’s meltdown, because someone had to keep their shit together? Or had this been such a long time coming, Thor had already done his mourning all by his little self?

Thor opened his mouth, couldn’t find the words. He gave him a nervous smile.

“I think we better sit down.”

Loki was going to puke. He wondered why he wasn’t crying. He guessed he was in shock. He had thought he would be ready when the time came. He wasn’t.

They sat down; Loki on the settee, Thor on the armchair. Thor held his brother’s hands in both of his. Loki was fucking shaking. Another nervous smile from Thor, even tighter than the previous one. Was it intended to be reassuring?

“Loki, I… I know it won’t come to a surprise to you that… that I’m not happy with-with how things are right now in our lives.”

White noise flooded Loki’s mind. He was physically fucking shaking, his teeth would clatter if he wasn’t clenching his jaw. He was going to be violently sick all over the goddamn coffee table. And his brother was surely noticing, but he seemed to have decided to just push on ahead.

Thor was talking but it wasn’t registering. Words came through now and then.
“…this situation… not what we wanted… Something needs to… you and me…”

“Just fucking say it already,” he interrupted, the tossing and tumbling of apprehension in his belly now all-out painful.

Thor chuckled. He chuckled? Loki paled with outrage and shock. How could he fucking laugh, the heartless bastard?

“Oh, ok, don’t bite me,” Thor said, stroking his hand, still chuckling. He was shaking a bit as well. “Loki, baby… Jesus, this isn’t as easy as…”

“Thor!” he barked.

Thor looked him full in the eye, holding Loki’s hand firmly between his own.

“I-I want you to move in with me.”

Loki stared, blank.

“I want us to live together.”

Shocked frown. Utter confusion.

“I want us to come out.”

Loki’s jaw fell open. Thor was squeezing his hand too fucking hard.

“What…?” managed Loki.

“I want to come out,” repeated Thor. “I want us to go public.”

Loki stared, unblinking, for an eternity and a half, mouth still gaping. He whispered, because he didn’t have voice for more.

"You have completely lost your mind."

Thor smiled broadly now, dazzling, blinding.

“No, baby, I haven’t. I’ve thought about this a lot. A whole lot. For months now. I am sure.”

“Insane is what you are,” said Loki, still more wheezy than anything. “You do not fucking confess to the world that you’re shagging your own brother! You haven’t thought this through!”

“I have, actually, for once,” said his brother pleasantly.

He acted so smooth now, he looked so relieved. He had probably thought how this showdown would go, and it seemed things were going as he had anticipated, so he was calm and in control. His hold on Loki’s hand had relaxed from desperate to firm. He was stroking it gently. He stared right into his eyes again.

“Loki, this is how it is. I’m never going to give up on you, ever. You’re the only one I want, the love of my life, my soulmate, whatever you want to call it. You’re my husband, ok? My one. And I’m so blessed to have you, I’m privileged. Most people live their entire lives without ever experiencing what we have. So I refuse to give up on you just because it’s complicated. As long as you want me, I want to be with you. But not like this. We can’t go on like this. This situation is poison. It’s killing us both. Something needs to change, and I believe it’s not us.”
“It’s not an option…” whispered Loki. “It’s unthinkable.”

“We can’t hide the rest of our lives, baby, it just won’t work, it’s impossible. I’m not getting another beard. People will wonder what the fuck I am doing. And they’re going to pry, and they’re going to start suspecting, and one day, someone will out us. It can’t be helped. It will happen. I refuse to sit here and wait until they do. I refuse to let anyone else take this from us. I want to step up and tell the world that I’m not ashamed. That I love you, that we’re together, and that it’s brilliant. That I’m proud to be the one you love. I want to get out there, in everybody’s faces, with you. I want to live with you, I want to go out with you, I want to hold your hand down the red carpet, I want to…”

“Hold your horses, there, handsome,” interrupted Loki, sardonic. “If we do this, no more red carpets for you, because you’ll never fucking work again.”

“Fine,” said Thor, not one hair out of place, “no more red carpets.”

“You’re just saying that,” argued Loki, skeptical.

“No, I’m not. I’ve had a good run in Hollywood, a good career I can be proud of. Better than many, many other people in our business with picture-perfect lives. I’ve done well. I’ve left my mark. And yeah, sure, coming out may well mean I never work in Hollywood again. But, first, my career could have ended at any point, for reasons beyond my control. I could be unlucky and have a few flops in a row, and there you go, I’m yesterday’s news. It could happen, nobody’s immune. And second, there are other places. Who knows, maybe the BBC doesn’t mind so much about my private life. Maybe a small theatre somewhere. I don’t know. But even if it’s a complete disaster and I never get to act again… the fear of losing my job is not a good enough reason to give up on us, Loki, it just isn’t. Not anymore.”

Loki’s mouth was getting dry, he had been gaping so long. His brother had thought this through, indeed. He had answers for everything.

“…And what about my career?” he tried. “I’ll be the poster boy for perverts and deviants if we do this. I mean, even more than now. I’ll be accused of corrupting you, I’m going to fucking bet money on it. Have you thought about that?”

Thor nodded.

“Yes, of course. You have to be onboard with this too. It’s going to be hard. We have to be strong together.”

“And if I’m not onboard with this? Then what? We break up? Is this an ultimatum?”

Thor’s frown had returned.

“No. If you’re not onboard with this… I don’t fucking know. I-I don’t think I could do it. Leave you. So… I don’t know.” He looked into his eyes and lit up again. “But I think it’s what you’ve wanted all your life. Since we were kids and you wanted to hold my hand down the street. Since you insisted that we fucked in broad daylight and without a stitch on in Iceland, for the fucking sky and sun to see. You’ve never once been ashamed of this, you’ve never seen the wrong in this, you’ve never wanted to hide. You would have told mum and dad if I had let you. That’s who you are, and I love you so much for it, baby. Because you want to stand there and shout: fuck you, I’m Loki Laufeyson, I do what I want!”

“These are just words, Thor. I very much do not do what I want.”

“But what I’m getting at is,” said Thor, “that I think you’re more worried about this for me than you
are for yourself. That it’s on my account that you don’t want to go public, even if it’s killing you inside. And I think that keeping your head down, being denied, everybody thinking I’m with someone else, this is all hurting you and gnawing at you. This won’t work, baby. You have to be happy, you have to feel good being with me. You can’t just work your head around into thinking that it’s alright to be a dirty secret. It’s not right, baby. I am proud of you, I’m proud of being the one you love. I don’t want it to be a secret. You don’t have to do this for me, understand? I’m not afraid anymore. I’ll be alright. And I don’t want to keep hiding. I want to be with you in the open and never once have to lie about it again. Because I’d rather get a bad look on the street or a thousand bad words in the press instead of the twist in my stomach I get every time I want to hold your hand in public and I don’t. I loathe myself for it, for every lie, for every time I deny you. So what if the bigots and the jerks hate us? What if some lunatics in the Bible Belt burn us in effigy? We’re not doing anything bad, we do no wrong to anyone, I have nothing to be ashamed of. I’m not ashamed of loving you, but I’m ashamed of hiding. Do you understand me, Loki?”

He was squeezing Loki’s hand tight again, his expression intent, earnest. Loki was holding his stare, speechless, hesitating between screaming and fainting. Maybe he’d just do both.

“I know it’s not going to be all downhill after we come out. I’m not saying that all our problems will evaporate and everything will be perfect, and I don’t expect it to be. And I know that we’ll never be normal. So what? Fuck normal! But we will be who we are, and I believe with my whole heart that we will be stronger and happier for it. Even if it means facing haters and looks of disgust and contempt and the wrath of the Daily Mirror, even if it means we never fucking get to work again. I’ll still go to bed feeling better than I do now. I’ll be fighting the good fight, next to the person that makes everything worth it for me. I won’t have to look at my Oscar with resentment anymore. Awards and recognition and all that crap have been turning to ash in my mouth, baby. Even when a fan comes to me on the street I just can’t… I feel I’m a big fat fraud and a liar. That the person they admire would not hide something as big as this. That I’m taking advantage of them, even, letting them believe in something I am not. I’m not enjoying it anymore, I don’t want any part of it. But if we do this, I’ll feel alright in my skin again. And I don’t know what I’ll do, but at least I won’t be hating myself when I do achieve something. There is no downside to this, baby, there just isn’t.”

Loki was out of words, out of arguments, out of his fucking depth, and probably out of his mind, because his brother’s reasoning was starting to make sense to him. Thor stroked his hand again, called Loki’s attention with a squeeze.

“What is it? What are you thinking right now?” asked Thor.

Loki’s deepest fear. He was so afraid, he didn’t even want to think of it, let alone say it out loud, just in case his words conjured it up and caused it to happen.

“What if this ends tomorrow?” he said, in a small whisper. “One year from now? Five years from now? Then what? Your reputation won’t bounce back from that, you’ll be… tainted forever. And you will have lost it all for nothing.”

Thor shook his head, with a warm, loving smile.

“For nothing? How can you say...?” he cut himself. “Not for nothing, baby…” He turned his eyes down to think. He pressed his lips together. This was a hard thought for him to entertain too.

“Nobody can see the future. I’m sure every lover that ever was thought that their love was eternal. I know we’re not special like that. Can this end in a few years? Well, yes, of course. I can’t fucking see it, but... But that’s still not a good enough reason not to try. Because we don’t know what’s going to happen in five years if we do come out, but I can tell you what will happen in a few months, at best, if we don’t. That we’ll kill this, baby. It will die in our hands. Because I’m not happy, and
you’re not happy, and if we’re not happy together, then what’s the point? And I can tell you something else that will happen. That I may be on top of the fucking world, the greatest fucking star Hollywood has ever known, and get ten Oscars, and get a billion dollars per movie and the best parts and all the bloody awards, and I’m going to be there, alone and bitter and hating all that I have, because I traded it for you, I chose that instead of a chance to make it work with you. I know because I’ve been there. I was up there with that piece of junk in my hands and it did nothing for me, baby. Once the thrill was gone, that’s all it was, a piece of junk. A badge I got for lying.”

Loki scrutinised his brother’s face, aghast. Had he been so deep in his own misery that he had failed to realise that? He had believed Thor was happy…

“And baby,” Thor squeezed his hand, “I’ve loved you all my life. All my life. I know you well, and I never get tired of you. Everybody else is a shadow next to you. You’re my fucking everything. And I believe you feel the same about me. I believe we can last the distance, baby, and have a fucking great time doing it. I believe we have what it takes. I’m sure our relationship will evolve and change and god knows where it will end up, but I can’t see a time when I don’t want you by my side. I can’t walk out on this without trying. Whatever happens in the future, this should not end because we don’t try. I said I would do whatever it took. And this is it, this is what it takes. Let’s fucking fly into the sun together, baby. Let’s give it everything we’ve got. Even if we fail, we’ll live happier in our own skins, because we tried. We did not hide, we were not ashamed, we made a fucking splash. If it has to end, that’s how I want it to end, not watching it wither and die while it fucking poisons us. Don’t you agree?”

Loki could not think, could not speak, could not… anything. Thor’s blue eyes were on him, warm, radiant with hope.

“I know I’ve disappointed you before. I know I’ve taken you for granted. But now I know what I want, I know what is important and what isn’t. I know this is scary. I’m scared too. I know I’m asking a lot, I know it’s a huge leap of faith. But believe in me, baby. I’m up for it. I’ll be true to my word. I am worthy.”

Loki felt a clutch in his heart.

“What if I’m not?” he whispered. ”What if I can’t endure it? ...What if I stop being in love with you?”

Thor returned a small, caring smile.

“I know how hard this is for you. I know you have fears and thoughts I can’t fully understand. I know you struggle to see yourself the way I do. If you stop wanting me, you stop wanting me. It will not be the end of the world, we will have had our run. That’s fine. That’s fair. That won’t make you bad or evil, it won’t make me hate you. And whatever happens, I will always be there for you, in any way you need me to. I know you’ll be there for me too. But I believe in us, baby. I believe we’re fucking invincible. I know we can make it, together. We’re made for each other. We’re good for each other, bloody great. I believe in you, baby, I believe in us. Believe in us, baby.”

And Loki was fucking choking, chest heaving in great gulps of air. He stood up, shaking his hands as if he had burned his fingers, Thor’s warmth still on them.

“I-I need to…” he paced up and down, breathing in shallow, accelerated breaths.

“Baby, are you alright?”

Loki touched his throat, he rubbed it.
“I can’t fucking breathe,” he choked out.

“What’s the emergency?” Sigyn burst into the room, eyes wide in alarm. She was flustered, hair disheveled; she must have run from the flat. She took in his pathetic recumbent form on the bed, where Thor had carried him, up the stairs, bridal style (even though Loki had protested that he could walk by himself. Ok, fine, he tried, it’s just that he didn’t have much of a voice to protest with).

She dashed to his side.

“Loki, darling, what is it?”

Loki burst into tears, dry to Niagara falls in two seconds flat. He was sobbing violently.

“He-he-he… He w-w-w… he w-w-wants to… He w-w-wants to c-c-come out…”

She raised her eyebrows, baffled.

“He what, who, what?”

“Th-Thor…” sobbed Loki, “he-he w-w-wants to c-come out.”

Sigyn put her arms around him with some hesitation, as if unsure about how to proceed without a clear diagnosis.

“You mean he wants to…?”

“H-he wants to t-tell the w-world we’re to-together…” he said, still between deep sobs.

“Sweetie, are you crying or laughing?”

“I don’t even k-know!” exclaimed Loki, wiping the tears as they kept coming. Yes, he guessed he was sending mixed signals. A fair reflection of his present state of mind. “That arsehole! That c-crazy, crazy arsehole! He’s insane and stupid and ridiculous and I’ve never f-f-fucking loved him more!”

She smiled from ear to ear, endeared, with a big “Awww…” printed on her face in bold pink lettering, Comic Sans.

He made an effort to control his breathing, and felt himself calm down slightly.

“You have to do something, Gyn,” he pleaded. “He’s delusional and irrational and he thinks he’s the knight Saint George or something, and he’s thought about this a lot, because every argument I can come up with, he’s got it covered already, and I think I’m losing it too.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because he makes it sound reasonable.”
She laughed and hugged him.

“My silly boy,” she said, holding his head against her chest, “Look at you.”

“All I can see is boobs right now,” he grumbled.

She petted his hair and his sobbing abated. Anxiety rose instead. He sounded a lot more calm, but when he spoke next, what he was feeling inside was a deep, cold shudder.

“We have to stop him, Gyn. He’s going to fuck up his whole life, and it will be my fault, and he’s going to hate me for it.”

“You don’t really believe that.”

“But my brain says I should.”

“That’s your anxiety kicking in.”

“No shit, Sherlock. Sorry, sorry, sorry, filter fail, sorry.” Deep exhale. “Oh, Sigyn, I don’t even know what to think anymore…”

“Why don’t we all sit down, have a cup of tea, and calm down a little? Thor, can you put the kettle on, please?”

“Oh my god!” gasped Loki, “He’s been outside all this time? You could have fucking told me!”

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It was a long chat, which started at the kitchen table and eventually relocated to the settee, Thor at one end, and Sigyn at the other, with Loki sitting on the floor, between her knees.

“So, basically, darling,” said Sigyn at one point, trying to summarise Loki’s whining and his ramblings and circular arguments, “what you’re really, really afraid of is that Thor doesn’t mean what he’s saying. That when he says he doesn’t care about not working again, he’s… what, lying?”

Loki shifted on his ass, which was getting sore, even with the fluffy rug underneath.

“Not lying,” he mumbled. “Just… not being realistic. Getting himself wrong. That he’s so fed up with this, and so eager for things to change, that he’s just trying to make himself believe that… I don’t even know anymore. That he will be alright with things that, when push comes to shove, he’s not going to be alright with.”

Thor let out a minimal huff of frustration. They had dealt with this several times already, over the course of the evening (the sun had set on them, talking about this). Thor had made repeatedly his impassioned arguments about the purity of his intentions, and the thoroughness of his self-examination before he dared mentioning this coming out thing to his brother. And here they were
again, pretty much exactly where they had started. He was probably beginning to fear that they could talk and talk and talk until they were blue in the face, and it would be for nothing. Well, grumbled Loki to himself, in the absence of empirical evidence, this was a matter of faith. Did you peg me for a person who takes people on their word?

But he was getting anxious that he was testing his brother’s patience, and that he would be dumped right there and then, simply because of being such an awful, untrusting pain in the butt. He tried to explain his reservations once more. He tried to keep calm and sound reasonable.

“You say it yourself, how impulsive you are, that you’ve let yourself be led by wishful thinking before, and then regretted your choices…”

Thor clenched his jaw and looked away. Loki unconsciously dug his nails in the flesh of his palm.

After a minute of strained silence, Thor got up to pace, rubbing his brow. Loki cringed in fear, “Now you’ve done it, Laufeyson. Now he’s pissed off.”

“How can I convince you?”, grumbled Thor from the other end of the room. He sounded at the end of his tether, out of arguments or reasons or words. He had tried them all. “How?”

Loki took a deep, shuddering breath.

“It’s a very big fucking thing you’re offering to do,” he mumbled, after a moment. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I suffer from self-esteem issues. I struggle a little bit with, oh, I don’t know, feeling I’m fucking worth losing the adoration of millions.”

“Loki…” admonished Sigyn, as Thor turned a dark look towards him. Loki tried to make himself small.

“I also suffer from deficiencies in my sarcasm filtering mechanisms,” he muttered, eyes low. “Sorry.”

Thor’s scowl dissolved slowly into a tiny smile. He took his seat again on the settee and patted his thigh.

“Come here?”

Sigyn gave him a nudge, then a shove. Loki dragged himself up, and sat across his brother’s lap. Thor manoeuvred him so that Loki’s side was leaning against his body, head on his shoulder, face against his neck.

“I can’t convince you, but I can prove it to you,” whispered Thor. “Let me prove it to you.”

Loki said, with his eyes closed,

“I’m afraid you’ll think I’m just making up excuses because I don’t really want to do it. But I’m also afraid of saying yes straight away and you jumping on it without thinking it through. I need to-to be sure you have really thought about it.”

“I have thought about it. For months. I’ve considered all the possibilities. This one doesn’t even seem so big right now. I’m not afraid anymore, and I’m even struggling to believe I was so scared before.”

“That’s not reassuring at all,” mumbled Loki.

Thor gave him a squeeze.
“Look, I have had enough experience in the business to be pretty sure that, from this job, it’s acting I like. So, if worse comes to the worst, we’ll just have to fund our own projects, and if there are one hundred, fifty, ten fucking people on this sweet earth who don’t give a damn that we’re brothers and we’re together, we’ll act for them. And if we have to move to a fucking desert island for ten years until the press forgets about us and leaves us alone, we can do that too. I don’t know, baby, I just don’t think it will come to that. I think we can say goodbye to Hollywood, but there are so many other places, so many. And sure, the paps will hound us for a while, but sooner or later the public will get used to the idea, we’ll become old news, and we’ll be able to live in peace. I’m probably never going to run the NSC like dad wanted, but that was never my dream, it was his. I’ll have to get used to working on a different scale and find my feet again, but I can do that, don’t you think? Aren’t you always telling me how stubborn I am, that I never give up, no matter how hopeless? Well, I’m determined to pull this off. I have very good reasons.”

Loki listened in silence. Thor had one more thing to add.

“And I think your fans have already proven that they’re beside you, through thick and thin,” he said. “I think we’ll always find someone who wants you in their play, even if you live with your own brother…”

Loki sighed.

“I’m just fucking petrified that this has no turning back,” he said. “We can’t rehearse it, we can’t fucking sound the audience for a reaction before we premiere, we can’t go back to the editing room if it doesn’t work. We can’t say it was a joke. Once it’s done, it’s done.”

“That’s true,” said Thor. “But it’s true for so many other decisions we make everyday. There are not many that are worth risking everything for. This one is.”

Loki was quiet now. He was tired of arguing; he was tired of hearing his own voice. He was scared and full of anxiety, and he wanted to crawl back to a safe place and not be made to make up his mind about something so fucking massive.

“I’ll tell you what, Loki. What you guys need to do is talk to Nat,” said Sigyn. “She’s been thinking about this for a while. She has given every possible scenario a lot of thought. I think she has some ideas about how to make this easier and less traumatic for everyone involved. Perhaps you’ll feel more confident after you hear what she has to say, Loki.”

Both brothers turned to her, perfectly synchronised.

“Nat has thought about this? About us coming out?”

“Since before you got together, actually,” said Sigyn, smiling sweetly. “She told me it was her job to try and cover for every eventuality, and that knowing you both a little, that particular eventuality was top priority on her list.”

“And you’re only telling us now?” said Loki.

She shrugged.

“You didn’t ask.”
Loki was curled up on his side in bed, in the dark, waiting for his brother to finish whatever the hell it was he was doing in the bathroom. He was not sleepy. He was still revved up from the earthquake-slash-hurricane-slash-tsunami earlier today. Sigyn had recommended an anxiolytic. He still didn’t expect to get so much as a wink, but at least he wouldn’t toss and turn all night and get up feeling completely frazzled and uptight tomorrow morning.

Thor slipped into bed behind him, and ever so gently moulded his body against Loki’s back: a suggestion, an open invitation. It was warm and cozy. Loki crept back a couple of inches. His brother got the message and cradled Loki’s thighs with his, spooning him. He threw an arm around his waist, and nuzzled against the back of his neck.

“Hey,” Thor whispered.

“Hey.”

“You sleepy?”

“No.”

“Me neither.”

Thor pushed his hips ever so lightly against his rump, tentative. He was half-hard. Loki exhaled deeply, languid.

“Good idea,” he muttered, reaching around the back of Thor’s head and offering his throat. Open-mouth, hot and wet, slight sucking. Loki groaned and pressed against his brother’s hardening erection, grinding. He could ride that to oblivion and back several times. It felt so fucking good knowing his brother had never intended to go anywhere, that every time they had fucked these last few days, he had not been thinking that it could be the last time. That his hunger was just that - hunger.

Loki pressed and circled and massaged; Thor’s breathing caught. He must be feeling rather squashed, but his response was to nip the crook of Loki’s neck and suck. How he loved to hear Thor’s breathing picking up, to feel it steamy hot on his skin.

Loki turned his head looking for a kiss. When he couldn’t get it as deep and full as he wanted it, with that awkward twist, he turned in his brother’s arms to face him. Thor grabbed his ass to pull him close, and Loki threw one thigh over Thor’s hip. They embraced tight and Loki found his brother’s mouth with his own. They made out like a couple of randy teenagers.

“You said to Sigyn before,” mumbled Thor between kisses, “that what I said made sense. You said you had never loved me more.”

Loki groaned.
“Do we need to keep talking?” And as he tightened his thigh around Thor’s hip, their bare cocks pressing together, he licked into his brother’s mouth.

“I think a lot about… when we were kids,” continued Thor, even as Loki tried to kiss the words off his lips. “I think… of every time you… tried to… hold my hand on the street… or make out… in the movies… and I pushed you away…”

Loki broke the kiss and huffed, exasperated. Without pulling away from Thor’s arms, he put his head on the pillow, and gave in.

“Yes, and?” he said, impatient. He could barely make out his brother’s features in the dim light from the street lamps outside. He guessed more than saw that little, apologetic smile on Thor’s face. Was he sorry he was killing the mood? Damn, Loki was sorry Thor was killing the mood too.

“I remember how you looked at me,” said Thor, “how much I had disappointed you. You expected more from me, you expected better. And then I think about early last year, when we got together again. You weren’t angry or disappointed that I was holding back this time. You didn’t expect anything else. And it made me… It made me so fucking sad that you had come to see me as that person you could not expect better from. Or expect even. I was your hero once, wasn’t I?”

“I’ve finally grown up and seen sense,” said Loki, sarcastic. “Sorry, that didn’t come out right. What I mean is that… that reality is what it is. People are not meant to be heroes.”

“Well, that sucks,” grumbled Thor. “I liked being yours.”

“Even when I held you to impossible standards, and put you up on a pedestal, only so I could watch you fall from it?”

Thor was quiet now, probably wondering what the fuck Loki meant.

“Have you ever thought how nice it felt to be me back then?” said Loki. “To leave the shitty job of being sensible to you, while I relished my rebellious ways? That because you were being the reasonable one, I didn’t have to? I got to push and push and push, even when I knew how dangerous and stupid it was, because I knew you were there, inflexible, with your feet on the ground, protecting us both. It was a very comfortable position for me to be in.”

“But in Iceland…” argued Thor, “we were pretty much out in Iceland. And we were happy then. You fucking dazzled with pride whenever we kissed or got cute in public, whenever somebody spotted us. You didn’t take on the part of the sensible one then. And why does either of us have to be the voice of reason in this? Why can’t we both just be a little wild and a little mad this time, and fuck it?” He was toying with a lock of Loki’s hair. “Let’s be a bit wild and a bit mad. Let’s be brave, and proud, and rebellious. Let’s set the world on fire, together, you and me.”

Loki’s eyes were stinging furiously, that lump in his throat was growing to the size of his fucking fist. The things his brother had said today. It was overwhelming, to see Thor becoming before his very eyes the man Loki had always thought he could be - his knight in shining armour, his hero.

Loki kissed him, holding his face still and close, putting every emotion he could not articulate into the pull of his mouth. He pressed hard against him, and he felt Thor’s cock twitching, hardening up again. He pressed and moved and pressed some more. Thor’s hands were on his butt now, kneading, guiding. His low, hot groans were driving him insane.

He pushed Thor on his back, and climbed on top of him. He was still kissing his pliant brother within
an inch of his life while he reached for the lube and prepared them both. He sunk onto Thor’s cock a lot faster than he probably should have, because he saw white for a moment. His brother growled, his fingers dug into Loki’s hips. They were connected, gaze and flesh, both short of breath, both shaking.

Loki ground his hips, opening himself more, making Thor’s jaw fall and his expression tense up. He began to move up and down, he began to bounce — Thor wasn’t even breathing. His brother’s arms lent him some strength, and helped him keep the rhythm, because he was fucking melting, and by himself he would just fucking lose it. Thank god, Thor was breathing again. One could tell because of the breathy moaning.

Thor began to fuck up, their hips coming together hard and fast, slamming at the highest point of their respective curves. The powerful clash reverberated up Loki’s spine, making him see stars.

“Oh my fucking god…” he moaned. “Fucking hell, Thor…”

“Fuck yes, say my name,” panted Thor, “say my name…”

“Make me…” whispered Loki with a smirk, voice breathy.

Thor’s hands grabbed onto his hips hard. Thor began to slam him down as he thrusted up like the powerhorse he was. Someone wouldn’t be sitting down for a few fucking weeks… Loki gritted his teeth, whimpering like a fool, and as his brain turned to mush, he just…

“Ah, Thor…”

“Shout it, baby…” said his brother, huffy breaths, “let’s… wake up… the fucking neighbours!”

Loki was fucking himself fast and dirty, while his brother spat in the face of fucking gravity, his arms bulging, biceps the size of Loki’s fucking head.

“Thor… oh fuck, fuck, Thor… Fucking hell, fucking hell… brother!”

Thor came right then, growling, with sudden, sharp jolts that shook him whole.

Panting heavily, looking totally undone, he jacked his brother off to completion while Loki kept grinding and circling his hips, Thor’s still hard cock inside him, until he came with soft sobs.

And Loki stayed there, above him, panting, watching his brother underneath, that obscenely gorgeous chest rising and falling, painted with Loki’s own come and glistening with sweat. Thor was stroking gentle circles on his hips with his thumbs. He couldn’t see Thor’s face, so he touched it. He tugged the wet locks away from his brother’s face, then from his own.

“I fucking needed this,” he said, struggling to regain his breath. A bit more composed, a couple of seconds later, he mused, “If somebody ever organises the Sex Olympics, we should apply, don’t you think?”

Thor laughed, a low growl of content. His cock twitched inside Loki’s body with his laughter. It felt fucking incredible.

“It was the ‘brother’ thing that did it, wasn’t it?” whispered Loki in his brother’s arms, a few minutes later. “You kinky bugger.”
Thor laughed again, as he held him tight.

“‘Yes,’” whispered Loki, a while later.

Thor might be sleeping, for all he knew.

“‘Yes?’” said his brother.

So, not sleeping then. Loki gulped.

“‘Yes,’” he repeated. “‘Ok. We’ll do it.’”

A moment of frozen quiet, followed by Hurricane Thor, and then a near-death experience when his brother forgot himself and squeezed Loki between his arms with all his might.

They didn’t say anything else that night. They didn’t really need to.

They slept pretty damn well, considering.

Chapter End Notes

Well, how about that? How you guys feeling? Because I needed that too, goddammit.

Fun fact: I was going through the comments to find out which insightful soul had given me the idea for the initial flashback. The comment suggested that it would be interesting to find out more about what had been going on in these boys' heads, around the time of Loki's attempted suicide, and after. I noted the idea down, began to nurse it, and it finally found its time in this chapter. I wanted to thank this person for giving me the idea.

Heh, it was Thorctopus, my wonderful beta. XD
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Natasha has a plan. Thor and Loki need to get the ball rolling, and the first hurdle is a pretty fucking tall one.

Chapter Notes

Do you notice how nicely the text flows? The excellent grammar and punctuation? That's Thorctopus' work, that is. She's also responsible for the much more coherent, more complete, more in-depth scene at the office, and she was the one who said "there's something missing at the end, I want to know more about this and this and this." Basically, she's a fucking dream of a beta. I love you and adore you, Ctopey.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thor had his knuckles on the door, ready to knock, when Loki pulled at his arm.

“Can I stay here?” he begged.

It was so unfair, so unfair, and Loki did feel like absolute shit about chickening out on him like that, and he had totally meant to do this with him, together, cross his little black heart and hope to die. Sure, of course he had anticipated he’d be shitting bricks, but he had wanted to be brave and strong, and just grab Thor’s hand and walk in there and get this over and done with. But he couldn’t, he fucking could not, sorry brother I’m so friggin’ sorry, please let me off the hook one more time, please… Not that he could say any of that out loud, but he could squash his brother’s hand to a boneless pulp, that he could do. He could also stare at Thor with balloon-sized pathetic eyes, and if he wasn’t careful, he could be sick on the two-hundred-year-old Persian rug, but that was the extent of his capabilities at the moment.

Did Thor throw it in his face? Did he remind him that he was a grown man on medication, with lots and lots of therapy behind him, and that he should be able to pull himself together and get the fuck on with it? Did he? Oh no. Instead, he squeezed his hand, and smiled.

“Sure, baby.”

And that was it. Just like that, Loki could breathe again. Thor even fucking hugged him. Surely, brother, you don’t want to be rewarding this kind of behaviour, do you? Oh, well.

“Do you think you will come in, later? I mean, if there’s no immediate danger.” He said it as a joke. Ha ha, funny.

Loki nodded, and meant it, but he always meant so many things, and then, when push came to shove…

“Wish me luck,” said Thor, and kissed him. He lingered on it, as if there was serenity or strength to
be gained from it. Well, brother, good luck with that.

Thor steeled himself, squared his shoulders, and knocked.

“Come on in!”

Before he shut the door behind his back, Thor threw him a wink. If he thought Loki had missed that his hands were shaking… Well, he hadn’t.

After staring for a couple of seconds at the closed door like a forsaken pup, Loki took a seat in the private waiting room. Yes, there was a waiting room. Several, actually. This one was the smallest, for friends and family only. There were more, for the plebs, for the patricians. The office where Lord Borson of Asgard Hall, Peer of the Realm, National Treasure, held his court, occupied the entire top floor of that grand old building in central London. It was able to accommodate the meetings of the array of foundations, charities, boards, and committees of which Lord Borson was a member (more often, the chairman), and the little army of administration staff it took to pull that off, plus run both the financial and intellectual estates of Frigga and Odin Borson. Thanks to the finely tuned engine that was this place, he still found time to grace the juries of this or that other film festival, or make an appearance in a movie every now and then, if a friend was asking, or the part was enticing.

Loki hadn’t been here in an age, but it hadn’t changed at all. It had a patina to it, with its mahogany furniture and oak paneling, the precious antique books on the shelves, the rich, thick carpet in red and gold, and the museum-quality art on the walls (governments just kept gifting it to him, alongside the huge paychecks they forked out to persuade him to head their national theatre companies). The greatest names of the world’s entertainment industry of the second half of the 20th century had walked these hallways, or wished they could, as well as many high priests of other spheres of the culture and the arts, a choice selection of prima ballerinas of international politics, an assortment of Nobel Prize winners, so on so forth. Their pictures were on the walls. Shit, Odin apparently had shaken hands with fucking everyone.

Time seemed to have stood still in this place, so the main office must have remained pretty much the same as well. Loki remembered the sumptuous Tudor style deco, the paneling on the walls, which concealed actual secret cabinets, the windows from which you could see the cupola of Saint Paul. And that colossal carved desk must surely still be there, dominating the room, and would forever remain so — it would take ten fucking elephants to move it, and they didn’t fit in the lift. And Thor would be sitting in one of those regal cushioned chairs in front of it, across from his father, telling him that…

Jesus fucking Christ almighty.

What were they so afraid of? Correction: what was Loki so afraid of? Why was he gnawing his nails to throbbing stumps? What could the man fucking do? Strongly disapprove? Yell? Disown them?

You’re not scared of anything he’ll do, you’re scared of what you’ll feel, said Sigyn. But hadn’t Loki already felt fucking everything there was to feel about the old man in that room? He had loved him and worshipped him, he had been desperate for his approval, he had hated him to death, and all the stages in between. And here he fucking was.

He had been looking at old photos the other day, god knows what got into him. Thor was already snoring; Loki couldn’t sleep a wink. Thor had called Odin that morning, asking to see him. Frankly, Loki, it doesn’t take a genius. Anyway. Those photos. Thor had made some trips to their parents’ flat when he first moved back to London, and with the old man’s blessing, he had taken a few
mementos. “We have almost no photos from when we were little,” he had said. They had had a look together when Thor brought them in, and they selected a few to frame and put on the wall and on the mantelpiece. The ones from their teenage days got harder to look at. Loki was vain, and he didn’t like to look at that twiggy, gangly little shit, no matter what Thor said about his dancing legs and arse. Then they got to a small stack of photos from those trips to the seaside Odin had taken Loki on, when he was off school, after he came out of the clinic. And those, Loki had refused to look at one year ago. They had been taunting him all this time, haunting him, from that drawer. What were they even there for? Why had Thor taken them? Was he expecting something would stir in Loki? Because it sure as hell had, but it didn’t bring him any closer to reconciling with that time, or with Odin. Or had it been Odin who asked Thor to take them? Because he didn’t want them there, or because he too hoped that…? Oh, who the hell knew. And since Loki was the king of Never Fucking Asking Anything Ever, he’d probably never find out.

So many things he never asked. Why the hell did Odin even take him on these trips? His mother claimed it was his idea, to get Loki out of the house, take his mind off things, breathe some fresh air (Ha, of course Odin would be of the “exercise and sunlight cure all ailments” school of thought). Almost definitely, there must have been an attempt at bonding or something of the sort behind it all, because pleasure couldn’t possibly be the point of it; Odin looked as if he was passing kidney stones most of the time.

But then, there were all those photos. Odin enjoyed photography, and needless to say, he excelled at it. He enjoyed the process; we’re talking rolls of negatives, red-lit darkrooms, trays with chemicals, actual printed images at the end of it. So that explained the photos of sweeping seascapes, architectural details, interesting people, curious shopfronts, all those things Loki saw Odin snap his camera at, as he trailed behind him, sullen, morose, hating with intensity the fucking English weather, and the bloody great outdoors.

But a passion for photography alone didn’t explain all those father-and-son shots. This was before the Selfie Age, so Odin would stop some passer-by on the street, and kindly ask them for a moment of their time. Ah, the faces of those people when they realised this was not just an inoffensive old man taking his grandson out for a walk; the double-takes, the looks of awe and disbelief (“my goodness, it’s him!”), just as shocked as if it had been the Queen herself, stopping them in the street for a little favour. Did Loki feel a teeny tiny bit smug at the effect his father had on the common populace? Hm, yeah, a teeny tiny teensy bit, perhaps. He was fifteen, give him a break.

He had refused to see those photos back in the day. This was the first time in his life that he saw them. Look at him, fifteen-year-old, scrawny and gaunt, his face a fucking skull, so pale. He didn’t eat much in those days — enough to get the doctors and his mother off his back, but certainly not enough to make up for the growth spurts that kept pulling and stretching him to new heights every few weeks. Didn’t his body get the memo? Its current occupant had no sodding interest in puberty, fucksakes! He had never intended to see his fifteenth birthday anyway, and yet he kept on not just living, but changing, growing, becoming! To his teenage, depressed self, it was as if his own fucking flesh and bone was telling him “it’s just a phase.”

Hell, he looked awful, sickly, and to top it off, moody and stiff. He hated having his photo taken. He was shy, ok? Yes, him. He hated seeing himself, that stupid horse face he had back in the day, the chicken neck, the fucking eyebrows he had not yet learned to trim. But he condescended to pose for them, most of the time, because his father insisted. (Yes, his dad. Because Loki could scream at the world whatever he wanted, he could repeat ‘he’s not my father!’ until the cows came home, but he himself wasn’t having any of his own shit, not anymore, and he hadn’t for some time.) Odin not only insisted, but he also took great care to find a nice background, he’d take pains to put both of them in the right place for the optimum shot, he’d instruct the kind passer-by taking the photo about what he wanted, and asked them to take several shots, to get a better chance of success. He cared about
getting them right. It mattered to him. Loki couldn’t bloody well imagine his old man staring at them lovingly at home, with his mum, but he guessed it must have happened. He wasn’t sure he could process that, then or now.

And look at him, in those photos, the old man. His hair was already grey, his face had always been weathered, wrinkled, full of character and nerve. He was older than mum, and he had already been of a respectable age when Thor was born. Even in those amateur candids, his presence and his intensity came through. He stared into the objective without fear. He was accustomed to it, he mastered it. He didn’t know how to look at a camera any other way. But his arm around Loki’s shoulders was stiff, he leaned rigidly towards his son, a space between them, and his smile seemed forced. He looked… Hell, he looked nervous.

You know, for such a self-possessed, articulate, eloquent man, who clearly enjoyed the sound of his own voice very much, his dad had been very quiet on those trips. They would drive for hours without one word, only the radio with some music on, to alleviate the silence. Whenever they stopped to see the sights, they might say a thing or two. Odin would say, “Look at this. Over there.” Loki would look, and say not a lot, or nothing at all. It was not that he didn’t like it, but he was uncomfortable, and he felt self-conscious. He was supposed to know this man, and this man was supposed to know him, but they were like awkward acquaintances. Two complete strangers would have found something to talk about at least — what’s your name, where do you come from, where do you live, what do you do. They didn’t even have that. They needed to go to a deeper level, and they obviously weren’t ready for that.

Sitting at a terrace, if the afternoon was nice, Loki would ask for a milkshake, or some ice cream, or lemonade, anything, really, to give himself something to do while they sat together in silence, staring at the markings in the formica table top, the rust poking through in the cracks in the paint, where the salty sea breeze had got to the metal underneath. He’d pretend he did not notice that his dad kept putting his mineral blue eye on him, the frustration and yearning in those stares almost toppling Loki off the fucking chair. This man, whose mouth had spoken the most eloquent words ever written about the whole range of human emotion, who knew so many of them by heart, just could not find anything to say to his teenage son. 

If Loki had known how, if he’d been feeling braver, and more at ease in his own skin, he might have been able to get over himself and tell his dad that he didn’t have to say anything. That he already knew. That he had told him in his own way, when Loki came to in his arms last February, Odin’s panicked shouting coming through a thick fog, “What have you done? What have you done? Goddammit, Loki, wake up! Tell me what you’ve taken! Loki! Loki!”

“Dad…”

“Oh, thank god, thank god…” The sheer, luminous relief in his father’s voice, that bone-grinding hug that went on forever.

Perhaps Loki had dreamed it all. He dreamed that his father had picked him up, and carried him, stumbling, huffing and puffing under Loki’s weight, to get to the phone. It would have made more sense to leave his son where he was for a moment, make the call, and come back, but in his dream, his dad didn’t want to leave him, not even to be reasonable, or practical. He had crushed blurry-eyed, nauseous, half-conscious Loki against his chest while he phoned 999, and he never moved from his side. He rocked him in his arms, and himself, to and fro, to and fro. He’d slap his face every now and then, to startle him out of unconsciousness, and he never stopped talking to him.

“Don’t sleep, son, come on, up! Up! Come on, boy! Open your eyes! Look at me, Loki, look at me! That’s it, that’s it, there you are… Look at me, son. Stay awake. You’ll be alright. Come on, Loki,
come on… You’ll be alright… You’ll be alright…”

“I’ve sometimes wondered whether it would not have been better for him and for all of us if I had just picked another one.”

Loki lit up a fag, and smoked it down to the filter in five deep, long, furious drags. (Yes, you could smoke in this place, and there were several ashtrays to prove it. Odin Borson does what he wants.)

To anyone who should ask, he would have replied that he didn’t give one single fuck about what Odin thought of Thor and him being together. Good job nobody was asking. His acting skills, much to his own chagrin, did have limitations after all. And the truth of the matter was that, right now, what he was seeing in his mind was what their father would be imagining when he heard the news. He’d see his brother and him, fourteen and fifteen, a couple of kids, together, naked. They were his sons. They were brothers. Well, Laufeyson-was-Odinson, no fucking wonder you can’t face the music in there. For the first time in your life, this situation is making you feel, really feel, like a fucking pervert.

It didn’t seem so bad that night, at Natasha’s place in London. They met up for dinner (Clint was cooking), and while sitting and chatting relaxedly around the table, waiting for the meal to be ready, drinks in their hands, Loki took advantage of a gap in the conversation, and casually made the announcement.

“We’re going to do it, by the way. We’ve decided to come out.”

No shock, no alarm, no panic. Just that little smirk of hers, so blessedly reassuring.

“Do you have a plan?” was all she said.

“No really,” said Loki. And with a sarcastic grin of his own, “They tell me you do?”

“I do,” she said. “We do it in stages. First, we let rumours filter and do the rounds. We build it up, from the social networks to the mainstream media. We expose the general public to the idea slowly, so that they start getting used to it. We enlist a series of allies with lots of sway. They foster debate, and engage in it when it arises. They lead it our way. There’ll be resistance, but wherever there is a positive response, we make sure we nurture it - we amplify it and spread it. We create the right conditions, and then, when it’s time, we confirm it. A press release or a press conference, we shall see.”

“How exactly do we start the rumours?” said Loki.

“You just start living your lives,” said Natasha. “By which I mean, you spend the night at each other’s when you feel like it. You go on dates. You are affectionate in public. You show up together here and there…”

Thor’s face was a poem. A hallelujah anthem, to be precise, luminous with hope and elation. He was already loving this plan.

“Affectionate?” said Loki, more cautious by nature. “Define.”

“Holding hands?” jumped in Thor.

“Not straight away,” said Natasha, with an eyebrow tilt of commiseration to Thor’s puppy-eyed disappointment. “This too, we build it up. We start with ambiguous gestures that make people think,
and look twice, but are not too obvious. Before we hit them with the news, I want them to ask questions, and start contemplating the possible answers. As time goes on, we can escalate it. You will be able to be more open, more flirty. When it’s close to revelation day, by all means you can hold hands. I wouldn’t let them catch you kissing in public just yet. Not on the mouth anyway.”

Thor blushed like a schoolboy. It had to be her clinical approach.

“How long will phase 1 go on for?” asked Loki.

“It will depend. We’ll have to gauge the response we get, and modify your behaviour accordingly. We’ll know when the time is right. I expect anywhere between two months and half a year, and no more than that. But it’s not something I’ve ever done before, and we have no precedents for it, so it’s really just a shot in the dark. Does that sound reasonable to you?”

Thor and Loki shared a look. Thor was smiling.

“There is one condition,” said Natasha. They stood to attention. Her tone was cautious, her stare unyielding. “I would strongly recommend that you don’t give the full, true version of the story. I recommend you declare that your romantic and sexual interest in each other only appeared after *Mariners*. Not in your early twenties, and certainly not in your teens. I think you should say you already knew you were not blood brothers when you first became attracted to one another.”

Natasha’s stare remained firm and serene. Loki turned to his man. Tendons had become apparent in Thor’s neck. Even Clint in the kitchen had stopped pottering.

“You can always tell the whole story when you’re old and wrinkly and don’t give a damn anymore,” said Natasha. “But at this point, it’s about getting this under control, and giving yourselves the best chance at coming out, and living your lives after that, without having it destroy you. As a couple, as individuals, and as actors. You are free of course to do as you wish, but in my opinion, this one lie will make your relationship much more palatable to the public. There will be many who, even feeling shocked by the idea of two brothers romantically involved and together as a couple, will still wish you well, and wish to keep liking you, and this will give them the disclaimer they need to come to terms with your relationship.”

Thor’s knuckles on the table were white. Loki grabbed his hand.

“What do you think?” asked Thor.

“What do *I* think?” repeated Loki.

“Yes. Is this a problem for you?”

Oh, Loki felt tired. And stretched very, very thin. And so very fucking anxious. Coming out was exciting, sure, when you considered it in the abstract, but when it came to the actual thing, Jesus fuck, there seemed to be a new terror around every corner. All he wanted right now… Scratch that. Rephrase. What he absolutely *didn’t* want right now was to be made to think any fucking more. In his humble opinion, he had done his fair share of life-changing decisions this year, and then some, and he wanted a fucking break, to last him all the way into the next decade at least. What he wanted was instructions, a plan he could follow step by step, some clear, specific motions to go through, so that he would not need to look too far ahead. He wanted to keep his eyes on his feet, instead of the uncertain future that awaited them, a grey wall of mist which concealed who knows how many unexpected horrors. Basically, he didn’t fucking care what version they told the world. But he couldn’t really say that, could he? Thor had turned to him for fucking reassurance. Right? Dammit.
“I just… I want this to work out and be together,” he said. “We trust Nat. That’s why we’re here. If she thinks that this is the best course of action… I say we do what she says.”

Thor went all broody and pensive, and Loki thought, we’re fucking screwed. Thor was an all-or-nothing, bullheaded, noble, magnificent, beautiful oaf.

“Fine. We do this Nat’s way,” said Thor. He didn’t sound enthusiastic, but he did sound determined. It was more than Loki had expected (do try not to praise the heavens out loud, Loki-boy, your brother might take it as sarcasm.) “What happens then? After we confirm.”

“After the announcement, you leave London for a while. Go on holiday somewhere nice and quiet, and let us weather the first wave of the shit storm. Have fun, get some sun, enjoy your new life in the open.” A knowing smile (then again, all her smiles were knowing). “When you come back, phase two begins. Once the first surge of hysteria has abated, we schedule a number of extensive interviews with respectable, liberal-minded people, and you disclose what is needed to satisfy, and thus diminish, the public’s curiosity about your relationship. We’ll fabricate a version you’ll have to stick to. You will be asked questions you will consider invasive. I recommend you don’t shut down. You can decline to answer, but bear in mind that, the more open you are, the less room you will leave for imaginations to run wild to fill in the gaps. To put it bluntly, the less it seems you are withholding information, the less dirty it all looks.”

“Less dirty? Not if I give my version…” smirked Loki, feline.

Thor snickered like a fool, with a healthy blush. Doofus.

“For a period of time after the coming out, we will have to manage your public appearances carefully. You can’t disappear completely. You have to show up together with some regularity, to quench the thirst for news and updates, or the value of any gossip or image related to you will go through the roof, and every vulture in town will come to stalk your doors, with long-range objectives and drones and god knows what. There will be hunger to see gestures of intimacy between you. There will be a race to get the first image of you kissing, dancing, out on a date. We will sabotage that race by providing those images ourselves.”

“Do we set up an Instagram or something,” said Loki, sarcastic — but not entirely, because who knows…

“You leave that to me. Now, as for the first official public appearance together. That will be a huge event. We’ll have to choose the occasion. People will be waiting to see how you’ll act toward one another.”

“How will we act?” asked Loki.

“I’m still thinking about it. It will depend a lot on what the situation is. I can only anticipate the public’s reaction to a certain extent. I guess we’ll have to see. After that, and for the first times — I’m talking years —, we’ll have to tread with care, and be clever. We’ll do periodic overall assessments of the situation, and adjust your public exposure accordingly. More joint interviews or fewer, more panel shows or fewer, more premieres together or fewer…”

All this talk about managing appearances and doing the rounds on the TV was winding Thor up. Loki could see it in that clench in his jaw and that wrinkle in his brow, getting deeper. Well, what did you expect, brother? That they were going to stand up together in Speaker’s Corner and shout to the crowds, “We Are Boning!”? Natasha read the signs too.

“I know this will be trying for you,” she said. “You have to keep thinking about the ultimate goal,
which is to make the public and the media eventually lose interest in you. I will not ask you to hide and lie for the sake of it, and certainly not any more than the bare minimum to get us by. Because I know it’s not what you want, and because I don’t think it’s what we need. I think showing courage and acting with normality will play in your favour. It’s just a case of being a little crafty, acting with some deliberation, and yes, manipulating public opinion to our best advantage. But the objective is not to court their attention or even their goodwill. What we want is to bore them to death, so that the public will, one day, leave the two of you alone.”

Thor had a petulant, contrary air about him, still broody.

“Any questions?” said Nat.

“The adoption,” said Thor, his blue eyes pinning her down with defiance.

“What about it?”

“It changed nothing for me. I feel exactly the same as I ever did about Loki. To me, he is just as much my brother as he ever was, blood or no blood. If they should ask me how I feel about—…”

“You just lie, Thor,” sighed Loki, exasperated. The man was stubborn, for god’s sake! His uptightness was infecting Loki, who was at the end of his tether anyway. “Are you afraid of going to hell or something? Because I’ve got some news for you, brother…”

Thor threw him a resentful glower, upset that Loki wasn’t showing more sympathy for his plight.

“Would that be a problem for you? Lying about this?” intervened Natasha, more diplomatic, her direct, business-like approach easing up the building tension somewhat.

“Yes,” declared his brother, ignoring Loki’s renewed sigh.

“Fuck’s sakes, Thor!” exploded Loki. “I know the truth, you know the truth, does it matter so much if—…”

Thor began to say something (loudly) in response, when Clint’s voice came from the kitchen.

“You can’t possibly know what the experience of having siblings is for anyone else but you. Nobody can. I’d leave it at ‘it’s complicated,’” he said.

“Works for me,” said Natasha.

“Can I use this reply for all the questions?” grumbled Loki.

He sighed, cooling off. Thor was still pouting by his side. Tentatively, Loki stroked his brother’s hand under the table, a peace offering. Thor grabbed his hand again. They threaded their fingers together.

“Then that’s that,” said Nat. “Well, ideally, soon after your announcement, something big should hit the news, and take the heat away from you.”

“Perhaps Russia could be persuaded to invade a former Soviet state or two,” said Loki.

“Leave that to me.”

Both Loki and Thor raised their eyebrows. She smirked.

“So, when do we start?” said Loki.
Natasha shrugged. “Right now?”

Thor smiled, turned to Loki.

“And how does it start?” he asked.

“Why don’t you go out together for a drink tonight? And if you look at each other the way you do in private, I guarantee the rumours will start.”

They laughed. They may have even blushed. Loki rolled his eyes.

“Just look?” said Thor, although that once-over he threw Loki could hardly be described as ‘just looking’.

“No, you can be affectionate. I wouldn’t hold hands down the street just yet, but… you guys are tactile. Without making it too obvious, do what feels right. Before you start properly courting in public, however, we need to tackle your father.”

They looked at each other blankly, like a pair of idiots.

“Fuck,” said Thor, “I forgot about dad.”

Clint laughed from the kitchen. Loki laughed too, because at the time he had thought it was funny.

“We want to know where he stands as soon as possible, so that we can prepare for his reaction, whatever it may be. Any clue how he’ll take this?”

“He’ll probably have a heart attack and die on the spot,” said Loki. “Is that good or bad, from a PR perspective?”

He spotted Thor casting his eyes down, frowning. Way to fucking go, Loki-boy, always so sensitive. He leaned closer to his brother, and in a contrite mutter he said, “Sorry.”

Thor sighed, deflated.

“It’s ok. You’re probably right.”

It had taken several nudges from Natasha before they dared approach Odin. By that time, the internet was already thrumming with it. It had not taken much, just three or four nights out with the whole gang, in which there may have been some flirting, one arm around the waist as they walked home, and lots and lots of sleep-overs (these Tumblr people, with their minds permanently in the gutter). But Odin was a hurdle they had to overcome before Operation Public Courtship could begin, so Thor eventually found the guts to make the terrifying phone call, and set an appointment. The office, not the flat, because Loki wasn’t up to going there yet.

And now here they were, Thor inside, Loki burning a groove into the carpet with all that pacing up and down, wondering what the hell was taking them so long. There still hadn’t been any screaming, be it Odin casting his son out of his sight, or from Thor, yelling for an ambulance. They must be talking. What the fuck about? What was going on in there?
“Come on in, son.”

His father had stood up to greet him, and approached to deal him one of those brief, blink-and-you’ll-miss-them, back-breaking hugs, just like the ones between Odin and his old man.

“I thought your brother was with you.”

“He is outside.” Thor cleared his throat. He found it sandpaper dry.

“Oh, I see.” That smile on Odin’s face could mean a million things. “Well, I hope he’ll join us later. Please, have a seat.” The way he talked always had an abruptness to it. Quick words, long pauses in odd places. Made you listen.

They both sat down. Not at the desk, that was too formal, but there were a couple of armchairs and a couch by the windows, facing each other over a coffee table. His father poured them both a glass of water from a fancy, heavy crystal set. His hand, as Thor followed its arch as it tilted the bottle, had acquired a transparent quality with old age. His pink scalp was visible where his bright white hair had thinned. He looked frail. Consciousness of his father’s age hit Thor, as it did every time he saw him lately. If you visited more often, he admonished himself severely, those changes would seem more gradual and they wouldn’t shock you so much. —After today, would he ever be seeing him again? He gulped.

“So what is this very important thing you had to talk to me about,” said his father.

Thor inhaled, exhaled.

“I-I wonder if you’ve heard the rumours; on the internet,” he stuttered. He cleared his throat again. “About L-Loki and me.”

“Come on. Like removing a fucking plaster. One strong pull, and it’s done. Come on. “The rumours that Loki and me, that we, that we’re together.”

Odin’s eye lingered on him, scrutinising. Thor tried to hold that stare with all his might. He blinked, but didn’t look away. His father nodded in silence.

“Well, at some point in the next few weeks, we’re not sure when exactly yet, there is going to be a press release, or a press conference,” swallow, “con-confirming them.”

“Confirming the rumours,” repeated his father, slowly. “The rumours that you and your brother are
a… uh, a romantic couple.”

Inhale, exhale.

“Y-yes.”

Odin’s one eye left Thor for the first time. His posture didn’t alter, he remained apparently as relaxed as he had been. Then again, he had fine control of his expressions and his body. There simply was no fucking telling. Thor drank down his glass of water, and took the liberty of pouring himself another without asking.

“How long has this been going on,” asked his father.

“After we finished shooting Mariners,” replied Thor, automatically.

“No, I mean, before that.”

“Pardon me?”

“When you were kids. Was there something going on then?”

Thor’s mind blanked out, jammed. He must have turned pale.

“So your mother was right,” said his father.

Thor’s eyes opened wide.

“M-mum?”

“You were not as subtle as you think,” smiled his father. That’s right, he was fucking smiling.

“She-she knew?”

“I had my suspicions, but she was quite certain.”

Thor’s entire life passed before his fucking eyes, or so it felt in his stomach.

“How did you… Why didn’t she…? Why didn’t you… do anything?”

“What would you have had us do?”

Thor gaped like a fish out of water.

“We were out of our depth, I must confess,” said Odin. He was so calm, so tranquil. With age, his voice had lost some resonance and gained a raspy edge. “We debated about it long and hard. First of all, we didn’t know for sure what was going on. Second of all, whatever it was, it seemed to be making you both very unhappy. We were concerned, of course. Frigga wanted to talk to you, but even she wasn’t sure what she would say, or how to approach you. Telling you both about Loki’s origins was a possibility, but one that frightened me, both of us, very much. And we feared the consequences for you, for your relationship as brothers, if we came to you with this, and we were wrong. So you see, son, it’s not so much that we washed our hands of it so much as… well, we just didn’t know what to do, and while we pondered our options, your brother… Well, when Loki went to hospital, we had more urgent problems in our hands. And then of course, when he came back, things seemed to have changed between you, so it seemed unnecessary to complicate things further by bringing the subject up. We agreed to postpone the discussion until it became relevant again, but somehow, it never did. Or so we felt. Until today.” Odin drained his own glass in one gulp. He
asked, “Did we do wrong? Should we have intervened?”

Thor was rubbing his forehead. His head was throbbing. The cacophony of questions that jostled in his own mind seemed to be locking heads with each other like a fucking rugby mêlée.

“I-I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t know.”

Although Thor could hardly say he had felt ready to get in there in the first place, he had been contemplating the potential scenarios, the many ways this conversation could develop, to give himself at least some options. But this possibility had never even entered his mind. He simply didn’t know where to go from here. His father didn’t rush him.

“What did she think of… Did she… Was-was she… Was she alright with this?” Thor said at last.

Odin reclined more deeply in his armchair. His posture expressed easiness, reclining to one side, one elbow on the arm of his chair, but his hand, quickly clenching and unclenching, said something else.

“She had… mixed feelings,” he replied. “She had many questions. Nothing prepares you for something like that. She wasn’t against it, if that’s what you want to know. She never talked about separating you. She wasn’t horrified, or disgusted, or appalled. And the realisation about what was really going on dawned on both of us very gradually, so I can’t even say there was a moment of true shock. We just witnessed your relationship become more and more intense, passions running high, teenage angst loud and sweeping, and then there was a suggestion here and there that there was more to it than… Well, two teenage brothers with stormy temperaments, so close in age. Whatever shock we experienced, it came in lots of small doses, and we dealt with it separately, on our own, before we sat down together in Asgard Hall one evening, after you’d gone to bed, and discussed our suspicions for the first time. We laughed that night, you know? It was a relief for both of us.”

“A relief?”

“It was good to speak of it out loud. There had been so much tension in the car that day. And we might have felt a tad… uncomfortable, what with those burning looks you used to throw to each other, as if we had even fewer eyes between your mother and I than we had.”

Thor chuckled, and it was a relief for him too.

“Oh, god,” he said, his mind in the past for a moment.

“Nothing prepares you for something like that,” said Odin. “And you were both so young. And at fifteen, you already looked like a man, but your brother…”

Thor’s stomach turned. He held his father’s stare. There seemed to be something unspoken there, lingering.

“I never meant for it to happen,” he confessed. “We knew it was a mess, and yes, a lot of the time it didn’t make us very happy. It was so complicated, and we were so afraid of being caught. But I was swept away by it. I couldn’t…” He huffed, blushing deep red. “I guess I was overwhelmed by what I felt. I couldn’t help myself.”

“Was your brother swept away as well?”

Thor stared up.

“What do you mean?”
Odin’s eye wandered, he measured his words.

“One of our chief concerns in all of this was… Well, you were fifteen, and you had… well, you had dated. Your brother, as far as we knew, had not. So one of the questions your mother would have asked you both is… Well, she would have wanted to make sure the pace you had set for yourselves was one you were both comfortable with.”

Thor narrowed his eyes to a squint, weeding out the intention hiding in that carefully constructed and delivered jumble of words.

“Did she think I was taking advantage of Loki? Or for-forcing him to…?”

“Did you?”

“Did I…? No!” Burning, his neck, his face, his ears, his bloody hands were burning. “Is that what you thought as well?”

“My son,” smiled Odin, “I’ve always believed, and I told your mother so, that your brother plays you like a fiddle. That no matter what was actually happening between you, the one pulling the reigns was probably always Loki.”

Thor gaped, appalled.

“Loki does not play me!” he protested, indignantly. Gritting his teeth to control the volume of his voice, gripping the arms of his chair tight. “I’m nobody’s fool.”

Odin hadn’t even flinched. He had always been hard to rattle, and he reacted to his son’s bouts of temper with a still, relaxed composure Thor had always been intimidated by.

“I didn’t say you were,” said his father. He carefully withdrew his gaze and softened his voice. “That did not come out the way I intended, my apologies to you, and to your brother. What I meant to say is, that you’re a good man, and you were a good boy, and that I could not, then or now, imagine a universe in which you would do anything to hurt Loki. I don’t believe you had the impulse, or the necessary guile, to convince him to do anything he did not want to do. He’s much too clever. In other words, I don’t believe you could take advantage of your brother, now or then, if you tried, but neither do I believe that you would ever try.”

Thor was not entirely pacified by that.

“Loki does not play me. Alright? We love each other. I don’t know how it came to be what it is, but we got there together. Yes, he was young, but…” His face flamed red. He had just had a flash of his brother’s scrawny, fourteen-year-old naked body in the tent, in Iceland. “But whatever happened between us, happened because we both wanted it. Today, and in the past. Always. Alright?”

Thor didn’t know who he was standing up for, himself or his brother, but his conviction managed to make him win for the first time in his life a staring contest with his father.

“Well, although I never doubted you, it’s still a relief to hear that,” said his father, as he distractedly turned the wedding band on his finger. Thor had only started to notice that gesture of his after Frigga died.

“That’s good to hear,” he said, now calm.

“I am sorry you were so frightened when you were kids. I do wish we could have let you know you had nothing to fear from us. I will never know how things would have been if your mother and I had
spoken to you back in the day. For you, for your brother. Perhaps some things would have been different, or perhaps not. But perhaps it doesn’t matter so much. Does it? Am I being presumptuous if I say all’s well that ends well?”

“Loki and I… We don’t want to pretend the past never happened, but we have worked very hard to… To not let it get to us and dictate our present circumstances. We have our whole lives ahead.”

“True.” Odin smiled, nothing but a flicker in the corner of his mouth. “Why don’t you call your brother in?”

Thor swallowed, his throat dry again.

“Is this…? Are you…”

“All is well, son,” said his father calmly. “Please, call him in.”

Loki was standing by the window with a fag when Thor walked into the room. He sprung one foot in the air when he noticed him. Thor offered his hand.

“He’s asking for you. Come in?”

Loki looked like he’d rather have the hairs of his ballsack removed one by one with tweezers. And yet, he put out his fag, and approached. He took his hand. Thor gave him a proud, supportive beam.

They stood by the door of the office, but neither dared take another step inside. Odin stood up, and took one step closer, but no more. His one eye went from Loki’s face to their hands, tangled together — fusing into one flesh soon enough, their grip was so strong.

“He knows, Loki,” said Thor. “They’ve always known.”

“They?” asked Loki.

“He means your mother,” said Odin, and again took his seat. A meticulous actor, always aware of body language, perhaps he judged that sitting down might make his children feel less intimidated. “Will you please sit down.”

Thor gave his brother’s hand a squeeze, and they both walked to the couch. Every creak and screech of the old furniture seemed louder in that frozen silence. Loki was better than his brother at staring contests, and except for his breathing, slightly shortened, he was still as a lizard; and like a lizard, his stillness was full of tension, always ready to spring.

“Younger brother tells me that you intend to go public with your relationship,” said Odin. Loki didn’t bat an eyelid. No question, no answer. “For what it’s worth, I think it’s the right thing to do. You must do this before anybody else does it for you. It has to be on your own terms, at the time and place of your own choosing. You must not let people think that you are afraid, or ashamed, or they will make you suffer for it. They admire people with guts, and they make allowances for those they admire. And you must not be afraid. The public perception of both of you as individuals is that you are out of the ordinary, somewhere above and beyond the common experience. Take advantage of that. Extraordinary people do extraordinary things and live extraordinary lives. And whatever they do, they own it. If you are proud, they will respect you for it. So be proud. You have no reason not to.”
A frown had set on Loki’s brow, and on Thor’s own. What the hell was in that water?

“As for me,” proceeded Odin, “I will do whatever you need me to do. I will speak out to support you, or I’ll be quiet, whichever serves you best.”

Thor turned to his brother, whose eyes were narrowed with caution. They had been bracing themselves for anything from tears, to screams, to coldness and rejection, to a fucking medical emergency. They didn’t know what to do with this.

“The reason I’m doing this…” Odin choked. When he spoke again, his voice sounded thick, laboured. He kept toying with his wedding ring. “If your mother was here today, she would have stood by you both. She would have offered her support. She would have told you to live your own way, and do whatever you need to be happy. I’m striving to live up to the love she…” Choked again, his bottom lip was fucking trembling.

Meanwhile, Loki’s fucking fingerprints would end up marked on Thor’s skin, his grip was that strong. His brother had an expression of astonishment so pure and open, it took twenty years off him. Thor himself didn’t fucking know what he was feeling. He couldn’t breathe for how much there was.

Their dad took a resounding breath, to try and steady his voice. He couldn’t look at them.

“I’m striving to be worthy of it, the love she bore me. For her, and for you, both of you. You have my blessing, my support, and my… my love. I love you both.”

A stunned silence. Thor wanted to take that old man in his arms and hug him tight, but they just didn’t do that, did they? His eyes were wet. As for Loki, he looked so calm, so serene. It wasn’t even as if a weight had been lifted, but as if it had never been there in the first place.

Odin huffed and puffed a few times, as he stemmed the tears. He wiped his eyes and his nose, and straightened up.

“Loki, if I may, I would like to speak to you alone for a moment. Is that possible?”

Loki turned to Thor, still looking serene and composed.

“Please, wait outside,” he said. “I’ll be alright.”

He was much more collected than Thor right now, what a plot twist.

Less than three minutes later, Loki was out of the office, with a slight frown.

“What… what happened?” asked Thor, as they walked down the hallway towards the lift. “What did he want to tell you?”

“I don’t know,” said Loki. “He didn’t say anything. Please, let’s go home.”

They were in the taxi, collapsed bonelessly on the backrest, knackered, quietly processing the events of the last hour in each of their own heads, when Loki said,

“He held my hand.”
Only then did Thor realise he hadn’t stopped rubbing it since they got out of the building.

“He got up from the chair, and leaned over,” added Loki. “He scared the shit out of me, I thought he was going to hug me or something. He just held my hand really tight, and he looked like he wanted to say something, but he didn’t. Then he let go. That’s all.”

Thor was smiling, deeply moved. He would have liked to see that.

“He’s always sucked at this,” said Loki, a while later. He too was smiling.

Later that afternoon, they had stretched on the couch, filling it from end to end. Loki was pressed all along Thor’s back, his hands playing in his brother’s hair. Allegedly, they were trying for a nap, and Thor felt exhausted, sure, but he also felt wide awake.

“She knew,” said Thor, when it became apparent that Loki, still playing with his hair, was not sleepy either. “Mum.”

“What did dad tell you?”

Thor filled him in, more or less. He made a bit of a mess of it, but hopefully the idea was clear.

“God,” said Loki. “She did repeat many times ‘is there something you want to tell me’, but I thought she meant… I don’t know, the depression, being gay, the bullying, I don’t know.”

“And perhaps she did.”

“Yes, I guess. I tried not to be paranoid.” He snorted, a little giggle. “What do I always say? You can’t ever fucking know a person.”

“She always tried to explain you to me, what was in your head. When she was gone, I felt so lost. But you know what was worse? Back then, when you were still in the clinic and we talked about you, and everybody tried to help me with, you know, how to behave around you, what not to ask, what not to say, what not to do… And mum would try to help me too, but all I could think was that her advice just wasn’t good enough, because she didn’t know about this. Made me feel even lonelier. And angry. Irrational, I know, but… I wanted to yell at them ‘you’re not really fucking helping me, so leave me the fuck alone!’”

“Well, she knew,” said Loki. His fingers in Thor’s hair made long, sweeping brushes. “So whatever advice she gave you was sound. I hope you listened to her.”

“I don’t know, you tell me. Did I treat you right, when you came back?”

A silence. Oh.

“You didn’t treat me much at all,” said Loki. “But neither did I, with you. So.”

After a moment, when Thor didn’t say anything, Loki wrapped his leg around him, hooked their calves together.

“It mustn’t have been easy for you,” he muttered.

Thor felt a choke. “It felt like there was a chasm one thousand feet deep between the two of us in
those days. I thought I’d lost you forever.”

“So did I.”

“I thought it was what you wanted.”

“…So did I.”

Thor rolled over in the confined space of the couch, and wrapped one arm and leg around his brother, hiding his face in the crook of Loki’s neck. Loki returned the cuddle.

“I thought I wasn’t good for you,” he whispered.

Loki didn’t say anything. He just kept cuddling. They had talked about this before.

“I didn’t mean to play with your head,” Thor whispered. “With your feelings. I never meant to hurt you. Ever.”

“I know. I did mean to play with yours, several times. And I did mean to hurt you on occasion. I’m sorry.”

“It’s in the past,” muttered Thor.

“Precisely,” said Loki. “So quit whining.”

Thor chuckled, and hugged strongly. After a while, he felt Loki’s fingers in his hair again, but they were tugging. Wait a minute.

“Are you braiding my hair?” he asked.

“Yes.”

Fair enough. Thor sighed deeply against his brother’s neck, smiling.

“There, done,” said Loki, as he pushed him away.

Thor met his eyes, met his smile.

“You know what, Laufeyson?” he said. “I think I’m going to take you out on a date. I’m going to wine you, dine you, and romance you. In a nice, fancy place, with lots of people around us. Saturday evening. What do you think?”

“I think not, Odinson,” said Loki. He smirked to Thor’s expression of baffled disappointment.

“Because I’m the one who is going to take you out on a date.”

Thor grinned blissfully.

“Oh really? So, what’s the plan?”

“Nothing special. But if you’re lucky, I might let people see you touching my… shoulder?” teased Loki.

Thor feigned shock.

“So forward,” he rumbled, burying his face in his brother’s neck.

“I might let you escort me to my lodgings,” whispered Loki, pressing against his brother. “I might let
you kiss my hand.”

“Hm-hm?” mumbled Thor.

Loki’s voice, playful and teasing, became a soothing rumble. Thor made some noises, and tried to follow, but before he realised, he was asleep.

* *

“Thor?… Thor!”

Loki huffed in irritation. His brother had nodded off, and he was trapped against the backrest of the couch by what felt like two hundred pounds of muscle. But that wasn’t the worst of it. The worst of this was… what the hell did he do with that boner? All that nuzzling and talking Thor had been doing right by the skin of his neck… Bloody hell, he wasn’t made of stone.

Thor’s breathing crushed his chest. He was drooling on Loki’s silk and baby alpaca sweater. Loki sighed, and petted his hair. Thoughts of mum and dad in his mind - making him smile, how about that. The intensity of his father’s stare as he crushed his hand, earlier that afternoon. The sharp, small nods, as he tried to communicate what he could not put down in words, his eye red. The old man had been begging him, imploring. And Loki had nodded back, and relief had flooded that old face, along with tears, and a broken smile, not too dissimilar from the one Loki remembered waking up to one afternoon in February, when he was fourteen years old.

'Is there anything you want to tell me, darling?', his mum’s voice. 'You know you can talk to me, whatever it is. Nothing will shock me so much or make me so angry that you need to be afraid to tell me. I'll always love you, no matter what, always.'

He saw himself, fourteen years old. He’d listen to that, nod, and tell nothing. He knew it all back then, didn’t he? And to his fourteen-year-old self, his secret was the biggest, most fucked up, most unspeakable secret in the world, ever. You don’t know what you’re saying, mum, he’d reply in his mind, with a world-weary sigh. You wouldn’t be saying that if you knew.

She had known. She had guessed. She had kept on loving him, in spite of it.

'Is there anything you want to tell me, darling?'

Yes, yes there is. I love him, mum. I’m in love with Thor. I want to be with him. I don’t know how it came to be, it just did. He’s the only one I ever wanted. And now he wants to come out, and I want that too, but I’m frightened. And I wish you were here to hold my hand and you’re not, but maybe you are, I don’t know; sometimes it feels you are, a little. Never mind. I’m a certified loon, ain’t I? And possibly a bona-fide pervert. Does it matter, mum? Do I still get to have this?
She would have smiled, maybe even laughed a little. She would have stroked his long hair out of his face. Loki couldn't put words in her mouth right now, he couldn't figure out what she would have said to that. His mum was dead, he would never know what she would have answered. But the ghost in his mind had heard him, and was still stroking his hair, and she was still smiling.

“Can you believe that we’re doing this, baby?” he whispered, trying not to disturb his brother. “That we're really going to get out there and tell the fucking world?”

For a spell, he tried to imagine it. Down the street, going somewhere, anywhere, holding hands. Heads would turn. Would they manage to meet their eyes, hold their chins up? What would it be like, to kiss his brother on the mouth in the middle of fucking London? What would it be like, to simply get on with their lives, together, as other people did? - Don’t jump the fucking horse, Loki-boy; a normal existence was still a long, long way away, if it ever even came to happen...

You know, there were times when the whole idea of coming out had him nauseous with terror, but there were others when he couldn’t fucking wait.

He petted his brother’s hair in long, slow strokes, and tried for a nap himself. He’d be making Thor pay for falling asleep on him in the middle of fucking foreplay, but for now… He tried to get comfortable. And Thor was so warm, he smelled so good. It wasn't too hard.

Chapter End Notes

I know it took long. These guys matter a lot to me, and telling their story takes a lot of work, so it's always slow going. I hope it was worth the wait.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Operation Public Courtship, go.

Chapter Notes

*sobs* this was so hard, so hard... I thought I'd never make it. Worst case of writer's block since I started writing again. Thought that was it for me, that my run was over.

Unfaithful next, and Musketeers, when they let me.

Thank you Ctopey as always, to the sweet anon who let me know they were waiting for this, to Angymadsygin for the encouragement, to all of you who have dropped in a kind word. (hits on "post" with immense relief.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thor was early. He checked his watch again, as if that would make time move faster, and perched on a stool by the bar. He ordered a drink, for something to do with his hands. He was charged with a nervous energy that had him tapping his fingers on the counter. He had not been to this place before, so he had not known what to expect, but the stylish, sleek decor, the low, warm, reddish lighting, and the fancy uniforms of the staff, screamed “singles bar.”

He didn’t get why Loki wanted to meet there, instead of leaving home together, but since it was Loki’s treat, Thor decided to just roll with it. He did have the impression that his brother had put in a lot of thought into this date, and that he had planned it down to every tiny detail, possibly taking some cues from the landing of Normandy, so he decided to keep his mouth shut and follow the program. After all, it wasn’t just a date, was it? It was some fine PR wrangling of the most subtle order. He was sure that Natasha had asked for a thorough summary of the night’s events to be submitted for her approval. Operation Public Courtship began tonight.

Thor checked himself in the mirror again, and thought he’d end up wearing out the bloody suit from brushing off fluff that wasn’t there. And a nice suit it was, made to order especially for tonight, three-piece, deep maroon, black shirt, no tie. With one last look at his reflection in the hallway mirror before he left the house, he had thought to himself, yup, my dear fellow, you shall go to the ball. It was also a throwback to another suit he had worn ages ago, on that fateful MTV Movie Awards night that had haunted his and his brother’s lives for a long time, the night when that accursed article in Variety dropped the bomb about Loki’s adoption. He hoped that Loki would get what Thor was getting at with it. New beginnings. Let’s go back to the start, where everything went to shit, and let’s do this again. This time we’ll do it right.

“Can I buy you a drink?”

He turned to the voice, a beautiful woman, nicely coiffured.
“Thank you, but no, I’m waiting for someone.”

“Oh.” She drifted away, disappointed.

Thor had a sip of scotch.

The second caller didn’t take long, nor the third after that, or the fourth. The novelty was being approached by a man this time as well.

“No, thanks, I’m waiting for someone,” he kept repeating.

He guessed it was his fault for being so early, but he had been climbing up the walls with nerves, checking himself out in the mirror thirty times, and starting to second guess his choice of outfit when it was way too fucking late to do something about it. He figured he’d just get himself out of the house before he did something stupid, and they started tonight on the wrong foot.

He stared into his own eyes in the mirror in front, his reflection a ghostly, confusing, prismatic image amid half-full bottles, glass shelves, sparks of light. A deep breath. He would be lying if he didn’t admit that part of him was chickening out. It was a pretty big thing, tonight. He knew Loki would be nervous too. Thor was apprehensive about, well, repercussions, about stirring the waters and dragging shit to the surface. Yes, a part of him just wanted to text Loki “forget it, let’s go home.” The other part of him straightened up his suit, took another deep breath, and smiled. His brother was taking him out on a goddamn date tonight. With the express purpose of being fucking seen going out on a date, together. He didn’t know what plans Loki had, but whatever they were, this was starting in a bloody singles bar, and that was promising.

“Are you here alone?”

“No, sorry, I’m waiting for some-…” said Thor as he turned to the voice. He cut himself off, and smiled. It was Loki. “I’m waiting for someone,” he finished, with a smile and an intent stare.

“Been waiting long?” asked Loki, meeting his gaze, and matching the intensity of Thor’s with interest.

“A while,” said Thor. “I was early.”

“Hm, eager. Hot date? Important occasion?”

“Both. And you?”

Loki smiled, “Same. Can I get you a drink while you wait?”

“I’m good. Can I buy you a drink instead?”

“Won’t your date mind?”

Thor smiled.

“Maybe.”

“Jealous?”

“Very. And possessive. I kinda like to poke him with that. I like the reaction it gets me.”

“Like scratches across your face, for example?” said Loki with a reptilian smirk, casually letting Thor see the classy black polish on his nails.
“And along my back,” said Thor.

Loki’s eyes widened with something that gave Thor a slight shiver.

“Dump that loser, baby, I can show you a real good time,” teased Loki, feigning a thick American accent of some description.

“Maybe I will. What can you do for me?”

“Don’t want to spoil the surprise, but I promise it will be fun,” said Loki, with a wink.

Thor had a sip of scotch, and pretended he was thinking about it. Then he asked for the check. Loki picked it up. The bartender looked from one to the other with faint puzzlement. The whole interaction, what with the looks they had given each other, their heads close together, the low mumbling, had been equivocal, to say the least. That too gave Thor a little shiver of exhilaration.

“After you,” said Thor. And he proceeded to follow his brother, in his black, three-quarter length suit, long coat with seal-fur collar, the antique, silver pocket-watch Thor had given him for their first anniversary in the pocket of his velvet-trimmed waistcoat, decidedly Victorianesque ankle boots, with a row of small round buttons up the side. His hair was up in that messy bun he must know Thor couldn’t get enough of (it reminded him of Loki’s tussled after-sex hair). His eyes were lined with kohl. He was like the dashing villain straight out of a dark, steampunk-themed graphic novel. All he was missing was the tall hat and a long cane with a silver skull handle. He had dressed to impress, and to draw attention, and damn, wasn’t he succeeding.

Once outside, with the same air of initiative, Loki stopped a cab. They hopped in. Loki gave an address to the cabbie.

“Where to?” asked Thor.

“Told you, it’s a surprise.”

For a heartbeat, their eyes connected and locked. After they broke, with some flustering, Loki appraised him head to toe.

“Ok, let’s have it,” said Thor.

“Have what.”

“My suit. You’re dying to say it, so let’s get it over and done with.”

“Say what?” snickered Loki, but he sounded baffled.

“Yes, it’s fucking red. I look like a pimp or a mobster or something.”

“Why would you chose it, if you thought I would take the piss out of it?” asked Loki.

“Because I knew you’d like me in it, no matter how many jokes you made.”

“You know me that well, huh?”

“Like my own brother,” Thor winked.

Loki’s eyes on his face, on his mouth.

“It’s not red, it’s deep maroon. The Sixties cut is lush, and you should always wear a waistcoat. I
find it classy as fuck, and you look hot as hell in it,” he declared, in a discreet mutter, for Thor’s ears only.

“Thank you,” said Thor. He didn’t have the words to return such an unexpectedly thorough and candid compliment. “You—you look stunning as well. A-amazing.”

Loki barely smiled with his lips, but his eyes expressed satisfaction. They glinted as they took in the city that rushed past them.

“Can you believe we’re doing this?” whispered Thor.

“Feels pretty surreal. We can still change our minds. All we’ve done so far is confuse a bartender.”

“You want to? Pull back.”

Loki threw him a piercing glare.

“Do you?”

Thor didn’t hesitate for one second.

“Hell, no.”

“Then, neither do I,” smiled Loki.

Thor checked where the cab driver’s eyes were, and reached for Loki’s hand. He wanted to find out if it was trembling. It felt stable.

“Are you ok?” he whispered.

“Surprisingly, yes,” Loki smiled warmly. “I’m feeling… hell, I’m excited.”

Thor squeezed his brother’s hand tight between both of his for a moment, and kissed it before he let it go. When their eyes met again, they both smiled. There was a time when he could have sworn Loki would never be able to look so calm and smile to him so sweetly.

“Ah, here we are,” said Loki a moment later, as the taxi pulled over.

Thor got the door of the restaurant for him.

“Laufeyson, table for two,” said Loki to the maître. “I requested the courtyard.”

“Indeed, sir. Do you wish to leave your coats in the cloakroom?”

She lead them there.

“Allow me,” said Thor, and helped Loki out of his coat.

The intimacy of the gesture, out in the open, even if it was just witnessed by a maître and the cloakroom girl, made Thor’s pulse race. Loki just stood there with his back to him, nonchalantly, elegantly unbothered, as if it was an everyday occurrence, but Thor saw his brother’s Adam’s apple bob in his throat when he stroked his hands down Loki’s shoulders and arms, and Loki turned his head to him. Made Thor think of other situations in which he got his brother out of garments. It had him shivering with anticipation, as if this was their first date. When Loki turned to face him, Thor
said softly, “The scarf.” He grabbed one end, and pulled it slowly from around his brother’s neck. The gentle, sensual caress of the fabric on his skin made Loki’s Adam’s apple bob again.

The whole thing had played out before the rapidly blinking eyes of the cloakroom girl, and the completely inexpressive face of the very professional maître. Today, every gesture and every look had meaning and carried a weight. It was thrilling.

“If you’d be so kind as to follow me,” said the maître, with a tiny bow.

Heirs of Odin and Frigga Borson that they were, they knew how to make an entrance. Heads did turn, both among staff and guests, some jaws fell open, some eyes went wide. They somehow always managed to look one foot taller than most anyone else in the room, and they do not just hand out this Hollywood star quality in raffles, alright? Glamour, magnetism, physical impact, call it what you will, it’s an aura, a thing that’s in short supply, but both Thor and Loki had it, and how. Dressed in their finery as they were today, they looked like actual fairy-tale royalty.

They walked past the outer ring of tables, where some medium mixed groups, and even a family, were having an early meal, and were escorted to an indoor courtyard with a glass-vaulted ceiling, under which a tangle of real cherry-tree branches in bloom criss-crossed and hung low above their heads. Thor gazed up, in awe. Loki seemed quietly pleased. Thor got the chair for him.

“This is beautiful,” said Thor, once the maître had left them alone.

“Apparently, it was recently named the most romantic restaurant in the world.”

Thor had to smile pretty much from ear to ear. In spite of his cool, unfazed expression, his brother was faintly blushing.

“How did you find it? Don’t tell me you googled—…”

“Banner recommended it,” cut Loki, his blush intensifying.

“Banner? You went and asked Banner for romantic restaurants?”

“I did no such thing. I was talking to Sigyn about, uh, this, tonight, and he happened to listen in. He heard I hadn’t made up my mind about where to go for dinner, and he suggested this place. Ok?”

“And you went for it, the most romantic restaurant in the world.”

“We were looking to send a message, weren’t we?” snapped Loki.

“Aggressive…”

“Nervous,” confessed his brother, tempering his last outburst with a shy little grin.

There was a long silence. Not totally uncomfortable, but it was apparent they both wished to break it, and couldn’t think of how. Thor’s gaze wandered. He took in the delicate pink blossoms above their heads, entwined with a string of fairy lights, set out against the purple, darkening London sky above, the fireplace on the far wall, the low, warm lighting… and the shifty, curious looks of the rest of the patrons, who flinched when caught ogling, and quickly looked away.

And then he caught his brother looking. Swooning, even.

For a moment, they just stared at each other. The smiles turned to broader smiles, turned to pursed lips, turned to a nervous fit of giggles.
“Oh, sweet Lord, I’m fucking shaking…” chuckled Thor, wiping a tear from his eye.

Calm down, Odinson, let’s all keep our heads. He tried to think of something to say.

“Right. Uh. So, Loki. Uh, you were saying the other day, you felt like doing theatre next?”

Loki seemed quietly amused with his brother’s awkward, clumsy attempt at making conversation, the little shit, but he threw him a line.

“Yes, I am looking forwards to being on a stage again. Ideally, something involving singing and dancing, but at present, none of the offers on the table really grabs me by the balls.”

“Maybe you’ll have to write it yourself,” Thor said.

“Well, depending on what happens in a few weeks, I may even have to fund it myself, attend it myself, review it myself…”

Thor’s smile fell for a second.

“Oh, please,” said Loki, kicking him under the table. “Cheer the fuck up, it was a joke. What about you? What’s next? You’ve not mentioned anything about new projects for some time.”

Thor scratched his beard as if he was pondering. Truth was, he was buying himself a second.

“I’ve been thinking… I’d like to make a comedy. I’d like to dress in casual clothes and be silly and goofy and make people laugh, for a change.”

“Oh dear.”

“What, you don’t think I can?”

“What, make people laugh on purpose?”

“Ha ha. Aren’t you funny.”

“Certifiably so.”

“No, seriously now, Loki. Do you think I shouldn’t? Or that I can’t?”

“I think there is something especially disarming about an actual living god of beauty smashing into doors face first and tripping on banana peels. I’m thinking Carole Lombard, Marilyn Monroe, Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant. You’d be delightful. And hilarious, I’m sure.”

“Did you just call me an actual living god of beauty?” smirked Thor, all smug.

Loki could roll his eyes until he saw the back of his head, but there was no disguising that blush on his cheeks. Ah, Loki was in a most delightful mood this evening, at times snarky and demure, and this was already the nicest fucking date night ever. Thor brushed his foot against Loki’s under the table and hooked their ankles together, with a broad grin.

“We’ll have the Chocolate Sensation for two,” said Thor, when it was time for dessert.
Loki gave him an indignant stare, but didn’t protest until the waiter had left.

“I was actually between the Hot Goat Milk and Tahiti Vanilla rice pudding and the Millefeuille,” he said, miffed.

“We can have those to go,” joked Thor. And in a whisper, with a searing stare, “I just remembered the things you used to do with those ice creams in Iceland.”

“Is that a dare?”

“It’s a double dare.”

“You’re toying with forces beyond your ken, Odinson. Are you sure you can handle this?”

“Bring it,” said Thor.

“Ok, you asked for it. It’s on.”

They both followed the plate with their eyes as it was set on the table.

“Well, then,” said Loki, once the waiter had left. “I’m waiting.”

Thor had a quick look around. People must have grown accustomed to their presence. He detected no shifty glances. With his pulse beginning to race, Thor thought that this was about to change. He loaded up the spoon, taking some care to fill it too with some of that burnt honey ice cream and Armagnac jelly.

“Go on then, come get it,” he muttered, holding the spoon up.

Loki got up, leaned over, and took it in his mouth. He hollowed his cheeks around it, and pulled back slowly, his lips dragging on the metal. When the rich chocolatey goodness hit his tastebuds, he let his eyes droop languidly, and he moaned with delight. Thor’s middle was shaken by a deep shiver, as a surge of hot blood suddenly deluged the area. Loki sat back on his chair, with a smarmy grin, savouring the morsel in his mouth, with his eyes branding hot on his brother. When he licked his lips, Thor oomphed quietly, as if he’d been hit. He remembered Iceland very fucking vividly right now, his brother teasing him like that, back in the day when Loki was too squicked to put his mouth on him, and Thor’s imagination ran riot with ideas of how it might feel.

When he had a look around, he noticed several astonished expressions. They simply did not understand what was going on, because the simplest, most obvious explanation for what they had just witnessed was unthinkable. Well, think again, thought Thor, with a wolfish smile. His heart was hammering with the thrill of it, electricity running in his veins. Fuck yeah, now we’re fucking talking!

“This is gorgeous,” purred his brother. If he had noticed the reactions around them, he wasn’t showing it. Supremely oblivious and unflappable, he loaded up his spoon. “Want to taste?”

They left as they had arrived, princely and magnificent, with an Olympian nonchalance and uber-confidence that you really had to be of a certain special temperament to be able to pull off. Which they were, alright.

But once they were in the cab, they burst out laughing.
“That was insane!” said Loki, between giggles. “Did you see that woman’s face? The one in the pink dress with the pearls? I thought she was going to fucking come slip a twenty inside your pants!”

Thor couldn’t stop to breathe, let alone to speak. He didn’t remember the last time he had laughed so much.

“Oh god,” he whimpered, when they started to calm down. “Best date ever. Thank you, baby.”

Sobered up all of a sudden, Loki threw a nervous look at the cabbie. And that sobered up Thor too.

“It’s ok,” said Loki quickly, smiling. “Just takes some getting used to.”

“Ballet?” said Thor with very little enthusiasm, as the taxi pulled over by the theatre and he saw the posters and signs.

“You haven’t heard of Sergei Polunin?” said Loki, guiding him to the door.

“Uh, you know I don’t really keep up with this world. I only ever enjoyed ballet when it was you dancing.”

“In that case, I think you will be pleasantly surprised.”

Thor didn’t make any more comments, but braced himself for a solid hour of boredom. He loved to see Loki dancing, but he had never really gotten into the dance thing himself. He disliked the snobbery around it when they attended Loki’s performances, the snooty audience, so prim and stuck up, and Loki’s even snootier teacher (or coach or whatever they called him), never satisfied, never a word of praise, always staring down at his charges, Loki among them, as if they were tiny repulsive things the Lord had burdened him with to atone for past sins. What was worse, it made Thor feel stupid, because he didn’t get it, didn’t feel it, its secret code flying right over his head.

It was a small venue, intimate. The audience was very close to the stage. Lights dimmed down, silence fell. A single dancer appeared, barefoot, topless, covered in tattoos, naked but for a nude-coloured leotard ending above the knees. His very presence radiated something sexual, urgent. You could not look at him without being affected. Thor felt the energy in the place change, become charged, the air thrumming.

There was no music. The dancer moved with such a compelling, perfectly balanced blend of brute strength and grace. The thumps when he hit the floorboards after a jump made the audience flinch. His performance was expressive, dramatic, hypnotic. Thor had feared it would be too abstract, too hard to penetrate, and he was sure he was missing most of the nuances that an eye trained in the language of dance could appreciate, but he was enthralled. Perhaps there was an entire story in that choreography he was missing, but he was gripped by it just the same.

After a while, when the first dancer was already sweaty and strained, although his movements remained impeccably smooth, another male dancer appeared. They circled each other, an undertone of aggression in their posture. They engaged, their clashing impulses and sheer muscular power releasing a wave of energy. They rolled, jumped, shoved each other, threw each other in the air, and
held each other close, and there was so much passion now, a fraught, tormented romance unfolding without words before the audience’s eyes. They met in a corner and kissed, and it felt as if everybody in that place was holding their breath. They embraced, they spun around each other, they kissed again, and the dance had now become an elegant, stylised version of fucking, soundless but for the heavy breathing of their physical strain, the sensuality of it all hitting the audience, which returned waves of arousal. An entire auditorium being treated to the most beautiful, classiest sex show imaginable, and reacting with shivers, muted gasps, and discrete squirms.

When it ended, with the dancers/lovers in a heap on the stage, there was a second of intense, suspended silence before the applause began to rise. And Loki was watching him. Thor returned the stare. Look at us now, Thor commanded the audience in silence, feeling still electrified. See us.

“I think you enjoyed that,” said Loki, when the applause finally began to quiet down and people were picking up their things.

Thor discreetly tucked himself in, with a quiet snort.

It was a very pleasant evening; spring was in the air. The street was full of tourists and revellers, and they were just another couple, walking side by side, enjoying the atmosphere. Some people did a double-take, but most just kept on walking, too busy enjoying their own lives to mind anybody else’s business, which was nice, for a change. Thor put an arm around his brother’s waist, and Loki stiffened up for a moment, but didn’t push him away. After a while, Loki put his arm around him too. And Thor wanted to howl at the moon and tap-dance up the walls in sheer fucking unbridled joy.

They ambled aimlessly for a while, just enjoying being together on such a lovely night, having a good time, like couples in love do. Such a simple thing, yet so powerful, washing away months and months of frustration, self-loathing, and mounting disappointment, dissolving it all into a fresh feeling of content. He was a lucky man; the stars smiled on him, life was good tonight, and the future was full of promise.

“So, what now?” asked Thor.

“Hm, original plan? Home.”

“The plan has changed?”

“I sort of… It’s such a nice evening. Want to stretch it out a bit. I feel like going dancing.”

“Do I have to dance as well?” asked Thor, wary.

Loki laughed.

“You can just watch.”

Fucking hell, Loki.

“Lead the way,” said Thor.
A small club with a rainbow flag at the door. The bouncer’s eyes got as big as footballs when he spotted them in the queue, and he didn’t so much gesture to them as fucking curtsey. The queue parted before them like the waters of the Red Sea. Sometimes, this celebrity thing had its perks. They strutted obliviously amid a chorus of awed expressions, as if it was all their due, and thus nothing to make a fuss about. Which was, of course, the trick. A couple of flashes did go off, but some voices rose in admonishment, “Leave them in peace!”

Once inside, the dull rhythmic thud resolved into a disco song. They got rid of their coats and suit jackets, and in their waistcoats and shirts, they went in. Thor shouted for drinks at the bar (between his natural low key and his theatrical training, no barman ever ignored him), and they squeezed between groups of punters until they found a spot by the back wall. There was no point in trying for conversation with that noise, so for a while they just stood there, observing, and trying to give off “nothing to see here, please move on” vibes.

The music was anything from Lady Gaga to the Bee Gees. Compared to Loki, Thor couldn’t dance for shit, and tended to get stiff as a board trying, unless he’d had a few, so he was happy to stay at the back. Loki, however, was already swinging, little shoulder rolls, the thing he did with his neck. He doesn’t realise, does he?, thought Thor. He thinks he does, he plays with it, but he simply hasn’t got a clue just how fucking sexy he is. It’s something about the way he moves and about the way he stands still, a liquid, feline elegance, effortless, perfectly harmonious, and simply out of this fucking world. In that complicated, hazy time between childhood and puberty, back when Thor’s feelings for Loki had already departed the shores of a passionate though straightforward brotherly attachment, and had entered the confusing stage, but had not yet resolved into, well, specifics, Thor used to interrogate himself about what made his brother so intensely, uh, watchable. He didn’t look like a girl, and he didn’t move exactly like a girl, not quite, but neither did he look like most boys Thor knew, and certainly didn’t move like them. Loki was Loki, he walked his own path, he set his own rules, and that shone through even in the way he occupied a space in this world. And Thor fucking worshipped him for it. What a strange realisation, that even then he sort of knew that Loki was the only one for him, the only one Thor could see himself loving and wanting for the rest of his life.

He leaned to whisper into his brother’s ear.

“Dance for me.”

There was a shiver there, and his brother turned to face him, his eyes darting from Thor’s eyes to his lips, and back again. He never got tired of the effect he had on him, of witnessing Loki trembling like a flame because of something Thor had done or said, sometimes just from a look. Would that ever wear off? Would Loki one day just get used to him, and the thrill would wear off?

Well, watching him dance now, Thor could not envisage a time when Loki would ever stop working on him. His arms thrown up, head tilted back, eyes heavy lidded. The classy bugger, he needed nothing more than to swing his hips just so to make Thor’s throat feel dry as sandpaper. After some time, when it suited him, Loki went for it, his feet flying as if gravity was something that happened to other people. He was dancing for himself, for his own enjoyment, making love with the music, smiling so much.

Of course, by now they had both been spotted and recognised, and whereas there were still a few souls brave enough (or high enough) to keep moving in the same area as Loki Laufeyson, the Lord of Dance, most had just taken a step back to enjoy the show, and avoid unflattering comparisons. There was a thrum of excitement running through the place, as if a special covenant was taking
place. Which it was.

In the following hour, Thor was accosted several times, with polite overtures he had no problem in turning down without explanation, eyes fixed on his brother. The come ons Loki was getting were of a more physical nature - men who approached and invaded his space, trying to catch his eye. Loki ignored them all, except for a couple who hovered near with some decent moves. Then it was Loki who insinuated himself between them both. The lucky buggers welcomed him in their space with broad, excited smiles, and the three of them danced together. Nobody touched anybody anywhere but on the hips, and not that much, but they did not need to, to put on a pretty suggestive, racy show. And as Loki spun and swerved and snaked between his two pretty dancing partners, he kept throwing his brother long looks, which Thor could see were being noticed. Again, people seemed puzzled; he spotted confused frowns and people talking into each other’s ears. No way to know what they were saying, but Thor would put his money on, “But aren’t they brothers?” He was smiling himself, high with excitement and desire and the wild rush of it all, feeling like they were racing down a steep road with no brakes. There was no turning back from this. This was going to happen. Sooner rather than later, he would be out in this world with his brother who was also his lover by his side, and everyone would know. They would see them together and know what they got up to behind closed doors. And they would both be able to just stare them in the eyes and own it all. No more pretending, no more hiding, no more lies.

Thor stepped onto the dance floor, reached for his brother, and pulled him close.

“Home, now,” he said into Loki’s ear.

Loki’s eyes dazzled with electricity. He blew a kiss to his dancing partners, and they walked out riding a wave of baffled attention from the entire place, their leaving together like that spelling out for all to see in the universal code of dating, “bedtime.”

They had an arm around each other’s waist again as they walked to find a cab, and by now it felt as natural as breathing. People were watching, but Thor forgot to take notice. He kept his eyes on the flowing stream of cars, waiting for a taxi to turn up. Loki was watching him with a look that made Thor feel ten feet tall and made of precious metal. He was so tempted to kiss him, right here, right now.

“Taxi!”

They sat close together inside, slumped against the backrest, tired. Thor’s hearing was numb. What a night.

Distractedly, he began to stroke his fingertips on Loki’s thigh. He felt a ridge underneath the cloth. He frowned.

“What’s that?”

Loki crossed his legs, and pulled his pants up just a tad to uncover his calves. Thor’s jaw dropped. He was wearing fucking fishnets.

“And the rest,” smirked Loki.

“Jesus, Joseph and Mary,” mumbled Thor, making his brother laugh. Loki lead Thor’s hand to another area. Was that a fucking garter? Thor gulped. “God, you’ve had them on all night?”

“Stupid question, brother. Why wouldn’t I?” Loki uncrossed his legs and covered up. With a low,
sheepish look, he asked, “Is that alright?”

“Very alright,” rumbled Thor, shifting on his ass to accommodate his semi.

Loki looked so relieved, and so damn pleased with himself. He was adorable. Loki noticed the endereared expression on his brother’s face and rewarded it with a kick on the shin. Thor threw his head back, smiling in bliss.

“So, you planned out the entire night?” he asked.

“Yup.”

“All of it.”

“All of it.”

“And what’s the plan now?”

“Giving you the best orgasm of your life, that’s the plan,” whispered Loki into his ear.

Thor felt a plunge in his stomach, the caress of Loki’s breath sending shivers down his neck.

“Tall order. How do you intend to do that?” asked Thor.

“Surprise.”

“Can I get a clue?”

“Props.”

“Oh…”

“Nothing kinky - don’t be afraid, brother.”

Thor raised an eyebrow

“Afraid?”

Loki smiled broadly and turned his eyes to the window. Thor returned to tracing idly the ridge of the garter and the stockings through the fabric of his trousers.

Ten minutes later, Thor had his brother pressed against the inside of the front door of the house, one thigh between Loki’s legs, hands on his arse, kissing the living daylights out of him. The little pleading, whimpery noises he was extracting from his brother had Thor grinding his semi against him like a horny teenager.

“Need some water,” said Loki between kisses, while his brother was busy ravishing his neck. “And some air to breathe would be nice too.”

“A good pounding is what you need,” rumbled Thor, grinding, grinding.

His brother chuckled and gave him a shove. That sound, though. Hmmm...
Thor had poured them both a glass of water. They were taking a breather, acting civilised, and drinking in silence for a moment. Thor’s ears had not yet recovered from the decibels at the club. The current peace and quiet were soothing.

He stared at his beautiful brother in front of him, that slight fluster on his cheeks and neck, his mouth still pink and swollen from the makeout downstairs. Loki saw him staring, met his eyes, held them. It did things to Thor, that stare. It was cunning, it sparkled with mischief, and with whatever it was that Loki still had in store for him.

After Loki put down his glass, Thor crowded him against the worktop and stared him down, delaying the kiss. Loki wrapped his arms around Thor’s neck and pulled him close. He tilted his head back and got on his tiptoes, waiting for Thor’s mouth. Thor pulled back, because he wanted to see that face for a bit longer. His brother looked lovely waiting for a kiss, his lids heavy, mouth parted, glowing with a very immediate, very carnal kind of yearning.

“Goddammit, Thor,” grumbled Loki, as he sunk his claws in his brother’s hair and drew him in, crushing their mouths together with brattish demand. Thor let out a hungry growl, and pressed his entire body against his brother’s. He palmed Loki’s lingerie-clad legs through his clothes.

“I want to see it,” he mumbled, hands busy with the fastenings of Loki’s trousers.

“Wait wait wait,” Loki held them still. “Wait, I’ve got… I had something in mind.”

Damn, baby, thought Thor with a shiver.

“What thing?”

Loki pushed him away.

“Living room,” he whispered, and lead him by the hand.

Once in the living room, he pulled out a chair and made Thor sit on it. Thor obeyed without protest, intrigued. Loki went away to put on some mellow, sexy music. Ok, now Thor was really intrigued. Loki turned around, already undoing the buttons of his waistcoat, and soon his shirt, with a very subtle, almost unconscious hip swing and shoulder roll, barely acknowledging the music. Thor swallowed. Loki dropped his shirt, let his hair down, kicked off his shoes, and unbuttoned his trousers. Slowly, teasingly, he began to ease them down. Thor took a deep breath as the whole set-up was revealed: lacy knickers, garter belt, garters, fishnet stockings, all in black silk and black lace, with dark green ribbon in cute tiny bows, and a rich, deep green velvet trim. Loki was biting his bottom lip as he waited for his brother’s reaction. Thor couldn’t possibly fathom why on earth, but his brother seemed anxious about it.

“Fuck,” was all Thor was able to say, once his brother was standing in front of him in nothing but his lingerie. His eyes were running mad up and down those never-ending legs, over the bulge of Loki’s not inconsiderable manly bits cupped in black silk, the contrast of the absolutely fucking charming, delicate, sheer, lacy set, against that slim, but toned, and definitely masculine torso, those strong arms and shoulders, that long neck. “Fuck,” he said again, short of breath.

“Like what you see?” said Loki, more relaxed now, reassured by that reaction. “I wish I had my heels.”
And Thor gave him a look, because, frankly? He needed readjusting, again. He was throbbing.

“Come the fuck here now,” he growled.

Loki strutted closer, swinging his hips. When he was one step away, he started dancing. He twisted and spun and snaked his hips, offering himself up from all angles for Thor to appraise. And hell, the back side was just as jaw-droppingly enticing as the front. He should have imagined he would have never seen a pair of knickers fit so perfectly as they did on his brother’s fucking perfect butt. Thor was panting. He reached up to touch, but Loki swung his hips and dodged. Then he straddled his lap, and rolled his hips, grinding his arse on Thor’s erection. Thor raised his hands to hold him.

“Huh-huh, not allowed,” whispered Loki straight into his ear, and stood up to turn over and keep dancing, running his own hands on his body, teasing, eyefucking, in full burlesque mode now.

Throbbing and panting as he was, Thor felt an unpleasant tumble deep inside all of a sudden. A memory flashed in his mind of that club, the smell of it, the feel of the cheap velvet of the chair where he had sat when Loki had danced for him, and the mess in Thor’s head and in his body. He remembered disgust mixing with a guilty, fucked up desire, the sickest feeling he had ever felt for his brother. All those bastards slipping money into Loki’s leather pants, shitbags who didn’t give a shit that Loki was so young, and so messed up and sick, so helpless, and so lonely, who were instead happy to take advantage of that, and were not at all disturbed by the fact that they were taking part in helping Loki destroy himself, his self-respect, his sanity, his future; hell, his entire fucking life, as long as they got their cheap thrills. Thor didn’t want to be like them, but he had watched Loki dance half-naked around that pole, he had had him grinding his ass on his lap, and his cock had been hard. He wasn’t above it, and he feared that maybe, if it hadn’t been his brother, he too would not have cared to learn the story of the kid dancing around the pole. Was he just like the sad, sleazy motherfuckers in that club?

Loki was straddling his lap again, working him. Thor grabbed his hips. Loki went to say something in admonishment.

“No, none of that,” said Thor, with a serious frown. “I get to touch you. And I get to kiss you.”

Loki’s eyes narrowed for a second. He had caught the hardness in Thor’s voice. His own expression softened and became tender. He dipped in to kiss him. Thor held him tight to take his mouth.

“Do you want me to stop?” whispered Loki.

Thor grabbed his silk-clad arse and drew him close. He bucked up his hips. Loki got him, and grinded down. Thor gasped, buried his face in his brother’s neck, listened to him panting, whimpering.

“Hold me. Kiss me,” asked Thor.

He cupped Loki’s face and crushed their mouths together again. Loki wrapped both arms around Thor’s neck and worked his hips as they kissed, rubbing and pressing just fucking right. Panting, Thor didn’t seem to get enough of the feel of those knickers under his palms, Loki’s legs through those fishnets. Foreheads touching, trading kisses, feeling his brother’s erection poking over the hem of those knickers, plum-soft skin through a whisper of lace.

Breathing hard, Thor grabbed Loki’s hips and held him still.

“I’m going to come in my pants,” he warned.

Loki smiled with drowsy abandon.
“We can’t possibly have that, I love that suit,” he mumbled. And into his ear, “Take me to bed.”

Loki stood up, with mussed up hair and ravished mouth. Didn’t even blink when Thor loaded him onto his shoulder, palming his arse as he hopped up the stairs, slipping his fingers under the fabric. He only chuckled lowly, or gasped with feigned shock when Thor’s hand lodged between his thighs.

Thor dumped him onto the bed without ceremony and jumped on top of him. Loki purred into the kiss as he wrapped his thighs around him. Thor slipped his hands inside his knickers and pulled them down.

“Hm, wait,” whispered Loki. “Let’s get you undressed.”

Thor kneeled up on the mattress and set to work on his own shirt, as he let Loki undo the fastenings of his trousers and drag them down his butt. He enjoyed Loki palming him through his pants, cupping his balls. Thor laid down on top of him. Between tugs and pulls, they got Thor out of his clothes. With Thor completely naked, and Loki in his knickers, garter belt, and stockings, they made out at leisure, grinding lazily against each other, the night ahead of them as long as they wanted to make it.

“So that orgasm of my life thing…” rumbled Thor.

“Hm, oh yeah, that… Get off me. Lie down. Belly up.”

From the bed, naked, sprawled, hard, Thor watched his brother get up and go straight to his side of the wardrobe. There was a small black box Thor hadn’t spotted before - not that he went prying. Loki returned with a strange contraption, the weirdest fucking dildo Thor had ever seen.

“The hell is this?”

“This, my dear brother, is called an Aneros. It’s a hands-free prostate massager. Want to have a look?”

Actually, yes. Thor examined it. It wasn’t particularly thick or bulgy or, uh, threatening.

“How does it work?”

“You insert this bit, which presses right against your prostate. This other bit rests on your perineum, massaging from the outside. This is a handle to move it from the outside. You operate it yourself, by contracting your body around it.”

“What makes it so special?”

“You’ll see. It takes some practice, but I can guarantee you, you’ve never felt anything like it,” said Loki.

“You’ve tried it?”

“Not this particular piece; this one is brand new for you. But yeah, I have tried one like it. When you date Tony Stark, you try everything at least once. Or almost everything.”

Thor turned the thing this way and that, unimpressed.

“I can help,” said Loki, “but you have full control all the time. It’s not even powered.”

“I’m not scared,” said Thor, raising an eyebrow. “I’m just skeptical.”
Loki smirked.

“By the end of this, you won’t be. Your self-love practices are about to change forever.”

Thor shrugged. The thing seemed harmless enough.

“Ok. Have at it.”

“Can you get the lube for me? It’s in your drawer,” said Loki, that low, silken voice of his. “Lie down. Spread them. Knees up.”

Once Loki had the business end of the thing nice and slick, he took position between Thor’s legs.

“Want to do it yourself?” he asked.

“No, you do it.”

Loki kissed his knee, and stroked between his buttocks, gentle circles on his hole, Thor’s breathing deep and calm. He let his eyes droop and focused on the sensation of his brother’s touch.

“Are you ok?” asked Loki, softly

“Yeah.”

“I’m going to put it in, now.”

“Ok.”

Loki gently, lovingly, inserted the thing. It was not particularly thick or long or girthy, and a lot thinner than a cock. Thor really didn’t see how…

“Clench your butt,” said Loki.

“Hm?”

“Clench.”

It took Thor a moment of concentration. His erection had flagged while Loki was busy preparing the thing, and now his cock was resting on his stomach. It twitched and bobbed whenever he tightened up around the thing. As he squeezed, the toy moved and pressed inside him, the bulbous head stroking right on his sweet spot again, and again, and again. There was a deep, remote, subtle kind of sensation. Hardly mind-blowing though, at least so far. It was pleasant at best, a low simmer.

“I’m clenching,” he said. “Is this it?”

“Keep going,” said his brother, as he laid down beside him, propping himself up on his elbow, and watching his face, his eyes like embers, burning quietly.

“How long does it take?”

Loki laughed.

“Just keep going. Good things come to those who wait.” He dipped low to kiss him, and stroked slowly down Thor’s body, delighting in the way his muscles bulged as Thor bucked his hips up to increase the sensation.
“Touch my cock,” begged Thor.

“You’ll thank me for not doing it,” whispered Loki, ghosting his fingertips along his hip grooves, over his thighs.

And yeah, ok, it was slow, kind of low-key stimulation, but it was building up. His breathing was getting short, his eyes drooping. He did not need Loki urging him on now, or himself; his body seemed to have caught up with the brief. Without prompting or suggestions, Thor tried new moves. Pressing against the mattress, rolling his hips, bucking up.

“Hmm…”

“I know,” said Loki. “Can I do it for a bit?”

Thor nodded, spreading. His brother grabbed the tiny handle and worked the thing inside him, side to side, in circles, in gentle fucking motions.

“Hmm…” Thor spread them wider, closing his eyes. Ok, that was very, very nice.

Loki stole a lazy kiss and let go.

“Carry on.”

When Thor clenched tight again, sensation had climbed up a few marks. He hummed low. That relentless pressure exactly where he needed it, it seemed to both scratch and excite an itch at the same time. It was almost frustrating. But it was intensifying, and Thor was beginning to get now what Loki had been talking about, because if this got him anywhere in the end, after working on it for so long, it had all the makings of something colossal. He kept at it, panting turning to whimpering, his hands hovering close to his cock, aching to touch. He grabbed the headboard rails above his head to avert temptation, and Loki purred in approval.

“God…” moaned Thor. “Fuck…”

Loki was staring at his face, his considerable erection squashed against Thor’s thigh. Thor was slipping into sensation and fast losing dignity and self-control, pretty desperate by now to keep making that maddening feeling inside get stronger. He was bucking his hips fast, nervous jerky movements, grinding and rolling, anything and everything to just keep that bulb inside moving and stroking and pushing. Thor’s knuckles around the rails were white. He was shuddering, whimpering, begging without words. It was coming, it was, but it was coming from so fucking deep down, he feared it would never peak. He whined, desperate, pleading. His bloody arse was getting tired. Loki noticed. He reached between his thighs again, grabbed the handle, and worked the toy inside him. Thor whimpered, sobbed, shook up, shuddered. He was right on the verge of something.

“Fuck, fuck…”

“That’s it…”

Like a rolling wave that swelled and swelled and swelled.

“Fuck… Loki… fuck…”

“Keep going, baby…”

Thor went at it again, and the sensation finally, finally crested, and it began to wash through him. Thor worked himself frantically, jerking, shaking, chasing that full, overpowering orgasm that was
surging from a place he didn’t even know was there.

“Oh my god, oh my god…”

He kept on clenching and bucking his hips, screaming through the longest, most overwhelming climax he had ever felt, eyes pinched so tight he was seeing sparks.

It left him shuddering, panting, and boneless, a puddle on the sheets. But as he came to earth, he realised he hadn’t ejaculated, and that he was still hard.

“Did… Did I do it wrong?”

Loki chuckled, and kissed him. He shook his head.

“Was it good?” he asked.

Thor nodded heavily.

“Don’t take it out,” said Loki.

Thor shook his head no with his eyes closed. He was still floating, so relaxed and limp he felt ready to melt through the cracks in the floor.

Loki was doing things beside him. Thor opened a lazy eye. Saw that Loki had taken his knickers off, but left the stockings and garters. He grabbed the lube. He straddled Thor’s hips and began to prep himself. He didn’t spend a lot of time on it.

“You think I can, so soon?” asked Thor.

Loki winked. Sitting on Thor’s thighs, he started to slick him up. When his fist closed around him, to stroke him to full hardness, Thor shook up, and that made him clench up, and,

“Nnn…"

Loki laughed. He took position. With drowsy eyes, he lowered himself on Thor’s cock, and bore down hard to breach himself.

“Fuck…” huffed Thor.

Loki laughed a little, his chuckles dissolving into sighs and gasps as he kept taking him in. Fully seated now, he rolled his hips, and every move Loki made had an echo deep inside Thor, where the toy was still lodged.

“Oh my fucking god…” he said, with a strangled voice. “How is this even physically possible… and why didn’t I know about this until now…”

Loki laughed again, straddling him, hands on Thor’s chest. He petted his face. He started to move. Faster. He started to bounce, slamming down hard.

“Jesus Christ…” gasped Thor, hands loosely on Loki’s hips, being torn to fucking shreds. Soon, he was sobbing again, pleasure building up steadily, as his beautiful brother fucked himself relentlessly on him. Thor began to buck up his hips, seeking the clash that made that thing inside him push on his sweet spot, and the movement that made him clench around it, sending fucking waves of heat through his core. He made himself keep his eyes open, to watch Loki riding him quickly and furiously, biting his lip hard, panting, huffing, a sinful expression of mounting pleasure and strain.
“Fuck… I’m going to come again…” sobbed Thor.

“Hold on, oh god, wait…” pleaded Loki, taking it up a notch. Which only made it worse for Thor. This time it felt completely different, strangely frustrating in a way, a lot more like an insanely tantalising itch he was never going to be able to scratch. He grabbed his brother’s hips firmly to make him really bear down hard. Every hit of Loki’s body against him echoed deep inside. He was getting on that strange ride again, feeling almost possessed, his body taking over, fixated on the idea of that orgasm that teased him from a place just beyond his reach. He rolled his hips and grinded up and fucked his brother, anything to get that hit.

Whimpering, Loki took himself in hand and began to spill, come warm on Thor’s chest and abdomen. Thor didn’t stop fucking up, hell-bent on coming again, but it was when Loki began to roll his hips again, pressing down, crushing Thor’s hips against the mattress, and then fucked in shallow thrusts, that Thor came again, a long, intense orgasm that was nothing like he had ever felt before in his life, cold instead of hot, and left him flat on his back, mind blank, unable to move.

Loki above him was panting hard, chest and shoulders heaving, arms trembling. He leaned closer to give him a slow, deep kiss. Thor half-opened his eyes for but a second.

“Fucking hell,” he sighed.

“Can’t bloody move,” chuckled Loki, as he tried to climb off, legs weak.

Thor pulled him into a hug, rolled them both over. On their sides, he wrapped around his brother.

“Ew, sticky,” grumbled Loki.


“I should have guessed this thing would turn you into a cuddly sap. You need to take it out by the way.”

“No.”

Loki laughed.

He was boneless and knackered and just wanted to sleep, but Loki made sure that would not happen yet. After much prodding and elbowing, and some pinching, Thor relented to move. They tidied up, washed, drank some water.

While Loki was in the bathroom, Thor struggled to stay awake. With his eyes closed, he went over the whole evening again. Well, full marks for showing a bloke a good time, brother, he thought with a smile. He breathed deep, feeling calm and content down to the marrow of his bones, like he had not felt since he couldn’t remember when. He was relishing the memory of every surprised or confused look they got tonight, and of every moment he had felt like touching Loki, and he fucking had. He had anticipated some frustration at having to measure and curb how affectionate or how obvious they were, but he had found it actually quite sexy. It was almost like a prolonged tease, a game between them both. Because they had to show restraint for now, but the day when they wouldn’t have to anymore was in sight, and Thor found that he could wait, if this was how they were going to while away the time.

The sudden flood of clarity pouring through the bathroom door made him open his eyes a slit. And the vision of Loki strutting in those fucking fishnets and garter belt, black lace and velvet delightfully framing his cock and balls, and his perfect white butt as he sat down on the bed, ensured he kept his eyes open. He never would have predicted he’d be into that, but then again, maybe he should have
seen it coming.

“Leave them on,” said Thor, when Loki made to take off his lingerie. Loki indulged him, with a smug little grin, and laid down with a happy sigh. Thor spooned him from behind, nuzzling against the back of his neck.

“Wait till you see me in my heels,” whispered Loki.

“But warn me first, and remind me to write my will.”

Loki laughed.

Thor was breathing deeply, feeling heavy as a stone, the mattress sucking him in, as relaxed as he had ever felt, sleep claiming him.

“I can’t believe you kept this hands-free massager thing secret from me,” mumbled Thor.

“You didn’t like to play in that area for a long time, remember? And also… Hm.”

“What.”

“It was hot, and I wanted you to try it, but… You were on a different planet. So, cool for solo play, but frankly, I prefer you to enjoy yourself a bit less, and be here with me a bit more.”

Thor kissed his neck, happy that his brother wasn’t seeing what even he might have called a stomach-turning, disgustingly endeared, loved-up, sappy grin. His fingers were idling and ghosting over the side of Loki’s thigh, right where the stockings clung to his skin, and slipping under the garters, over the sensitive skin of the back of Loki’s thighs and butt.

“Stop it,” squirmed Loki. “Tickles.”

He rolled over to face him, big eyes. Thor stared back, brushed the hair out of his brother’s face.

“I thought it would be scarier,” said Loki, whispering. “I was so nervous, but it was… Hell, it was fun, wasn’t it?”

“It was great,” agreed Thor. “Best date night ever. The looks on people’s faces was the cherry. Thank you, baby.”

“Are you happy?” asked Loki.

Thor kissed him.

“Yes, I fucking am.”

His brother smiled blissfully, and burrowed close. Thor gathered what little will he had left to grab the quilt and tuck them both in. He wrapped Loki in his arms. He was asleep the moment he closed his eyes.
The restaurant Loki takes Thor to is the Clos Maggiore in London. Look it up. It's ridiculously beautiful. (I've never been, but I fucking will).

Sergei Polunin, the guy that performed in David Lachapelle's vid of Hozier's "Take me to church."

Oh, inspiration for Thor's outfit, from Mr. Hemsworth's recent photoshoot for Modern Luxury. Imagine it with Thor's long hair. (let me die here).

https://41.media.tumblr.com/f62a7e4500a3d75dbb7da2f0430421f1/tumblr_o4h7voRDOz1rv1d8ho1

(Loki's outfit not based on any particular image, although perhaps I'm thinking a bit of Thomas Sharpe. As one does.)
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

"The last eight weeks had been a shitstorm of end-of-days proportions, and his celebrity adoptive brother, and your humble servant, had spent it at its very eye..."

The time of truth has arrived.

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you Ctopey for working me hard, and making this better with your suggestions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Loki put away the fag he’d been trying and failing to light, and just stared into the horizon, the wind of high altitudes buffeting his face and tousling his hair — very dramatic. It was peaceful up here. If one is in need of perspective, the roof garden of Stark tower, sixty-seven floors above the ground, is a good place to start looking for some. You can be reminded that the world is vast and crowded and busy, and that most of the people way down below, just going about their day, gave not one single flying, crawling, or burrowing bit of a fuck that two celebrity adoptive brothers were going to announce to the world tomorrow that they were shagging each other. New York had been a good call, Romanoff. Everyone here is in far too much of a hurry to care.

Perhaps they should have come earlier, because it felt like the rest of the world did care about their little celebrity pseudo-incest situation. The last eight weeks had been a shitstorm of end-of-days proportions, and his celebrity adoptive brother, and your humble servant, had spent it at its very eye, and pretty baffled and annoyed at that, since they had always been told that the eye of the storm was supposed to be the calm spot. Well, it turns out, when one is riding a whirlwind from hell, like one of those desert storms that involves hurricane-speed winds and demonic blazing tumbleweed twisters, there is no calm spot.

Yes, it was all intended. Yes, it was all going according to plan. Yes, they had tried to prepare themselves. No, it had not fucking worked — or maybe it had, and they were actually coping well, who knows. Hard to tell.

It was the geometric progression of the escalation that had left them breathless trying to keep up. It began as a murmur, and for a long time that was all it was. They started “living their lives” while Natasha’s people peeled their eyes and ears and waited. From the prayers of the shippers — which not even the shippers themselves must have taken seriously — after their First Public Date, it had grown to a clamour of whispers in the far reaches of the internet — “It is said,” “it is rumoured,” “they’ve been spotted,” “they’ve been seen.” Some of those accounts, by the way, were very accurate. But it was still so wild, so unthinkable. Only the accumulation of incidents, which in isolation could be easily explained away, lent it a shred of credibility. Therefore, only the wackiest,
most scandal-thirsty media outlets would take it. Which it made it sound even more absurd and implausible, and so, nobody in the real world seemed to be giving it credit. At times, it even felt like they would be able to live like a normal couple after all, simply because the world, blinded by their familial bond, would refuse to believe what they had before their eyes.

But then, as they continued to show up together, as they continued to let themselves flirt in public a little bit more, be a bit more demonstrative, become a bit more brazen, the clamour grew to a roar, and climbed up a couple of tiers closer to the surface of the mainstream social media. At this point, the bigger tabloids did pick it up, online first, the printed rags soon after. But they still gave the rumours little to no credit, and they either completely misinterpreted them, or they deemed it a publicity stunt. The articles were very vague, and contained mostly questions. What are these boys up to? What are they trying to make it look like? Is this intentional? Should they sack their PR team? We all know Loki is, well, the way he is, but why does Thor let himself be dragged into it? Concerned readers want to know. The serious media, meanwhile, wouldn’t touch the issue with a ten foot stick. Too scandalous, too outrageous. They could see that there was smoke, and they were definitely intrigued about the fire, but they were not going to report such a ridiculous thing and be accused of spreading unconfirmed faff.

Now, just because they weren’t reporting it, doesn’t mean they weren’t looking into it. Both the media and many private citizens, always armed with their phone cams, waiting to catch the million pound image that would throw some light on the subject (and lots of zeros into the bank account of whosoever succeeded in capturing it and selling it first). And so, “start living your lives,” which sounded wonderful on paper, soon became a nigh unfeasible feat. At first, the surveillance had been discreet, something they could just ignore — the snap of a phone, sly, persistent looks at bars and clubs, a car that starts right when they jump into a taxi. That wasn’t too bad. They still managed to go to the shops relatively undisturbed, take Minnie out, walk to the tube and back. Thor could still go running in the park. Loki could still get by foot to the studio of his new acroyoga-capoeira guru, T’Challa. They still managed to dine out almost in peace with their friends. But one by one, they lost all these tiny liberties, starting with date nights. Yes, dates drew gluts of attention towards them, and helped to speed up the process and the road to Revelation Day, but they had turned into a fucking freak show. The last time they tried dinner and a movie, they were spotted, reported on Twitter, and soon they were being chased around town, besieged whenever they went indoors, and hounded to the separate doors of their respective houses — because by then they were both in a bloody awful mood. Besides, thinking of a horde of paparazzi downstairs, waiting under their fucking windows like a distorted, nightmarish twist on the balcony scene in R & J, is hardly a turn-on.

They stopped going out on dates, but the “damage” was done, thank god. Like a crack in a dam that keeps getting wider and wider as the water trickles through, two paps camping at each of their doors became four, became six, became a dozen, and then an entire fucking swarm of them, tremendously keen on documenting for posterity every time they ran out of milk. Instinctively, this made them more cautious and more discreet. Counter-productive. The pressure of the press reached a plateau.

One night, after spending the whole day cooped up in the flat, hiding away, having observed for some time the paps across the street, fraternising over Starbucks and Costa, cameras hanging idle, Loki had a moment of clarity. This thing needed a good shake-up. He slipped into his battle-dress — velvet trousers, flowing silk shirt, leather jacket, things he knew turned his brother wild, and screamed “date” with flashing blue lights — put on big sunglasses so that hopefully he wouldn’t be blinded by the flashes, and pushing on through the cloud of reporters, he walked to Thor’s house. They were photographed abundantly, and probably got an instant tan when Thor opened the door and drew Loki in with an arm around his waist. The flashes were still going off even after the door was closed. What the fuck were they trying to get?

He spent the night there, and in the morning he called a cab back to his flat, again being
photographed from every single possible angle on the short walk from house door to car door. He shut it behind him, and exhaled. There, he thought, now they had a nice caption to put under their photos: *Loki Laufeyson leaving his brother’s house in the morning, after an overnight call.* (The fact that on that particular occasion they had spent such a night watching films and then cuddling together on the settee, and that all their activities could be classified as suitable for General Audiences, that was merely a footnote.)

The papers *did* pick it up this time, and reported it. But they still resisted believing it. The tone was almost indignant: Just what the hell was going on? What were these kids playing at? *Why aren’t they denying it?* - That was still miles away from where Natasha wanted to take them, a frank, open discussion about sibling incest among consenting adults.

Anyway, for Thor and Loki, that was the end of life as they knew it. The cloud of paps never cleared off again. It was annoying to them, but it was making Sigyn’s life impossibly complicated. She was on board, and wholeheartedly supportive of their plan and their goal, of course, but she still had to get to work and back every day through a swamp of photographers and reporters, who didn’t seem to tire of screaming impertinent questions at her, no matter how steadfast he was in ignoring them. And it would only be getting worse and worse.

So Loki sort of expected it, and he had even thought to suggest it himself, but he had not yet brought himself up to do it, and was still taken by surprise when she said one day, over dinner preparations,

“I think I’ll go to Bruce’s until this whole thing settles down.”

Loki put down the knife he had been slicing vegetables with, very slowly.

“You’re not angry, are you?” said she, pleading.

“Not angry,” he replied, a choke in his voice.

“Oh, darling…”

He protested that he was fine, but she hugged him tight just the same, and he held her back with bruising strength, for a long time.

This day had to come. He had only put back having to think about it, but it was always going to catch up with him in the end. You see, *when this settles down* was a hazy little spot in the horizon, maybe years from now. *This* would only get crazier and crazier until it exploded on Revelation Day, after which the plan was to take a long, long journey (not sure where yet, but Thor talked about a tour around the world with sparkly eyes). And after that, they would return home as the most infamous couple in the universe, or they would either have to take up a little spot under a rock in the desert, or buy themselves a remote Scottish island, but in any case, Thor wanted them to live together. As in, together as a couple. As in, *not* with Sigyn. It was always going to happen, sooner or later, one way or another. Bruce and Sigyn were not too traditional (neither was much for official papers or house and kids and all that chuff), but they had been together for years, and, well, perhaps it was time to evolve. In short, this was goodbye. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. Loki hugged tighter, and tried not to break down altogether.

A couple of days later, Loki was watching her taxi speed away down the street, amidst a blitz of flashes that followed her like a retreating thunderstorm. The place felt a lot emptier than it had any right to be. She hadn’t even taken her things yet. But Minnie’s bed and her food and drink bowls were gone, and that, for no reason in the world whatsoever, surely, hit him harder than he could put into words.
When he could not fucking get out of the house to get some fucking bread that evening, that’s when his melancholy turned into an almighty rage. He hadn’t even seen Thor in a week.

“Romanoff, get us out of here. I can’t stand this anymore.”

“Pack for a long trip.”

She had a car at their respective doors in under an hour, ready to take them to Sif’s place. Once they got there, they jumped onto a rented nondescript Toyota with tinted windows, and they drove off to Asgard.

Decompression. The city around them thinned and vanished like a cloud of smoke, and it felt that, with every mile across the countryside, so did the pressure of the press. They both sighed when the familiar sights of Asgard Hall greeted them around the curve.

Since they now had people coming in every week to air the place, dust, and check that everything was running smoothly, the house did not have that dead, abandoned feeling. It felt suspended in hibernation instead, ready to open up and blossom for them.

Natasha had warned them to stay behind the gates, order in whatever they needed, and not show themselves around much, to give themselves a break from it all, but they were so eager to walk down a street without having to contend with the paps, that they went to the village for supplies several times. Which meant that, by the fourth day, they had photographers camping outside the gates, and soon enough, blurry photos taken with a ridiculously long-distance objective of the two of them walking the grounds, with captions along the lines of “Hiding together in the family home. Does father know?”

“Does father know what!” screamed Thor at his phone screen, open to the news site Nat had referred them to. “Just fucking say it already, so that we can get the fuck on with things!”

In spite of the renewed siege of the press, it wasn’t a bad few days at all. Yes, tele-objectives could catch them whenever they went outdoors, and man, that was annoying, but at least the vultures could not get physically near them, so they could get the illusion of peace and freedom, and some sun and fresh air too, and could almost pretend they were getting on with their lives. They managed to keep busy too. Thor kept doing the rounds, changing lightbulbs, oiling hinges, screwing loose screws, noting things that needed seeing to by professionals (it was a listed building after all), taking care of the minor repairs he could do himself, and pottering in the garden. Wood to chop and pile up to dry, undergrowth to tidy up, paths to clear, Frigga’s rose garden to increase and tend to. He returned muddy and sweaty and ruddy-faced, manly smell. There were jokes about Lady Chatterley’s Lover, and finding a nice sturdy tree deep in the woods.

And then, after all that, Thor still found the energy to go for long runs around the grounds, for the rowing machine and the other workout devices Thor had added over the last couple of years. His brother would strain the poor things until they creaked and all but steamed, because under the collected and quiet exterior his brother mostly managed to keep on these days, Thor was fucking fuming. He hated the media pressure with the fire of a thousand suns, and he hated even more that he couldn’t in fairness lash out against it because they needed it. They needed the buzz to grow, to clamour even more loudly, to jump the gap from tabloids to serious press, from gossip to legitimate discussion. They couldn’t turn against it, they had to court it and nourish it instead, but to say that such a thing was repulsive to his nature was an understatement of the same caliber as describing Donald Trump as a bit of a twit.
And so, there were some bad moments. Thor was a liiiittle bit cranky and moody at times. And Loki was not always as patient as perhaps he should have been, and there were raised voices now and again. *This was your idea in the first place* was always at the tip of Loki’s tongue, and he didn’t always succeed in biting it. Because he *didn’t* resent Thor for this. He didn’t, honest! But fucking hell, Loki was struggling to keep the pool of anxiety from rising above his knees, because frankly, would they even make it to Revelation Day? Or would the time come and they’d be “actually, you know what? Forget it, we changed our minds about this whole being together thing anyway. I can’t fucking stand this asshole.”

Thor apologised after every outburst, and so did Loki (most of the times, practically always, almost), but what really seemed to help right now was sex. So they started to do a lot of that. More than usual, that is. They ended up making a considerable dent in a certain private to-do list of theirs, and were well on their way to completing the first *tour* of the house. The first ‘tour,’ you know, nudge nudge, wink wink. They were working their way up to their father’s office, but not quite getting there yet. Loki had done some shit, but fucking in their dad’s sanctuary, for some reason, was up there with the kinkiest stuff; so much so, it was a little intimidating. And that, coming from a man who was fucking his own brother.

Loki too had found himself stuff to do for when he wasn’t frolicking with Thor around the house. He had been sorting through the boxes in the attic with their mum’s stuff. Odin had just lumped it all together and put it away, unable to have it lying around, but now it was time to have a systematic look, tidy up and classify the contents, and select the things that did not belong in a box in the attic and should be out there in the world instead. The awards, the annotated scripts, photos with public figures, and some correspondence with leading names of the culture and the arts, all that kind of stuff needed to go to the archives of The Frigga and Odin Borson Foundation. Some of the gowns up there were worthy of the V&A’s collection, for craftsmanship and reputation. A part of him stood up in arms at the thought of losing such treasures. The yellow gown especially, custom made for her, he predicted really big problems in parting with. He slid his hand once more under the shoulder piece where it would have touched her skin. The silk had a warm, soft feel, almost living. He imagined it behind a glass in a museum, where he could never again feel the fabric under his hands. Yes, he would struggle. Where he completely came apart where with her shoes, everyday clothes, her underwear, her last fucking pair of slippers. Except for charity perhaps, there was no compelling reason to help him make up his mind about what to keep and what to give away. He was able to select a few things he could use himself - Frigga loved rugged manly woolen gansey jumpers, which sat perfectly on her tall, athletic frame; they would fit him snugly. They would fit Thor more snugly still, that would be worth seeing. She also had a thing for rustic silk scarves. He took a pair of leather gloves that didn’t really fit him, but that Frigga had worn a lot; just slipping his hands where hers had been took his breath away, in the best possible way. But for the most part, he just put everything back in its box. He wasn’t able to give away one single pair of knickers.

So they kept busy in Asgard Hall, which was just as well, because trips to the village soon had to stop. The vultures had followed them to the country, and were becoming a nuisance with the neighbours. The traders were happy about the sudden spike in the business, but most people were not amused. The upside was that a swarm of paparazzi preying on a small village in the countryside finally had the TV taking an interest in the affair. And while they debated the old-age conundrum of celebrity culture, and where should the limits between private and public interest lie, they had to address the underlying issue: the reason why the paps were suddenly so obsessed with the Odinson kids, the crazy rumours, the conspiracy theories, questions of why don’t they issue a denial, why don’t they talk, what the hell are they really up to, *do they even realise what it looks like*?

Which was great, really; perfect, excellent, just what they needed, but the neighbours had never signed up for this. After a couple of weeks, they told Natasha they had to leave. She considered their time in Asgard very well spent strategy-wise, but she agreed. She said, “How about Stark Tower?”
As they walked from the taxi to the airport, the swarm of reporters closed in, standing in their way, thrusting recording devices in their faces, blocking their path. Thor held his hand to help him through. The blitz of flashes left Loki seeing sparks all the way across the Atlantic ocean, but the photos of the two of them hand in hand, looking so much like an updated version of Liz Taylor and Richard Burton, big sunglasses and vintage fur collars and all, had instantly flooded Twitter and the websites of newspapers and magazines.

When he was looking at those photos on the plane, something stirred inside him. He realised that up until this point, it had not really sunk in. Now it dawned on him at last what they were doing: Together, in public, for real. Thor and him. Thor and him. Something too wild even to allow himself to dream of it when he was a kid. It shouldn’t have happened, not in a million years, but it had. It was happening right now.

The buzz of the cabin had put his brother to sleep about five minutes into the flight. The bastard was handsome even with his jaw hanging and snoring gently, his golden mane of hair framing his noble face, a napping lion. There were other passengers around them, flight assistants walking up and down the aisles. With some trepidation, Loki leaned in, and kissed his brother on the corner of the mouth.

When soon after, Thor’s head fell on his shoulder, Loki didn’t shove him off. He kept on reading his book, but inside, he was reeling. He had a strange thought: I think I’ve just seen the future. And isn’t it half nice.

Stark Tower. A sixty-plus floors golden cage. They avoided the public areas and the offices, but that still left them with a decent patch to stretch their legs. They had a suite near the top, but it had to be said for Tony’s employees, no rumours of them sharing lodgings with only one bed (albeit big enough for a small family, provided that its members didn’t fidget too much and got along) were detected in the press.

And so, from their lovebird’s nest, they sat back and watched as the rumours became news. It all really took off when Ellen dedicated an entire show to real-life, non-famous incestuous couples, and referred to Thor and Loki by name (though only after clearing it with Natasha). Her treatment of the subject was her usual sympathetic, humorous, non-judgemental approach, and one was left with the feeling that these things happened more often than people believed, and that it could be no big deal if they didn’t make it so. She was the first to use the i-word in the vicinity of their names in mainstream media.

Also, it was out. The pact of silence had been breached. Now incest was the new fucking black, and many other talk-shows tackled it, with differing approaches, from the most sensationalist to the more moderate and thoughtful. The society pages of a leading show-business magazine printed the now famous airport photos and ran a brief note, “Can it be true?” (This made Thor pull his hair by the way. “What the fuck else do we have to do?” he roared.) More in-depth articles soon appeared, summarising the events of the last few months - finally, Loki’s exquisite care in planning their first public date paid off: every known detail of that night was looked into for clues about the truth. And the conclusion was that it wasn’t even subtle.

In the tabloids, the hunting season started for real. They had become the hottest property in town, and new levels of paroxysm were reached. There had to be something about them every single day. One would have thought that there was enough material to go around from the last couple of years alone (god, but they had been busy!), but they soon had started to dig further back. The dossiers Natasha sent them became a sort of near-death experience: they could see their whole lives flashing before
their eyes. Even things they thought lost, things they didn’t even know existed. Someone had gone to some considerable lengths to find photos of Loki’s production of *Edward Scissorhands*! (Whoa, ok, fucking embarrassing, the stick-insect Siberian-gulag-chic looks he sported back then. And oh my god, Matt! Loki wondered what had happened to him. The second boy to kiss him, after Thor. So fucking strange, he hadn’t thought about him for ages.) And so many other rarities. Once you put aside the permanent terror that images from Iceland might start popping up, and fuck up the purged, editorialised version of the relationship they were going to try and sell (it never happened), and after the stomach-dive of the initial shock, it was actually kinda nice to see there was a record of those half-forgotten things. Yes siree, the researchers for those rags were earning their wages.

On many gossip and entertainment talk-shows, there were now permanent panels of self-appointed experts in *Thorkiology*, ready to pass comment on every single shred of material they threw at them. They went through all that stuff the researchers unearthed, from the remote past to the most immediate present, and elaborated their theories about what was going on, since when it had been going on, who was in on it, who was out, and why, and a long et cetera. They analysed the possible meaning of every sentence down to the last fucking comma, and every photo or video down to the smallest facial twitch. The body-language experts had a good year — they had never been in such high demand.

Because Thor and Loki were unavailable for comment, the press turned to the next best thing: known acquaintances, extended family, former relationships. Odin had absconded to a friend’s Swiss Alps hideaway weeks ago, to save himself precisely this kind of harassment. As for the rest, Natasha had of course prepared for that, contacted people in advance and offered advice about how to tackle the press, from informing them thoroughly about their rights, to a range of strategies to avoid them. Thankfully, everyone declared something in the region of, “I don’t know, I don’t care, I love them and wish them the best no matter what.”

For Thor and Loki, the time had come to inform those closest to them who still did not know. Odin said he would take care of the family and make sure they kept their peace until the official announcement. That left their friends.

Heimdall was intimidating to tackle, because the man was intimidating himself, but he had simply arched an eyebrow and said, with a smirk, “oh really, I never would have guessed.”

With Peggy, the problem was another. Thor was afraid that the long shadow of this whole thing would darken the chances of *Lancelot*, and Peggy’s directing career.

“I should never have taken the part,” he said. “Or at least, I should have told you what my personal situation was. I abused your trust.”

“Don’t be daft,” she told him. “We don’t know that this will affect *Lancelot* negatively. We already turned our backs on a large portion of the audience when we had Arthur and Lancelot kiss, didn’t we, and good riddance. But anyway, whatever happens with that movie, we’ll be alright, and my career will be all right, and besides, why the heck are you even thinking about that now? You are going to come out! You’ll get to live out in the open!” She gave them both that blinding smile of hers. “This is important! This is your life! Don’t let a bloody movie put the smallest damper on it. Certainly not on my account. I’m happy for the two of you.”

Loki invited Sam over to the Tower. He took him up to the roof garden. They ambled for some time, catching up on little things. Sam went along with it, but he kept darting looks. He knew Loki was up
to something. It took quite a long tour of the goddamn roof before Loki could bring himself up to it.

“Sam, I-… There’s something I need to tell you,” he said, shaky.

And he got stuck there for an uncomfortably long time. He wanted to do this in slow increments, instead of dropping it on Sam like a bucket of ice. He could not think of anything. He was afraid of every word that came to mind; he picked them up and discarded them slowly, as if he was handling explosives.

Sam threw him a line.

“Is it about Thor?”

Loki’s eyes widened, he gaped.

“Yeah, I thought so,” said Sam. He had a kind, serene air about him. “Is it true, then? The rumours? You and Thor are… you’re together?”

Loki gulped. He nodded. Which was not how he had wanted this to go, but there you go, it was done.

They ambled on in silence for another minute, but it was a strained silence, full of tension.

“Aren’t you shocked?” Loki asked at length, baffled. “Or sickened, or something? I mean, with the— the brothers thing.”

“Well, I’m not sure, babe,” said Sam. “You know how I think, live and let live. And you’ve always kinda done your own thing, haven’t you? Besides, I’ve had a few months to process this. With the rumours and all, things started to fall into place, what I had seen of the two of you together, what I knew about you. It explained a lot. About you. About us. This has been going on for a while, hasn’t it?”

Loki nodded. He felt weirdly bashful admitting this to Sam.

“A very long time,” he said, eyes low. “Pretty much f-forever. On and off.”

“Tell me one thing,” said Sam after a moment, eyes low, stance thoughtful, his voice soft, with an effort to make it non aggressive. “You left me for him? Was that the reason?”

Loki’s stomach dropped. He probably looked pale. Get yourself together, dammit.

“No— Not like that. I did not…” He tried to think of a nice-ish way to put it; they were all pretty awful, so he just picked one at random. “I did not jump from your bed to his. That’s not what happened. I didn’t even hope that— By then, I didn’t really believe there was a chance w—with him. But,” he gulped, wondering just how hurtful this would end up coming out, “when he, when he came back into my life, I realised I…” He could not. It was excruciating.

“You realised he was the one, not me,” said Sam.

God, fucking kill me already. He guessed he owed Sam a verbal answer, but he physically could not produce any with his throat choked down to a fucking knot. He exhaled, and he nodded. Again.

Sam nodded too, still thoughtful.

“Thanks for telling me.”
Loki contributed yet another entry to the nodding festival.

They walked in silence some more.

“You look happy,” said Sam. “Well, not right now, right now you look green, but, you know. Are you happy?”

Loki’s eyes fucking flooded. He was a bloody mess.

“Yes,” he pushed out.

Sam gave him that sexy, cheeky, dimpled smile that had caught Loki’s eye the very first day.

“Better be good to you. Better make you laugh a lot,” he admonished. “Tell him I said so.”

Loki smiled, and that made the tears fall down. He wiped his eyes and nose, and like one of those stupid car ornaments, he nodded again.

Compared to that, Steve seemed a piece of cake. Well, it wasn’t.

They were sitting in the couch of their suite, after dropping the news. He was frowning deeply, angrily, looking from Thor to Loki, and back to Thor.

“Since when?”

They offered a brief summary. The unedited story. Steve’s frown became deeper and deeper. For a few moments, he was quiet, and seething. He turned to Bucky.

“You knew about this?”

Bucky nodded. He looked resigned, his defenses lowered. If Steve got upset with him for withholding the truth, he would have it coming.

Steve did not lash out. With his breathing shortened to furious huffs, he stood up and left.

For two whole days, Thor was extremely quiet and withdrawn.

“I would have not pinned him down as the judgemental kind,” told Loki to Bucky on the phone.

“That’s not what this is about,” said Bucky. “He feels betrayed. He had not given the rumours any credit because he thought that, if there was something there, you would have told him. He’s upset that you’ve kept it from him for so long, that I knew and he didn’t. He’s hurt that you have not trusted him with this. Not that he’s actually said any of this out loud, of course, that's me guessing, but I'm quite sure that's what it is. He’s pretty devastated. But it’s about the secret, the fact that Thor kept something so massive from him for so long, not the-, you know.”

Loki was dumbstruck, poleaxed. This was fucking awful. They had fucked up so bad. Thor would be torn apart. Hell, he would start tearing himself apart over this. They had become really close during the shoot, Thor and Steve, in that manly, "we don't really talk that much but we're two peas in a pod and he's my bro" kind of way. It was fucking disaster. The hell were they going to do?

“Hey, it will be fine,” said Bucky to Loki’s stunned silence. “I’ll talk to him. When we’re on speaking terms again, I mean. I’ll make him see your side. He just needs some time.”
Loki wasn’t sure which he would have preferred, revulsion at the incest thing, or betrayal. He would have hated to have to cast out Steve out of their lives on petty sexual morality grounds, but didn’t the guilt over how they had handled this feel half shitty.

Steve did come around. He knocked on their door about a week later, looking as if he had had to physically climb to get out of his pit of fury, disappointment, and feeling of betrayal, and the climb had been grueling. He apologised for his initial reaction, said he was sorry that he had made it all about himself when it wasn’t, and offered his full support. His jaw was grit all through it.

Thor wanted to explain himself. Steve endured about two minutes worth of reasons and apologies, then he stood up.

“I really can’t do this right now, man, sorry,” he said. And he left.

Thor had tears of anger and frustration in his eyes by then. Anger at himself. Frustration that there was no turning back time to do this right. It was a matter of time now. Too bad Thor wasn't great at patience. It weighted on him, having to sit it out.

Then there was Jane. She too would need directions (Natasha called them “suggestions” or “guidance”) about what to tell the press. About the official version they were going with, that is, to avoid confusions, because she knew the uncensored story. Thor felt he had to be the one to do it, not Natasha or Clint or one of their minions, but he was terrified. They had not talked in years. He kept putting it back, and Natasha had to nudge him into it several times.

Loki saw him pick up the phone, and clearing his throat profusely while he waited for an answer. He realised what his brother was getting ready to do and left him to it.

“It’s done,” announced Thor afterwards. He looked a bit pale.

“Is she on board?”

“Yes. She’ll just say she doesn’t have a clue about anything.”

“Are you ok?”

He had a serene look on him, a lightness to the set of his shoulders, like a weight had been lifted and he was finally able to stand up straight. His eyes were bright and fond.

“Yeah. She’s fine. She recently got a long-term research tenure and she’s collaborating with NASA. She’s dating a guy that sounds great. She sounded… She sounded good. You know, happy. She congratulated us and wished us good luck.”

Well, damn. Not that they should have expected anything else - the girl had always had class.

His brother had a better taste in women than Loki had given him credit for in the past. Take Amora, for example. When she was approached by the press, she said, “Oh honey, if it’s true, could you blame them?” Loki even liked her a little bit after that.

A part of Loki, he must admit, simply luuuurved to not only stand in the eye of the hurricane but also
be the cause of it. All those people (friends, family) jumping through hoops and bending themselves backwards to help them out. Who knew so many people cared? Yes, a part of Loki wanted to just bask in it. Another part of him, probably planted there by Frigga (it was an undeniably British trait), was awfully sorry about the fuss.

And just how much bigger did the aforementioned fuss need to get? Natasha was still not satisfied. The story was still pretty much relegated to the entertainment and gossip sections of the serious media, and the open, reasonable discussion she was hoping for had yet to start.

But as the press circus mounted, some people who always have time for this kind of thing decided that whom a couple of British actors was fucking was indeed their business. Down in Texas, a merry gathering came together around a bonfire of assorted items (DVD’s of Thor’s old movies, a few copies of the book *Mariners*, photos of Loki in Frank’n’Furter costume…) and they waved signs with quotations from the Bible, while chanting slogans the essence of which could be summarised as “sinners burn in hell.” They recorded everything and uploaded it on youtube. Now, that was a proper fuss.

Loki had forgotten the unpleasant chill this kind of thing sends down your spine. Watching your face go down in flames while people spew hate about you, screaming they wished horrible things happened to you… You think your skin is tough, but this kind of shit still gets under it.

Thor was angry. How dared they. Loki reminding him that they knew this was coming didn’t help. Telling him that one day they would be snogging on the streets, rubbing it in their faces, and being the most disgustingly handsy celebrity couple ever, that worked a lot better. Reminding Thor of those people when they fucked worked really, really well. For Loki, that is. Imagine they can see us. Imagine they can hear us. Imagine they’re imagining we’re doing this right now. All the hours Thor was spending in Tony’s gym, burning off his irritation and sweating out the cabin fever, was paying off, and now. He was in Olympic form. Ow. So fucking worth it. As in, fucking against the wall? Lovely, lots of it, but totally amateur. They’d been doing this thing, where Thor reclined on his back, Loki on top of him facing up. Thor fucking grabbed him around the back of his knees, and lifted him bodily, and let him drop to slam him down onto his cock. All Loki had to do is enjoy the ride. Which he did, immensely, while simultaneously marveling at the sheer fucking power unleashed by that mighty titan that was his brother. Loki was far from a twink, and Thor could still push him this way and that like a feather pillow. He loved his brother’s spirit and his personality, his kindness, his intelligence, his sense of humour, his joy of living, sure, but, damn, those muscles. With no little shame, Loki thought Thor could be half the man he was inside, and Loki would still be a complete slut for that magnificent outside. He was only half joking when he said that, with guns like these, decency, intelligence, and personality could go take a hike. Provided the sense of humour remained, that is.

Anyway, the Texas ‘barbecue’ incident was only the first of many, and so it came to be that this Odinson Brothers affair finally hit the big time. *The New York Times* ran a cartoon, an editorial, and a piece about (gulp) incest. More articles appeared, tackling the issue from all fucking angles: historical, cultural, statistical, psychological, theological, biological. The *National Geographic* published a very long piece, pretty much covering all of those. So much to learn.

Meanwhile, on TV, what the experts seemed obsessed with defining was whether what Thor and Loki might be doing did or did not constitute ‘proper incest.’ Needless to say, those debates were not run along the lines of a scientific convention, so they pitted those who treated the thing from a cultural perspective against the legalists, or the theologians against, say, the psychologists, and nothing even remotely resembling a conclusion was ever reached. Hah, they should have asked
Thor. These discussions got on his nerves. According to him, yes, it fucking was incest, absolutely, incest of the most incestuous variety, Incest with a capital I. He did not want a get out of jail free card on this. He was an incestuous incester who incested, ok?, and proud.

“You’re a sick, kinky bugger, Odinson,” Loki purred, with a grin.

And he made a point of moaning “brother” a lot when he was riding him a few moments later.

Over last week, the evening prime time talk-shows started to have fun with it. Proper fun. They had mentioned it before, when it was a media craze, but now they had started to tackle The Issue in their opening monologues. The Right Wing had a field day blaming it all on the devastating effects of the Obama administration, legalising gay marriage, the consequent decline in family values, and those godless liberals. According to them, the Homosexual Agenda now also included legalising incest and making the youth of America start to fornicate with their blood relatives. Sodom and Gomorrah, cats and dogs laying together, mass hysteria, the Apocalypse has arrived, repent, repent. Meanwhile, the godless liberals all sent a similar vibe, bless their souls: “ok, it may be true, so what?”

This morning, they got a call. Romanoff.

“Ok, boys, it’s time.”

And she told them she was calling up a press conference for tomorrow. That they could either be present, or not.

“We’ll be there,” said Thor. “We’re done hiding.”

Loki didn’t say much. His throat was suddenly parched dry.

The announcement made the tabloids implode. They were running around like headless chickens, speculating. What would they be announcing? It had to be a confirmation! Couldn’t possibly be anything else! Everyone to battle stations! They were going to confirm!

Friends had been dropping by all day, and many had forgotten to leave. Clint was never far, and Tony and Pepper of course were always around, but soon Steve and Bucky too had arrived, then Peggy and Angie, Sif, Fandral, Hogun, even Sam, and Sigyn and Bruce were expected any moment now. Volstagg couldn’t make it, but he sent warm regards and strength.

They were there for support, but Natasha put them to work. Nat needed more eyes and ears to keep abreast of the surge of press activity. Some shows had even announced vigils to wait for the great moment, for god's sake. Hundreds of TV networks worldwide had requested access to the press conference, and asked to broadcast it live. It would be the biggest show of their careers.

MTV was running several vids, showing apparently every single fucking time they had ever so much as looked at each other with a camera present, with a selection of classic love songs for a soundtrack (from “With or Without You” - an inspired choice for their early years -, to “Nothing Compares 2 U” to illustrate takes of some pretty obvious looks they had exchanged through the years. Regina Spektor’s “Us” was a surprise. Loki decided he should learn to play it. Mumford & Sons “White blank page” had a fucked up feel to it that was just so right). That was kinda sweet. Loki may or may not have downloaded some of those vids for keepers, cheesy as they were.
Other TV broadcasters were not being as charitable. They really liked to run ultra-condensed short clips about their lives. And my, my, my, wasn’t Loki’s biography colourful. At that frantic, almost-30-years-in-under-2-minutes pace, with the emphasis always favouring the flashier bits, it seemed that he had spent his days dedicated to nothing but subverting society’s moral codes. Fox News was even using extremely pixelated frames of the fucking sex tapes, for which Natasha was studying whether or not to sue.

Meanwhile, in England, The Sun had managed to unearth posters that used to hang on the walls of The Dark World, and now they were everywhere. And that was how Loki finally became, officially, and pretty fucking literally, poster-boy for the depraved, the corrupt, and those who would surely end up roasting in the flames of hell.

“Nothing makes one so vain as being told that one is a sinner,” wrote another poster-boy for depravity in his day. Well, there was that. But it still got to him when they compared these kind of images to ones of Thor looking angelic and wholesome, next to this or that other girlfriend, next to Jane. The narrative was downright mean: While Loki was away from Thor’s life (presumed dead, or in mental hospital, or in a club selling his body), the older Odinson had been normal, successful, he had thrived. Then Loki returns, and Thor’s life starts going down the drain; first he comes out with the bisexual thing, and starts playing perverts in movies, and now this? What next? Well, they were delighted to show you “what next”, Babylon rising! They showed photos and clips from the queues lining up to see The Rocky Horror Show, all those people in outrageous costumes; they were only children for god’s sakes. Loki Laufeyson was the devil, his influence was poison and it corrupted everything it touched, and he had to be stopped.

Loki rarely wasted any time wondering whether he was corrupting anyone. He saw himself rather like a beacon to galvanise the misfits and make them feel safe in numbers, and proud. But you know? Those who said he had “turned” his brother had a point, albeit a very small one. He did manipulate Thor into giving him their very first kiss after all. And things had changed between them after that, ever so slightly. Had he been the one to set the ball in motion all those years ago? Would things had gone differently if his young gay self had not had his heart set on not receiving his first kiss from a random female stranger, but from the handsomest, most dashing boy he knew? (Oh, Laufeyson, honestly, who fucking cares at this point.)

Thor held his hand through the onslaught of the prophets of the apocalypse who had named him the Antichrist, and Loki made a point of shrugging and looking unaffected, so as not to trouble his brother. And he largely was unaffected. He knew this would happen. He didn’t like it, but he’d seen worse. However, when some (famous, respectable) voices in England threw their hands in the air and tore their tunics about what something like that would do the family’s reputation and to Frigga’s legacy, and how that stain would forever mar everything their parents had achieved, that was a bitter pill to stomach.

They were absolutely right, of course. Nobody would ever tell the story of the family again without remembering this. It couldn’t be helped. They couldn’t get their mother’s blessing, so their dad’s would have to do. And that, they had. It was too late to change their minds anyway; what they had done so far would already brand the Odinson name for the rest of their days, and beyond. The only way was forward. That was what Loki told himself at least. Didn’t dispel any of the blame, but helped getting on with things.

Thank the merciful heavens, it was not all doom and gloom. Several magazines had all coincided in filling a page with one or another glossy photo of the two of them during the Mariners press tour, looking gorgeous and dapper and über-glamorous, with the caption, “With a brother like this, who cares about a little taboo.” And ain’t that the truth, sister.
Last but not least, the Tumblr nation had taken to the streets and were slowly congregating in several meeting points in cities around the world, many in costume, others in Loki’s Army t-shirts, a sea of signs with shows of love and support, flooding the internet with their selfies and their joy. The BBC were at this very moment broadcasting from Trafalgar Square, where the poor reporter was being crowded by a bunch of euphoric fans who were trying to get the camera to show a “Thor and Loki Forever” banner, a stencil of a manip showing the two of them kissing, surrounded by hearts and arrows and all. There were at least two hundred people having a picnic on the stairs of the National Gallery, and more kept coming fast. They intended to spend the night there, the reporter said. The Mayor of London would have something to say about that, she added, but if the Metropolitan police should come to disperse them, no worries, dozens of pubs were announcing lock-ins for the fans of Thorki.

“God, I hate that fucking word,” Thor was grumbling.

“I think you’ll have to get used to it,” said Natasha. “It’s been trending on Twitter since the announcement.”

Loki had given up on the roof garden, but the wide terrace of Tony’s penthouse, a couple of floors down, was somewhat more protected from the elements. He found Bucky out there. He had had the same idea as he.

“Hey,” said Loki, as he leaned on the veranda next to him, and lit up a fag.

“Hey,” answered Bucky, also busy indulging his nicotine craving.

“Nice bling.”

Bucky pulled that smug cock-eyed grin of his, and touched the ring on his finger fondly, as if it was a pet, a living thing that could feel.

“Yeah, not bad, eh?” he said.

“May I?” asked Loki.

Bucky slipped it off and handed it over. Loki laughed slowly. Engraved on the inside of the platinum band, two names joined by a fucking heart.

“Oh my god,” said Loki.

“I know, right?” laughed Bucky. But he slipped it back on with reverence.

“When?”

“Sometime in Spring.”

“God. You are serious, aren’t you?” he grumbled.
Bucky grinned.

“Whatever Steve wants. It’s his party.”

Loki huffed in dismay.

“I swear, if you dare wearing matching white tuxes, I’m disowning you.”

Bucky laughed. “I’ll let him know.”

After a quiet moment of contemplation, with his eyes lost somewhere in the hazy Brooklyn skyline, Bucky said, “Can’t fucking believe it’s happening.”

“Who are you telling,” muttered Loki. “It wasn’t Romanoff, was it? She didn’t pressure you into it or anything. Right?”

“No,” laughed Bucky, “it wasn’t Nat. Steve’s been wanting to do this for a long time, and I had run out of arguments to get it out of his mind that don’t sound like I just don’t want to do this. I’m as scared about his career as I always was, but… I guess he’s not a child, right? I have to trust that he knows what he’s doing, I guess? All I can do is stick with him through thick and thin, and keep my fingers crossed for him. For both of us. And for you guys.”

“Yeah, we’ll need all the luck we can get.”

“Well, if timing our announcement a couple of days after yours will help, that’s what we’re going to do. That’s the only thing Nat did, suggest that we timed it.”

“We are thankful,” said Loki.

“So are we. We needed that push. Hell, it seems like all you ever do is push us. God knows where would we be today without your goddamn pushes, Steve and I. Definitely not engaged to be fucking married, that’s for sure.”

Loki gave him a nudge.

“Anytime.”

He went to lit another fag. His hands were not too steady. The hesitant, stuttering gesture, not like Loki’s usual sharp self, called Bucky’s attention.

“Hey, slow down,” he said.

Loki sighed, defeated, and put the cigarette and the lighter away. For a moment, they said nothing.

“What you’re going to do is pretty damn amazing, you know,” said Bucky softly.

“Pretty damn fucking terrifying.”

“If anyone can pull it off, it’s you. I mean, you and your brother. You guys are made of some special stuff, you know?”

“Almost as special a stuff as Steve?”

“Almost. And that’s saying something,” smiled Bucky. He elbowed him gently on the side. “You’ll be alright.”
Loki sighed again, came out a bit shuddery.

“From your lips to god’s ears,” he muttered.

“Hey, sorry to interrupt,” Thor poked his head out the door. “Sigyn’s here.”

“About bloody time!” grumbled Loki.

Five seconds later, he was squeezing the living daylights out of her.

“Where the fucking hell have you been!” he mumbled to her hair.

“Nice to see you too,” she said to his neck.

An early dinner of assorted take-aways was served on the cramped coffee table in their suite, with people crowding all the surfaces of the settee, including back and armrests, more people sitting on the rug, and others on chairs dragged in from other rooms. (Clint had even brought in his own comfy armchair in the lift. Thor helped.) About a dozen smartphones were scattered between the food containers, vibrating and whirring as messages kept coming in.

As for Loki, he was sitting on the rug next to Sigyn, between his brother’s feet. Every now and again, Loki would nudge his head against Thor’s knee, and Thor would give his shoulder a squeeze, or mess up his hair, but otherwise, they were being uncommonly restrained. Neither would admit they had been holding back, but they were. Sam was there, and Steve, and other people who had only just heard about this, and they were feeling… Inhibited, that must be it. The least brotherly thing Thor had been doing tonight was to leave his eyes wander, and delay considerably, on Loki’s collarbones and throat, exposed by the wide boatneck of his ballet sweatshirt. (He had made one when they arrived at Stark Tower, where he had a huge floor to practice the new moves T’Challa had been teaching him, and when he realised the effect those sweatshirts had on Thor, Loki quickly went and made himself a few more. Since they spent so much of their time lounging, as of late Loki was seldom seen without one. Even after a couple of weeks, the results in the Thor department were still spectacular.) Whenever Loki caught his brother staring, he had a shiver, he flushed with pride. He was putty in his hands, wasn’t he? Should he be embarrassed? He was fucking thrilled.

The conversation had already covered tomorrow’s program of events, Steve and Bucky’s announcement, the possible foreseeable outcomes of the whole thing, the planned extended secret world tour to let the air clear off afterwards. And after that? Ah, that was the question, wasn’t it?

“Loki is writing a new play. A cabaret. Aren’t you, Loki?” said Sigyn.

“Sort of,” he said. “Just me, maybe a little chorus of dancers, a small band, and a piano. It’s going to be kind of a frankenshow. I want to put together a bunch of songs and dancing acts I’ve admired forever. Bob Fosse, I’m crazy about him, and I’ve never done anything of his. I’ll choose songs that I like, from musicals, pop, whatever. And I’m thinking some prose too, Wilde, Yourcenar, things that mean something to me. Even putting some poems to music perhaps. I have a huge list, so I think the show will change every night. I’d like to perform in small venues, with lots of interaction with the audience. If there is any after all of this. Oh, don’t pull that face, I’m only joking,” he told his suddenly solemn audience. “It’s going to be the most self-indulgent thing in the world. After all, whoever does turn up will be a die-hard anyway, so I’ll be able to do whatever I want.”

“Sounds really good,” said Peggy. “Can’t wait to see it!”
“And what about you, Thor?” asked Steve. He had been trying to mend bridges all night.

Thor took a swig from his bottle, delaying his answer. Loki slipped one hand under the hem of his brother’s jeans and began to run small circles on his ankle. Not sure if he did it to reassure Thor, or himself.

“Well, this morning there was a pile of scripts this high on the table,” said Thor. “If there are any still left by tomorrow night, I’ll have a look, and I’ll let you know.”

A tense silence ensued. And his brother had spared them the knowledge that the pile had already started to dwindle considerably over the past few weeks.

“It’s ok,” said his brother. “When we decided to do this, to come out, I realised I should not be committing to anything for the time being, until after the deed was done. It didn’t seem fair, but it was for my sake as much as anyone else’s. I don’t feel like waking up the day after next swimming in lawsuits for breach of contract on morality grounds or some such shit. I don’t want any of that on my mind. I want to be celebrating.”

Commiserating smiles all around, expressions of quiet support, bit lacklustre. From the corner of an eye, Loki saw Thor have another swig of his beer, and a rather deep one at that. He gave his brother a squeeze around the ankle. The little smile on Thor’s face made his stomach slump. Loki was suddenly hit by an overwhelming craving to have a fag. Or three.

He was only just lighting the second when the door slid open and Tony’s head popped up.

“Am I disturbing you?”

He approached without waiting for Loki’s reply. When he shut the door behind him, it was the sudden absence of noise that made Loki realise conversation indoors had resumed.

Tony joined him by the veranda. They both took in the sights of Manhattan by night for a minute.

“You do know that at least four of those scripts will still be on his table this time tomorrow, don’t you?” said Tony. “It’s really good stuff too, juicy and interesting, but too indie, too small, too sexy for any of the mainstream names to risk it. But Thor…”

“He’ll have nothing to lose anymore,” completed Loki.

“Sometimes that’s not all bad.”

“Well, I appreciate it, Stark, but I’m afraid my brother’s too proud to accept anyone’s charity,” said Loki softly. “If that’s how he sees your offers, the big bullheaded arse is capable of turning them down on principle. He’s stupid enough to do that.” Loki sighed miserably. He was already seeing it happen.

“Charity? Far from it. To begin with, not only I will not be able to afford his salary, but he’ll have to put in his own dough as well to make it happen, because the big guys will not want to fund this, and I’m rich, but I’m not that rich. Second, do tell him I’ll be cunningly and selfishly taking advantage of his desperate situation to push my own agenda. That I’m using him as an excuse to do things I’ve been wanting to make for years, and never quite got round to. That should do it.”

Loki tried for a smile, but it wasn’t one of his brightest.

“Hey, what is it,” nudged Tony.

“It’s just…” Loki rubbed his eyes. He had a sour, deeply unsettling sensation in his stomach, worse than nerves. He was so scared right now, he was even afraid that vocalising his fears would make them materialise. The deluge of shit, brimstone, and fire that would be raining on their heads this time tomorrow, on their family, on their mum and dad. Will it be worth it? Will they make it through? He sighed instead of letting any of that out. “I just hope he can take it.”

“He will,” said Tony. “He’s strong, and stubborn, and he knows what he wants, and when that man gets an idea in his head, he’s unstoppable. He’s stronger than you think. You’ll see. And so are you. You’re doing what you need to do for your own sake, and there’s a lot of strength in that.”

Loki nodded. For the last few hours, the roller-coaster sensation had become more and more a constant fall. He felt like he was slipping ever downwards, nothing to hold on to, nothing to break his fall. It had not happened yet, but there was no stopping this now, no turning back. It was terrifying.

“So, will you think about Salome?” asked Tony, intent on getting him out of his troubled mind. “Please, tell me you will. At least consider it.”

“I said I will. But…”

“No buts.”

“But I’m too old for it I fear. And not that good a dancer.”

“You’re an infant, and you’re an awesome dancer. You’d be breathtaking surrounded in flowing veils, pure incarnate sin dancing to seduce a man who’s decided to devote himself to chastity. Kissing those cold, dead lips after you’ve had him beheaded for turning you down, repaying the depraved tyrant who’s done the deed for you with a dance. Still in love and in lust for the man you’ve murdered. Hell, Loki, I’m seeing it so clearly, I may have to direct it myself.”

Loki had half a smile on now.

“Careful, Mister Stark.”

“You said you were of age in England,” teased Tony.

It made Loki smile frankly now, and maybe blush a little. Tony’s eyes were dreamy as he looked back.

“I remember you back then,” he said, “your big eyes and long legs, a crazy combination of old soul, world-weary cynic, and a shaky, flinching, dazzling beginner, with your whole life ahead. The sexiest person I had ever seen. I was nuts about you.”

Loki took in those words with a thoughtful silence, and a grin.

“I thought it was the whoring you were interested in. That you had heard about it, and you were either curious, or expecting to get all the kinky shit for free, or both.”

“Jesus, don’t say that. You’re breaking my heart.” And he looked it.

Loki grinned, gaze unfocused, lost in the memories.
“Then you actually took me out on a date and you treated me… Well, not like you were only interested in me for my, uh, professional skills.”

“I wanted to put the whole world at your feet,” said Tony, eyes bright.

“And you did. You have.”

Their eyes connected, and there was a moment. Tony broke it up.

“Ok, there is no way on earth to say this without sounding condescending, but. Loki, I’m proud of you. How far you’ve come. How far you’ve still got to go. I can’t wait to see it.”

Loki’s throat tightened a little.

“It’s so fucking scary right now, the future,” he said. “It’s a black mass of terror coming towards us. There’s no fucking telling how it will end.”

“You’ll be alright. Both of you. You’ll see.”

Loki smiled and nodded.

“Thank you,” he said after a moment. “For everything. And then some.”

“Ok,” said Tony.

Loki leaned closer, and kissed his lips, a soft peck. This mouth had been so familiar once. He was glad of touching it one more time. It had always comforted him.

“Zowie…!” sighed Tony.

The atmosphere in the living room when they rejoined the party was gloomy. They were zapping from one TV station to another, and apparently the dominating subject this evening seemed to be ‘Showbiz Scandals and The Movie Stars That Were Ruined By Them.’ And the captions accompanying picture after picture of Thor looking serious and concerned? Ah, so witty, so fucking cruel. ‘Falling Star’, ‘The Fall of the Gods’, ‘The Harder They Fall.’

“Jesus fucking Christ,” grumbled Loki. He swished in and turned off that shit. “Enough. Tony, do you have a Wii console? Anyone fancy some fucking virtual boxing? I feel like punching the fucking air tonight.” (It was so full of doom and gloom, and it seemed intent on crushing them all. It was asking for it.)

“I have the most advanced gaming devices in existence and in development in this building, and you ask for a goddamn Nintendo Wii?” said Tony, dismayed. Loki gave him an eyebrow. “Yeah, fine, I’ll make a call.”

“Oh, make sure they bring Mario Kart,” said Loki. And instead of the rug, this time he took his rightful place on the throne — his brother’s lap.

There was over a dozen people in the suite with them, and only four controls, so everyone had to take turns and squeeze into overcrowded seating areas. It was cozy, and it invited mischief, but for some time they both behaved.
Ah, but the Odinson Brothers were competitive. With other people they were vicious, but only in the game. With each other, nothing was out of bounds: kicking, elbowing, pinching, tickling. Even when the one wasn’t playing, he wouldn’t leave his brother alone.

Their friends suffered patiently through it. The atmosphere was lighter after all, everyone was laughing and having fun. They talked around them as if they couldn’t hear them, knowing that they were not able to spare a second to reply; they were too intent on winning, or beating each other at least.

“God, what a pain in the arse,” grumbled Sif, the umpteenth time the game was being delayed by Thor holding the remote up and away from Loki’s reach, just because he could, the arsehole.

“God fucking dammit, Thor!” grumbled Loki a moment later, as he twisted and shifted in his brother’s lap, elbowing his gut viciously, to get Thor to stop tickling him — neck, sides, under his sweatshirt.

“They’re like a couple of five-year-olds,” noted Peggy.

“Oh, you haven’t seen the worst of it,” laughed Sigyn.

“Dear me, it gets worse?”

“Oh yes,” said Fandral. “I prefer this to the lovebirds routine. Then, on top of everything else, they get disgustingly handsy and cute, with hearts in their eyes, and little cupids around their heads. It’s frankly repulsive. Not that I’m jealous.”

Bucky and Steve, who were also piled on top of each other on the armchair, and had been mumbling sweet nothings into each other’s ear for a few minutes, pulled back with a blush of shame, as if they had been chastised.

As for Thor and Loki, they had both been trying to be, uh, personable in that department, but after having Loki’s arse on his lap for the last hour (and a secret semi that said arse contributed to nurture and conceal at the same time), Thor probably did not need Fandral putting any ideas in his head. In any case, Loki was one up on Thor, and Thor didn’t seem to be able to catch up on him (maybe because he had half his view constantly blocked at crucial moments by a certain black mane of hair). In any case, he clearly thought he needed to, uh, up his game.

It began, auspiciously, on Rainbow Road. When Loki was in first place, Thor leaned closer, and nuzzled into his ear. When that only caused Loki to squirm, but wasn’t enough to make him derail, Thor put his mouth on his brother’s neck, and got nipping and sucking. Loki squealed, missed a turn by several fucking miles, and came last. He turned his head around, to find Thor smirking, all smug.

“You bastard,” he said, gasping in shock at his brother’s wily ways. “Fine, you asked for it. It’s war.”

When it was his turn next, Thor endured very serenely, but looking rather flushed and glassy eyed, trying to keep his focus on the game, as Loki shifted and rolled strategically between his thighs. Poor Thor wanted to seem unaffected, but when the race ended he came in third from last.

Neither of them was even playing next, so they sat pretty on top of each other and watched the game. But Thor had clearly something else on his mind now, because Loki could feel him getting harder, and if you waved a stick at Loki, he was going to want to play with it. He kept squirming and rolling, and watching with sadistic enjoyment as his brother’s face got ruddier and ruddier, his pupils wider, and his scowl deeper. Loki may or may not have detected the looks their friends exchanged
between them. He may have even noticed a couple of them getting up and clearing up some of the take-away containers, and picking up their jackets. He really wasn’t bothered at all. Loki was a man on a mission here. His brother had started to pant slightly.

They had to call him three times before he heard it, when it was his turn again. With herculean efforts of self-restraint, he managed not to whimper, and finish the race, even with Thor’s hands on his hips, pressing him back against his crotch. And when it was Thor’s turn again, Loki leaned back, close to his ear, and as he pressed himself just so, he started to moan breathlessly, not giving a fuck who would hear. Thor blushed in Technicolor, ditched that race, and dropped the control.

“Now you’re going to get it.” He trapped Loki’s neck under his arm for a vicious noogie.

“Stop it! Get off me!” Loki was twisting and squirming to no avail.

“Or what!” said Thor, throwing Loki on his back to tickle him to death. He didn’t even realise that the couch was deserted.

“I’m going to fucking…” But he could not complete the thought, he was snarling and laughing too much.

“Ask for mercy!”

“Never!”

Loki was on his back on the couch, with his brother flush on top of him, hard and panting, when they both stopped and looked around, and realised they were alone in the suite. Thor laughed darkly.

“When did they leave?”

“No idea.”

Thor looked down at him. His heart was beating fast, Loki could feel it. Was he thinking what Loki was thinking? Loki trapped him between his knees.

“Does it matter?”

He pulled his brother down for a long, messy kiss. He wrapped around him with arms and legs. Thor made a hungered humming noise, working his mouth. Loki bucked up his hips, and Thor ground down on him.

“Fuck,” he gasped.

He grabbed the collar of Loki’s sweatshirt and dragged it even lower, uncovering his collarbones and one shoulder, and he dived in, his mouth hot and hungry, kissing and sucking and nipping, demanding on his skin. Loki threw his head back in offering, and kept pressing against him, a deep hard pulse of heat down below. Thor was humping him with determination now, his breathing huffy. Loki’s hands roamed around, clutching tight his brother’s jean-clad, cast-iron buttocks, spurring it on, and then running under that soft, tight red t-shirt, nails tracing parallel pink tracks down his back, making Thor groan. It was all too fucking perfect. Except that, no matter how much Loki rubbed and pressed, and tried and tried and fucking tried, this thing was not building up.

“Shit, I’m going to get a fucking rash,” he chuckled, giving up. “Apparently, I’m too old to come just from necking and dry humping.”

Thor laughed again. Such a low, grumbly sound, it gave Loki shivers.
“It’s not the age, dear, it’s the mileage,” teased his brother. And in a rumble, into Loki’s ear, “You’re too well fucked these days.”

“Hm, am I now,” purred Loki. “You know what I’m old enough for? Remember when I was fourteen, and I was too squeamish to suck you off?”

Thor smirked, instantly catching his drift, and eager to oblige. He sat back to leave Loki room to maneuver, with his knees wide apart, crotch of his jeans bulging. Loki slipped to his knees in front of him. Thor cupped his chin, thumb across his brother’s lips.

“God, how I wanted this mouth on me,” he whispered, panting slightly. “You don’t know how many times I jerked off imagining how you would feel. That clever tongue of yours. Your face when you tasted me for the first time.”

Ah, Thor’s face, goddammit, eyes wanton and hazy, feverish with lust for him. Loki was fucking throbbing, the crotch ridge of his jeans cutting circulation where he needed it the most. He stood up to take off his clothes. Thor watched him, while stroking the inside of his own thighs, palming his erection, licking his lips, dry from breathing fast. When Loki went to take off his sweatshirt, Thor said,

“Leave that on.”

Loki grinned.

“Your shirt,” he said in turn.

His brother indulged him. Loki’s eyes trailed down his neck, over that smooth, fucking perfect chest and stomach, to that wisp of hair under his navel. He wondered if he’d one day start taking that bloody divine body for granted. Well, maybe one day he might, but today was not that day. He sunk to his knees again, so that he could feast on it, and touch and kiss every square inch of it, while big, strong hands stroked and guided his head, fingers threading through his hair. Thor’s breathing deep and slow now, relaxing into it, tensing again with anticipation when Loki began a decidedly downwards path. Kissing and licking, Loki revealed button by button every inch of flesh. Thor had to push his butt up to help him drag the tight jeans down. His cock towered beautifully now before Loki’s eyes.

“I remember warning you,” said Loki, “‘you can do it to me but I won’t do it to you’. You went into a right huff.”

“But in the end I did it anyway. I was too curious. It took you about three seconds to come.”

“You were gagging, complaining that I should have warned you. I couldn’t fucking think, let alone talk… It was mind-blowing.”

“I’m happy you came in my mouth now,” sighed Thor, stroking his hair.

“I wish it had been me to give you your first blowjob,” said Loki wistfully, stroking his hands where he pleased. “I wish I had been the first person you fucked.”

Thor cupped his jaw again, brushed his fingers through his hair.

“I’m glad I was your first,” he muttered. “But my priorities have changed. I just hope I am your last.”

“Tempting fate again, Odinson, tut-tut,” chastened Loki. “I’m not as ambitious. I just want to be your best.”
A shadow of something sad flicked across his brother’s face. Thor didn’t let it linger. He arched an eyebrow, grinning.

“Well, get to it, then.”

He slipped his thumb past his brother’s lips. Loki sucked and worked his tongue. Thor guided his mouth lower. Loki stuck his tongue out, and licked from base to tip, eyes locked on Thor’s, which fluttered and drooped.

He set out to work, and although he had wanted to excel himself, soon he was just doing what his own desire dictated, technique be damned. His brother was rewarding him with moans and sighs, praises and curses, bucking up towards him, begging for more, and whenever Loki took a breather, before he plunged in again, Thor would watch with wide, anticipating eyes, which would droop the moment his brother's mouth touched him again, and Loki's own body shuddered with it, what he was doing to him. Thor looked so fucking beautiful, spread open, boneless, undone, utterly abandoned to Loki's every whim and his will.

By then, Loki had forgotten about the competition, and all he wanted was to make love to his brother’s cock until his jaw went slack. But long before that happened, with Thor shuddering, holding back his breath, Loki’s throat working around the head of his cock, he gently shoved him off, fingers raking deep in Loki’s hair, and opened his eyes drowsily.

“I want to come inside you,” he whispered.

Almost folded in half on the couch, ankles around his brother’s neck, Loki was taking an epic pounding.

“When mum and dad… got rid of… the old couch in my room…” Thor was panting, as he fucked him, “…I fucking cried. Couldn’t… explain why of course… But maybe they… figured it out anyway…”

Loki had a thought and chuckled, air crushed out of him by tireless, vigorous thrusts.

“I hope… they didn’t look too close… That thing had more… stains on it… than the sheets of a… Las Vegas motel…”

Thor chuckled breathlessly, and managed to take it up another gear. The thump thump thump of their bodies, so fucking wet and urgent and desperate. Loki bit his lip, his moans ragged, huffy.

“Baby…” sobbed Thor, going at it for dear life now.

“Fuck... Fuck, brother…”

About to burst into flames, Loki began to jack off. He timed it just right, because just then Thor’s rhythm began to falter, his thrusts slower, deeper, harder. Soon, with his brother buried deep inside him, Loki went off all over his ballet sweatshirt, moaning like a cat in heat, daring Thor to keep his eyes open and watch.

Sprawled on the couch, fucked out, Loki thought he would miss the views from this suite when they
left tomorrow. Signs of their inhabitation littered the place. His brother still piled clothes layer upon layer on any available surface, not bothering to fold them and put them away, or in the bloody laundry basket, until there was an actual goddamn certifiable mountain of them. Blame it on the post-coital glow, but what had been getting on Loki’s tits since they were kids and still shared a room, now only made him smile and shake his head fondly.

It had been a good few days, cooped up and all. Living quietly side by side, and not struggling not to tear each other apart. Quite the opposite. There had been many peaceful hours, piled over each other on the couch, reading from their tablets, or watching movies, planning their journey. As comfortable with each other as an old married couple, as hot for each other as a pair of newlyweds. *Teenage* newlyweds.

And for all of Loki’s anxiety about the future, Thor shone with such dazzling optimism and hope, it chased the clouds away. Fucking hell, look at him, if you even could without burning your retinas. He seemed ready to take on the whole world and conquer it. His brother could see the finish line now. He could almost taste it. He radiated something good, self-assured, unassailable to doubt or fear. And so, Loki thought that, yes, it may yet fuck up everything for them, but it was clearly the right thing to do, no matter what the risks. It wasn’t so much that he believed that everything would be ok. It was more believing that, whatever happened, they could take it.

He did not believe in fate, or predestination, or anything beyond accident, causality, and chance, but when he looked back on all the events that had brought them to this day, he believed that without them, they would not be where they were tonight. Every experience and every moment had led them here, to be wise enough to know what they wanted, and realise what they had; to be willing and ready to fight for it, and know how to do it too. And do it with confidence, full of faith; in each other, in themselves, in the two of them as one, faith that they could overcome. And so, he could lay there today and tell himself, I don’t regret a thing, and fucking mean it. It was a good place to be.

Thor returned from the bathroom with a glass of water and a wet towel. He sat next to him on the couch while Loki tidied himself up, watching him with an enigmatic smile.

“What’s with the Gioconda look?” said Loki, after a drink.

“I’ve been thinking…” started his brother.

“…Yeah?” urged Loki, when Thor didn’t finish the thought.

“I’ve been thinking that, if we do this, we’ll be as good as married, right? We can’t really break up in six months - we’d never live this down. Have you thought about that?”

Ok, that was… What?

“Not like that, no.”

“What do you think?”

Loki frowned. What the fuck was his brother on about?

“I guess,” he said, hesitantly.

Thor sat back and got comfortable, patted his thigh for Loki to rest his head on. Once he had him there, he petted his hair in long strokes. It was disturbingly nice.
"Remember that time we became blood brothers?" asked Thor.

"Uh-huh," said Loki, his lids heavy, pleasant shivers from Thor’s touch running from his scalp all the way to his toes. "Mum went ballistic. She threatened to send us both to counselling, because self-harming or some shit. It was just a little finger cut…" He chuckled. His eyes were completely closed now. "I remember thinking that one day you would get married and have children, and I would stop being as important to you. I must have been ten or something when I started thinking that. That you would always matter more to me than I mattered to you. And I began to say goodbye, to try to prepare myself for the day I would lose you. I wasn’t going to wait for you to leave me. I was going to leave first. It feels a bit like I spent the first twenty years of my life saying goodbye to you.” Loki had tried to maintain a neutral face, keep his words from getting too heavy, but a frown had set in his brow and wouldn’t ease. Thor’s hand, which was still petting his hair, moved to smooth over it.

“You wanted to grow up and see the world and… fuck other people, I presume. I sometimes fantasised about following you like a shadow everywhere you went. Not asking for anything, just being there. You wouldn’t have pushed me away, would you? You would have tried. You would have wanted to have it all. Then I realised that it could not be. That this is not what I wanted. I would soon resent you for the crumbs I once told myself I could live with. There was no way around it, no way to stop it. One day I would have to give you up, and we would have to live apart, and that was it. It was hard. I wouldn’t have believed in a million years... Well. This.”

"Growing up, seeing the world, meeting other people… it’s sort of what was expected from me,” said Thor thoughtfully. “I didn’t question it. It was the way things had to be. We would have to part ways and have our own lives. We were brothers. There was no alternative. I never even thought I could challenge that. But then I did grow up, and I went out to the world, and saw a bit of it, and I did meet other people, and… It wasn’t as good as advertised. I mean, it was ok, I guess, but… you were gone, and you didn’t want me, and the world wasn’t…” Thor’s voice had faltered. Loki looked up, found his brother staring at him, his gaze intense, fire behind it. “It’s just, nothing could hold a fucking candle to you. Nothing can. Everything is kind of ordinary and banal with other people. Everything is like… Sunday afternoons, I don’t know. Nice, not horrible, just… Not really much to live for. So I have tried to live the life I was supposed to, but it was just not good enough. I would always end up choosing you. Over and over. I would choose you every time. I have. I do.”

Loki had listened to his brother’s words without fucking breathing. He liked to do that, the bugger, leave him floored and flat on the ground, speechless, numb, crushed under a fucking wall of love. It felt like he had to say something, but hell, what does one add to something like that.

“What he said,” he mumbled.

Thor poked his side in retaliation. Loki squeezed his hand, to let him know that he had heard him. Thor squeezed back.

“You’re my brother, and that’s as forever a thing as it gets, and I know we can’t do it legally,” said Thor, his voice lower now, shy almost, “but we can do it, uh, symbolically. I mean, if you’d like to. I would like to.”

“Do what.”

Thor gave him a nudge, Loki lifted his head to let him up. Propped up on his elbows, Loki followed his brother’s movements with an arched eyebrow. Thor walked to the bedside table, and walked back with something in his hand. When he got closer, Loki saw it was a small velvet pouch. He sat up, intrigued. Thor upturned the pouch, and a dainty ring fell on his palm. He held it up. Even in the uncertain light of nighttime Manhattan, Loki recognised it at once. He stared at his brother, puzzled.

“It’s mum’s ring. Her grandmother’s ring,” said Loki, stating the obvious.
Thor was still holding it up.

“It’s for you,” he said.

Loki’s eyes went wider, his frown deepened.

“What do you mean, it’s for me.”

Thor sighed, smiling.

“I mean, it’s—it’s for you. You know.” He was blushing now, heavily.

Loki stared blankly.

“Does-does dad know?” All he could think of saying.

“Who do you think had the bloody ring to begin with? When I told him I was going to do this, he told me I should—… That mum would like it if it was her ring.”

Loki was gaping, dumbstruck, and astonished on so many fucking levels; he didn’t know which shock to begin losing his shit over first.

“You told him you’d...? And he...? What… what the hell, Thor?”

“Lord have mercy. Who’s the bloody oaf now?” grumbled his brother. And speaking as if to a very slow little boy, “Will you symbolically marry me or not, Loki?”

Loki looked at the ring in his brother’s hand. If you had asked him at any other time in his life what he thought about marriage, he would have said this forever thing was bollocks, and that a ring wasn’t going to change that. He would have said it made sense only as a practical thing, because you save on tax, or it gets you a pension. The idea of a symbolic gesture of union would have made him retch.

But then again, Thor had never fucking asked him to symbolically marry him before.

Loki wasn’t good at these things, he knew he wasn’t. He felt he was always overreacting in minor situations, and underreacting when it was important. He wished he could get it right this one bloody time.

The tears that rose to his eyes hopefully helped to convey the general impression that he was taking this to heart. He extended his hand.

“Yes, brother, I-I will,” he said.

Because less is more and all that.

Thor smiled quietly, all the light back in his face. He grabbed Loki’s hand, and stared meaningfully into his brother’s eyes as he slipped the ring on his finger. Only it stuck half-way, and would not go any further.

“Ow, ow, ow!” said Loki. “What are you trying to do, shave shards of bone from my knuckle or something? It doesn’t fucking fit, ok? Why the hell didn’t you take it to re-size?”

“How the hell was I going to do that? I wanted it to be a surprise,” sulked Thor.

“You borrow one that fits for comparison, dumbass!”
Thor had a moment of epiphany. Too late now. His face was a very sad poem. His grand gesture, spoilt and ruined.

“Give it here,” grumbled Loki, and put the ring on his pinkie. It fit. He showed his brother.

“Looks… silly,” said Thor.

Loki raised his hand to cuff him. Thor snatched it, laughing. He kissed the palm, kissed his wrist, kissed the ring. Loki found himself staring at the dainty solitaire, blue diamond on gold setting, that was Frigga’s through and through, and now his and Thor’s. Slight and delicate as it was, right now it was so loaded with meaning, it felt as heavy as the heart of a neutron star. He stared into his brother’s eyes, and yes, fuck, he was affected. There, moment restored. Ta-da. Thor leaned in, eyes closed, foreheads touching. They kissed.

They cuddled up on the couch, Loki nestled in the curve of his brother’s body. They were both too nervous about tomorrow to sleep, so they settled down for a long night.

“What do I give you?” asked Loki after a while. “I’m not going to ask dad for his ring. We’ll all end up sectioned in a fucking mental clinic, especially dad.”

Thor chuckled behind his back.

“How about matching tattoos?” he said.

“You’re joking.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Depends.”

“On what.”

“On whether you say yes.”

Loki thought about it.

“Like what.”

“Thor and Loki forever, a heart and an arrow,” said Thor.

“Absolutely fucking not.”

“Ok, ok…” laughed Thor. “Our names in runic alphabet, then.”

Loki thought about it again, still unconvinced.

“Where?”

Thor reached around his brother’s body, and traced a heart on his chest.

Loki rolled his eyes.

“We’ll discuss this again when you’re willing to be serious.”

Thor chuckled behind his back, nuzzled into his neck, making Loki shiver. Loki rolled over to face his brother, threw his leg over Thor’s, burrowed his face in the crook of his neck. His brother
squeezed him between his arms, and Loki snuggled up with a deep breath.

“Forever and Brother,” he muttered, after a while.

“What?”

“What we should have in our goddamn matching tattoos, in runic alphabet, or elvish, or whatever, decorated with entwined snakes or Viking patterns or something.”

He almost felt Thor’s smiling silently, as he hugged him tighter.

Loki’s whole world right now was peace and warmth. He might just manage to sleep tonight after all.

Loki checks his watch. It’s 10:54. Still? Yeah, idiot, it’s been all of ten seconds since you last looked. He shakes his hands. He’s trying not to jump. He rolls the ring on his pinkie instead. Again, and again, and again. Like, he’ll dig a fucking groove in his goddamn flesh. How did he fucking function before he had it? Oh, right, instead of three fags in the last ten minutes, he would have had six. And bitten his nails down to the bloody roots. Yay for symbolic engagement rings then.

They’re in the antechamber (so to speak) of the press room of Stark tower. The backstage, basically, waiting for their cue. Sigyn is there, never far. She had been physically surrounding him with her arms up until a few moments ago, when Natasha stepped out, and Loki’s tension escalated several orders of magnitude; she knows that maintaining the embrace would have made Loki feel suffocated, and probably caused him to snarl, so she’s stepped back, left Loki some breathing room, and went to join Bruce, Sif, Fandral, Hogun, Clint, Tony and Pepper, who are standing a bit further back. They talk in hushed tones and send warm smiles their way whenever he catches their eye. It feels a little bit like the waiting room of a hospital, about to be taken away for a life-or-death operation or something. Steve and Bucky are waiting upstairs, and Peggy and Angie as well - they’re too well known, Natasha wants to keep focus on Thor and Loki right now, no distractions. There are other people too, some familiar faces from Tony’s staff, some Loki can’t remember having seen before. But Loki feels that his brother and him occupy their own bubble, or a fishbowl rather, like two specimens on display. Everyone keeps staring at them.

Out there, it’s jam packed and noisy, everybody talking on their phones, photographers vying to get better spots, security people physically separating the rowdier individuals. They look like a mob ready to swallow them up.

“Oh, baby?” asks his brother.

“Yeah. No. Yeah. I’ll… Yeah. I just want it to be over already.”
His brother smiles warmly, so much love in his eyes.

“It’ll be alright.”

He’s so fucking calm. Is he on something? Loki guesses he’s just… He’s ready. He’s been waiting for this moment for months, and now it’s arrived, and he’s where he needs to be. Loki could fucking strangle him, but there are too many witnesses. And he is fucking shaking.

“We still have time, you know?” he says, his words quick and edgy, full of spikes. “We can just tell Natasha to announce Steve and Bucky’s wedding, and get the fuck out of here.”

“Are you crazy? After all the buzz we’ve created?” says his brother, looking puzzled.

“It’s not final until we get out there.”

“Forget it. You can’t be serious. You’re not serious, are you?”

Is he? He’s just so fucking terrified he can’t think. He looks anxiously to the press room. Natasha has stepped out there and is addressing the reporters with her usual sternness (she will read a declaration, and Mr. Laufeyson and Mr. Odinson will stand by it with their presence, but they will not be taking any questions at this time).

Loki’s heart is hammering so hard, he thinks he can fucking hear it.

“Last chance,” says Loki.

Thor stares at him, calm and serene again, exuding confidence and a kind of regal poise that makes him shine. He has a quick look around them, where their friends and a bunch of strangers are trying not to stare too intently. With a smile, and staring straight into Loki’s eyes, Thor cups his brother’s face with his big, warm hands, and kisses him full on the mouth. Loki’s eyes flutter shut. He hears the muffled gasps around them, cameras clicking, murmurs rising from the press room, where people in the first row must be able to see them.

When Loki opens his eyes, his brother is there, smiling.

“Too late,” says Thor.

Loki exhales. He had been holding his breath for some time without realising.

“You crazy, sappy oaf,” he grumbles.

“I love you too,” says Thor. “That’s our entrance. Shall we?”

Ok, one last deep breath, eyes front, don’t let the minor upheaval you have already unleashed distract you from the much bigger one you’re heading for.

Thor holds his hand. Trying to ignore everything and everyone around them, they step out there.

Pandemonium. A lightning storm of flashes, their names in shouts called from a hundred different directions. Loki focuses on the feel of Thor’s hand, the ghost of his kiss still on his lips.

They take their seats. Loki shakes his hair, and slips on his mask. Leans back, crosses his legs, tilts down his head, predatory, begins to stare people down.

Well, then. Showtime.
“Nothing makes one so vain as being told that one is a sinner.” The other poster-boy for depravity is Oscar Wilde, may he rest in glory.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

It's been three years since The Big Reveal. As per Natasha's plan, it's time for an
interview, to catch up with the boys, set the record straight on a couple of issues, and
find out how is it to live in the open as arguably the most infamous couple in the world.

And here it is.

Chapter Notes

No, I had not forgotten about these two. I hope you haven't either.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Interviewer: We are in the beautiful music room in Asgard Hall with Thor Odinson and Loki
Laufeyson, adoptive brothers, whose coming out as a romantic couple three years ago stunned
the world. This is the first time since that momentous announcement that they have agreed to
speak candidly about their private lives and their relationship. (She turns from the camera to the
boys) Thor, Loki, thank you for having me. It’s an honour and a privilege.

Loki Laufeyson: (charmingly) Thank you. Great to have you here.

I: You’re not just saying that, are you?

(Loki laughs, doesn’t answer)

I: It’s going to be three years soon since your coming out as a couple. First of all,
congratulations.

Thor Odinson: Thank you very much.

I: You seem very happy.

T.O.: We are.

I: Well, what a momentous three years it has been!

L.L.: I’ll say.

I: You have proven those who augured the end of your careers wrong. That must feel good!

T.O.: We’ve avoided sinking into a pit of infamy, and we’ve overcome the first hurdles, but in our
line of work, actually keeping employed is always a struggle. You have to keep earning it, keep
pulling in the punters to the movies, to the theatres. I don’t think we’ll ever feel like we’re home free, with or without personal life issues. Anyway, there’s cause for optimism.

I: We’ll be speaking more about what you’ve been up to in a minute. First, if I may, I’d like to ask about what happened immediately after the Big Reveal. You got on a plane and disappeared. Where did you go?

T.O.: We traveled the world. It was great.

I: Did you have to disappear for security reasons?

T.O.: Yes, in part. We were advised to fly under the radar for some time, until the situation calmed down and we could get a clear picture of the lay of the land. And in part, we just needed some time and space to ourselves, and some peace. We had been under intense scrutiny for months before we actually gave that press conference. We needed a holiday.

L.L.: And a honeymoon.

(Thor laughs)

T.O.: Yeah, that too.

I: Speaking of honeymoons, you did reappear briefly for the wedding of your friends Steve Rogers and James Barnes.

T.O.: We couldn’t miss it. They made us best men.

I: They have mentioned that they owed their coming together to you…

T.O.: That would be Loki.

I: Oh?

L.L.: Long story. Another time. But actually, the final kick in the butt was yours, wasn’t it?

T.O.: (laughs) Like you said, another time. It’s their story anyway, ask them.

I: Why did it take so long after the first rumours emerged before you decided to come out as a couple? I hear it was all a carefully planned process.

T.O.: Yes, the entire thing was engineered almost like a military operation. Delaying confirmation was a part of it.

I: But it was always the plan, coming out?

(both simultaneously)

L.L.: No.

T.O.: Yes.

(They look at each other. They laugh.)

L.L.: Initially, there was no plan. We just… We had this thing that was pretty f*** big, and which neither of us was willing to give up, but we wanted to… We had to take it one step at a time, keep
putting one foot in front of the other, precisely because making plans and looking too far into the future was absolutely terrifying. We tried to keep it a secret initially, while we figured things out, because we didn’t really think any other course of action was a real option. But as time went by…

T.O.: We couldn’t do it. I couldn’t do it. It wasn’t just a case of being discreet to preserve our privacy, we had to actually lie and pretend to prevent people from finding out the truth. And doing that was… I hated it. It angered me so much. In my heart, I believed there was nothing to be ashamed of, and having to act as if there was just… I hated it, and I hated myself for doing it. And I know there are plenty of people who indeed think that what we have, Loki and I, is profoundly wrong, but… I don’t? Who the hell do we harm? Some god? Whose god? Not mine… So it was doing my head in to act as if the public had to be protected from something that wasn’t anybody’s business but our own. We didn’t deserve that. Loki didn’t deserve that. At one point, it was affecting both of us very badly. We were unhappy. I am convinced it would have split us up if we had tried to keep the secret. And I wasn’t going to have that. This is too important.

I: So Thor wanted to go public. What about you, Loki?

L.L.: To begin with, I thought it was a terrible idea. It was not that I enjoyed having to hide this, when what I really felt like doing was parading down the streets bragging and celebrating, but I thought the backlash would be more than we could cope with. That it would destroy us. That we would lose everything, and we’d never work again. That my brother’s career mattered more to him than he thought it did, and that when that was gone, he would deeply resent the reason he had given it up for —that is, little old me. I was willing to put up with almost anything to keep this from seeing the light of day, and ruining his reputation and his career. And mine too, I guess, but I have a different fan base, so I thought I might just be able to get away with it. It’s not like I’m a stranger to living on the fringe of social acceptance. It can be argued I’ve already done all sorts of bad things to the family name, so what’s one more. But Thor was adamant that he knew what he was doing, that he would soon get back on his feet, that it would be worth it. I wasn’t convinced, but there you go. Turns out, I was wrong, and Thor was right.

T.O.: I’m going to have that part of the interview printed in f**** gold and framed, and I’m going to hang it on the wall.

L.L.: (deceitfully sweet grin) Only if you want it transferred straight onto your forehead by means of me smashing it on your face.

T.O.: (laughing) Fair enough. But yes, when the first rumours came out, it was intentional. The plan was already in motion. It’s not like we had been discovered accidentally and risked exposure, and felt pressured to come out. At that point we absolutely wanted to come out, and starting rumours was phase one of the plan.

I: So the plan was to do it in stages.

T.O.: Exactly. Sow the idea, let it take hold, begin to raise questions. Plant the notion in the public’s minds, to defuse the shock factor and soften the landing somewhat, and then tell the truth, after people had already started getting used to it.

I: A lot of people still claimed initially it was all a publicity stunt.

(Loki laughs)

L.L.: We know. Hysterical, isn’t it?

T.O.: (sarcastic) Yeah, we were too famous and doing too well, we had to do something about that.
But these days of lax morals you really have to go the extra mile, right?

\textit{(Loki laughs)}

I: You must have been quite anxious before the reveal.

L.L.: Terrified. We had no idea what to expect.

I: How did you prepare for the reaction?

T.O.: Coming out to the people closest to us, I guess. Every time we told someone, and the world didn’t end, it helped. And of course, now we knew that, even if the whole world turned on us, at least we had them by our sides. We would pull through somehow. We would be okay no matter what, with a little help from our friends.

I: Would you say the plan came out ok?

T.O.: Well, we’re together, we’re happy, and we’re working. Yeah, I’d say so good so far. \textit{(Looks at Loki, they hold hands for a moment.)}

I: I have to ask. In your statement to the press, you declared you got together after shooting Mariners. But there is a lot of speculation about... There are many conspiracy theories out there. Can we get the timeline clear?

L.L.: \textit{(while Thor is resolutely staring at his hands, tightly clasped on his lap.)} By all means. We reconciled after a long period of estrangement; we signed up to make a film together; in the process, we realised there was something there; we talked about it; nothing happened during the shoot, it was not the time or the place; and then, after we wrapped up the shoot, we went on a date to see what happened, and this is what happened. Nudity was involved. We’ve been a couple ever since. \textit{(Wicked grin that screams “come on, challenge me, I dare you”.)}

I: You were both seen with different, uh, companions in the months that followed the shoot. Were you already together, then?

\textit{(Thor squirms in his seat, clearly uncomfortable.)}

L.L.: Yes, we were.

I: So, it was a distraction manoeuvre.

L.L.: Absolutely.

I: Was that your publicists’ idea?

L.L.: Nope. All mine. At that point our publicists weren’t involved. They may have been onto us already —they’re awfully insightful like that, and we’re that subtle— but we had not actually told them. About getting us beards... Thor took convincing. As in, he hated the idea, he was dead against it. But it was early days between us, and we were going to start the press tour for Mariners, and lots of eyes were going to be on us, and there were rumours on the internet already... I wanted Thor to get a clean chance at the awards he deserved, I wanted all the attention on his performance in the film. We needed more time to figure it all out. I just wanted to dangle something shiny in front of the press to distract them from the rumours about us. Our dear friends agreed to help us out.

I: Did they know?
T.O.: (snappy) Yes, of course. They are my closest friends. Of course they knew.

I: What was your father’s involvement in the plan? He expressed his support publicly on the very day of the reveal, but did he take convincing?

T.O.: Not at all. He stood by us from the start, and he said he would do whatever we required.

I: What was his initial reaction? I suppose he was shocked...

(The boys smile at a private joke.)

L.L.: He was very accepting very quickly. We had been scared sh*tless for weeks thinking how to break it to him without killing him from a heart attack, and he was… No, he was surprisingly ok with it.

I: How do you explain that?

(Another secret smile.)

L.L.: Our father is a very open-minded man. I blame Shakespeare. (A thoughtful pause. More serious now.) I think our mother’s death changed his views about a lot of things. There was a… hardness, an intolerance about him. He had very clear ideas about… Everything, really. But once our mother was gone… (He chokes. He looks at Thor.)

T.O.: Yes. I agree. My mother’s passing changed us all. And with my father, it certainly shook him deeply, and made him review his feelings and his thoughts about lots of things. Concerning his own life, his work, his legacy, how intransigent and self-demanding he was, and never letting himself be truly satisfied. But after mum died… I mean, look at the very work he took on after her death, he started to let go a bit more, have more fun… And he was more forthcoming with me, he made an extra effort at letting me know that he was proud, and that he loved me. And Loki… (Looks at his brother, who remains quiet, his hand held between both of Thor’s on Thor’s lap.) What he told us when we came out to him was that our mother would have wanted us to be happy. It’s almost as if he had embraced the way our mother related to people and to the world, which was extremely generous and compassionate, never passing judgement, never condemning anyone, but always trying to see things from the other’s point of view. My mother was a very forgiving, very wise woman. And I sometimes feel that our father’s way of coping with her death is to… to keep alive that part of her, to treat us as she would have.

I: Your father has stated publicly many times that he’s fully convinced Frigga would have stood by you.

L.L.: I think she would have. I have no doubts. She would see us now, how we are. I’ve never been happier.

(Thor smiles, kisses his brother’s temple.)

I: Loki, your relationship with your father wasn’t always easy. How is it these days?

L.L.: (a considerate pause) It’s no secret I did not deal with the news about my adoption well, to put it mildly. I should have been told much earlier, but I know now the reasons why that didn’t happen, and I can understand. My parents regretted deeply how it all went down, and I’ve made my peace with that. It doesn’t upset me anymore. But even before I found out I was adopted, I had been very angry. I was… I already had problems. I struggled a lot with… confusion, heartbreak, with a sense of… I don’t know. Not belonging, not fitting, not measuring up to expectations. It was hard to hate
our mother, so my father bore the brunt of it all. We simply didn’t get along very well. And yeah, it’s taken me many years to get over that. Both of us, my dad too. But after the way he has dealt with what life, and myself, has thrown at him these last few years… He has had to face several situations that can’t have been easy for any parent. He really came through with the-scandal of the sex tapes. That was a real turning point for me, and how I felt about him, about it all. I would have never expected… He surprised me. He really taught me a lesson there. And he went on to make many other public and private gestures that, to me, show a kind of unconditional support you don’t get from someone who doesn’t really... accept you. Who doesn't actually love you, unconditionally, no caveats, no buts. Which is I guess what I had always felt was missing between us. So I don’t only respect him as a man, as an artist, as the man my mother loved, but also as the man who took me into his home and tried to raise me as best he could which, at the end of the day, is all you can ask from a parent, isn’t it? So, yes, I guess he’s my father. Again. And on top of that, we have found many common interests and passions, and… Well, I guess we’re good friends now as well.

(Thor listening with a warm, emotional smile. Loki elbows him to make him stop staring.)

I: What was the reaction to your relationship among your work colleagues? How did the reveal go down in that area?

T.O.: In the US we get lots of private, individual shows of support, but then there is always the excuse of the box office, of this or that other higher exec, or the studios, or whatever. “You know, guys, if it was up to me, it would make no difference, but you know, the big guys…” Which is what I expected, frankly. In England, it’s different. The industry is a lot smaller, everybody knows everybody. So lots of people are supportive and really don’t seem to care, but other people are very angry at us. They accuse us of disgracing the family name, my mother’s heritage, the entirety of the English contribution to the world culture and the arts. They say they’re not against our relationship in itself, but against us making it public. Which is an extremely British way to think, by the way. You’re alright as long as you keep your sins in private. They even accuse us of fishing for publicity, and they’re really upset that we’re getting it. And then they’re the best of friends to our faces. I’m not sure if they realise how hypocritical they are.

I: Do you have an answer for those people?

(Loki looks at his brother, who is brooding and pensive. Squeezes his hand.)

T.O.: I don’t think we have to, but I want to say… We are our parents’ children, that’s true. We have benefitted from their fame, their talent, their support. We owe them a lot, we are grateful, we want to honour them, and their heritage. But we’re also our own people, and we have a right to our life and our choices. And just like that, Frigga and Odin Borson are more than capital figures of British culture, they’re more than wax statues or bronze sculptures, they’re our mum and dad. And this is what it is, it happened. (He looks at his brother, holds his hand.) We fell in love, we wanted to be together. We know it’s unusual and against custom and traditional morals, and that to some people it’s sinful and outrageous and infamous and we should be ashamed, but the fact is, it happened, and we’re not ashamed at all. We harm no-one, absolutely no-one. We are not against anything, we did not set out to destroy anything. We just want to live our lives. And keeping the secret was destroying us. Lying about it. Putting on an act, denying what was there, denying ourselves. And like I said, I don’t feel guilty about it, I don’t feel ashamed. So it came to this: hiding and pretending, in fear of a moral system that wasn’t our own, that we did not share, and destroy ourselves in the process, or be honest, and try to make a go at this. It was a no-brainer. It only took guts. And guts, we have.

I: You have to live under a permanent security detail, don’t you?

T.O.: Yes. The world is full of nutters.
I: How do you cope with that?

T.O.: With patience and good humour. You end up getting used to it. I’m sure it won’t be forever, but if it is… Well, we’ll make it work.

I: Do you miss living a normal life?

L.L.: What is a normal life? My ‘normal’ has been a lot of different things at different times. But you know what, no. With our jobs, I think we live lives that are pretty much out of the ordinary. And that’s why we do it. Any actor who tells you they want a normal life is either talking bollocks, or his ‘normal’ and your ‘normal’ mean entirely different things. Or they’re in the wrong line of work. S*%d normal. I prefer extraordinary and fabulous.

I: Speaking of extraordinary, fabulous, and work, you have both been very busy! Loki, you’re about to embark on your second year touring the world with your cabaret show *God of Mischief.* You’ve done Europe and North America, and I hear Asia is already sold out?

L.L.: Yeah. We’re doing well, but the venues are very small. It’s not like I’m filling football stadiums.

I: I hear you’ve had to restrict how many tickets are sold to individual people, because there’s many repeat visits, since the show changes every night!

L.L.: True. Some people are really keen, and those who were being left out were justly annoyed at the hoarders.

I: Why all the changing? Is it just to keep it interesting?

L.L.: Interesting for me, yeah. To keep it fresh. But also because there were just too many acts I wanted to dance, too many songs I wanted to cover, too many stories I wanted to tell, and they didn’t all fit in a couple of hours. I agonised trying to decide what to leave out, and it was breaking my heart. And since this was to be a self-indulgent exercise of the highest order, I thought, why compromise? Have them all. It definitely helps to maintain my attention. I’m a mercurial character; I get bored easily. I doubt I would have wanted to carry it on for so long otherwise.

I: You don’t oppose to people taking recordings of the live show.

L.L.: No. Why? Free publicity. It actually seems to draw people in. As long as they don’t use flash or pester me too much, no problem. They’re usually discreet and respectful.

T.O.: Well, they’ve seen what you do to people who annoy you.

(Loki laughs.)

CLIP. Fragments of Loki’s cabaret show. Loki on stage with chorus of dancers. The costumes are mainly burlesque and flapper 1920’s style, with nods to the original movie *Cabaret,* the musical *Chicago,* and the era of glam rock (with several direct references to David Bowie and Lou Reed, *Transformer* era). Cut to Loki sitting on the stage, legs hanging off the edge, reciting conversationally a fragment of *The Little Prince.* Cut to Loki sitting at the piano, singing alone, then leading the audience to sing along. Cut to Loki strutting among the tables in stiletto heels, chatting up the audience.

I: One particular performance comes to mind. On opening night in London, with Thor’s attendance. The video went viral and caused a considerable uproar. Do you know what I’m
referring to?

L.L.: (smirking, checking his nails) Haven’t the faintest.

Loki in high heel platforms and a very revealing, skin-tight black velvet jumpsuit, unzipped to way below the navel, barely decent, a dark green feather boa around his neck and shoulders, flashy makeup. He’s purring “I could have danced all night” (Lerner and Loewe). He climbs off the stage and approaches his brother, sitting in a table right by the stage. Loki begins stalking, romancing, seducing Thor as he sings, dancing around him with very suggestive moves that echo the lyrics. Thor seems tense at first, as if he’s being the target of a prank and is trying to take it in stride. Loki suddenly straddles Thor’s lap, and keeps singing. He’s eyefucking his brother silly, Thor is staring back with intensity. At one point, it feels as if they’ve forgotten that there is anyone else in the room with them. After several almost-but-not-quite brushes of lips, as if they’re teasing but they will not dare, Loki finally captures his brother’s mouth in a fierce, hungered kiss, fingers threaded in Thor’s hair. The audience goes into hysteric. Thor’s hands rest on his brother’s waist at first, then his hips, then slide to quickly grope his arse. The song ends, the band starts the next number. Loki breaks the kiss slowly, eyes and lips lingering, and slips off his brother’s lap. He struts away, swinging his hips, with a look over his shoulder, and a wink at his brother. Thor is holding his stare, a heated look. Loki retakes the stage, wolfish grin, for a moment he looks at the audience with a complicit grin and pretends to fan himself. The chorus of dancers join him, the next song is “All that Jazz” from the musical Chicago.

I: What’s the story behind that moment? Up to that point, you had been very discreet and, dare I say, almost prudish, with how you behaved around each other in public. And then this. What happened there?

L.L.: I can’t help myself around this man, what can I say.

(Thor laughs. He seems a bit flustered.)

T.O.: (seriously) We had talked with our people about it, about how we should behave in public, how affectionate or not we should be. We wanted to save ourselves a few headaches, frankly. Everybody seemed to agree that keeping it clean, so to speak, would be best. We wanted to try not to ruffle any more feathers, try not to feed the media frenzy. We wanted to be boring and uninteresting, send the message that there was nothing to see here, hoping to rush along the time when we’d be left in peace. But then…

L.L.: We felt corseted. And not in a sexy way. We’re very hands-on, both of us, and pretending we weren’t… We don’t like hiding. We came out so that we could be ourselves at last.

T.O.: And on top of that, it soon became clear that, no matter how prim and proper we tried to be, it would always be too much for some people. Us existing is already too much. There’s no pleasing them. They won’t be appeased, no matter what we do or don’t do. So we thought, s*#d it. We’re going to be the way we are. And if it offends people, it’s up to them. We’re just trying to live our lives.

I: But, doing it on opening night, was it a bid for attention?

L.L.: Actually, it was an early birthday present.

T.O.: An entire surprise party, more like.
I: You mean you didn’t know Loki was going to do this, Thor?

T.O.: Absolutely no idea. We had talked about holding hands and kissing in public, not this. Not that I’m complaining, mind.

L.L.: I improvised, I went with the flow. I was feeling very, very happy that night. A bit high on all the excitement and the nerves and all. And there was this handsome f*cker on his chair being insufferably gorgeous… I felt like rubbing in the noses of the entire human race that he was mine. So I just went for it.

(Thor stares persistently at his brother, amused and starry eyed. Loki is looking quite smug.)

L.L.: And you know what, I have this hope that every time we get handsy or flirty in public, one bigot suffers an aneurysm and dies on the spot. We’re basically making the world a better place, one hater at a time. I think we got rid of a couple hundred that night alone, and we clear out a handful more whenever this vid does the rounds. You’re welcome.

(Thor laughs.)

I: Thor, let’s talk about your work. You have been awfully busy yourself! You starred in Lancelot, Peggy Carter’s controversial take on the Arthurian cycle, and more recently you played the lead in the powerful The Story of John D., which you have also produced in partnership with Pepper Potts and Tony Stark. And now you’re preparing a play in the West End with your father! Where shall we begin? How about your new role as producer?

T.O.: That’s been a lot of fun.

I: How did it come about?

T.O.: Well, I fully expected interest from Hollywood to dry out after the big reveal, and that’s exactly what happened. No surprises there. When we went into this, I did it being fully aware that I would have to rethink my career. No more blockbusters for me, goodbye to the A-list. Which was ok. I have had my run in Hollywood, and I’d say it’s been a great one. I was able to do some very interesting work, like Blood Meridian, The Cold Six Thousand, Mariners, and Lancelot, because I was at the peak of my profession. I achieved everything I set out to achieve. It was pretty hard to top, and I wasn’t all that excited anyway about just clinging onto that spot, fretting about maintaining my status, with an eye always on opening weekends. So perhaps a radical change wasn’t a bad idea, reveal or not. I like to feel hungry and excited. I like a bit of adventure, I like to feel like my feet don’t quite reach the bottom. Now, Tony is a long-time friend, he was the first to really bet on me when I first came to the US, and he’s been as loyal and supportive of the both of us as we could ask for, and then some. He suggested I take advantage of my new status as an industry outcast with nothing to lose, and got involved in some risky projects he had in the drawer. We decided to begin with The Story of John D.

I: What was it that drew you to this project?

T.O.: What didn’t. It’s the story of a man who embodies a certain masculine ideal. He’s a pro footballer, successful, rich, serial womaniser. He’s self-centred, entitled, he has it all, and he takes it all for granted. It’s his due as an American white male who has conquered the world. And then, one day, he gets beaten up and brutally raped. And his entire life starts to unravel. First of all, his self-esteem. He’s a macho man, he regarded himself as an Olympian god, and yet he was overpowered and violated. How could this ever happen to him? The body that was the source and the reason of his privilege has become a source of pain, shame, and humiliation. And he doesn’t know how to deal
with it. Since he was young, he has learned to toughen up, keep everything in, be self-sufficient. He doesn’t want to ask for help, he wouldn’t know how, and he wouldn’t know how to accept it. He would never have admitted to it, but he wakes up in hospital after the aggression, he’s been examined thoroughly, and everybody knows. Now he suffers from paralysing PTSD, the police doubt his story, his teammates treat him like a pariah, and even his family and friends seem to blame him for what happened somehow. His world collapses. He loses everything. To start to get over it, he’ll have to unlearn everything he’s been fed all his life about what it is to be a man, and rebuild himself and his worldview from the ground up. The story was utterly gripping, the script was fantastic, and I felt it had important things to say about what it actually means to be a man in our culture. I wanted it to see the light, and I wanted to be the one to do it.

CLIP. A scene from the film. In a hospital room, Thor as John D. is about to be examined. He shoves the nurse off brusquely when she approaches. The doctor goes through the horrifying list of injuries with a colleague, in hushed tones. They address sly side looks to John D, who is trying to keep a stoic, inexpressive front, but is clearly in shock.

Cut to images from the shoot, Thor behind the scenes in producer mode, with Tony Stark and Ginny Potts.

I: As an actor, it must have been a very intense experience.

T.O.: Yeah, it was. But it’s what I enjoy the most. I like to go to the most difficult, most extreme places in my mind, and put it all out there. It’s exhausting, but it makes me feel alive.

I: It was an extraordinarily compelling performance.

L.L.: Stoic characters ravaged by extreme emotions are my brother’s speciality. He can convey ten different types of pain with the twitch of an eyebrow. And he doesn’t even know how he does it, the b*gger.

(Thor keeps his eyes low, modest, but he’s grinning with delight.)

I: I felt it was very clever, how the rape itself is never actually shown, and yet the horror of the experience comes through.

T.O.: Yes, I liked that about the script. You get it from the medical and the police report, and from images, sounds, and situations that are apparently unrelated but yet become triggering for John… And it’s probably worse than if you actually showed the rape. There is always the danger of ‘pornifying’ it, if you will, and we absolutely didn’t want that. You see the effects of the violence in his body, in his thoughts, in how destroyed he is left by the ordeal. You don’t have to see the ordeal itself to be horrified by it.

I: Let’s hope your performance and the film receive the recognition they deserve in the big festivals to come.

T.O.: Thank you very much. More awards means we may be able to open in a few more theatres and get more people to see it, so fingers crossed.

I: What about your role as a producer? How was that experience?

T.O.: It’s been an education. And a steep learning curve! I’ve enjoyed getting involved with all the aspects of the production, and having a say in the process and the end result. I cared a lot about the
material, and for once I officially got to have my voice heard in many decisions that, as an actor, you sometimes just find already on the table when you get to the shoot. And it’s been so much fun.

**I:** The film had a very low budget. I suppose it has been quite a departure from what you were used to.

T.O.: Yes, but it’s not the first time I’ve had to scale down, so to speak. I think it was the distribution side of things where I’ve suffered the biggest shock. We have had to work very hard to get this film to the theatres, so when we have managed to, it’s felt twice as sweet. The publicity tour is another thing I’ve taken in a completely different spirit this time. You always care about the film, and you want to do your part to see it do well, but in big budget Hollywood productions you’re on a treadmill; you go where they tell you, talk to whom they tell you, you do what the contract says, then you go to the hotel, and the next day you’ll do it all over again. This time I was the one trying to talk to people about the film, trying to get them interested. It wasn’t a chore. The festival run has been exhilarating. It’s been the most exhausting publicity tour of my life, but also the most rewarding. So, overall, I’ve found the whole process very energising. I’m looking forwards to the next one.

**I:** What’s it going to be?

T.O.: Well, we have several ideas in the works. We shall see.

**I:** But there is a play with your father first. Tell me about that!

T.O.: Hm, that started almost as a joke. My father has a love-hate relationship with Tennessee Williams. I think he did some in his youth…

L.L.: *(cutting him)* He did. Beginning of his career. He was in *Streetcar, Iguana, Cat*… and he wasn’t crazy about those plays, because except in *Iguana*, he always played the sides; Cooper, Mitch…

T.O.: *(laughs)* We don’t take to supporting characters too well in our family.

L.L.: *(sarcastic)* No, you don’t.

T.O.: *(laughs)* Anyway, he is not crazy about Tennessee Williams, but he sometimes says our family gatherings at one point were like one of his plays. And one day we got talking about Brick and Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and started talking about their relationship. And we’d bring out the play and kept coming back to it, and at one point, Loki said that if we liked it so much, we should do it.

L.L.: It was ironic. It’s a bit like suggesting to a couple of married actors that they should do *Virginia Woolf*. You obviously don’t wish them well. But they took it seriously, god help us all. I also suggested I should play Maggie, but you both pretended you hadn’t heard a thing in this case. Your loss.

T.O.: *(laughs)* We were not going to let you steal this one, baby.

*(Loki blinks in surprise at the endearment, unusual in public. He looks so much younger for a second.)*

**I:** You already starred in this play.

T.O.: In an amateur production in drama school, yes. But this is going to be something else… I’ve only worked the once with dad, when we were kids. I’m kind of terrified about doing it again, with
him directing and acting, really daunted, but I’m looking forwards to it too. It’s no secret I really look up to him and I admire him deeply as an artist. What we have already discussed about the play and the characters is… well, it’s going to be intense. Revisiting Brick ten years later, with my own father playing Brick’s father… *(he covers his face, suddenly overwhelmed)* Oh dear, what have I got myself into…

*(Loki is looking at him mockingly, and shaking his head.)*

L.L.: Indeed.

I: What about you, Loki?

L.L.: What about me?

I: Would you like to work with your father?

L.L.: *(considers it, measuring and calculating his words)* Probably. It would have to be a very special project.

I: You are at present in talks with the BBC to take part in the projected mini series based on stories and poems by Edgar Allan Poe. Your father is going to direct one of them. Any chance of coinciding?


I: Tell us more about this project.

L.L.: It’s very exciting. It’s taking shape beautifully. Each episode is going to have its own personality. Some will be paying homage to the style of Hammer Studios, those classic, Technicolor, kitschy, adorable horror films from the sixties and seventies, so it should be a lot of fun. Some are going for a very modern, cutting edge, Japanese style of horror. Some I think will veer for early 20th century German Impressionism. I’m going to take part in the episode featuring the dramatised reading of *The Raven, Annabel Lee, The Haunted Palace*, and so on — I’m doing the reading along with Jeremy Irons, Sophie Okonedo, Indira Varma, Idris Elba, and others — and it seems the look of that will be in the traditional romantic style — romantic as in the Romantics, capital R, old ruined graveyards, crumbling Gothic cathedrals, so on. I am in talks about acting in another episode or two, maybe in disguise, maybe CGI, we’ll see how the schedule pans out. Anyway, it’s going to be really cool. Can’t wait.

I: Let’s talk about *Lancelot*. An extraordinary film in many ways. There was a considerable delay between shoot and release. Did that have anything to do with the reveal?

T.O.: There was a technical side to it. Peggy had a very clear vision of what she wanted, and she’s a huge perfectionist, so post-production was always going to be complicated. And, yeah, since there was no rush to release it, she was able to take her time.

I: No rush, because of the big reveal…

T.O.: *(sarcastic)* Yes, the lead actor got himself into quite a bit of a scandal in his private life.

L.L.: …With a member of the supporting cast.

T.O.: Yeah, that. To improve the film’s chances of being assessed on its own merits, it would not hurt to let some time go by.
I: Some of the techniques involved were quite unique…

T.O.: There was a mixture of old-fashioned smoke and mirrors and CGI that I think is hugely effective. Some frames were painted with actual oils and then rendered and animated. Peggy used traditional, artisan crafts in really novel ways, and some optical tricks that practically hadn’t been used since the birth of cinema. She even learned to use some of the software herself, so that she could convey more effectively what she wanted, and some new technology was developed on an as needed basis to cater to what she asked for. The entire cast renounced our salaries to pay for it, and a lot of the team took only minimal wages. Peggy didn’t get anything herself… We were all excited about her vision and wanted to see it come to pass.

I: After so much effort and dedication, it must have been disappointing to see the film being overlooked for the bigger awards.

T.O.: Yes. Especially for the visual effects team, sound effects, art direction, costume, etc, it was a crying shame, and a huge injustice. It was a great film all around; it deserved better.

I: Do you feel responsible for that in any way?

T.O.: There is always the doubt. What would have happened if we had waited to come out until after the movie was released? I sometimes wished we had waited, to give the film its fair chance, but I don’t think it was possible. I couldn’t wait another year or eighteen months. We made a selfish decision, because it was killing us. It was killing me.

L.L.: But Lancelot was never going to bring a certain demographic to the movie theatres. There was an outcry from the outset about the portrayal of the relationship between Lancelot and Arthur as openly romantic, and there was the hissy fit of a group of Arthurian scholars actively campaigning for a boycott… The moment Peggy decided to go with that kiss, we had already said goodbye to the box office race.

I: It was quite an epic kiss. I’ve often seen it captioned with that William Goldman quote from The Princess Bride: “Since the invention of the kiss, there have only been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind.”

L.L.: So unfair. Nobody talks about purity when we kiss.

T.O.: Peggy was very demanding. I think we must have done about twelve takes…

L.L.: Actually, she was perfectly pleased with the second. She was just enjoying herself after that. As were we all. (smirking mischievously.)

(Thor rolls his eyes. He’s a bit flustered.)

I: In any case, Lancelot met huge critical acclaim, in spite of being shunned at the Oscars. Peggy Carter is preparing her next film, about Indian suffragettes, and Steve Rogers’ career also got a big boost.

T.O.: He had been struggling to be taken seriously as an actor. And he’s a damn fine one. His directorial debut will help the audience see him more as the complete artist he is.

L.L.: He’s too damn pretty, that’s his problem.

T.O.: That’s never been a problem for you.
T.O.: (rubbing his side) Ow.

I: And Loki, you did the seemingly impossible again, making people talk about your Merlin almost as much as they did about your Morgan LeFay…

T.O.: I had help. The costume and makeup designers worked some true magic. I had ideas, but they had the expertise. It was a thrill to watch it come together. I’ve always loved dressing up, and I’ve always put a lot of thought into my costumes. With this, I had absolute freedom, and the best imaginable resources and artists to help me realise what I had in mind, and bring even better ideas to the table. It was like falling into a barrel of cream, honestly. And once I was in costume, the performance came ever so easily and naturally. Merlin was wild and primitive, mystical and wonderfully strange. Morgan… With all the stuff I had under those gowns to give me a female figure, and with the gowns themselves, my posture changed, the way I walked… The wig altered the way I held my head and turned and moved. So I’d say half of the performance I owe to the costumes, and the people who created them.

I: There was an outcry when no big awards came your way…

L.L.: Quelle surprise, honestly. But in any case, I don’t bloody care if they were trying to punish me for my personal life. It was a fair trade. I had so much fun with those parts, and I am f*cking thrilled with my personal life. What’s a couple of measly awards compared to that. I’d say thank you, but keep the outcry for more worthwhile causes.

I: You did get recognition for your play Sonder, with a Borson Award for the greatest theatrical achievement of the year. Do you think it was a nod, a show of support from some of your colleagues?

L.L.: Yes, perhaps. I think there was a point being made there, a gesture of defiance. It was a great moment all around. The play means so much to me.

T.O.: I would say, though, that the board that awards the Borsons is known for…

L.L.: …Impenitent snobbery?

T.O.: (undeterred) …For focusing on the art, and only the art, which is where the huge prestige of the award comes from. They have never shown any regard for commercial success or popularity, or lack thereof, or anything but merit. I think they rewarded Sonder because they felt it deserved it.

L.L.: In any case, I’m sure winning helped to turn the tide in our favour.

T.O.: Then we have nobody to thank for that but yourself.

I: What about the public mood? Do you feel accepted by people on the street?

L.L.: Depending on the street.

T.O.: (laughs) Yeah, exactly. There are places in this world where our security people won’t let us go. We’re talking a number of states in the US, several European countries, several ultra-conservative countries around the world. Which is kind of unfair to a lot of the people in those
countries, who I’m sure wouldn’t be anything but perfectly kind and polite if they should ever come across us, but there you go. But I have to say, I have yet to get a really nasty look from a stranger in the street, and instead, what we have had often is people coming to us and say, “hey, I never knew who you were before, but you’re being very brave, good for you, stay strong,” this kind of thing. Then there’s a lot of people who just take the “live and let live, no skin off my back” kind of approach. Then there are those who don’t want to care, who rationalise it. They say it’s not really incest because we’re not blood, that’s the most common. And then there’s the fans, of course, who are tirelessly supportive, and mobilise to back us up at every public appearance and wrap us in love and affection, and that means so much. Wherever we go, whatever we’re faced with, we can always remind ourselves that there are thousands of wonderful people in the world who wholeheartedly support us, and sometimes that’s all you need to get you through an unpleasant situation, or get you over a rough day.

I: In some ways, with young people, you’re more popular than ever…

T.O.: Well, at the moment, we are the Antichrist for a good deal of the establishment. Kids tend to respect that.

L.L.: And we look good on a t-shirt.

(Thor laughs.)

I: How is it, being the most infamous incestuous couple since Anaïs and Joaquim Nin? How do you cope with all the attention?

(They share a look.)

T.O.: There is a certain circus freak side to it, not particularly pleasant. You do get the impression that people are looking at you and thinking…

L.L.: They’re picturing us naked and f***.

T.O.: (chuckles, flustered.) Yes, that. As if that was all there is to it.

L.L.: Yes, sex is no more than 85% of it, give or take.

(Thor laughs, covers his face, shakes his head in dismay.)

L.L.: (wiggles eyebrows) Give and take, actually.

T.O.: (laughs) Oh my god, Loki...

I: Although, if you’ll excuse me, I daresay they might do that even without the familial bond.

L.L.: We’re photogenic like that.

T.O.: (laughs) How did we end up talking about this. Anyway, I believe that’s a common occurrence with same sex couples? People have sex firmly on their minds when they look at a same sex couple, in a way that doesn’t happen with straight couples. It’s weird. And then there’s the celebrity part of it. I mean, just look at Steve and Bucky, there is a craze to catch them doing the normal things a married couple does… So it’s good to bear that in mind. It puts things into perspective. It’s true that we get those boycott threats, and there have been several incidents with wackos now and again, and yes, our movements around the world are restricted, and we need bodyguards, and Steve and Bucky don’t, but… We just get on with it. Whenever I feel tempted to moan about it, Loki is right there to remind me it was me who wanted to come out in the first place,
I: Would you change anything?

T.O.: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not even the rough months before we decided to do it. That’s when we learned what we were willing to put up with, and what we were not willing to put up with. What was worth it, and what was not. I am very glad we can live in the open now, that we can hold hands and look people in the eye. It’s made us stronger.

(Loki is smiling and looking adoringly at his brother.)

L.L.: Yeah, no regrets.

I: We asked the followers of our blog to submit their questions. We’ve chosen a few.


Question from Marissa, in Ecuador. “If you could, would you like to get married?”

T.O.: Hello, Marissa, thanks for your question. Uh… (Mutual look, Thor smiles, Loki shrugs, he’s blushing!) We… uh, we already… We consider ourselves…

(Loki puts up his left hand, showing a white gold ring on his fourth finger.)

I: Oh, oh! Congratulations!

T.O.: Thank you very much.

I: Can we have the juicy details? Who proposed?

L.L.: It was all Thor. I’ve always known he was appallingly romantic, but the traditionalist streak came as more of a surprise…

T.O.: What can I say, I like my symbolic pledges of eternal devotion.

L.L.: (smirking with mischief) We also got matching tattoos.

(Thor arches an eyebrow in warning.)

I: You may. But the camera better not, or you lose the family audience.

(Thor biting in a smile, neck and cheeks pink.)

I: (laughs) I see. Alright then, Question from Pure _Starlight_, in Samoa. “How does it feel to find out you’re in love with your own brother?”

(Silence. Mutual look, bashful smiles.)

L.L.: “It’s a cold and it’s a broken Hallelujah.”

(Thor smiles widely and warmly, flustered.)

L.L.: It’s not an epiphany. It’s a process. A slow and subtle dawning, if you will.
T.O.: Yeah. It’s realising little by little that your feelings are complicated, and getting ever more complicated and confusing all the time, and not having an answer for what it is. Until… You know that Sherlock Holmes aphorism? Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Switch improbable for unthinkable. And once I accepted that there was only one explanation to all that confusion, only one that felt right and answered all my doubts, and that this answer was, that I was in love with Loki… hell, what I felt more than anything was relief. And then, knowing it was reciprocated… Joy unbound. Jackpot. Loki is and always has been my best friend. Falling in love with your best friend, and being loved in return—I just feel so lucky.

I: Any feelings of shock, or revulsion? Denial?

L.L.: For my part, no. I’ve never felt much constrained by what society, tradition, or religion said I should or should not feel. I’ve always felt a little bit out of place. Or a lot. I’m used to swimming against the current.

I: That takes courage.

L.L.: Hm, I don’t know. It’s just what it is, a part of me as much as the colour of my eyes or my anxiety. I didn’t ask for it, and I wouldn’t know how to do it any other way. When my feelings for Thor began to… When I realised that I was in love with him, in the usual, non-platonic sense, I just… Well, that’s what it was, no point denying it. And since I’m not much for old-fashioned notions of sin, or morality, or tradition, no point in fighting it either. I don’t particularly relish in the sinfulness of it, is what I mean. I’m just a bloke who’s happened to fall in love with this other bloke, who happens to be my adoptive brother, that’s all. Just look at him, for f*ck’s sake. Is it that unthinkable?

(Thor rolls his eyes, flushed.)

I: And you, Thor?

T.O.: Hm. Well, like I said, it was a relief, and it was liberating, to just… face reality, accept that this was what it was. I wasn’t particularly bound by religious or moral notions either—we come from a very open-minded background…

I: As your father’s reaction has proven.

T.O.: Yes. But initially, in the very beginning, I may have struggled a bit more.

L.L.: You’re more sensitive to expectations. But that’s only natural, there were always more expectations pinned on you. I was always the wild card, but you were our father’s heir, the golden son.

T.O.: (definitely bashful, regretful even) I think I made Loki suffer with my, uh, my doubts at first. I want to slap myself now, for some of it.

L.L.: (sweetly) Leave the slapping to me, brother.

I: If I may, do you still call each other brother?

(They share a look. Loki shrugs.)

T.O.: It’s what we’ve called each other all our lives. Old habits are hard to break.

L.L.: And we’re a couple of kinky f***ers.
(Thor laughs)

T.O.: And it’s what we are. We’re brothers. In everything but blood. I don’t want excuses made for our sake. Some people are going to hate us no matter what, so we might as well own it. I’m in love with Loki. I’m in love with my brother. It’s what it is. No apologies.

I: From Jen F., in Nebraska, the USA, “Would you like to adopt?” Steve and Bucky are in the process. Would you guys…?

T.O.: Uh, we… can’t. Definitely not as a couple. I guess legally we would be able to apply as individuals, but it’s not like the people in charge of, uh, dealing with the selection of acceptable candidates wouldn’t know, would they?

L.L.: I think if we ever tried… I think it would become such a public process, everybody would feel entitled to have a say, the controversy would be… God, I’m exhausted already just imagining it. I don’t feel like opening that can of worms, we have enough on our plates as it is. And I wouldn’t want to pass the stigma on to the child. I am adopted, so it’s something that hits close to home, but there are other ways to help.

I: The Asgard Foundation.

L.L.: Yeah. That’s one time-consuming, self-centred, spoilt little brat we’re raising between the two of us…

I: Recently you have become much more involved in it.

T.O.: Yeah. Our father told us it was time to do our share. Initially we were reluctant, thinking perhaps our involvement would do more harm than good, but dad wouldn’t hear it.

I: Does a more hands-on approach means that you get to steer the funds to causes that are dearer to your heart, like for example, mental health and homeless youths? The foundation has been doing a lot of work on those areas recently.

L.L.: Actually, the foundation has been working hard in those areas for a very long time. My mother started the mental health charity when I was a child, and Thor got us involved in already existing organisations working with homeless youths, like Shelter and Centrepoint. What I have done is start a charity in support of sex workers.

I: That branch has been the focus of some controversies...

L.L.: Probably because it’s not about rehabilitation. Well, it’s not the only thing we do. Sure, the charity tries to help sex workers who want to quit that job, and even co-operate with the police in cases of abuse and slavery we have been made aware of, and we offer rehousing, access to detox programs, access to training for work or school, and we partner with sympathetic businesses to get the people we help employment opportunities, but we also try to help people who want to remain in their current occupation, and help them on their own terms, with what they need, not what we or society or politicians think they need. Anything from health care and medical advice specific to their situation, to putting in touch people who wish to pool resources and rent a place, to be able to do their job away from the streets, and be relatively protected from the mafia, and help them with the legal side of things. It has been said that this amounts pretty much to promoting prostitution, almost pimping. But we don’t see it that way, and neither does the British legal system, so.

I: Another question by the readers. Aw, this one is very cute. It’s from K.L. from… oh! From
Warwickshire, right here in the UK. “How does it feel to be able to kiss in public?”

(They share a look, both break into a broad smile.)

T.O.: (still staring at his brother) Awesome.

L.L.: (staring at his nails) Yeah, not bad at all.

I: The first, shall we say, official kiss was at the Borson awards, only a few months after the reveal. Was it part of the plan?

L.L.: Not, though it could have been. It was more of a “try and stop me” moment. The play meant so much to me, and I just got the recognition of one of the toughest juries there are, and I was out there in the spotlight with the love of my life, and we weren’t hiding anymore, and for the first time ever I was able to… Hell, of course I was going to kiss him, to hell with PR, I was going to grab him and kiss him come rain or shine. Like I said, try and stop me. Sorry, Nat.

(Thor’s smile is overflowing his face.)

CLIP FROM THE CEREMONY, the moment when Loki’s name is announced. Thor stands up clapping, Loki shakily stands up too, looking stunned. Thor hugs him, holds his face, they stare. Loki kisses him, both close their eyes, and hug again before Thor lets him go and pushes him along to go get his award.

I: From Leeloo in Japan. “Would you like to make a romantic film together?”

T.O.: (laughs) Yeah, I’d like that. I’m not sure whether the world is ready for it, but… Yeah, I would.

L.L.: The world will never be ready for it, might as well just…

I: Any specific ideas?

L.L.: How about a genderbent remake of *Body Heat*? Put a chair through the window to come ravish me and then kill my husband?

(Thor laughs, hides his face.)


T.O.: He’s always had a thing for Patrick Swayze in that film.

L.L.: Darling, anyone with eyes should have a thing for Patrick Swayze, in any film. (*eyes widen, he’s had an idea.*) Oh my god! Genderbent remake of *The Bodyguard*!

(Thor is looking lovingly at his excited kid brother.)

T.O.: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

L.L.: Oh god, you’re such a dudebro.

L.L.: Wait, they were gay?

T.O.: Some historians claim that.

L.L.: You’re on. Will you take me for a ride on the handlebars of your bike?

T.O.: We can do that in a minute.

L.L.: Hm, how about that...

I: So, what’s next now for the both of you? What are your plans now?

L.L.: Well, I have at least another half a year touring the show in Asia, with a break to work on the Poe project in the summer. There is something in the air about a fictionalised life of Byron as a vampire… Don’t pull that face, Thor, it’s actually a very cool project, the script is incredible. We’re still trying to find the money for that. We’re not even clear if it’s going to be a film or a play because it could be easily turned into either. And I may or may not start first thing tomorrow to bug Tony Stark about making that remake of The Bodyguard. Anyway, that’s what we’ve got at the moment.

T.O.: I’m going to be busy with the Cat, and then we’ll see what Tony, Pepper, and I decide to go for next. But first of all, since Loki is going to be away for a few months, and we’ll only be able to scrape up a few days here and there, a short holiday.

I: Iceland?

L.L.: (grinning) Not telling.

I: We’ll end it here. It’s been an absolute pleasure and a great privilege...

Chapter End Notes

I hope that covered pretty much everything?

1. Wouldn't God of Mischief be FUCKING INCREDIBLE. You think T-Hiddy would be game?
2. The Story of John D. -- totally made up.
3. LET'S CROWDFUND THIS BBC-E.A. POE THING!!
4. Yes, I have read some accounts that say Butch and Sundance were gay. Well, bi. Or that Sundance was madly in love with Butch. Variations thereof. Cool, eh?
5. Omg Thorki Dirty Dancing AU, The Bodyguard AU... GIVE ME ALL THE TROPES!!
6. *wipes little tear* Don't mind me is the last notes-thing I make for this fic, I'm a bit emotional. Did I miss anything? Let me know.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

This is where we leave them.

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by Thorctopus, my partner in crime, many times saviour, always supporting and encouraging and always there to cheer me up, nudge me in the right direction, get me to dig a bit deeper and try a bit harder, and never give up, never surrender.

Thank you Writernotwaiting. For your regular pick me ups and long-distance hugs and for always always being there and for your wonderful words of encouragement.

And to all of you's who've left a note these last 6 months to let me know you were waiting for this, thank you. Thank you for every comment. Thank you for reading. I absolutely could not have done it without you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Loki woke up from his nap to a strange, watery light. He had to check his pocket watch on the bedside table to know the time - late afternoon. On his back, yawning, he looked around. Took him a second to remember where he was. He was still pretty jet-lagged.

“Thor?”

The space beside him on the bed was empty and cold. They had slipped in it together after the interview, once the crew had cleared, after signing a few autographs, posing for selfies, and being personable with the interviewer. How Loki had wanted to fool around. There had been some kissing, humping, and rolling in the sheets, but once Loki was horizontal, it was a matter of minutes before he couldn’t keep his eyes open. Well, he’d landed in London before dawn, straight from New York, got driven to Asgard in a hurry, and made it there with just enough time for a shower and a change of clothes. He so did not want to think what he must look like in that goddamn interview. He’d winked at the makeup girl when she said what a lovely complexion he had. A few years ago, he would have bitten her hand off for taking the piss, but he didn’t do that anymore, did he?

It had not been the terrible ordeal he had expected. The interviewer was a well-respected journalist, a familiar face from the BBC, sympathetic to their whole situation, and a great fan. Loki had never met her before, but she’d made them both him and Thor at ease very quickly. She seemed to find them charming, and very amusing, and that had spurred Loki on. He might just have felt a little too comfortable, actually. Nat, from behind the camera, had facepalmed a couple of times, rolled her eyes a few more, and had seemed on tenterhooks around some sensitive subjects. But through the wizardry of videoconference, he and Thor had gone over the questions with her, days before the interview, to make sure they were on the same page on certain issues which required a measure of
fabrication, editing, or doctoring of the facts, and besides the increasingly brazen flirting, they had kept to the script like the seasoned professionals they were. Once the show was over, Nat didn’t seem concerned. That had to be a good sign.

Baring his soul had been as cathartic as it had been exhausting. Loki felt scraped down to the bone. After three years of stubborn silence on the matter, however, it felt good to just let it all out. And to leave a few necessary lies carved in stone. Not that the conspiracy theorists would ever lay it to rest. They unearthed footage from their early careers, and god, hadn’t they been obvious or what. Like, Loki-boy, calm your thirst… Yeah, those rumours weren’t going to dissipate any time soon, but as long as the mainstream media kept to the gentlemen’s agreement of ignoring all of that and push the official version, they shouldn’t be too worried. In a few more years, when Thor and Loki the Couple had become boring old news, perhaps the bottom-feeders would poke that hive again for some cheap thrills, but by then, his brother and he should be fully established, and shouldn’t fear the truth rocking the boat too much. Hell, perhaps by then they would be the ones wanting to come clean, if they felt safe enough to do so. Loki did have a taste for scandal, after all.

But that was a matter for another day. The item on the list had been that goddamn interview, and it was done and dusted, at last. Thor had been dreading it for weeks, their first Joint Interview, and Talking About Personal Things and all. Loki had mostly just got empathic jitters, and had been mildly alarmed about some of the most thorny issues (would Thor just burst out with the unedited truth? “Yes, we have always been in love! Yes, it’s always been sexual!”) But nah, he had stuck to the official version like a good boy. After all, Thor was no more a tangled ball of righteous anger, a coiled spring about to give. And Loki could not put it all down to his magic touch. It’s more that removing the stress about having to maintain so many secrets and lies will do that to a man. Thor was happy these days, and it showed.

There would be a few more interviews on the subject in the near future, and a top-up whenever public interest spiked for any reason, to defuse it. And there would be a long, long tour of Asia, and Thor would be soon tied up with the play in London, only able to visit every few weeks, and that royally sucked indeed, but such was the life they had chosen. The compensations were more than worthwhile, and so were the reunions. Loki had learned the hard way not to take either for granted, and to try to enjoy fully what he had when he had it. For now they were both in the same geographic coordinates, glory fucking hallelujah, and even better, they were on a blessed holiday. For all of three precious weeks, starting right now, their time was their own. Loki was so, so not going to waste a minute of it dreading the day they would have to fly once more to opposite ends of the globe, not until he absolutely had to.

But where was Thor, anyway. Loki got up, stretched, groaned. He was still wearing the shirt and the suit pants, so he took them off. He rummaged for some scruffs in Thor’s side of the wardrobe. They were nice and baggy on him, and they smelled of Thor.

His brother was not in the kitchen either. The house was silent; he must be out. Loki would search the grounds soon, but first of all, he needed a cup of tea.

With the cup steaming in his hands, he shuffled to the music room, now restored to its usual appearance. He nestled on the couch with a blanket, cuddling the mug. They loved that room, it was their preferred lounging nook whenever they played old married couple -reading together in silence, sharing a blanket, Loki’s feet on Thor’s lap. Looking around now, Loki noticed the new photos Thor had put up since last time. There was one from last Christmas, the two of them and their father on a bench in Frigga’s rose garden, taken on one of dad’s cameras, with a goddamn timer (thinking about it, a selfie stick might have been worse). The three of them sitting there like lemons, holding a smile, waiting for the fucking thing to go off. They had needed several attempts. This one must have been the last, when they had just been laughing sincerely at how silly they were feeling. Nobody was
staring at the objective anymore, his father was half turning to tell Thor to check the timer was on, himself eye rolling, Thor laughing at whatever Loki had just said. Bit blurry here and there, but it was a very nice photo, actually.

They had been over for lunch in the London flat a few times by then, but that had been the first Christmas they spent in Asgard with Odin since the Great Reveal. It had been awkward, to say the least. Over dinner they had talked mostly about work. It had seemed safest, until goddamned *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* got mentioned, *again*, and Loki couldn’t help himself from uttering that fateful, “since you love it so much, why don’t you just bloody do it.” Only time would tell how that would end.

In the evening, Thor lit up the fire in the music room. Loki had played the piano for a while, with his father standing by with a glass of scotch in one hand, the other on Loki’s shoulder. Then Thor brought out an antediluvian box of board games Loki had not seen since he was ten. After much coaxing on his brother’s part, Loki had sat down with him on the rug in front of the fire. Their dad had refused to take part but looked on kindly, with a little, blissful smile. Loki was the one with the reputation, but Thor managed to cheat even at fucking snakes and ladders, the sly fucker. And then of course, made Loki blush to all fucking shades of red playing footsies under the coffee table, under their dad’s very nose. Jeez, his brother had no fucking shame.

Then again, this was only the preview to the real highlight of the evening— actually going to bed. Believe you me, folks, there aren’t many things comparable to retiring to your boudoir with your adoptive *brother*, with your *father* in the house, only a few doors down -you father who *knows* what you get up to behind closed doors of boudoirs with your adoptive brother... Thor, kinky bugger that he was, had gotten extra dirty on him that night. Loki flustered even now, thinking about it. And to this day, the world believed that Loki had done the corrupting in this relationship! Loki was impatient sometimes to get to the “old farts with no fucks left to give” part of their lives, so that he could publish their fucking uncensored autobiography and set the bloody record straight on that account.

Well then, that tea would take another half an hour before it was actually drinkable, right? Ah, Loki-boy, you should have suspected you weren’t a true born British person when you realised you couldn’t drink scalding hot liquids like the rest of your family.

Loki put down his cup, and went to fetch a warm coat and his wellie boots so that he could go looking for his brother. He had not been with the golden oaf for more than two months, and thinking about last Christmas had put some ideas in Loki’s mind. Lots of catching up to do.

* * *

After spooning his jet-lagged, sleep-deprived, mentally exhausted, snoring little brother for a blissful hour or two, Thor had gotten a bit antsy. He was impatient for Loki to wake up, but he knew well how much sleep, and lack thereof, affected Loki’s mood. He should better give him time to rest, and start this holiday on the right foot. So he carefully slipped out of bed, tucked his brother in, and
kissed him before he left.

He didn’t have much to do, really. He’d arrived to Asgard a few days ago, and got to the bottom of the to-do list very quickly. They were leaving tomorrow for their cottage in Iceland, and Thor had already packed for both of them. They didn’t need much, they kept all the essentials there. Thor had already done the rounds of the house, taking notes for the housekeeper of things that needed attention or mending. He always had emails to answer, but that could wait. One thing he’d not been able to do yet because of the rain was spend some time in the garden. He picked up the small tool kit and his phone and stepped out.

Frigga’s rose garden was thriving. It would still be a few years before it reached maturity —the climbers still had not taken over the pergolas, and the bushes had not yet spread to full width— but it was already a thing of beauty, and Thor was proud of it. He had a walk around, cutting the wilted blossoms, taking pics with his phone to send to the head gardener whenever he spotted a problem or a pest. And he thought out loud, mumbling under his breath.

“Look at you, doing so well. Good girl, I thought we had lost you to the caterpillars. You’re feeling better now, aren’t you? …And you, sweetheart, you’re such a stunner. I’m thinking we should put you somewhere on your own, you’re such a show-stealer… Hm, what’s this? I thought we got rid of these things. Damn bugs.” He took a picture, made a note of the little reference number at the base of the rose. “I’ll send the nurse over, you’ll be right as rain in no time.” He leaned in to sniff one, and hummed in delight. “Hm, darling, don’t tell the others, but I think you might just be my fave, you know that? You smell like heaven. I’ll cut a couple of flowers for Loki later, that alright? He’ll want to put them in the music room, for mum.” He kept walking. “He was saying the other day, on the phone, that he still talks to her in his head. That he’d told her about this place, her garden. He asked if I ever talk to her. He said I should try. I didn’t tell him I already do, in my way…” He caressed the delicate petals of an old-fashioned tea rose. “One of each variety. It’s impossible, of course, but we’re trying anyway. I mean, there’s like a dozen new varieties every year, we have to be picky. Not that we don’t have the space, but they have to be something special. We keep getting people asking if they can name new varieties after her. We don’t know what to do. We don’t want to cause a riff… What would she do?” Thor stopped himself for a moment. “It’s nothing,” he told no-one. “I just, I say these exact same words to myself so often. Especially when it’s something about dad. Or about Loki. …Loki keeps saying this thing I find so depressing, that we can’t really know her, that she was this… mystery. And I guess he’s right, to a point. Dad told me only a few months ago she had been deeply depressed after Loki left. And she never let me see, she never let me know it… I mean, I don’t know what I could have done, I was a fucking wreck myself, but… He says she blamed herself. And I just…” Thor’s eyes had got cloudy. “Did you die feeling like that? Blaming yourself? Thinking you had screwed up with him? Oh mum…” He wiped the corners of his eyes, and focused on deadheading roses in silence for a bit.

“Loki says you saved him in there, don’t you know?” he mumbled after a while. “You… you didn’t fuck up with him. You—you loved him the best of us all. That love pulled him through the worst of it. Everything you did. It’s what kept him going. You put something inside him, lit something inside him, and it did not let him sink, it helped him get out of it after he hit rock bottom. And I’m trying to do that for him now. I mean, he’s okay, he’s doing well, I wish you could see him. But if he ever gets sick again… Jesus, I hope not. But if he does. I’m trying to—to put it all in there every day, my love, you know, and so hopefully, if he sinks down again, I’ll be there with him, in a way, and he… God.” He sniffled, scoffed at himself.

He worked in silence for some time, gently leading some shoots to curl around a trellis.

“Dad’s fine, by the way. Well, you know him, he’s not easy. I mean, he doesn’t even make it easy on himself. But I think he’s fine. This new play has put some wind in his sails. Loki says I’m insane
for doing the *Cat* with him, that we’ll end up murdering each other live on stage, but I’m… hell, I’m kinda looking forwards to it. I mean, dad is not the way he used to be. He’s more chill. I’m not too scared. Anyway, can’t really get out of it now. What will be will be.

“…Dad says you would have been fine with this. With-with Loki and me. But that you were concerned that… You know, back then, we both felt so mature, so grown-up, like there was nothing left for us to learn. It’s taken me all these years for it to really sink in we were just a pair of kids. I understand now how horrified you would have been, imagining what… God. Sometimes I wish we would have… I mean, I don’t regret it as such, what happened happened, but I wish we would have waited. I wish we had been older. Or I wish we’d… I wish maybe we had left some, uh, things, for later. But I swear to you, mum, I never… I did all I could to be good to him. I never tried to hurry him or… Christ.” His face was burning, as if she was actually there right now, giving her that eyebrow, the one Loki raised exactly the same way.

“I wonder if you ever blamed me. For what happened to him. When he-when he put himself in hospital the first time. Loki says I’m a self-centred asshole and that not everything is about me, by which he means to say very tenderly that he does not blame me, but… I’m still not so sure. He had been struggling for years, but when it all went to hell between us, that’s when he… And I pushed him away. I thought then we were just falling apart, but I pushed him away, and I…” Huff. “Let it go, Thor. It’s in the past. That’s what Loki says. What you would say, maybe. And dad says all’s well that ends well.

“And we are. Well, I mean. Loki… he’s always been his own kind of amazing, even at his worst, but now that he’s content with his life he’s like a supernova. To think he could have just. Never make it this far. That he could have died.” Thor struggled to swallow down the choke. “Without you by his side growing up, he would have collapsed and imploded, I’m sure. And I don’t know what I would have done. I don’t know what I’d do. I mean, I guess I’d live on. Dad is living on. He didn’t just give up when you died, though I think he wanted to. But he’s not. He’s making it count. For you. For us. He’s not the man he used to be, though, he’s softer and kinder, but also… Hell, without Loki, I wouldn’t be me. I wasn’t me for a long time. I was a different version of me that carried on with things and was reasonably content, but I was only half of what I am when I’m with him.

“So what’s the secret, then? You and dad, forty years. Till death do us part. Dad told me off that time, the opening night of *God of Mischief* in Paris, because I didn’t send Loki flowers. I told him, but I already did when he opened in London. He was appalled, like, horrified. ‘What’s the matter with you, boy? You always send flowers on opening night! Always!’ I laughed then. I mean… god, this situation gets positively surreal so many times. Remember the pseudo-wedding? With dad there and all? I swear, if there was ever a time for us all sinners to get struck by lightning…” Thor laughed. “But yeah, I now send Loki flowers every opening *and* closing night, and sometimes in between, on important dates, like, the hundredth performance or whatever. Dad approves. And Loki approves too. Like, so much.” Thor blushed. “Sorry, mum, you don’t need to hear about that.

“Anyway, it’s surreal, but it’s good. Life in the open, I mean. We can breathe now. We’re good. Loki and me. We look after each other. We make each other finish our veggies and brush our teeth and wrap up warm when it’s cold and all that. We’re solid. We’re happy. I thought we wouldn’t make it, at one point. Everything really started falling into place when we decided to come out. And look at us now. I think you did good with us, mum. Don’t you? I mean, yeah, there’s the incest thing, but you know, apart from that. We’re good people. We’re doing well. We’re alright.”

“What are you mumbling?”

Loki had appeared suddenly behind his back, startling Thor half to death.
“You nearly gave me a heart attack…” he gasped, hand on his chest.

“Sorry,” smiled his brother. He was standing there in his wellies, wrapping Thor’s coat around him tight. “Does talking to them really make them grow faster or something?”

Thor smiled secretly to himself.

“Worth trying.”

“Are you going to play them Mozart too?”

“Nah, not today. I think I’m done.” He dusted his hands and sat down on a bench. He patted his lap. Loki climbed on like a lazy cat. Purring, he wrapped his brother’s neck in his arms, and kissed him slowly. There would be time for frantic and urgent, but for now, Thor closed his eyes and took it easy.

“Did you sleep well?” rumbled Thor, nuzzling his neck, peppering kisses on his cheek and temples. “Feeling better?”

“Hm…” purred Loki, snuggling closer. “I could do with a nice hot bath.”

“Sure. How about a back rub.”

“You don’t mean the back, do you.”

“I didn’t say just the back, no.”

Loki made a contented noise, and rested his head on Thor’s shoulder. Thor held him close.

“Are we all packed?” asked Loki.

“Yup.”

“Sleeping bags too?”

“They’re in the cottage.”

“Hm. Can’t wait. I wish we could just teleport there, though. I can’t tell you how much I’m not looking forward to getting on another plane tomorrow.”

“It will be worth it.”

“Hm.”

Loki nuzzled into his brother’s neck. Thor petted his hair slowly.

They were quiet. The clouds broke to the west, some pink and purple and gold trickled through.

“Atmospheric,” murmured Loki.

Thor breathed in the smell of his brother’s hair. He was thinking of their mum. And Iceland. And the many things spoken and heard today in that interview. And Loki close to him, warm and safe and happy. He wanted to say something, express in some way that this was important, that he wasn’t just sliding through this moment unaware. That they had fought hard for it, and that he did not take it for granted. That he fucking loved him more than he could say.
“Loki…”

“Hm?”

Where to start. How.

His brother raised his head to stare at him, expectant. Thor opened his mouth, looking for words. The right words at first, then any words at all; none was coming.

His brother smiled, mostly with his eyes, knowing, seeing. He kissed him gently, a brush of lips, with his eyes closed. Thor smiled into the kiss, and hugged Loki tight. He squeezed tighter and tighter.

“I can’t breathe, Thor,” grumbled his brother.

“Fucking finally,” laughed Thor, his eyes cloudy again.

Loki chuckled softly too, hugging back. After a moment, he pinched him. Thor squirmed.

“Let go already,” said Loki, “or the neighbours will call the sop-control brigade on us.”

Thor laughed and loosened his hold. He stroked Loki’s hair, his face. His brother’s beauty still hit him at times, and he would observe feature by feature as if he’d never seen him before. It made Loki a bit self-conscious, but he didn’t complain. Much.

“How about that back rub,” said Loki, his eyes low, a lovely blush on his cheeks. Thor smiled from ear to ear; well, damn, so I can still make you blush.

“Yeah.” Thor rubbed his eyes, his voice choked up.

Loki got on his feet and offered a totally unnecessary hand to help his brother up. Thor must cut quite a picture, with his unspoken words and his teary eyes.

“Hey,” said Loki, and pulled a little mischievous smile. “Race you.”

“Race me?” Thor snorted. “How old were you again?”

“You don’t dare? Oh well, it’s fine, I understand. Sometimes I forget.”

“Forget what.”

“Your age.”

Thor snorted again.

“You’re hilarious, baby brother.”

“On the count of five?”

Thor shook his head slowly.

“Oh, come oooon…” said Loki. “Five, four, three…”

Thor gave him a solid shove, making Loki stumble back, and ran for it.

“Asshole!” screamed Loki behind his back.
Thor heard him run after, and curse, “Fucking wellies!” He was laughing.

The end.

Chapter End Notes

*sobbing*

So there we go. It's finished. The monster is finished. I wrote a fucking novel. I FINISHED a fucking novel. I can't believe it myself.

Been with these kids since fricking November 2014. My first Thorki too. I have lots of feelings.

End Notes

I'm incredifishface on Tumblr. I have a "dog inside the heart" tag for fanart, photos, manips and stuff that remind me of this 'verse, in case you want to check it out.

The title comes from Federico García Lorca’s "Ay, voz secreta del Amor Oscuro!", originally written as a painful lament over gay love, which in the early 20th century, in Spain, it was still very much the love that dared not speak its name and had to remain secret, even though it ached to proclaim itself out loud, proud and inevitable and yes, natural.

I feel there is a very Thunderfrosty quality to this sonnet.

"Oh secret voice of dark love!"
Oh bleeting without wool! Oh wound!
Oh drooping camellia, needle of gall!
Oh current without sea, city without wall!

Oh immense night in sure focus,
celestial mount rearing up in anguish!
Oh dog in the heart! The persecuted voice,
the mature lily, the boundless silence!

Get away from me, hot voice of ice,
don’t throw me into the wilds where
fruitlessly groan the flesh and sky.

Leave alone the hard ivory of my head,
have pity on me, rip my sorrow to shreds!
For I am love, for I am nature!"

(the original version now, if you feel like comparing. It's exquisite.)

Ay voz secreta del amor oscuro / ¡ay balido sin lanas! ¡ay herida! / ¡ay aguja de hiel, camelia hundida! / ¡ay corriente sin mar, ciudad sin muro!/
¡Ay noche inmensa de perfil seguro, / montaña celestial de angustia erguida! / ¡ay perro en corazón, voz perseguida! / ¡silencio sin confín, lirio maduro!/
Huye de mí, caliente voz de hielo, / no me quieras perder en la maleza / donde sin fruto gimen carne y cielo. /
Deja el duro marfil de mi cabeza, / apiádate de mí, ¡rompe mi duelo! / ¡que soy amor, que soy naturaleza!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!