Make Your Move

by concavepatterns

Summary

Darcy always thought that soulmate bonds were a gigantic load of garbage, until fate drops an injured trickster God in her lap. Now they have seven days to decide whether this bond will make them or break them.

Notes

I literally have 6 chapters of this fic already written but for some reason I've been dragging my feet on actually posting it, so here it finally is!
Chapter 1

It was nine hundred degrees outside and Darcy was barely even exaggerating.

“Tell me again why we’re back in Butthole, New Mexico,” she panted, lifting another cardboard box of Jane’s equipment from the back of the Jeep and hauling it into the lab.

“Well,” Jane gave a little grunt as she pulled the last of the boxes from the vehicle, “the clear skies are the best conditions for studying atmospheric anomalies, and all this wide open space means that we can test the Einstein-Rosen Bridge without attracting any unwanted attention.”

Darcy frowned and looked at the flat, dusty expanse of desert surrounding them. “It’s definitely isolated. There’ll be no one to hear us scream when we get eaten by dingoes.”

“I’m pretty sure there are no dingoes in New Mexico, Darcy.” Jane set her box down with a relieved sigh and headed for the small ice chest sitting on the counter. She pulled out two water bottles and tossed one to Darcy.

Darcy immediately twisted off the cap and took a greedy drink. The cool water felt amazing on her dry throat but it did little to relieve her crankiness. “At least tell me we aren’t sharing a trailer.”

“Nope!” Jane replied brightly. “I’ve got a real house rented and get this: there’s central air.”

“You’re shitting me,” Darcy swept the hair off the back of her neck and fanned herself with her hand in a weak attempt to cool off.

The air in the lab was thick with humidity, stale and unmoving despite the fact that they’d left the door open in the hopes that a breeze would blow through. Yeah right. Darcy suspected that the words ‘breeze’ and ‘New Mexico summers’ had never been used in the same sentence.

“It’s no joke,” Jane confirmed, “we can pick up the keys at two this afternoon.”

Darcy chugged the rest of her water and wiped the back of her hand over her sweaty forehead. “Thank God for small miracles,” she murmured.

The house was nice. Way nicer than Darcy had expected it to be. It was modest, with only two bedrooms and one bath, but it was clean and far more spacious than Jane’s old trailer, which was really all that Darcy could ask for.

The living room and kitchen were one large open concept area, decorated in a fairly typical desert theme of reds and oranges, and the cold terracotta tiles lining the floors felt incredible on Darcy’s overheated skin as she slipped off her sandals and padded through the house barefoot, tugging her suitcase behind her.

Darcy’s bedroom (she got her own room!) was painted a cheerful pale yellow. There was even a small desk next to the bed so she could set up her laptop and stream Netflix in the evenings. Sweet.

“Jane!” Darcy called, setting her suitcase down on the bed before poking her head out of the room and into the hallway. “What’s the status on that central air? I’m dying over here.”

“Um...”
Darcy frowned. When Jane hesitated, it was never good.

She fished around in her suitcase for a package of hair ties and scraped her curls back into a messy bun, reveling in the feeling of finally having her neck bare. Abandoning her unpacking for the moment, she wandered down the hall until she found Jane fiddling with the thermostat on the living room wall.

“Please don’t tell me it’s broken.” Darcy cringed, preparing for the worst.

“Definitely broken,” Jane confirmed grimly. “I’ll have a look at the main unit outside. Maybe it just needs a new part.”

“ Astrophysicist by day and A/C repairwoman by night?” Darcy questioned, raising an eyebrow.

Jane laughed and gave a casual shrug. “Mechanics are mechanics. If I can build my own equipment from scratch, I’m sure I can figure out an air conditioner.”

“Okay but if you can’t fix it in twenty minutes, come back inside,” Darcy ordered, “today already sucks bad enough, I don’t need to be playing nurse to your heat-sickness on top of everything else.”

“Deal,” Jane agreed, crossing the room and sliding open the patio door that lead out into the small backyard.

When the door shut behind her, Darcy blew out a breath and headed for the kitchen. Thank God they had already done a grocery run. Darcy desperately needed a popsicle if she was going to tackle the rest of her unpacking.

She was just licking the last of the cherry-flavoured treat off the stick when she heard an odd, muffled noise coming from the front door.

Darcy tossed the stick in the trash and warily approached the entrance way. It was probably just a stray dog looking to come in. There were a lot of them loose in this area. Or maybe...oh hell, what if there really were dingoes here? What if they wanted to eat her face off?

She had thoroughly freaked herself out now. Reaching for the only weapon-like item she could find close by (a tripod for one of Jane’s telescopes), Darcy put her hand on the door knob and took a steadying breath. Okay. On three. One...two...

She pulled open the door and instantly her hands went slack. The tripod landed with a clatter on the tile floor and Darcy suspected that her jaw was probably taking up space on the floor right now as well. Totally shocked, she could do nothing but stare up at the sight in front of her, and when she finally regained her voice, she did the only thing she could think of: call for backup.

“Jaaaane!”

“I don’t have heat stroke, Darcy. I’m fine!” Jane yelled from the backyard.

“Um, it’s not that. You might want to come in here for a minute!” Darcy called out with a note of hysteria creeping into her voice.

She heard the sliding door open and shut as Jane came back into the house, wiping her dirty hands on her jeans. “What’s so important that...oh.”

“Yeeeeeahhhh,” Darcy said as the pair stood side by side, blinking up at their foreign visitors.
Standing on their doorstep was a dirty, battle-weary Thor and in his arms he held the battered, unconscious form of his younger brother.

Apparently there was still room for Darcy’s day to suck even more. Wasn’t that just great.

“Thor! Oh my God, what happened? Come inside. Darcy – clear off the couch!” Jane went into a frenzy, pushing unpacked boxes out of the way and making a vain attempt to tidy the mess that was their living room.

“But he’s gonna get the furniture all bloody,” Darcy complained as she gathered up the various throw blankets and magazines littering the couch. “We’ll lose our security deposit!”

“That’s not important right now.” Jane directed Thor into the living room, keeping her hand glued to his arm the entire time.

Of course it wasn’t important. Darcy sighed and stepped back, giving Thor some space while he gently laid his brother down on the couch cushions. It was that damned soulmate bond. Honestly, Thor could give Jane a severed foot and Jane would display it in a crystal vase like some kind of priceless gift.

The bond always seemed to turn smart people stupid; made them blinded by love and screwed with their character in the oddest of ways. It made Darcy really damn glad that she hadn’t found her soulmate yet. With luck, maybe she never would. She valued her independence too much. The thought of being so completely attached to someone made her feel a little queasy.

Speaking of queasy, the half-dead Norse God on her couch was starting to make her stomach churn. There was a sickly grey pallor to his skin and a jagged wound in his side had dripped a trail of blood all the way from the front door to the living room.

“What the hell happened to him?” Darcy blurted out, watching with a mixture of disgust and fascination as Thor worked on carefully removing Loki’s jacket and shirt. It was like a car crash, awful but she couldn’t look away.

“Broad axe,” Thor answered gravely. “He was fortunate enough to dodge the worst of the blow.”

“Right,” Darcy said sarcastically, “that’s only a scratch. Slap a band-aid on and it’ll be just dandy.”

When Thor pulled away the rest of the bloody fabric, leaving Loki naked from the waist up, the full extent of his injuries were pretty horrifying. Darcy sucked in a sharp breath when she saw just how deep the gash in his side truly was.

On shaking legs she made her way into the kitchen and parked her butt in a chair. Yep, that was definitely all the blood and guts she could handle for one day.

“It’s going to need stitches,” Jane observed, leaning in to look at the wound. Her nose crinkled up in disgust but otherwise she showed no real reaction to the gore.

“Can you help him?” Thor asked, his hand landing on Jane’s shoulder and squeezing gently.

“Of course.” Jane’s eyes instantly softened and Darcy held back a gag. She wasn’t sure what was worse – all the blood or the two love-struck idiots in front of her.

Jane looked after the stitches, mainly because Thor’s hands were too large for the delicate work and Darcy still felt like she was a minute away from developing a case of the dry heaves.
Once the gash was cleaned and stitched, Darcy deemed it safe to return to the living room. She perched on the edge of the coffee table since Loki took up the entire couch and both Thor and Jane were occupying the room’s only other chair.

“So uh, it’s not that we don’t appreciate the visit, but why did you come here?” Darcy asked Thor curiously. “Why not take him to one of your doctors on Asgard?”

Thor grimaced and shifted in his seat, the question obviously making him uncomfortable. “I thought it best to avoid Odin,” he replied. “Loki sustained his injuries quite foolishly and I gather our father is not pleased by this news.”

“What happened?” Jane reached for his hand, giving it an encouraging squeeze.

Thor sighed, using his free hand to rub his palm over his face. “Loki travelled to Jotunheim and began an unnecessary war. Our father, and his father before him, worked tirelessly for centuries to build relations between Asgard and Jotunheim, and now Loki’s actions have caused the truce to collapse.”

“Really?” Darcy shot a glance over her shoulder at the unconscious God sprawled out on her couch. “You’re telling me that one guy ruined centuries of peace between your realms. Just like that.” She snapped her fingers.

“Just like that,” Thor confirmed with a serious nod. “The truce had always been a rather tentative agreement. Loki simply tipped the scales of what was already a delicate balance.”

“But why would Loki want to start a war with the Frost Giants?” Jane questioned.

“He is one.”

Thor’s reply was met by a moment of shocked silence.

“He’s what?” Jane said at the same time that Darcy piped up with a very eloquent exclamation of, “the fuck?”

“It is a long tale,” Thor explained, “but I suppose we have the time.”

Darcy leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees as Thor told her and Jane about Loki’s true heritage and Odin’s lies.

“Loki was angry, not thinking clearly,” Thor finished, “so he sought out the Frost Giants with the intention of wiping out the entire race.”

“One versus a whole species,” Darcy commented, “he’s damn lucky he’s still alive after that.”

Thor nodded. “I was very fortunate to find him when I did. He would have surely died had I arrived but a moment later...” he trailed off as his voice grew gruff with emotion.

Jane leaned into his side and placed a comforting kiss on his temple. “Don’t worry. He’s going to be fine. We’ll keep him here until he heals, right Darce?”

“Woah, what?” Darcy sat up a little straighter. “Harbor a murdery lunatic? Are you nuts?”

“He’s not dangerous,” Jane argued, “he only wanted to kill the Frost Giants.”

“Yeah and the KKK only wanted to kill black dudes. Is that supposed to make it any better? Murder is murder, Jane!” Darcy exclaimed.
“But Darcy-”

“This is that stupid soulmate bond talking, isn’t it?” Darcy interrupted, narrowing her eyes. “Are you even hearing yourself? The old you would never agree to this!”

“It’s the right thing to do,” Jane insisted.

“Darcy,” Thor interjected, “if I may ease your worries, I assure you that my brother holds no ill will towards Midgard but if his presence here truly bothers you, I will see to moving him as soon as possible.”

“It does bother me,” Darcy admitted, “but where else would you take him?”

“I may have an idea,” Jane said slowly. “Remember Agent Coulson? I kept his card. I don’t know if I fully trust him since he did steal my research – and your iPod,” she added when Darcy opened her mouth to interrupt, “but he might be the only one who can help us.”

“No harm in looking into it, I guess,” Darcy agreed, “and can you tell him that I want to be reimbursed – oh, woah! We’ve got a live one!” She jumped up from the coffee table when Loki began to stir behind her, letting out a long, broken groan.

“Brother!” Thor was instantly out of his chair and kneeling in front of the couch, his face full of concern as he leaned over Loki’s prone form. “How fare you?”

Loki opened his mouth to respond but immediately began to cough, lapsing into a fit of loud, dry hacking noises that sounded like a dying seal to Darcy’s ears.

“I’ll get water,” she murmured, heading for the kitchen. She filled a glass from the tap, idly hoping that with all his fancy magic and near immortality, the sick God would be off her couch in a day, tops. Darcy wasn’t sure how much of this she could handle.

She returned with the glass and held it out towards Loki, who was lying with his head propped up on the arm of the couch. He seemed to be a little more alert, though he still looked like death warmed over.

Their hands were shaking in almost equal amounts as Darcy passed him the drink; hers with nerves and his with fatigue.

When Loki accepted the glass, their fingers brushed. It was just the lightest of touches, barely even perceptible, but Darcy felt it right down to her bones.

In that one instant, everything changed.

A jolt ran through her, electricity dancing its way across her skin. Everything seemed to subtly shift into focus, like a missing puzzle piece had finally been put into place. The room grew clearer to her eyes as though a fog had been lifted, and each of Loki’s raw, ragged breaths were suddenly loud in her ears.

Darcy jerked back, automatically letting go of the glass and spilling the contents onto Loki’s bare stomach. He didn’t even seem to notice though; he was too busy staring at her with the same shocked expression that Darcy wore.

“Oh God, no,” she breathed, scrambling away from the couch.

“That is my name,” it took Loki two tries to get the words out after he was interrupted by the return of that
nasty, hacking cough, “tell me your name.”

Darcy shook her head, backing away even further until she bumped into Jane.

“Darce, what on Earth is going on with you?” Jane took one look at Darcy’s face and her eyes went wide. “Did you just...?”

“Yeah,” Darcy croaked, closing her eyes. Maybe if she wished hard enough, it would all be a dream. Sadly, when she re-opened her eyes, she was still in the middle of the living room, facing her supposed soulmate.

“It’s okay. It’s really not that bad,” Jane tried to console her.

“Truly, this is wonderful news,” Thor smiled encouragingly, “I have always wanted a sister.”

“Tell me your name,” Loki demanded again from the couch.

“Everybody just shut up!” Darcy exclaimed, feeling panic set in. Her hands were shaking and she felt sick; a shiver passing through her body that felt both too hot and too cold. There had to be some kind of mistake. There was no way that Loki could possibly be her soulmate.

“Look, we’ll work through this, okay?” Jane squeezed Darcy’s shoulder. “You don’t really have any other choice,” she said gently, “you know what happens if you try to deny it.”

The reminder made Darcy’s stomach drop. She had read plenty of news articles about people who tried to ignore their soulmate bonds. The bond was a genetic thing; built into a person’s DNA, so denying it always ended in one of two miserable ways: suicide or admittance into a mental ward.

“This can’t be happening,” Darcy dropped her head into her hands, “there are how many billion people on this planet and my soulmate had to be him?”

“Technically,” Loki wheezed from the couch, “I am not of this planet.”

“Not helping!” Darcy cried.

“Tell me your name,” Loki repeated again.

“She is Darcy Lewis of Midgard,” Thor informed him while Darcy was busy having her meltdown.

“No,” Loki said stubbornly, grimacing in pain as he curled his arms protectively around the gash in his side, “I want to hear her say it.”

“Oh, you want me to say it?” Darcy turned to Loki, shooting him a deadly glare as her voice grew louder and angrier by the second. “I’m fucking Betty White. There. You happy now?”

“Darcy-” Thor began, but she cut him off.

“Nope! I’m done with this. I’ll be in my room. Don’t come in unless you want to leave without your balls,” she threatened, storming down the hall to her bedroom and slamming the door behind her, leaving an awkward silence to settle over the room’s remaining occupants.

“Just give her some time to cool off. She’ll be fine,” Jane spoke, wincing when she heard the distinctive sound of a lamp being thrown against a wall, “....I hope.”
Chapter 2

Darcy remained shut in her room all afternoon and throughout most of the evening as well, finally surfacing at around 8 o’clock when she was starving and bored out of her mind.

She headed into the kitchen, keeping her chin raised high and steadfastly ignoring everyone. As she was rooting around in the fridge, she heard Jane come up behind her.

“There’s leftover chicken stir fry,” Jane offered quietly, leaning against the counter.

Darcy silently pulled the container from the fridge, dumped a portion of it onto a plate, and stuck it in the microwave.

While her food was heating, Jane spoke again. “I called Coulson,” she said, “his boss wants to meet with us so Thor and I are flying to D.C. tomorrow.”

“What?” Darcy blurted, so surprised by the news she temporarily forgot she was in the midst of giving everyone the silent treatment. “You can’t leave me here alone with him.”

“It’s for the best,” Jane explained, “and it’ll give you two some time to adjust to your bond. We’ll only be gone a week at the most.”

“A week!”

Jane nodded. “We need time to know whether we can trust S.H.I.E.L.D. If they’re legit, Thor wants to negotiate with them to get protection for Loki in case Odin or the Frost Giants come looking for him.”

“Why can’t Thor just ship him back to Asgard?” Darcy grumbled, pulling her plate from the microwave when it beeped. “He’s gonna have to face his father sooner or later anyway. Fork?”

Jane dug around in the silverware drawer and handed her one. “Loki can’t go back until he’s fully healed. Thor’s worried that Odin will punish Loki in the same way he did with Thor, and with the state that Loki’s in right now, he won’t survive being stripped of his magic and cast out like that.”

Darcy groaned. “I hate it when you make sense,” she said.

Jane tried to hide her smile, failing spectacularly. “So you’re okay with this?”

“Like I have much of a choice in the matter,” Darcy dug her fork into the pile of chicken and veggies with much more force than necessary.

“You always have a choice, Darcy.”

“Really?” Darcy raised her eyebrows skeptically. “So what’s my other option? Leave Loki to bleed
out on our couch while I go to D.C. with you, ignore my bond and slowly go stark-raving bonkers? No thanks. I’m kind of fond of my mind. I’d rather not lose it.”

“I know it seems bad now but I’m sure things will get better,” Jane reassured. “You two wouldn’t be soulmates if you weren’t compatible on some level.”

Darcy shoveled a forkful of food into her mouth, chewing thoughtfully while she struggled to find a silver lining in the cloud hanging over her head. “If Loki really is my soulmate, he’ll want to make me happy, right? So maybe if I order him to shut up and leave me alone all week, he’ll actually do it.”

“Maybe,” Jane agreed with a slight shrug of her shoulders, “you and I both know, stranger things have happened.”

Jane and Thor’s flight left at nine, so Darcy found herself up at the ungodly hour of six the next morning.

She was sucking back her second cup of coffee when Jane announced that they were ready to leave. Since the Jeep was their only vehicle and Darcy would need a set of wheels in case of emergencies (like picking up medical supplies for Loki...or driving off a cliff and ending the horrible nightmare that her life had become), she would be driving the pair to the El Paso airport two towns over.

“I must first speak with Loki before we leave,” Thor placed his and Jane’s carry-on bags by the door before making his way to the living room.

Loki hadn’t budged from his place on the couch. He was lying on his back looking rather stiff and it made Darcy wonder whether he’d managed to sleep at all.

“You will be alright while I am gone?” Thor asked him.

“Somehow I will manage,” Loki deadpanned.

“And are you well enough to shield yourself from Heimdall’s view?” Thor asked. Either he was ignoring Loki’s sarcasm or over the years he’d just become immune to it. Probably the latter. “Father mustn’t find you. Not until you are well.”

Loki chuckled roughly, “I have had that particular spell in place for centuries now.”

A slow, wide smile bloomed on Thor’s face and he clapped his brother on the shoulder, making Loki wince. “Ah, so that explains why I was always the one to receive the brunt of the punishment after our excursions to Vanaheim.”

“I sense a story here,” Jane came up beside Thor, smiling at him as she tucked their plane tickets into her purse.

Thor nodded, looping his arm around her waist and pulling her into his side. “Aye. We were young, barely yet men. Loki had discovered a secret passage between Asgard and Vanaheim, so after last meal we would often sneak out of the palace and travel through the hidden channel. We spent many an evening in the Vanir markets in search of young maidens.”

“Young maidens?” Darcy abandoned the cold remains of coffee in the bottom of her mug and joined them in the living room, crossing her arms over her chest and grinning up at Thor. “You were totally
trying to pick up chicks, weren’t you?”

“As I said, we were young,” Thor blushed slightly. “Loki and I were eager to locate our soulmates, so we sought to meet as many maidens as possible. On our return to the palace, Heimdall would be waiting with a stern word for me, but Loki always managed to avoid punishment.”

“You were a real troublemaker, huh?” Darcy glanced at Loki, unable to hold back an impressed smile.

“Evidently I still am,” Loki replied smoothly, giving her a lopsided grin. It would have almost been charming if it weren’t for the fact that he was deathly pale, shivering, and covered in dry blood.

Darcy’s stomach twisted and she quickly looked away, forcing the smile off her face. Shit. She was already growing curious about him, wanting to learn more about his childhood adventures. Apparently her soulmate bond was working fast.

She was grateful when Jane jumped in to fill the increasingly awkward silence. “So we’re set?”

“Yes, I believe so.” Thor agreed, giving Jane a final squeeze before they separated and gathered the last of their things, taking their bags out to the Jeep and leaving Darcy and Loki alone to stare at each other uneasily.

“Um, so, I’ll be back soon,” Darcy told him, “just...sit tight. Okay?”

“Does it look as if I’m about to go anywhere?” Loki raised an eyebrow.

“Right,” Darcy muttered, snatching her purse and car keys off the kitchen table. “You need anything before I go?”

“You have not yet told me your name,” Loki pressed.

“Michelle Obama. Now if that’ll be all, I’m leaving.” Darcy practically flew out the door, making sure to lock Loki inside the house as she left. He didn’t look like he was in any condition to get up and go wandering around, but she wasn’t about to risk it.

Unfortunately for her, traffic was light and the airport was barely crowded so it didn’t take nearly as long as she’d hoped it would to drop off Jane and Thor.

Darcy found herself standing back on the front step of the house only an hour and a half after her departure. She pulled her house key from her purse and nervously twisted the lanyard between her fingers.

This was it: the start of seven whole days alone with Loki.

God help her.

With a deep breath, Darcy unlocked the door and quietly crept inside. If she was silent enough, maybe she could hide away in her room for a few hours without Loki noticing.

She toed off her sandals and was just beginning to inch her way towards the hallway when he spoke.

“You’ve returned.”

His voice spooked her and Darcy nearly jumped out of her skin. “Yeah,” she wet her lips, feeling ridiculously inarticulate around him, “look at that, here I am.”
It felt like being under a microscope, the way his eyes were firmly fixed on her, tracking her every move. There was a dark seriousness to his gaze that made her shiver.

“You need something?” She asked, shifting uncomfortably under the directness of his stare.

“Actually, I would like to bathe,” Loki replied.

It had to be a dream. Some cruel, twisted nightmare. Anything else she could handle, but this? This might kill her.

Darcy pushed a hand through her hair and gave a dejected sigh. “The bathroom’s all the way down the hall. Can you even stand up?”

“Of course,” Loki looked at her as if she were an idiot and Darcy bit the inside of her cheek to keep herself from saying anything nasty.

She watched as he struggled on shaking arms, attempting to push himself into a sitting position. He let out a soft grunt of pain when he was finally seated upright, and that’s when Darcy noticed the glisten of fresh blood on his side.

“You moron,” she snapped, “if you tore your stitches, I’m sure as hell not sewing you back up!”

“I will heal without the aid of your crude Midgardian medicine,” Loki panted, trying to stand. He was looking extra pale and sweat had begun to gather on his forehead.

Darcy rolled her eyes. “You’re about to fall over.”

“Then what do you suggest?” He sounded cranky, not unlike an over-tired child, Darcy thought. She was beginning to think there wasn’t much of a difference between grumpy toddlers and self-entitled Gods anyway.

When she didn’t answer, Loki’s eyes flicked up to meet hers and Darcy could see the unspoken challenge in his gaze. He was daring her to help him...and he was certain that she wouldn’t do it.

“You think I’m afraid of you or something, cause I’m really not,” she said. It was true; she wasn’t. What she was afraid of was crossing a line and never being able to come back from it. Her soulmate bond was already yelling at her to help him, touch him, comfort him. It was making Darcy want to tear her hair out.

Loki continued to stare at her, swaying slightly on the couch. His silence was almost worse than when he was yapping at her.

“Ugh, alright. The sooner we get this over with, the better. C’mon.” She went to his side and hesitated for a moment, working out a game plan in her head before she awkwardly slipped her arm under his and heaved him up onto his feet.

The contact was intense, that was the only way she could think to describe it, and with the air conditioning still being broken, the already stifling house was suddenly beginning to feel a whole lot hotter to Darcy. It was bordering on unbearable and she suppressed a shiver as she felt a bead of sweat roll down the small of her back.

Loki’s skin was equally warm and sweaty against her, and it took all of Darcy’s energy to ignore the feeling of his bare torso pressing against her side. Every one of his miniscule movements - the subtle shift of his hips as he tried to keep his balance, the deep breaths that made his chest expand and contract - were making her body go haywire.
Loki leaned on her heavily as she guided him towards the bathroom. It was slow going since he had a good amount of height on her, and despite his skinny appearance, he felt like he weighted a ton.

“You’re gonna have to do a little more of the work,” she grunted, struggling to keep him upright. “I won’t be much help to you if you fall over and squash me like a bug.”

She felt the load on her shoulder lighten just a little as Loki straightened up and supported more of his own weight.

He was being oddly quiet, and when Darcy tilted her head to sneak a peek up at his face, she found that his jaw was clenched and his lips were set in a hard line. Pain or embarrassment; she wasn’t sure which he was feeling though she suspected that it was a combination of both.

When they reached the bathroom, Darcy made him sit on the toilet lid while she started up the shower.

“Be really careful with your stitches,” she instructed as she twisted on the hot water and tested the temperature with her hand. “There’s soap and all that in the shower. Are you sure you can do this?”

“Yes,” Loki bent over and attempted to unlace his boots but the movement caused the stitches in his side pull and he gritted his teeth, finally giving up and leaning tiredly against the toilet tank.

“Fuck. I’m gonna have to undress you, aren’t I?” Darcy sighed and dried her wet hand by wiping it on the front of her shirt.

“So it appears,” Loki murmured, not meeting her eyes. It could have been the effort of the difficult walk but Darcy was willing to bet that the light blush on his cheeks had nothing to do with physical exertion and everything to do with the thought of her pulling off his pants.

She moved until she was standing directly in front of him then slowly lowered herself down onto her knees, fighting her own blush the entire time. She started with the buckles on his boots first, working with quick, precise movements to loosen the straps. Her hands were shaking though, and when her fingers fumbled she breathed out a frustrated curse.

The second boot was a lot quicker once she got the hang of it and Darcy was able to pull it and his socks off fairly easily before she sat back on her heels and glanced up at Loki’s face.

He was watching her with a half-lidded, content expression, though Darcy was firmly choosing to classify that look as tiredness rather than pleasure. The last thing she needed was their soulmate bond complicating an already awkward situation.

The pants were next and Darcy leaned towards Loki, her hands hovering in the air just above his lap as she chewed on her bottom lip unsurely.

“How does this work?” She asked, looking to him for instruction. Fumbling with his boots was one thing but she sure as hell wasn’t about to blindly dive into this particular area.

“First loosen the straps on each side,” Loki murmured, “then the buttons, and lastly the zipper.”

His voice was rough and throaty, making her body react in all the wrong ways. Darcy shifted, squeezing her thighs together tightly in an attempt to ease the ache that was steadily growing between her legs.

She did as he said, first loosening each of the straps that ran along his hips, then unfastening the two buttons and slowly pulling down the zipper.
The room was filling with hot, heavy steam and Darcy had almost forgotten that she’d left the shower running until the air became so thick that she’d begun to pant. Of course, the cause of her labored breathing could have also been the fact that she was currently undressing a very attractive and rather well endowed God (at least that was the impression she’d gotten after her brief peek into his pants) who also just happened to be her soulmate.

The steamy air settled over her like an unpleasant blanket, and Darcy could feel the sticky coolness of sweat begin to cover her neck and chest. She pushed a few stray curls off her face, the heat leaving her hair damp and clingy as it stuck to the back of her neck.

Part of her wanted to bolt out of the house and never return. The other part was desperate to finish what she’d started.

“You’ll need to stand now,” she said, clearing her throat and hopping up from her kneeling position. She slid her arm around Loki again, trying to hold him steady as he swayed on his feet.

Once he seemed to be fairly stable on his own, Darcy let go of him and quickly tugged his pants down. Her face was burning with embarrassment and she locked her gaze on the wall behind Loki to keep her eyes from straying.

It wasn’t much use though, and she still wound up seeing way too much of him; the trail of dark hair below his navel, the hard muscles of his thighs, and then there was the fact that he was half-aroused.

“The bond,” Loki explained apologetically when Darcy made a surprised, strangled noise.

Right; their soulmate bond worked both ways. Darcy had been so concerned with herself that she hadn’t put any thought into the idea that Loki would be just as affected by the bond as she was.

“Lift your leg,” she said hoarsely, looking up at the ceiling and willing the blush on her face to subside.

Loki wobbled as he lifted his foot and Darcy slid his pant leg down to his ankle before pulling it off. They repeated the motion on the other side, leaving him completely bare.

It was intimidating. Even in his tired, injured state, Loki towered over her, made up entirely of muscle and power.

“Are you good to go from here?” Darcy asked. She was trying not to stare but it was a battle she was quickly losing. While her brain might be saying no, her eyes were saying hell yeah and thanks to her bond, she desperately wanted to step forward and drag her nails down his abs. The urge was so strong, it made her hands itch.

Distracting herself, Darcy turned to the closet and pulled a fresh towel from the shelf, leaving it beside the sink. “Sooo, towel’s there. I’ll be down the hall. Yell if you need anything.” But please, for the love of God, don’t need anything, she silently added.

Loki nodded and hobbled into the shower. Damn. He had a fantastic ass and now Darcy really needed to leave the room before she did something incredibly stupid, like feel up an injured God.

She ran to her bedroom, shutting herself inside and yanking off her sweat-soaked shirt before she threw herself face-down onto her bed.

This was bad. This was very, very bad. Her body was humming with pent-up arousal and her skin felt feverish. It took all of Darcy’s willpower to ignore the tug of her soulmate bond. It whispered seductive thoughts inside her head, telling her to go back and join Loki in the shower.
When the bond started offering up mental images to go along with its suggestive words, Darcy threw her pillow at the wall and let out a frustrated growl.

She needed a drink, stat.

Throwing on a clean shirt, she padded into the kitchen and went straight for the cupboard she and Jane had dubbed their official wine stash. The clock on the microwave read 11:36 but it was twelve o’clock somewhere, right?

God, just thinking of the fact that day one of her week with Loki was barely even half over yet...it made her want to cry. How the hell was she supposed to do this for six more days?

She was digging through a drawer looking for the corkscrew when Loki stumbled out of the bathroom clad in nothing but his towel (Darcy mentally kicked herself for not thinking to leave him a clean change of clothes). On top of his overall tiredness he looked dizzy too, judging from the way he kept his hand placed against the wall for balance.

Darcy’s feet moved automatically and before she knew what she was doing, she was at his side, letting him lean on her as they made the slow trek back towards the living room couch.

He smelled ridiculously good and she couldn’t help but marvel at how nice his skin felt now that it was free of all that blood and grime. Loki had wound his arm around her shoulders for support and his hand was currently tangled in the back of her hair. Each time he accidentally tugged, a little thrill shot through Darcy. Her soulmate bond chose that moment to pipe up again, offering up a rather detailed list of all the other scenarios in which Loki could be pulling her hair.

She’d need about eight bottles of wine to get rid of those particular thoughts.

When she finally got Loki back to the sofa, he plopped down onto the cushions heavily, letting out a relieved sigh.

“I’ll get you some pants,” Darcy offered, “Jane usually keeps a few spare pairs for Thor in her closet.”

“Hmmm,” Loki closed his eyes, too tired to say much else.

While his eyes were shut, Darcy took a moment to study him, noticing the dark bags under his eyes and the tightness of his mouth. Both were clear indicators that he was still in a fair amount of pain, and knowing that he was hurting gave Darcy a sick, uneasy feeling.

Her soulmate bond roared to life in her bloodstream, pulling her to him like a magnet and overwhelming her with the urge to comfort and protect him. The feeling was so strong, it made her chest ache.

Unable to stop herself, Darcy reached out and smoothed his damp hair off his forehead, letting her fingertips brush along his temple.

Loki made a soft noise of contentment and Darcy felt herself relax, the tight ball of anxiety in her stomach slowly loosening. The skin on skin contact seemed to be oddly soothing for the both of them, and it made Darcy think that maybe their situation wasn’t so bad after all.

For that brief moment, she felt like she could do it. She would make it through the week, Loki would heal without difficulty, and then they would sort out a way to deal with their bond.

Lost in her thoughts, her fingers continued to explore Loki’s face, drifting down until she was
unconsciously cupping his cheek in a tender gesture.

That’s when she snapped back into reality and once Darcy realized what she’d done, she quickly withdrew her hand, backing away like she’d just touched a toxic substance. Lucky for her, Loki seemed to be asleep. He hadn’t reacted to her touch at all.

With her heart hammering wildly, Darcy turned away from him and busied herself with finding a pair of pants that would fit his tall, lanky form.

As she sorted through Thor’s stash of clothing in Jane’s room, something inside of her felt different. There was a weird yearning in her bones that went far beyond the simple lust she’d felt for Loki earlier in the bathroom, and Darcy had a sinking suspicion that the line she was so concerned about crossing had just been leaped over.
Can I interest anyone in a little more UST? ;)

Loki slept away most of the afternoon, much to Darcy’s relief.

She used that time to finish the rest of her unpacking and make a meatloaf for dinner, all the while her brain was humming as she tried to come to terms with being bound to Loki.

There was no denying it; despite her best intentions she was already beginning to develop feelings for the guy. Granted, said feelings weren’t much more than pity at this point (he was sprawled across her couch pretty pathetically), but it was still a complete change of heart from when she’d been calling him a murdery nutcase just yesterday.

Was that really only yesterday? It felt more like two years ago to her overwrought brain.

Once dinner was in the oven and Darcy had scrubbed clean every surface of the kitchen, she collapsed into the chair across from Loki, feeling just as confused and uncertain about him as ever.

There was little else for her to do, so she snatched up the TV remote and began flicking through channels. Loki was such a sound sleeper she didn’t even have to lower the volume as she settled on some sitcom with a never-ending laugh track.

Loki finally stirred to life just as Darcy was finishing up dinner and loading the dishwasher. When she was done, she brought him two pieces of dry toast and a glass of apple juice.

“Eat up,” she plunked the plate and glass down on the coffee table, “and put some damn pants on too.”

Darcy snatched up the pair of sweatpants she’d set out for him, tossing them over to Loki. He was still sleepy and uncoordinated, so the pants wound up hitting him in the side of the head before falling into his lap.

“You cooked something. I want that, not toasted bread.” Loki said as he yanked off his towel and began wiggling into the sweatpants.

“Dude!” Darcy averted her eyes, staring up at the ceiling. “Warn a girl first!”

“It’s nothing you have not already seen,” Loki commented, pulling the pants up his hips.

“Whatever. Eat your stupid toast,” Darcy grumbled, returning to her chair across from him. “If you don’t barf it up, then I’ll get you a piece of meatloaf.”

Loki reached for the plate and stuffed half the toast in his mouth at once, chewing with a pensive look on his face.

“What?” Darcy asked exasperatedly.
“I wish for you to tell me your name,” Loki replied once he’d swallowed his food, “you still have not done so.”

“Mary Tyler Moore. For God’s sake, you know what it is. Thor told you.” Darcy slouched down in her seat and focused her attention back on the TV. It was on Wheel of Fortune now and she stared at the little white boxes intently.

“I want to hear you say it,” Loki glanced up at the television screen and frowned. “A legend in his own mind,” he said abruptly.

“If that’s what you want to call yourself,” Darcy commented under her breath.

“No, the solution to the puzzle,” Loki pointed his piece of toast at the TV.

“How the hell did you know that?” Darcy blinked at him. “They haven’t even started the round yet!”

Loki shrugged and resumed chewing on his food.

They lapsed into a strangely comfortable silence, the quiet only being broken by the sound of Loki crunching away on toast and their occasional guesses at each new puzzle that appeared on screen. Naturally Loki always guessed right and Darcy was kind of starting to hate him for it.

“Oh, no more of this,” she flipped to the Weather Network and Loki made a sound of protest.

“The final round was just about to begin,” he complained.

“You’ve annoyed me enough for one night,” Darcy pushed herself out of her chair and stretched her stiff muscles. “Besides, I should probably check your stitches.”

Overall, Loki was a pretty decent patient. He stayed still and didn’t complain when Darcy crouched down beside him and examined the wound on his side, gently poking at the small crisscrossed threads with as much clinical detachment as she could muster.

“You really are a quick healer,” she said, impressed by how much the deep cut had already improved. “I think the stitches can come out, actually. They’re not doing you much good anymore.”

“They itch,” Loki admitted, glancing down at his side.

“Okay, let me get the stuff,” Darcy went to the bathroom and searched through her and Jane’s modest little first aid kit until she’d retrieved a small pair of scissors, rubbing alcohol, and a few gauze pads.

When she returned to the living room, she nearly dropped her handful of supplies.

“No no no,” she whined, rushing over to Loki’s side. “I told you to wait!”

In the few moments she’d been gone, Loki had somehow managed to pull the stitches out himself and now blood was oozing out of small tears in his skin.

“What the hell!” Darcy groaned, dropping down onto her knees beside the couch as she doused one of the pads in alcohol and began dabbing at his side.

The burn of the disinfectant made Loki wince and he immediately tried to twist away from her.

“Move and I will throttle you,” Darcy warned darkly.
There must have been a good dose of sincerity in her voice because Loki actually listened to her, obediently remaining still and only letting out the occasional grunt when Darcy pressed particularly hard on his injury. Served him right anyway.

“How didn’t you wait?” She asked, making a face as she gathered up the bloody gauze and pieces of thread so she could throw them in the trash.

“It itched,” Loki repeated, settling back against the cushions and closing his eyes.

“So if your foot itched, would you have hacked it off with a saw?” Darcy shot over her shoulder as she headed into the kitchen and dumped the bloody supplies into the garbage can.

Loki didn’t respond and by the time she’d washed her hands and returned to the living room, he was fast asleep.

“Typical,” she muttered.

Darcy tossed and turned through most of the night. Despite feeling exhausted and desperate for rest, her soulmate bond kept nagging at her. Her bedroom was only about twenty feet from where Loki slept in the living room, but for some reason her stupid bond wanted her to be closer to him.

Darcy did her best to ignore the feeling and after a serious exercise in willpower, she eventually slipped into a light sleep when the numbers on her alarm clock had just passed 2 am.

Even in sleep, she got no relief.

She dreamed about him and in her dream, Loki had picked himself up off the couch, snuck into her bedroom, and slid between the sheets with her. That was it. There had been no suggestive touches, no naughtiness; he had simply spooned her. The heat and solidness of his body had felt was so real, so secure, that when Darcy woke up the next morning, she half expected him to be in bed next to her.

He wasn’t, of course.

As she stared at the empty side of her bed, an odd sense of disappointment settled over Darcy. It was almost enough to make her wish she’d had a sex dream about him instead. That she could handle (Loki was a good looking guy after all) but this...this unsettled her.

She was in a dark mood as she shuffled out into the kitchen an hour later, automatically heading straight for the coffee maker.

She brewed a giant pot for herself, doctored it with cream and sugar, then took her mug with her into the living room.

Loki was awake though he still looked awful. He barely lifted his head when she entered the room, but Darcy could feel his eyes follow her as she sat in her usual chair across from him and picked up a magazine so she wouldn’t have to make eye contact with him.

Once Darcy had drunk half her coffee and flipped through most of the magazine’s pages, she finally asked, “How are you?”

“How do you think?” Loki retorted, closing his eyes. Darcy saw his throat working as he swallowed
painfully.

“Oh! You’re probably thirsty. And hungry.” Some caretaker she was turning out to be.

She set her mug down and went back into the kitchen, dropping some bread into the toaster and drumming her fingers on the countertop while she waited for it to finish cooking.

She was only making him breakfast to speed up the healing process, Darcy firmly told herself. The sooner Loki got better, she sooner he’d be off her couch and 1800 miles away in Washington. This was no ‘out of the goodness of her heart’ crap. She was absolutely not doing this to make him happy. Nope, she couldn’t care less about whether he had slept well last night or if he was in a lot of pain right now, and she certainly wasn’t doing it because she wanted to see some dumb look of gratitude on his stupid face.

Despite the pep talk going on inside her head, her hands seemed to move of their own accord, and Darcy found herself returning to the living room with the extra addition of water, a banana, and a damp cloth when all she’d intended to do was toast him some damn bread.

“I didn’t grab painkillers,” she babbled a bit awkwardly as she set everything down in front of him, “I have no idea what they’ll do to you.”

“Likely nothing,” Loki replied, slowly raising himself up on shaking arms. He finally got himself into a half-sitting, half-leaning position against the arm of the couch but the effort cost him. There was sweat glistening on his forehead and Darcy could hear his breath coming out in short, harsh pants.

Since he was sitting upright there was finally room to spare on the couch so Darcy tentatively sat next to him, making sure to leave a good amount of space between their bodies as she passed him the plate of toast.

“Eat this first before it gets cold,” she said.

Loki smiled thinly, accepting the plate from her.

“Are there more puzzles on the television?” He asked between bites of his food.

“Ugh, no more Wheel of Fortune,” Darcy let her head flop against the back of the couch, “I’m limiting your access to that show. You can watch a movie instead.”

“A moving picture?” Loki polished off his toast and Darcy passed him the banana next. He finished it in four bites. At least his appetite seemed to be improving.

“Yes, a moving picture,” she mimicked his formal tone, “but first, let’s see that cut. Lean over a little.”

Loki leaned his upper body away from her, stretching to give Darcy better access to the gash on his side. She picked up her damp cloth and began dabbing at his injury.

“Looks really good,” she murmured as she gently cleaned around the wound. The cut had almost completely closed up and the jagged holes where Loki had so stupidly torn out his stitches were already scabbed over.

When she finished, she looked up at Loki to find that he was watching her with dark, piercing eyes. Darcy’s breath caught in her throat and she instantly knew that he was feeling the tug of their
soulmate bond, only because she was currently experiencing the same mesmerizing pull towards him.

She let the cloth in her hand fall to the floor as Loki shifted positions, turning his body towards her and eating up all the empty space between them.

Not used to being so close to him, Darcy was surprised to find that he had seriously beautiful eyes. She considered voicing her thought, but it was probably a dumb thing to say and her voice didn’t seem to be working properly at the moment anyway.

Loki inclined his head until his face was level with hers, looking hesitant and almost a little shy as his eyes flickered down to her lips.

It was ridiculously cute and nervous butterflies began to take flight in Darcy’s stomach.

Oh God, he was about to kiss her.

And she was going to let him.

Her hand went to his shoulder, steadying herself as she leaned into him, their noses just barely brushing. His breath was warm on her lips, enticing her to lean in a fraction more and close the distance between his mouth and hers.

That was all it would take, one little move, and Darcy found herself lifting her chin as her soulmate bond whispered to her.

Just a bit more...

“No no no no.” She came to her senses and scooted back to the very edge of the couch, taking in deep gulps of air as she urged her heartbeat to return to a somewhat normal speed. “I can’t. We can’t. First of all, you’re still healing,” Loki was looking considerably pale at the moment, “and secondly, this, us,” she gestured between them, “is just too complicated.”

“So what do you propose?” Loki rubbed his hand over his face, leaning back against the arm of the sofa and watching her with a guarded expression.

“We take this slow,” Darcy declared, “like stupid, crazy slow until we figure out what to do about this bond.”

“I will be gone in merely five more days,” Loki reminded her.

Darcy let out a frustrated groan. “I know, I know. I just...I can’t dive into this. You’re a freaking alien prince and the only reason you’re on my couch right now is because you waged war against some other alien planet and you lost. How am I supposed to deal with all that?”

“I didn’t lose. I momentarily withdrew with every intention of finishing what I started.” Loki countered.

“Really?!” Darcy exclaimed, “I’m trying to have an honest discussion about feelings and crap, and that’s what you take away from this?”

“What would you have me say?” Loki retorted, slouching down on the sofa cushions and closing his eyes. “I am not enjoying this situation any more than you are.”

“Oh, of course you’re not. How awful it must be for you to bum around on my couch all day while I
do everything for you.” Darcy muttered. “Just forget it.” She rose to her feet and gathered Loki’s empty glass and plate. “I’ll put a movie on for you and then I’ll be in my room. Don’t bother me unless you’re dying.”

She stopped, tilting her head in consideration. “Nope, even if you are dying, don’t bug me. Just shut up and do it in peace.”

The atmosphere in the house remained tense for the rest of the day.

Not wanting to face Loki, Darcy chose to while away the afternoon in her bedroom, making sure to first shoot a quick text to Jane to confirm that *yes*, the house was still standing, and *no*, she hadn’t strangled Loki. Not yet, anyway. There was still plenty of time for that later.

The rest of Darcy’s time was spent browsing the internet and reading a yawn-worthy historical novel she’d pilfered from Jane’s room.

Eventually her stomach protested loudly, telling her that dinner was overdue.

With a sigh she pushed herself off her bed and trudged into the kitchen, quickly slapping some leftover meatloaf and peas onto two plates before nuking them in the microwave.

She brought Loki his plate, avoiding his eyes as she murmured, “I’m gonna eat in my room.”

“Wait,” Loki reached for her wrist but Darcy quickly withdrew her hand, spinning away from him and heading back towards her bedroom. She had taken two steps down the hallway when she heard him speak again.

“Darcy.”

She froze, fingers tightening on the edge of her plate as she slowly turned to face him.

It was the first time he’d ever called her by her name, and a small piece of Darcy wished that he could have continued to never speak it. The way the word rolled off his tongue was almost sinful; rich and deep and all kinds of erotic. Even without the pull of her soulmate bond, it would have been impossible to resist that voice.

“What,” she asked softly, not trusting herself to speak at full volume. Her voice was too wobbly.

“Dine with me...please,” he added. “I wish to be in your company.”

The formality of his request, combined with the pleading puppy dog look he wore, was too much for her to deny. Ignoring him was one thing, but she couldn’t bring herself to be downright rude to him. Yet another lovely side-effect of her soulmate bond, Darcy thought bitterly.

“Fine,” she relented, plopping down into her usual chair across from him.

The action caused Loki to smile so widely, the corners of his eyes crinkled, and Darcy tried to ignore the way her heart skipped when he looked at her like that.

As she watched him cut his food into precise bite-sized portions, she felt her chest tighten painfully at the thought of having five days left with him.

Pushing her peas around, Darcy frowned down at her plate, struggling to decide whether time was
acting as her friend or her enemy. It felt like a bit of both; their remaining days together seemed to be too much and yet not nearly enough for her.

She had a decision to make about their bond, about the very fate of their futures, and she’d have to do it soon.

Darcy just hoped that her head and her heart would come to an agreement by then.
Their third day together began with a bang.

Literally.

Darcy awoke to a gloomy sky and the sound of raindrops pattering against the window panes. The telltale signs of a thunderstorm rumbled in the distance and it wasn’t long before the brunt of the bad weather rolled in, rain teeming down and lightning crackling across the clouds.

“Holy hell. Better start building an ark,” Darcy commented, lifting her coffee mug to her lips as she gazed out the window.

“I am rather skilled with a longboat should it come to such extremes.” Loki came up behind her, making Darcy jump with surprise.

“Woah! Hot beverage here.” She winced when her coffee sloshed over the rim of her mug and landed on her fingers.

“You frighten far too easily,” Loki leaned against the wall, watching her.

That was his favourite hobby, Darcy had decided: watching her. It seemed to be the only thing he ever did besides eating all her food and demanding to watch Wheel of Fortune.

A particularly loud rumble of thunder sounded outside and Loki flinched.

“You were saying something about being easily frightened?” Darcy lifted her eyebrows and grinned at him cheekily.

“I’m not frightened,” he said defensively, “I am simply not fond of thunder. Nor lightning, for that matter.”

“Reminds you too much of Mister Blond and Bicepy, huh? I get that.” Darcy padded into the kitchen to wash out her mug while Loki trailed along behind her like a puppy.

He was standing way too close and Darcy almost elbowed him in the stomach when she went to reach for the dish towel.

“Dude, you’re seriously invading my personal space. I’m glad you’re feeling well enough to get up and walk around, but you don’t have to follow me everywhere.”

“I’m bored,” Loki complained. He didn’t look happy about her comment but nonetheless he took a step back, putting some much needed distance between their bodies. “Your house is dull.”

“Yeah well I’m not running a summer camp here, there’s no arts and crafts hour. You’ll just have to amuse yourself.” Darcy finished drying her mug and set it in the cupboard.

Loki ran a hand through his hair and gave a deep sigh, staring off in the direction of the refrigerator with a forlorn look. He was the very definition of dramatic, Darcy was beginning to realize.

“Alright,” she said, tossing her dish towel onto the counter before looking up at Loki, “you want...
something to do? Let’s go outside. It looks like the lightning’s already passed.”

“But it’s wet.”

Darcy snorted. “No shit, Sherlock.”

She went to the front door and waited with her hand on the knob to see if Loki would follow. He did, and when Darcy opened the door she was hit with the most glorious cool breeze she’d ever felt.

The air was fresh and earthy, instantly perking her up and sweeping the last few cobwebs of dreary tiredness from her head. Feeling like a little kid, Darcy grinned at the gloomy grey sky and sprinted out the open door.

She ran into the heavy downpour, only stopping when she reached the center of the lawn, and then she tipped her head back, closing her eyes as the rain hit her skin. It felt so good to have a break from the stifling humidity.

Thoroughly soaked, she wiped the wet hair from her face and looked back at the house where Loki was standing frozen on the front step.

“You coming or what,” she yelled, unable to stop the wide grin that pulled at her lips.

She saw him chuckle and shake his head, and then he was walking towards her, mirroring her grin with one of his own.

“Are you out of your mind?” He had to nearly shout over the noise of the pouring rain.

Drops of water ran down his face in rivulets, working their way from his temples to chin. The rain seemed to accentuate just how dark his hair was in contrast to his bright eyes and when Darcy combined all that with the fact that his grey t-shirt was soaked through and sticking to his abs, her brain could barely function. He was one hell of a sight.

Her soulmate bond was instantly awoken, skittering across her skin like little electrical shocks. The yearning pull was back as well, taking up residence in her chest and thumping steadily alongside her heart.

She took a step forward and Loki’s eyes visibly darkened, his pupils growing wide.

There was a sudden shift in the air between them, a tension so thick Darcy doubted that it could be cut by any blade, not even the sharpness of the axe that had done so much damage to Loki’s body.

“What?” She asked softly when an oddly serious expression settled over his face.

Loki swallowed roughly, his Adam’s apple bobbing before he answered. “You have never looked more beautiful to me.”

The confession caused Darcy’s heart to leap into her throat and she furiously blinked the raindrops out of her eyes, tipping her head back to stare up at him. “We’re about to have a total Notebook moment, aren’t we?”

“I don’t know what that is,” Loki admitted, aligning his body with hers until they stood only inches apart.

“It’s okay. I’ll show you.” Darcy took one last step, their bodies finally touching. She could feel the warmth of his skin burn through her wet clothing and it made her whole body tremble.
Lifting her hands, she laid her palms on Loki’s forearms, slowly sliding them up to his elbows, his biceps, and lastly his shoulders. Then, with excruciating slowness, she stood on her toes and pulled his face down to hers.

She kissed him incredibly softly, with more sweetness and care than she’d ever put into any kiss before.

Loki made a noise of pleasure in his throat, threading both hands into her hair as he returned her kiss with an unexpected tenderness that made Darcy’s heart melt.

Their mouths moved together in perfect rhythm, kisses so long and deep that Darcy thought she would pass out from lack of oxygen. When her lungs began to ache she drew back, panting hard. Her little puffs of breath were visible in the cool air, swirling around their faces while the rain continued to pelt them.

Loki’s hands slipped out of her hair, moving down her back before he dragged them across her hips. The contact was so intimate and suggestive, Darcy had to bite down on her lip to keep from moaning aloud.

When he took her hands in his, Loki frowned. “You’re cold,” he rubbed her chilly fingers between his palms, working some heat back into the digits, “we should return indoors.”

“Yeah,” Darcy said for lack of a better response. That was all her brain could come up with. She was lucky she could even remember her own name at this point.

She allowed Loki to lead the way back into the house, feeling slightly dazed and overwhelmed as she trailed along behind him.

They’d had a moment. An honest to God moment. It was gentle and affectionate with an easiness about it that scared the crap out of her.

“Sit. You must be tired by now.” Darcy instructed, falling back into business mode once they were inside. Business mode was good; definitely not as intimate, and Darcy immediately decided that she was a big fan of business mode.

Loki was looking alarmingly pale and at Darcy’s suggestion, he collapsed into his usual place on the couch. “Perhaps I overdid it,” he grimaced, shifting into a more comfortable position.

“Damn right you did. Stay put, I’ll get you some dry clothes.” Darcy went to her bedroom first, quickly changing into a fresh pair of lounge pants and a tank before she raided Jane’s room for more of Thor’s clothing.

She snatched a pair of black pants and a t-shirt from the closet and then briefly popped into the bathroom to grab towels.

“Here,” she tossed Loki the clothing and one of the towels. Leaving him to it, she made her way into the kitchen, towel-drying her hair as she walked.

There was no way she could stay in the same room with him while he undressed. Just the thought of watching him peel off that wet shirt and pants was making her heart pound at double speed.

In the kitchen, Darcy pulled a container of hot chocolate mix from the cupboard, trying to keep her hands busy in the hopes that it would distract her from what was happening in the other room. Much to her chagrin the pull of her bond had returned, giving her the urge to push Loki down onto the sofa cushions and press her own damp skin against his.
“What am I gonna do about you,” she whispered under her breath, unable to stop from glancing into the living room as Loki stripped off his wet shirt and pulled the dry one over his head. He was facing away from her so Darcy had a full view of his bare back, the muscles flexing and moving smoothly beneath his pale skin, and the sight made her mouth go dry.

She finished mixing their drinks, adding a few mini marshmallows to the top of each mug while ignoring the way her hands shook. She breathed out a curse as marshmallows spilled across the countertop, and Darcy quickly snatched them up, tossing them into the trash with much more force than necessary.

As she carried the mugs into the living room, she paused as the lights overhead flickered once, twice, and then shut off, leaving the house dim.

With a groan, Darcy set the drinks on the coffee table and went over to the light switch on the wall, repeatedly flicking it up and down. Nothing happened.

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“Power’s out,” she said just as thunder boomed loudly outside, “...aaand that’s probably why. Looks like round two of the storm is about to begin.”

“What do you typically do in the event of these power outages?” Loki asked, picking up his mug and sniffing the beverage apprehensively.

“It’s chocolate, not poison,” Darcy rolled her eyes, grabbing her own mug and taking a sip. “Let’s see...usually Jane and I just talk, or read, or...oh, we can play a board game!”

“A game?” The corner of Loki’s mouth pulled up into a sly grin. “You believe you can beat me?”

“So it’s gonna be like that, is it?” Darcy raised her eyebrows, giving him a challenging look over her shoulder as she hurried over to the hall closet and pulled out a well-worn red box. “You might want to go light on the trash-talk cause I’m about to whoop your ass. I am an undefeated Scrabble master,” she declared, dropping the box onto the coffee table.

While Loki studied the game’s instructions with a level of concentration usually reserved for performing brain surgery, Darcy went in search of candles, gathering as many as she could find and placing them throughout the living room. They didn’t give off much light but it was enough to brighten up the dark corners. It also didn’t hurt that Loki looked damn good in the soft, warm candlelight.

“You ready to have the snot beaten out of you?” She asked, pulling a few throw pillows off the couch and tossing them onto the floor.

“What are you doing?” Loki looked up from the game’s instruction sheet with a brief frown.

“This is the only way to properly enjoy a stormy day.” Darcy explained, sitting cross-legged on her pile of pillows, “hot chocolate, candles, and a ridiculous mass of pillows so you can play games on the floor.”

“Why the floor?” Loki questioned, though he was already beginning to drag a few cushions and blankets down beside her.

“Why not?” Darcy answered simply.

She pulled the Scrabble board from the box and laid it out in front of her as Loki settled down on her left side, sitting close enough that his knee was touching hers.
Swallowing hard, Darcy passed him one of the little wooden racks, then the velvet bag that held the
game tiles. “Pick seven.”

While Loki organized his tiles, Darcy laid down her first word: craft. “Ha! Check it out, double letter
score on my first turn,” she said smugly, recording her points on the small score-keeping sheet.

“Your cause for celebration may be short-lived,” Loki warned, playing off of Darcy’s ‘r’ and laying
down a jumble of tiles.

“Kvarna? That isn’t even a word!” She exclaimed, pointing to the board.

“It is most certainly a word,” Loki sniffed, straightening his tiles, “a kvarna is a piece of ceremonial
armor worn over the vlinjist.”

Darcy groaned loudly. “Seriously? Now you’re just making up sounds.”

“I assure you, these are all common Asgardian terms,” Loki insisted, “but if you are that afraid of
losing the game, I shall limit myself to your Midgardian English.”

“Fuck no,” Darcy said emphatically. She was a Scrabble master, dammit, and no foreign space
language would intimidate her. “You want to use your fancy Asgardian words? Fine. I’ll still beat
your ass.” She picked up three of her own tiles, spelling zeal around the second ‘a’ in Loki’s newest
word.

“Yesss,” she fist-pumped, reaching for the score card with a grin on her face, “triple letter score on
z!”

The game continued until the board was filled up with an unusual mish-mash of English and Aesir
terms, and when neither could play any more words with their remaining tiles, they called it quits.

“Okay, so...” Darcy picked up the score card, checking their respective totals, “that’s 290 points for
me and you’ve got...843? Fucking hell!” She tossed the card back into the box. “This game sucks.
From now on we only play Go Fish.”

“A sore loser, are you?” Loki was trying to hide his smile as he cleared the board, dumping the
letters back into the bag.

“I haven’t lost a game in years,” Darcy emphasized, leaning back against her pillows with a sigh.
“You dethroned the Scrabble queen,” she said, watching Loki’s hands as he methodically put all the
game pieces back into the box. His fingers were long and elegant and she wondered that they’d feel
like skimming over her skin, or better yet, sliding between her thighs.

Darcy felt her cheeks flush and she stopped that train of thought immediately, dragging her eyes
away from him and staring at the leg of the coffee table instead.

“You say I have dethroned the queen, hmm?” Loki commented, sliding the lid back onto the box.

“Yes,” Darcy confirmed, peeking up at his face, “what are you gonna do about it?”

Loki turned his body towards her and the knee that had been so innocently brushing against hers was
now pressing hard into her upper thigh. “I can think of many things I would like to do, Darcy.”
There was a depth to his voice that was mirrored in his eyes, a look of honest longing rather than a
blatant sexual innuendo.

Fuuuuuuuck, Darcy thought, getting caught in the heat and depth of his gaze. Even when he was
hitting on her, he managed to do it in such a classy, sexy way. How in the hell was she supposed to
function after being on the receiving end of a look like that? She was so screwed.

Or, more accurately, her problem was that she was not getting screwed. By him. God, it was getting
harder and harder to deny how badly she wanted him.

Darcy was torn from her internal dilemma when she felt Loki’s fingertips graze her hand. She
stopped breathing as he slowly thread his fingers into hers. His hand was the perfect balance of soft
and calloused, making her shiver when his thumb dragged across the sensitive skin of her palm.

“Loki...” his name came out on a whisper and she licked her lips, dying to have another taste of him.
That single kiss in the rain wasn’t nearly enough; she wanted more.

“Darcy.” His voice was hoarse and the look on his face told her that he would do anything she asked
of him in that moment.

He bent his head until his mouth was hovering over hers, and just as Darcy was preparing to close
the space between them, she was interrupted by the loud hum of electricity overhead.

The lights flickered to life and in the kitchen Darcy heard the refrigerator kick-start noisily as the
appliance got back into working order.

“Looks like we’ve got power again.” She forced out a bland, single-note laugh.

“Yes.” Loki cleared his throat, extracting his hand from hers and awkwardly running it through his
hair.

“So uh, I guess I’ll clean all this up,” Darcy said, gesturing to the half-melted candles and giant
collection of pillows they had amassed.

Loki nodded. “I wish to use the shower, so long as you do not mind.”

“You don’t have to ask permission,” Darcy bit her bottom lip to keep from grinning. God, could he
ever be cute.

“Ah, right. Well then.” He dragged his hand through his hair again before getting to his feet and
reaching to help Darcy up.

She took his offered hand, making sure to quickly release it as soon as she was standing.

There was a moment where their eyes met and lingered, silently staring at each other as if neither
wanted to be the first one to move away, but then Darcy dropped her gaze to the floor and ducked
past him, hurrying off to the kitchen.

As she turned on the tap, preparing to rinse the mugs they’d been using, she heard the bathroom door
click shut and the shower started up a moment later, giving her all kinds of unwanted mental images
involving soap and steam and her soulmate.

Her hand closed tightly around the handle of her mug, squeezing until her knuckles turned white and
she thought the ceramic might break from the force of her grip.

Mugs and resolve, Darcy thought; it felt like both were only moments away from cracking.
I'll leave it up to your imaginations to decide what happens in that shower because
*Nick Fury voice* I'm nice like that.

Maybe Loki washes his hair, maybe he works out some...frustrations. Who knows
¯\_(ツ)_/¯
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

The rating has now been bumped up to E. I think you know what that means ;)

It was another restless night for Darcy. She tossed and turned, counted backwards from 100, and even attempted to name all the state capitals, but it was no use. She just couldn’t sleep.

Frustrated and exhausted, at 3 a.m. she finally rolled out of bed, snatched up her pillow, and dragged her blanket along with her into the living room.

“Stupid ass bond. I hope you’re happy now,” she muttered to herself, letting her blanket and pillow drop onto the floor next to where Loki slept on the sofa.

She camped out beside him and even though the tile floor was hard beneath her and she soon discovered that Loki snored when he slept on his back, it satisfied her soulmate bond enough that she fell into a more restful sleep than she’d ever experienced in her own bed.

Hours later, she was rudely awakened by a foot landing painfully on her calf.

“Ow! Fucking hell, that hurts!” She tried to jerk her legs out of the way but it only made matters worse. Her blanket became tangled around Loki’s feet and he toppled over, falling half on top of her in an awkward heap.

With a groan, Loki raised himself up on his arms, blinking down at her with sleepy confusion. “Were you sleeping on the floor?”

“No,” Darcy shot back sarcastically, “I was doing a fucking paint by number. Of course I was sleeping!”

“And you thought it best to lie at my feet like a dog?” Loki lifted his eyebrows. “You’re fortunate I did not step on your face.”

“Yeah well you weren’t so fortunate. I mean, it looks like someone stepped on your face. Because you’re a jerk. With a stupid face.” Darcy made a noise of frustration. “God, I can’t even insult you properly. This soulmate thing sucks balls.”

She could see Loki’s shoulders shaking as he balanced his weight over top of her. At first, Darcy assumed his arms were getting tired but then she realized he was only shaking because he was holding back laughter.

“What the hell man! Don’t laugh at me!” she pointed a finger in his face.

Loki’s face split into a huge grin and a few soft chuckles slipped out between his lips. “My apologies, min kjære.” He lowered himself down onto his elbows and used one hand to brush a piece of stray hair out of Darcy’s face, gently tucking it behind her ear.

As his gaze met hers, Darcy had to remind herself to breathe. Loki’s eyes were shining in the darkness and he wore a look of carefree playfulness on his face. It was the most gorgeous thing she’d
ever seen and before she realized what she was doing, Darcy found herself lifting her hand and running the tips of her fingers down the side of his face.

She wet her lips, her eyes never leaving his as she asked, “What does that mean?”

Loki’s throat worked as he swallowed hard, and although it was dark, Darcy swore she saw his cheeks grow pink. “It’s nothing. Simply a term of endearment in my native tongue,” he explained, watching her with those dark, striking eyes.

“But what did you call me? I want to know,” Darcy insisted. “Please?” She wasn’t above pouting to get what she wanted, so she stuck out her bottom lip while moving her fingertips down to the smooth skin of his jaw.

The contact caused Loki to suck in a sharp breath. “Darcy,” he warned.

She knew exactly what he was warning her of. She could see the pull of their soulmate bond burning in his eyes and feel the desire radiating off him. He held his body taut above her, not daring to press his hips against hers, but Darcy could see that the bond was beginning to win out over his chivalry.

He was almost at his breaking point and she had the power to tip the scales, to make him lose control. It was a heady feeling and right now Darcy could think of nothing better than seeing him let go.

“Tell me,” she urged softly, arching against him just enough to bring her chest into contact with his.

When Loki replied, his voice was strained. “Min kjære. My dear, or my beloved, as you might say.”

“Damn,” Darcy breathed, shifting so she could slide her other hand into his hair at the base of his neck, “how do you manage to make that sound romantic but also sexy as hell?”

Loki gave a throaty laugh, dipping his head until she could feel his breath warm on her lips. “Now that I have satisfied your curiosity, will you do something for me?”

“Depends,” she answered coyly.

“Tell me your name.” There was an underlying firmness to his demand that made Darcy shiver.

She took a breath and studied his face before replying with as much seriousness as she could muster, “Harriet Tubman.”

In the next instant, the weight and heat of him were gone, leaving Darcy feeling strangely disoriented and empty.

With an exasperated groan, Loki had rolled off her, sitting with his back against the base of the couch.

“You can be incredibly infuriating,” he said, dragging a hand over his face.

Still lying on her back, Darcy blinked up at the ceiling and cursed herself for being so stubborn. Why couldn’t she have given him a proper answer? She could be enjoying some mind-blowing sexy times right now but instead she had ruined the moment.

“I’m going back to my room,” she got to her feet though it was rather difficult considering how weak her knees felt. The heaving feeling of disappointment taking root in her chest didn’t help matters either.
She gathered her pillow and blanket into her arms and hoofed it back to her bedroom while a stream of every curse word known to man (and a few imaginative ones of her own) ran through her head.

Dammit, why had she done that?

It was probably for the best, the logical, not sex-depraved part of her brain rationalized. She’d told Loki that she wanted to take things slow and screwing him on the living room floor was definitely not slow.

But...

Her soulmate bond immediately perked up, ready with a list of any and all possible excuses that would get her back into the other room with Loki.

They only had four days left – technically three now, since it was well into the wee hours of the morning – wouldn’t that time be better spent giving into her bond rather than wasting her energy by fighting against it?

Darcy fell onto her bed and smooshed her face into the mattress to stifle her frustrated whine. It felt like a tug-of-war was going on inside her brain. No wonder so many reluctantly bonded soulmates ended up in psych hospitals. All these conflicting thoughts made her feel like she was losing her mind, which begged the question: was denial really worth it?

She felt like she’d been standing on a ledge for so long, desperately clinging to the last remains of her willpower, so unwilling to step off that edge and accept her bond, it was driving her half-crazy. She needed relief; needed to quiet her bond before she lost what little stability she had left.

After a few long minutes of fuming, Darcy came to a decision, pushing herself off her bed and stomping down the hall determinedly. Fuck it. There was no changing the fact that she was bonded, so why not give in to it for one night? Just to see what it was like, she told herself, and really, she was willing to try almost anything at this point to relieve the frustrating, ever-present buzz of her soulmate bond nattering away in her brain.

With her mind made up, Darcy stormed into the living room, coming to a stop in front of the sofa where Loki was still seated on the floor. Standing over him, she planted her hands on her hips and glared down. “Hey, you. Listen up.”

At the sound of her voice, his eyes snapped up to meet hers, full of shock and surprise.

“Darcy Anne Lewis,” she said, not breaking eye contact as she spoke, “that’s my name.”

A beat of silence passed, just long enough for Darcy’s heart to give one heavy, anxious thump in her chest. She wasn’t sure who moved first, but in the next instant Loki was on his feet and their bodies were crashing together, mouths meeting and hands eagerly roaming each other’s skin.

It was indescribable. Darcy’s body came alive at his touch, soulmate bond singing in her veins as their lips moved together, and she could feel the annoying tug of her bond settling contently in her chest. For once the stupid thing was being gloriously silent. She’d finally made it happy.

Loki’s hand found the hem of her shirt, slipping under the fabric and making Darcy gasp into their kiss. He immediately took advantage of her parted lips, sliding his tongue into her mouth. It was enough to make Darcy go weak in the knees and she gave him a push on the shoulders, directing him to the sofa. She needed him horizontal. Now.

“Not here,” Loki reluctantly dragged his mouth from hers, leaning his forehead against her own as he
spoke. “The first time I take you, I wish to do it properly.”

“And what’s your definition of proper?” Darcy questioned, looping her arms around his neck as she cocked an eyebrow at him.

Loki made a low noise in his throat and drew her body closer. “In your bed,” he said roughly, “completely bare so that I may explore every inch of your skin until I know your body better than my own.”

“Wow. Proper never sounded so dirty. I like it.” Darcy grinned, bumping him with her hip as she urged him towards her room.

Although Loki was no longer unsteady on his feet, he was still recovering and far from ready to jump into any strenuous activities. So when they reached Darcy’s bed, she laid her palms flat on his chest and pushed him down onto the mattress.

He protested of course, propping himself up on his elbows and grumbling, “I am not an invalid.”

“True,” Darcy climbed onto the bed and swung her leg over his narrow hips, “but as your soulmate-slash-general-caretaker, I make the rules and I say you need to take it easy. You were carved up jack-o-lantern style just a few days ago, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“I’ve not forgotten,” Loki instinctively brought his hand to his injured side, as if the memory alone was enough to cause him pain.

“Good, so chill out and let me do this.” Darcy silenced any of his further complaints by bringing her lips to his, and Loki’s tense body soon relaxed beneath her while their mouths moved together in a series of long, leisurely kisses.

When Loki groaned into her mouth, it was by far the hottest thing Darcy had ever heard. She eagerly deepened their kiss until it became hard and urgent, a sense of desperate need developing between them.

“The pill,” she murmured between kisses, “it’ll work on you, right?”

“An oral contraceptive? It will,” Loki confirmed, sliding his hands under her shirt and running his fingers up her spine in a way that brought goosebumps to Darcy’s skin. “Physiologically, I am rather similar to a Midgardian male in that manner, but I assure you Darcy,” he nipped at her lower lip, his voice turning into a growl, “in every other way, I am far from a mortal man.”

“Are you?” Darcy’s heart picked up speed, pounding frantically in her chest. She quickly sat up and pulled her pajama top over her head, saying, “If you’re going to make a claim like that, you’d better have the moves to back it up.”

Once her shirt was off, Loki immediately pulled her back down to him, spreading his hands wide across her bare back as his lips grazed the shell of her ear. “I will prove it to you over and over again, in ways that will make you scream my name. That I promise you.”

“Fuck,” Darcy breathed out the curse, her brain stalling as she tried to wrap her head around his very explicit vow.

Loki’s mouth found hers again and he kissed her hard, hips bucking up against her in a small taste of what was to come.

“You feel so good,” he murmured against her lips.
Darcy made a soft noise of agreement, bringing her hands to the front of his pants and palming his erection. “Just wait. It’s about to feel even better.” Her hand dipped below his waistband as she brought her mouth back to his, grinning into their kiss.

“Ah,” Loki released a strangled groan when her fingers brushed against his length teasingly.

She slowly worked him with her hand, all the while her eyes never straying from his body. He looked unbelievably good beneath her; eyes half closed with pleasure, hips jerking every so often when she moved her hand a particular way.

It was intensely satisfying to see the effect she had on him and Darcy was eager to see more, to bring him to the brink and then watch him come undone.

“Darcy, stop.” His hand closed around her wrist, halting her movements. “This will be over much too quickly if you continue doing that. I need to be inside you.” His voice was a thin plea and Darcy felt a hot pang of desire pulse deep inside her.

“Oh my god, yes. I need you, Loki,” she breathed, eagerly stripping off his pants before wiggling out of her sleep shorts.

Her skin was already flushed and sweaty due in part to the humid summer night and lack of functioning air conditioner, and when her bare skin met his, it blazed even hotter, like a fire smoldering beneath her skin.

Darcy swept her hair over her shoulder and bent her body forward until their mouths met in a hard, desperate kiss. Loki reached between their bodies, guiding himself between her thighs and slowly rubbing his head along the warm slickness of her core.

She couldn’t take it. The slow teasing movements, the hot pressure of him, it was maddening. Unable to stand it any longer, she brought her hips down in one swift movement, drawing him completely inside of her.

Darcy let out a low hiss, eyes fluttering shut as their bodies met. She heard Loki release a few of his own choice curse words but in her semi-delirious state, she couldn’t tell if he was speaking English or something entirely foreign.

She stilled for a moment, overcome by a sudden rush of feeling. It was a sensory overload in the best possible way and it must have been the work of their soulmate bond, Darcy thought, tuning their bodies to the same frequency and making every touch feel amplified. She nearly cried at the way he felt inside her; it was so damn good.

At last she shifted, grinding down on him experimentally, and in response Loki make a guttural noise, drawing back and snapping his hips up, pushing his full length into her hard enough to make Darcy gasp.

“Fuck,” her voice was so raw she barely recognized it as her own, “I didn’t know it could feel like this. So intense, so...” she trailed off, unable to find a word that could do justice to the feeling of their bodies moving together. In fact, half her vocabulary seemed to have instantly disappeared the moment their skin met.

“So right.” Loki finished her thought, groaning when Darcy brought her lips to his neck directly over the skin where his pulse beat rapidly.

Right.
It did feel right, Darcy was surprised to find. They fit together perfectly, as if they had been designed for each other, and each time Darcy brought her hips down, Loki matched the movement with his own thrust up, creating a deeply erotic push and pull between their bodies.

Their soulmate bond was almost palpable in the air around them, drawing them to each other, and Darcy suspected that at this point there was no stopping what they’d started, even if they’d wanted to.

Loki dragged his hands up her sides, briefly stopping at her ribcage to gently squeeze as Darcy’s mouth found the line of his jaw, leaving a series of hot, wet kisses on his skin.

“God, Loki,” her voice broke half way through the exclamation when Loki fisted his hand in her hair, pulling her head back at just enough of an angle to expose the pale curve of her neck. He scraped his teeth over her throat before turning his attention lower, swiping his tongue over one breast, then the other.

She cried out his name again, her hips faltering and losing pace when he took her nipple into his mouth, teasing it with his tongue before sucking hard enough to make her body arch against him.

“You are so charmingly vocal,” he murmured, turning his head to give equal attention to her other nipple, his mouth going to work on her until Darcy was reduced to a panting, moaning mess as her body rose and fell above him.

She could feel the hot tension of pleasure coiling in her belly, her breath hitching as the first sparks of an orgasm brought small spasms to her body.

“Don’t stop. I’m so close,” she begged as Loki’s hands traveled down her spine until he was firmly gripping her ass and thrusting into her hard enough to rip a strangled groan from Darcy’s throat. She pressed herself closer to him and buried her face in the curve of his neck, releasing a small whimper every time their hips met.

“Darcy...” Loki choked out her name, his fingers flexing and digging into her skin, “ah, fuck. Come with me. Now,” he ground out.

“Yes. Oh my god, yes,” she panted, rolling her hips against him as their movements grew rough and erratic.

Two more hard thrusts was all it took and Darcy’s climax hit her with the force of a freight train. She wasn’t quiet about it; her high cry of pleasure mixing with the low, desperate groan that came from deep in Loki’s chest. His grip on her tightened, holding their bodies flush together as he released inside her.

Boneless and exhausted, it took her a long time before Darcy had regained enough strength to lift herself off him and curl up at his side, resting her cheek on her pillow and gazing up at him.

“I wonder if this is how horny teenage boys feel,” she mused, sighing when Loki rolled onto his side to face her, hooking an arm around her waist. “I’ve never come so quickly in my life. It’s almost embarrassing.”

Loki chuckled but broke off with a wince when the movement pulled at the still-healing skin on his side.

“You okay?” She asked, craning her neck to peer at the jagged cut that ran just below his ribs, “I wasn’t too rough on you, was I?”
Loki scoffed, barely retreating from rolling his eyes. “I assure you, Darcy. I can handle far rougher activities than that.”

“Far rougher, huh? You are so demonstrating that later. Like, after I sleep for eight years.” Darcy yawned, shifting closer to him and placing a kiss on the edge of his mouth.

“Mmmm,” Loki made a sleepy, pleased noise, tightening his arm around her. “Good night, Darcy.”

“Night, Loki.” She relaxed in his embrace, her soulmate bond feeling as though it was finally at ease. Her mind was blissfully quiet and a warm, fuzzy feeling of happiness had taken up residence in her chest.

She would allow herself this one night to forget about the complications that went along with their bond, Darcy decided. She would ignore it all, including the little countdown timer that ticked away in her head, reminding her of how little time remained before Thor and Jane would return to whisk Loki away to some unknown location.

Could she really bear to be apart from him after what they’d just done?

There was no easy answer to that question so she pushed it aside, instead focusing her attention on Loki’s face. He was already asleep, cheeks flushed from the lingering effects of his orgasm and lips slightly parted. He looked so relaxed, so content, her heart squeezed painfully at the sight.

Curling her body around him, Darcy let out a shuddering sigh and closed her eyes.

Only time would tell what was in store for them she supposed, but that didn’t make the wait any easier.
Thank you guys so much for your awesome comments! You're all so supportive. Like a push-up bra for my muse. A brain bra! (That's quite possibly the strangest comparison I will ever make in my entire life.)
Anyway, on with the chapter! More NSFW-ness ahead :)

Darcy lazily rolled over in bed and stretched out her stiff muscles, feeling sore in a thoroughly satisfying kind of way. She cracked her eyes open, fully expecting to see Loki next to her, but the mattress where he’d been lying was bare.

Any lingering traces of sleepiness immediately drained out of her as she threw back her blankets and scrambled up, shoving her arms into the first shirt she could find.

Oh God, had Thor come back early? Was Loki already gone?

She was quickly descending into full-blown panic mode when she heard a loud clang followed by a muffled curse coming from the direction of the kitchen.

Breathing out a long sigh of relief, Darcy finished dressing at a more normal pace before she went to investigate just how much of a mess Loki had made.

“Um, whatcha doing there?” She asked, throwing her hair up into a ponytail as she entered the kitchen.

Loki was standing at the stove with a spatula in hand. “I was attempting to make breakfast but this horrid cooking machine is being rather uncooperative,” he said, narrowing his eyes at the front burner where a frying pan of blackened eggs sat.

“You should have called me for help,” Darcy reached around him, turning off the burner and wrinkling her nose at the stinky burnt smell.

“You should have called me for help,” Darcy reached around him, turning off the burner and wrinkling her nose at the stinky burnt smell.

“I wanted to surprise you,” Loki admitted, looking almost shy as he toyed with the spatula in his hands.

It was such an incredibly sweet gesture, Darcy didn’t know what to say so instead of speaking she plucked the spatula from his hand and tossed it on the counter before pressing her body against him. His arms automatically wound around her waist and Darcy eagerly tipped her head back, desperately wanting to feel his lips on hers again.

“Kiss me,” she breathed, her hands clenching in the fabric of his t-shirt.

Loki didn’t hesitate to bring his mouth down onto hers, kissing her hot and hard, somehow knowing exactly how she wanted it. It must have been a bond thing, Darcy thought.

She had fully intended for last night to be their one and only romp; just a test to see what kind of effect their soulmate bond really had on them, but as soon as Loki’s tongue pushed its way into her
mouth, Darcy was a goner. ‘One night stand’ her ass. She was in too deep, craving him like an addict, and there was no way she’d be able to deny herself now that she’d had a taste of how incredible bonded sex could be.

She rolled her hips against him, slow and teasing, before pulling back with surprise when she felt a wet spot soak into her pants. “Did you just...?”

“I did not,” Loki looked horrified by her suggestion. “I believe that is egg yolk,” he explained sheepishly.

Darcy’s lips twitched and before she knew it, she was doubled over with laughter, cackling until her eyes watered and her lungs hurt. “Oh my god,” she wheezed, trying to catch her breath, “how the hell did you manage to get egg on your crotch?!?”

“If you recall, I was trying to make you breakfast,” Loki huffed, looking away as a blush crept up his neck.

“Fuck, you’re adorable,” Darcy’s grin was so wide she thought it might break her face.

“Adorable?” Loki raised his eyebrows, giving her a hard look. “There may be a great many things that are considered adorable Darcy, but I assure you, I am not on that list.”

Planting her hands on her hips, Darcy gave him a slow once over, her eyes traveling from his feet up to his face. “Oh? Then what are you?”

He took a moment to consider her question, his mood visibly darkening before he answered her seriously. “I am damaged, unwanted, angry, likely too stubborn for my own good...shall I continue?”

“No,” Darcy shook her head, “but I would like to hear why you think you’re all those things.”

“Isn’t it obvious,” he muttered with a bitter twinge to his voice. “Thor told you of the circumstances which brought me here, did he not?”

“He did,” Darcy said slowly, “so I understand the angry part, but you’re gonna have to explain ‘damaged’ and ‘unwanted’.”

“I am a Frost Giant,” Loki spoke bluntly, looking at his burnt eggs rather than at her, “the blood of those vile, monstrous beings runs through my veins. I may not look it, but at my very core, I am one of them. I am every bit as savage as they are.”

“You do realize that as you’re saying this, you’re standing in my kitchen covered in raw egg because you tried to cook breakfast for me. That doesn’t sound very monstrous,” Darcy pointed out.

She managed to get a small laugh out of him, just a quiet little huff of breath, but it still felt like a major victory.

“That was the bond’s decision more than mine,” Loki confessed.

“So what? You still did it,” Darcy argued. “And as for the ‘unwanted’ thing, I think I made it pretty clear last night that you are very wanted.”

His eyes darkened and Darcy knew he was thinking of her straddling him, taking him inside of her and moaning out his name. It was a scene that was still all too vivid in her own mind.

“I was not thinking of you when I said that,” Loki’s voice was husky and he had to stop to clear his
throat before continuing, “I had meant that I was unwanted by my father. The man I assumed to be my father,” he amended. “To Odin I was nothing but a pawn in his war games, a bargaining chip he held in his pocket until the time arose for him to play his hand.”

“I can’t say whether that is or isn’t true,” Darcy frowned, feeling sad that Loki would automatically assume he was being used like that, “but I really hope you’re wrong.”

“Can I tell you something?” Loki’s eyes finally moved up to meet hers, his voice going soft.

“Anything,” Darcy confirmed, stepping forward and lightly touching his arm.

“I, too, hope I am wrong,” he admitted, watching her face as she slowly slid her hand up towards his shoulder. “I have never told anyone that before.”

“Well I’m glad you told me,” Darcy brought her hand down his chest, letting her palm rest over his heart beat, “and I’m glad you’re allowing yourself to hope. That right there tells me you’re far from being a despicable monster.”

Beneath her fingers, she felt his heart pick up speed.

“Darcy...” he stopped, wetting his lips before giving her a look that clearly conveyed his intentions, no further words necessary.

“Yes,” her voice was already breathy as he slid his arms around her waist, “fuck, I want you so bad.”

“Such a dirty mouth on you,” Loki murmured, pulling her tight against him.

“Mmmm,” Darcy hummed against his chest, “speaking of dirty, you’ve still got egg on you. We should really wash that off.”

“Should we?” The edge of Loki’s mouth pulled up into a grin.

“Yes,” she confirmed with a serious nod, taking his hand and tugging him out of the kitchen.

“Strip,” she instructed once they had made it into the bathroom. She released his hand so she could pull back the shower curtain and turn the knob until warm water gushed from the shower head.

“You don’t wish to undress me again?” Loki raised his eyebrows questioningly, though his hands had already gone to the front of his sweatpants, immediately loosening the tie and pulling them down.

“Too impatient,” Darcy’s eyes greedily raked over him as he stepped out of the pants and pulled his shirt over his head. God, he was a sight. Nothing but lean muscle and pale skin.

She anxiously pulled off her own clothing and yanked the elastic from her ponytail, letting her hair fall down her back and around her shoulders.

“You like that?” She asked with a saucy grin when she noticed him grow harder at the sight of her shaking out the dark waves.

“You have lovely hair,” he punctuated the compliment by stepping closer and reaching for one particularly curly piece, winding it around his index finger.

Darcy flushed under the heat of his gaze, feeling an ache for him deep and low in her stomach. “I could say the same to you,” she said, sliding her arms around his neck and playing with the soft strands that just reached the tops of his shoulders.
Loki nudged her backwards, walking her into the shower while their bodies remained pressed together.

The water was pleasantly warm as it soaked Darcy’s hair and slid down her skin. Loki stepped under the spray with her, his hands finding her hips and squeezing as he bent his head until his forehead rested against hers.

Water clung to his eyelashes like little glittery jewels, making the green of his eyes pop. Darcy couldn’t look away even if she’d wanted to; she was mesmerized.

She lifted her chin, pressing her lips to his. It was strange how different her soulmate bond felt when she actually gave it what it wanted. When she kissed Loki, her bond seemed to relax, tension unwinding like one giant sigh moving through her whole body.

Loki’s hands moved over her, exploring the soft skin of her shoulder blades, the curve at the small of her back, and the swell of her ass. Darcy turned her head, panting into the skin of his neck. Her legs felt boneless, like she could barely support her own weight.

“I need you,” she whined, bucking against him as the steady throb between her legs built to an unbearable height.

“Tell me exactly what you need, Darcy,” his voice was low as he brought his hands to her chest, cupping her breasts with his palms.

“Oh,” Darcy gasped as his thumbs flicked over her nipples. “I need you to fuck me,” her breath hitched on the last word as Loki’s knee pushed its way between her legs, encouraging her to part her thighs.

She spread her legs wide while he reached for her wrists, pulling her arms over her head and pinning them in place with his hand. The shower tiles were cold against Darcy’s back, making her spine arch as a shiver ran through her. She was stretched out on full display for him, and it was the hottest thing she had ever experienced.

With his free hand, Loki guided her thigh up to wrap around his hip, pressing the length of his body against her to keep her steady while she balanced on her other leg.

“You’re trembling,” he breathed into her ear, his hand sliding down to her bottom and cupping her ass, hitching her up even further around his hips until Darcy could feel his arousal pressing hard at her entrance.

“Oh my god,” there was an edge of frustration to Darcy’s voice as she writhed against him, desperate to get on with the main event, “please, Loki.”

“Since you asked so nicely,” his voice was a honey-coated whisper in her ear, and when he drew back, the look on his face was enough to bring Darcy to the verge of a climax almost instantly.

His eyes were dark, pupils blown wide as a smug grin pulled at his lips. He was enjoying teasing her. Darcy realized with a little thrill of excitement.

She had been so wrong when she’d thought of him as chivalrous. Now that his defences were down, she was getting her first good look at exactly how naughty her God of Mischief could be.

Tilting her hips in encouragement, Darcy moaned when he finally pushed into her. She was dying to touch him but Loki continued to hold her hands above her head, so she settled for grinding against him while leaning in and bringing her lips to his neck, biting at the pale, smooth skin. She already
knew how quickly he healed; she’d witnessed it firsthand, but she still wanted to leave her stamp on him. Even if it only lasted a moment.

Loki released a long, shuddering breath when her teeth scraped his skin. “Marking me, are you?” He asked as he began to move with slow, shallow thrusts.

“Damn right,” Darcy replied with an amount of vehemence that surprised her. She blamed it on her soulmate bond; it was chanting inside her head, the words echoing in time with each push of Loki’s hips, mine, mine, mine.

Evidently, that was the answer Loki wanted to hear. He pulled out almost completely before slamming into her with enough force to make Darcy cry out from the intense sensation.

As his hips set a swift, unrelenting pace, his mouth found hers, hot and insistent as he coaxed her lips open and kissed her until she could barely breathe. When their mouths parted, Darcy sucked in deep lungfulls of air while Loki’s lips moved down the column of her neck.

“Yes,” Darcy hissed, her eyes falling shut as Loki continued to thoroughly fuck her against the wall. “Harder...please,” she begged in between ragged breaths.

“Gods, Darcy.” Loki’s voice was hoarse as he finally released his grip on her wrists, closing both his hands around her thighs to hold her in place as his thrusts became rougher; losing his finesse as the last of his restraint slipped away. “I will never get enough of you.”

She was riding the delicious fine line between pleasure and pain as she dragged her nails down his back, feeling his muscles moving fluidly beneath her fingers. “More,” she begged, making a satisfied noise when Loki pressed her even harder against the wall, covering her body with his own until she couldn’t tell where she ended and he began.

“Right there. Oh my god, oh my fucking god, yes,” she babbled nonsense to him, hands tightening on his shoulders as she reveled in the pressure of his body moving against hers, the sound of his jagged breaths filling her ears. It felt like he was everywhere; surrounding her, filling her, insulating her. It was the most exquisite feeling in the world and she never wanted it to end.

“Say that again,” Loki demanded, his voice coming out low and gravelly. “Call me your God.”

“Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god,” she chanted the words he wanted to hear, squeezing her eyes shut. She was right on the edge, so close it was nearly unbearable.

The last remaining shreds of her self-control were slipping away and when Loki thrust forward with a particularly hard jerk of his hips, driving into her as deep as he could go, she couldn’t hang on any longer so she let go with both hands, succumbing to the overwhelming pleasure as she reached her peak.

Her orgasm rolled over her like a wave, forcing the breath from her lungs. The intensity made her vision blur, the world suddenly narrowing down to just the two of them, and Darcy dropped her head back, voice catching in her throat as her lips parted in a silent cry of pleasure.

Loki followed her immediately, his hips stuttering as he reached his release. He buried his face in her wet hair, stifling the deep groan that had climbed its way out of his throat.

It took a long time before they recovered enough to move; their loud breaths and the patter of water hitting the shower floor being the only sounds to fill the room until Loki finally shifted positions, slipping out of her.
“Are you alright?” He laid his hands on her shoulders, holding her steady when Darcy lowered her
leg from around his waist and wobbled on her feet.

“Yeah,” her voice was still throaty as she blinked up at him, “I think you literally melted my bones.”

Loki chuckled, turning and grabbing Darcy’s bottle of body wash from the caddy that hung over the
shower head. “In that case, stay still. Allow me do all the work,” he gave a mischievous smile,
squeezing some of the fruity scented liquid into his palm.

It was another twenty minutes before they actually left the shower. As his soapy hands were
massaging her skin, they had gradually drifted lower and lower until Loki was on his knees in front
of her, bringing Darcy to her second orgasm with the work of his fingers and mouth.

She could barely keep her eyes open as they crossed the short distance to Darcy’s room. She
collapsed on her bed, giving a satisfied groan when Loki stretched out beside her and threw his arm
over his waist, closing his eyes.

They had been napping for around two hours when Darcy was woken by the shrill ring of her
phone.

She made an unintelligible noise, batting her hair out of her eyes as she sat up and scanned the room
with still blurry eyes, trying to find the stupid thing. Her smartphone was on the desk in the corner
and she had to half-crawl over Loki’s body before she finally reached it.

He mumbled in his sleep but didn’t wake up as she plopped back down beside him and studied the
name on the screen.

Jane.

Darcy punched the talk button and brought the phone to her ear with a cheerful greeting of “Hey!”

“Hi Darce,” The familiarity of Jane’s voice made Darcy smile as she settled against her headboard,
wiggling under her blankets until she’d gotten comfy.

“How are things in the big ol’ fancy state of D.C.? Are there flying cars? Moving sidewalks?” Darcy
grinned despite the fact that her friend couldn’t see it.

“Hardly,” Jane answered with a laugh, “although I regret bringing so much plaid. I feel really under-
dressed here.”

“So you’ve already met with Coulson, I guess?” Darcy held her breath as she waited for Jane’s
reply. She was anxious to know exactly how much information about Loki’s situation had been
divulged to S.H.I.E.L.D. It wasn’t that Darcy didn’t trust Jane’s judgement; the problem was that
things had changed in the time Darcy and Loki had been left together, and Darcy wasn’t feeling
quite as eager to shove him out the door anymore.

“We did,” Jane confirmed, “he and his boss are definitely interested in meeting Loki, there’s just one
little problem...they’re only willing to let him stay at their facility if he agrees to be a part of some
program.”

“Program?” Darcy’s stomach did a nervous flip-flop. “What kind of program?”

“Coulson’s boss called it ‘The Avengers Initiative’. It’s like some kind of global police force, only
without the stiff regulations.” Jane’s voice grew strained, turning into an urgent whisper, “the whole
team of these Avenger people...they would be untouchable, Darcy. They could do whatever they
wanted, and if someone got hurt along the way, S.H.I.E.L.D. would call it a necessary sacrifice, sweep it under the rug and pat themselves on the back for a job well done.”

It took Darcy a moment to get her voice to work properly. “That’s massively fucked up.”

“I know,” Jane sighed, the noise coming across loud and tinny through Darcy’s phone. “Thor and I said no. I’m sorry, Darce. I know you wanted Loki gone, but-”

“It’s...it’s not all that bad, actually,” Darcy interrupted, feeling an embarrassed blush settle on her cheeks even though Jane was hardly face to face with her.

“Oh?” It was one innocent little word, but the way Jane spoke it clearly said she wanted Darcy to spill all the details.

“When are you coming back? Your phone battery will die before I manage to tell you everything right now,” Darcy said, her eyes wandering over to where Loki’s naked back lay just inches from her.

“We leave in the morning but have a layover in St. Louis, so the day after tomorrow,” Jane told her.

“Okay. See you then?”

“See you then. Bye, Darce.”

“Bye.” Darcy ended the call, tossing her phone onto her nightstand before rolling onto her side and brushing her fingertips down the centre of Loki’s back teasingly.

“Hmmmpfft,” he mumbled into the pillow before turning his head to squint at her. “You were on the telephone?” His voice was still gravelly with sleep, sounding far too sexy to Darcy’s ears.

“Yep,” she confirmed. “Thor and Jane will be back in two days.”

“I see,” Loki rolled onto his back, keeping his expression neutral as he stared up at the ceiling. “I suppose we should discuss my leaving then?”

“Or...” Darcy hesitated, wetting her lips, “we could talk about you not leaving?”

Loki turned his head to the side, blinking at her. “Truly?”

“Really truly,” Darcy responded with a smile that felt borderline shy. Sure they were soulmates but the fear of rejection was a powerful thing. There was always the chance he’d say no.

Loki’s lips stretched into a grin. “I think I would like that.” He reached for her, attempting to slip his hand between her thighs but Darcy immediately squeezed her legs shut.

“Food first,” she ordered, rolling out of bed and searching for a shirt and pair of panties. “We totally skipped breakfast in case you’ve forgotten, and I’m so hungry I’m about to start chewing on the mattress.”

She threw on her clothes and started for the door, unable to stop from putting a little extra swing her hips for Loki’s benefit. “Be back in a sec, okay?” She stopped in the doorway, turning slightly to look at him over her shoulder.

“I wait with baited breath.” The grin Loki gave her fell somewhere in between charming and criminal.
Darcy winked at him before wandering down the hall towards the kitchen, replaying that wicked grin in her mind.

What she didn’t realize was that if she had stayed in the bedroom for just a moment longer, she would have seen that smile drop from Loki’s face only to be replaced by a far more serious, contemplative look.

She may have come to a decision about the fate of their bond, but little did she know, Loki was only beginning to formulate plans of his own.

Chapter End Notes

Just a note: SHIELD will not be the “bad guys” here and it wasn’t my intention to make them come across that way, but consider the idea of The Avengers Initiative from an outsider’s perspective: a Russian assassin, genetically enhanced soldier, etc., are allowed free rein to keep a city safe by whatever means they deem appropriate, and the general public isn’t going to know how strong of a moral compass each of these Avengers have. Hence Jane’s reaction :)
After a breakfast late enough to technically qualify as lunch, Darcy was feeling antsy. She was dangerously close to developing a case of cabin fever after being cooped up indoors playing caretaker to Loki for so long.

Thankfully her patient/soulmate didn’t look like he was trying to achieve grim reaper status anymore so a walk would probably do him good, Darcy decided.

It was beyond ridiculous when she stopped to think about it: she had just fed her alien prince soulmate and now she was about to take him out for a walk like he was some kind of overgrown Norse dog.

A sudden image popped into her head of Loki frolicking in the front yard with his tongue hanging out like an eager puppy, and it was enough to make Darcy choke on her own spit.

“Are you unwell?” Loki asked when she broke out into a combination laugh and cough.

“I’m fine,” she wheezed between a few final weak coughs, waving off his help when Loki approached her. “I was just thinking that we should go out. Take a walk. I need some vitamin D before I enter wannabe vampire territory, and you look like you haven’t seen the sun in ten years.”

Loki glanced down at his pale arms with a shrug. “I have always been this way. Perhaps the tone of my skin is influenced by my Jotun blood.”

“Maybe. Hey, speaking of the whole frosty thing...will you show it to me?” Darcy asked as she flitted around the kitchen, opening and closing random drawers as she tried to locate a bottle of sunscreen. When she found it crammed in the back of a random junk drawer, she flipped open the cap and squirted a line of lotion up her arm.

“That is not wise,” Loki shook his head. “I will hurt you.”

In the midst of her heavy sunscreen application, Darcy looked up, giving him a dry, are you kidding me look. “Is that a fact or an assumption?”

“Ah, well, I...” Loki stumbled over his words, suddenly appearing to be very interested in the tiles below his feet. “I have never actually touched another being while in my Jotun form,” he admitted, “but,” he added in a firm voice, “we are not about to try it. Not here, not now, not ever.”

“Spoil sport,” Darcy grumbled, squeezing the bottle of sunscreen and lathering up her other arm.

“Yes, how awful of me to decline an opportunity to burn the flesh from your bones,” Loki’s words were weighted with heavy sarcasm. “Are you quite ready yet?”

“Hang on, hang on. Almost done.” Darcy finished rubbing in the sunscreen on her arm before holding the bottle out towards Loki. “Do my face?”
He sighed but accepted the bottle, shaking it until a blob of white lotion landed in his palm. “Very well, come here.”

He had to lean down at an almost comical angle to bring himself level with her face, and Darcy shut her eyes to keep from giggling.

Loki’s touch was hesitant at first, a light whisper moving along her cheekbones. Then he seemed to gain confidence, his fingertips gliding over her temples, down the straight of her nose, and along her chin.

He touched her like he was painting a masterpiece on her skin and Darcy almost whimpered when he rubbed in the last of the sunscreen, the pad of his thumb lingering dangerously close to her lips.

“All done,” his voice had dropped an octave, causing a shiver to pass through Darcy’s body.

She slowly opened her eyes, focusing on his bright irises. “We should go now,” she swallowed hard, her voice coming out slightly strangled, “before I push you up against the fridge and we never make it out of here.”

“That sounds far from terrible,” Loki commented, winding his arms around her waist and pressing his nose into the curve of her neck.

“Arrgh stop it with your adorable sexiness,” Darcy complained, taking a second to savour the feeling of being wrapped up in his arms before she pushed him away. “I actually need to go check on the lab for Jane. Gotta make sure no punk-ass hooligans broke in and spray painted dicks on the walls.”

“Why would you presume such a thing?” Loki frowned, following her to the door as Darcy gathered up her keys and located a pair of shoes for Loki to wear.

“Because,” Darcy’s lips curled up into a mischievous grin, “that’s what I would do.”

It was a short trek to the lab and upon their arrival, Darcy found that the building was completely untouched. No break-ins, badly drawn lopsided penises, or other forms of vandalization. It was almost disappointing, really.

“Since we’re here, do you want to check it out?” Darcy asked, pulling her set of keys from her pocket and dangling them in front of Loki’s face. “You strike me as the science nerd type.”

“Should I be flattered or insulted by such an assumption?” Loki quirked an eyebrow, stepping back and motioning for Darcy to unlock the door.

“Hmm, probably a little of both.” The dead bolt gave a satisfying click and Darcy pushed the door open, spreading her arms wide as she strolled into the lab. “Welcome to science paradise! Population one astrophysicist and one semi-reluctant intern. Everything you could possibly wish for is here, with the exception of a decent WIFI connection, air conditioning, and cable. So actually, it kind of sucks.”

“Charming,” Loki drawled, stepping over to Jane’s workbench and peering down at the various papers and gadgets scattered across the table’s surface.

“Don’t touch,” Darcy warned, “Jane’ll throw a fit if you move anything. According to her, that’s organized.”

Loki made a small humpf noise, ignoring Darcy’s advice and picking up one of Jane’s analytic devices. “This one will not work,” he declared, turning over the small calculator-like item in his
“Yeah I know.” Darcy said a little impatiently, raking a hand through her hair. The sweltering heat of the lab was already making the skin of her neck prickle with sweat. “Jane’s been trying to fix it but we can’t figure out what the problem is.”

Loki stared at the device in his hands, his brows pulling down in concentration. After a moment, his face smoothed out into a satisfied smile and he put Jane’s instrument back in place on her desk. “Whatever the problem may be, it is of no worry now.”

“Wait, you mean you fixed it?” Darcy approached the workbench, giving him a skeptical look.

"I have," Loki confirmed proudly.

"But all you did was make your angry face at it. Sorry to burst your bubble, but electronics can’t be intimidated," Darcy snatched the device off the desk where Loki had left it, flicking the switch on as she fully intended to prove her point to him.

Much to her surprise though, the screen lit up. The dumb thing was actually working.

“Firstly,” Loki spoke while Darcy gaped at the screen, watching information scroll across it line by line at a speed that her eyes could barely keep up with, “I told you so. Secondly, I do not have an angry face.”

Darcy blinked up at him. “Did you seriously just ‘I told you so’ me?”

“Yes,” Loki said rather primly, plucking the device from her hands and turning it off before he returned it to the desk.

“Unbelievable,” Darcy muttered, shooting a last disbelieving look at the now-functioning piece of equipment, “and for the record, you totally have an angry face. I should know, I’m on the receiving end of it ninety percent of the time.”

“You should teach me magic,” Darcy announced later that evening.

Loki had just finished his allotted once-daily episode of Wheel of Fortune and when the credits began to roll, Darcy quickly turned off the TV before he got sucked into watching some other program. He wasn’t fond of dramas or comedies but the God sure loved puzzles. Darcy figured she had watched more game shows in this one week than in all the years of her life combined.

When the television screen went blessedly dark, she joined Loki on the couch, snuggling into his side. He automatically wound his arm around her, his fingers absently running up and down the bare skin of her arm while he considered her request.

“Magic is not something to be taken lightly,” he advised. “If you wish to learn, you must be prepared to devote a considerable amount of time and effort to your endeavor.”

“I’m not asking to be the Sorcerer’s Apprentice to your Nicholas Cage, I just want to learn a cool trick. Something like what you did in the lab earlier.” Darcy tipped her head back until she could see his face, giving him her best wide-eyed, puppy dog look.

Loki groaned, shutting his eyes.
“Is that a yes?” Darcy grinned and shifted positions until she could reach his head, sliding her fingers around the back of his neck and pulling his mouth down to hers.

The kiss was slow and lazy, but like all their kisses, Darcy could sense the potential for it to become so much more. Their soulmate bond was waiting on the sidelines, ready to take control at a moment’s notice and escalate the kiss into a full-on session of frantic couch sex.

It made Darcy want to take back every eye roll and rude thought she’d ever directed at Jane and Thor. How did they go about day-to-day life without jumping each others bones every five minutes? Being bonded was hard.

Loki must have been having a similar thought because he made a small noise in his throat, pulling back and fixing Darcy with a stern look. “If you start that, the entire evening will be lost and you will never learn any magic.”

“So you’ll teach me something?” Darcy asked excitedly, moving to sit cross-legged on the couch cushions while facing him.

“I will,” Loki agreed, “but I must warn you that even the simplest spell will not come easily. Out of all the realms, I have found Midgardians to be the least naturally inclined towards magic. You are simply not designed to hold the energy required for complex spells.”

“So I guess conjuring up laser sharks and fireballs is out of the question.” Darcy frowned. “Damn.”

Loki gave her an odd look, the edge of his mouth quirking up into a smile. “You wish to conjure sharks and fireballs? My, my, Darcy. You have a positively catastrophic imagination.” He leaned towards her, a look of longing on his face as he spoke in a low voice. “I find it incredibly arousing.”

“Dammit, Loki. Don’t say that.” Darcy’s body flushed with heat and the anticipation of being with him was already causing her breath to come out in quick, shallow pants.

“This is your fault,” Loki accused, pulling back and rubbing a hand over his face. “How am I to focus on teaching you when you are so alluring?”

“You think that’s alluring?” Darcy grinned at him, resisting the urge to laugh at how absurd their soulmate bond could be. “So if I were to whisper ‘laser sharks’ in your ear, you’d get a boner?”

“I’m not answering that.” Loki cleared his throat, schooling his features into a bland, neutral look. “Now Miss Lewis, are you ready to begin your studies in magic?”

“Nope,” Darcy’s response was immediate, accompanied by a strong shake of her head. “If this is gonna work, you can’t call me Miss Lewis.”

“Why not?” Loki asked with an edge of exasperation to his voice.

“Too formal,” Darcy explained. “It’s like you’re my hot Hogwarts professor or something.”

With a sigh Loki leaned back against the couch, his eyes flicking up to the ceiling. “Then how am I to address you?”

“Call me Darcy but don’t say it the way you normally do,” she explained. “Like, don’t roll the ‘r’. It’s too sexy when you say it that way. I won’t be able to focus.”

“I simply won’t speak your name at all. Is that acceptable?” Loki turned towards her, mirroring Darcy’s position except his legs were too long for him to sit cross-legged, so he settled for tucking
one foot under him and letting the other leg hang off the couch.

“That should work,” Darcy confirmed with a business-like nod. “Okay, so what’s first?”

“You must open your mind and body in order to accept my energy. Palms up,” Loki instructed, taking her wrists and turning her hands over.

“Open my mind and body? Accept energy? This is beginning to sound a lot like yoga,” Darcy complained. “I don’t like yoga. I’m not bendy enough.”

“I beg to differ,” Loki muttered, clearing his throat and shifting a bit awkwardly on the couch. “Now close your eyes and focus on my hands.”

He laid his palms over hers and Darcy did as he said, eyes falling shut as she tried to focus on nothing but the warmth and pressure of his palms covering hers.

“Good,” Loki breathed, his voice growing softer. “Feel the heat. Absorb it into your own hands. Do you feel it?”

Darcy’s lips thinned out into a line as she concentrated on trying to pull the warmth of Loki’s skin into her own. “I don’t feel anything.”

“I beg to differ,” Loki muttered, clearing his throat and shifting a bit awkwardly on the couch. “Now close your eyes and focus on my hands.”

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Darcy’s lips thinned out into a line as she concentrated on trying to pull the warmth of Loki’s skin into her own. “I don’t feel anything.”

“Keep trying,” Loki urged. “Imagine a door opening within your mind, welcoming my energy inside.”

Straightening her spine with renewed intent, Darcy squeezed her eyes shut tighter and tried to picture a door swinging open. “This is dumb. I don’t—ooh!” She jerked back a bit as her palm began to itch with a tingling sensation.

A slow, warm pull like molasses was making its way into her skin, settling inside her body as if a cozy blanket were being wrapped around her.

“Yes,” Loki encouraged, his voice dropping to a quiet whisper so he wouldn’t break her concentration. “Keep going, you’re doing very well.”

Biting her lower lip, Darcy focused on drawing more of Loki’s energy into her. She felt like a giant sluggish magnet; the magic seemed to move at such an incredibly slow pace.

“How much longer?” She asked, eyes still shut.

“Just a bit more,” Loki assured. “Now I want you to choose an animal. Anything small. Picture it in your mind and study every feature; the shine of the eyes, the texture of the body. Be as detailed as possible.”

With a deep, centering breath, Darcy recalled one of her and Jane’s first nights in New Mexico. They had been out later than usual that evening, Jane peering through her telescope while Darcy relaxed in a chair next to the fire, occasionally poking at the logs with a stick but mostly just gazing up at the sky and letting her mind wander.

She had thought it was a bird at first when it went zooming over her head, but once it landed on the edge of a small, hollowed-out cavity in a nearby tree, Darcy realized it was actually a bat.

It was just a tiny little thing, no bigger than the palm of her hand, and it had blinked at Darcy with beady black eyes before climbing its way into the tree’s opening and disappearing from sight.
She thought of that bat now, picturing its covering of dark brown fur that looked as soft as velvet, the little squished nose, and wide ears that swiveled back and forth as it had stared at her.

“Darcy.” Loki’s voice drifted into her ears, sounding as though it was far away.

“Hmm?” Darcy hummed in response, only half paying attention. She was still too focused on recreating an image of the bat inside her mind.

“Open your eyes,” Loki instructed.

She cracked open one eye, then the other. “Holy shit!”

“Don’t lose focus,” Loki quickly warned, pressing his palms down extra hard on top of hers. “It will not last much longer.”

“Oh my god,” Darcy breathed, at a loss for any other words.

In the air above their heads, her little bat was hovering.

It was partially see-through, obviously an illusion, but the bat still looked as if it were alive. It opened its mouth in silent little squeaks, wings flapping as it dipped and dove in the empty space above them.

“Did I really make that?” Darcy questioned, still staring upwards.

“You did.” There was a hint of pride in Loki’s voice. “I couldn’t have possibly assisted you; I was unaware of which animal you had chosen. This projection is all your doing, Darcy.”

The image of the bat began to waver, slowly fizzling out like static on a TV screen before it disappeared completely.

“That was seriously amazing. You have to teach me more, Professor Magic.” Darcy could hardly contain her grin as she stretched out her legs, feeling a bit stiff from sitting cross-legged for so long.

“A professor, am I?” Loki drew back his hands, giving her a crooked half-smile. “I thought you did not wish to equate me with one of your fictional educators.”

“The lesson’s over,” Darcy explained, her voice taking on a flirtatious tone, “which means that now the student can properly thank her teacher.”

“Oh?” Loki said weakly as Darcy crawled into his lap, smoothly sliding her arms around his neck.

“Oh yes.” Darcy confirmed, arching her body against him and bringing her lips to his ear, breath ghosting over his skin. “Hey Loki?”

She heard him swallow hard. “Yes Darcy?”

“Laser sharks.”

She barely had time to take a breath before Loki was flipping her over and pinning her to the cushions, stifling her shriek of laughter with his mouth.
To say that Loki was in a bad mood would be an understatement and, naturally, Darcy had to find that out the hard way.

“SoOOO...” she began, drumming her fingers on the kitchen counter.

“Yes, Darcy?”

“I’ve been thinking...”

“Have you now?”

“Sure have,” she confirmed. “I’m a total thinker. I think all the time, thank you very much. And now I’m thinking about thinking, which just proves my point even more.”

Loki’s eyes flickered up from the issue of Scientific American he had stolen from Jane’s collection. “You’re speaking utter nonsense, Darcy. If you have something to say, I suggest you say it.”

“Jeez, someone’s a little testy,” Darcy commented, wandering over to where Loki sat at the kitchen table. She leaned her arms on the back of his chair as she peered over his shoulder. “Is epigenetic gene expression,” she quoted from the article he was studying, “really all that interesting? Cause I think you’ll like what I have to say a whole lot more.”

“Well, I’ll never know what you have to say unless you actually spit it out,” Loki grumbled, flicking to the next page of the magazine.

For a moment Darcy could only gape at him, her mouth opening and closing soundlessly before her voice finally returned to working order. “Okay then. Forget I said anything.” She frowned, turning on her heels and heading into the living room.

If Loki wanted to be an a-hole and read his scientific jargon in silence, that was just fine with her. She settled into her usual chair and snatched up the TV remote, beginning to channel surf to distract from the odd, unsettling feeling growing in her stomach. Loki’s quick dismissal had stung. Quite a lot, actually.

Darcy tried to shake it off, telling herself that her soulmate bond was just being overly sensitive, and as she continued to mash buttons on the remote, she heard Loki’s sigh carry all the way from the kitchen.

“Darcy?”

“I’m sorry,” she replied in an overly sweet tone, “am I breathing too loudly for you now?”

She couldn’t resist the jab even though the idea of starting a fight with Loki made her feel a little sick. Her bond was already protesting loudly, she could feel it echoing in her head and twisting in the pit of her stomach, but Darcy tuned it out. There was no way she was about to apologize for something that so obviously wasn’t her fault.

She heard Loki sigh again and then he was crossing the distance between them, coming to stand at
her side and looking down at her warily.

“I regret my earlier comments,” he spoke quietly. When Darcy didn’t respond, he licked his lips before awkwardly continuing. “That was uncalled for.”

“Yeah it was uncalled for. You were a royal dick.” Darcy kept her voice expressionless as she tossed the remote control back onto the coffee table, settling on watching a lame straight-to-TV movie. Something about twins, comas, and finding the true meaning of love. She wanted to gag at the number of clichés they’d managed to squeeze into only 90 minutes, but at least it was something to keep her attention off of Loki.

“You have my sincerest apologies, Darcy.”

“Thanks,” she said, though it was more of an instinctual response than an actual show of appreciation.

Eyes still fixed on the TV, she could sense Loki lingering at her side, and when she couldn’t take his silent staring any longer, she asked, “So who peed in your Cornflakes this morning?”

“What?” His voice was so full of baffled shock, Darcy couldn’t resist glancing up at his face. The expression he wore was borderline hilarious and she found herself cracking a small smile despite herself.

“Figuratively,” she explained. “I’m trying to ask why you’re in such a bad mood.”

“Ah, I see,” Loki rubbed the back of his neck. “I have much on my mind concerning Thor’s return,” he admitted. “Still, that is no excuse for snapping at you the way I did. You...you have become quite important to me, Darcy. I would not want you to think otherwise.”

There was an earnest sincerity on his face that made Darcy’s heart start to melt, and when Loki reached out for her, his fingers just grazing the top of her shoulder like he was afraid she’d turn him away, the last remains of hurt she’d been feeling began to evaporate.

“You’re pretty important to me too, you giant cornball.” Abandoning her movie, Darcy hopped out of her seat and launched herself at him with enough force to make Loki stumble back a step.

She buried her face in the fabric of his shirt, content to just stand there hugging him while the sound of his heartbeat thudded beneath her ear.

Loki’s arms wound around her waist, holding her so tight it verged on uncomfortable. Not that Darcy complained, though. He could probably crack one of her ribs by accident and she still wouldn’t pull away. Being close to him just felt so...right.

After a few moments, Loki broke the silence. “What were you about to tell me earlier?”

“Well...” Darcy pulled back to look up at his face, “assuming you’re not going to bite my head off for distracting you from your very important reading, I was going to remind you that it’s our last full day alone before Jane and Thor get back tomorrow night.”

“I shall do no biting,” Loki promised, lowering his voice, “unless you should ask for it.”

The deep tone made her body flood with heat and Darcy very nearly whined out loud. “Fucking hell. Did you really just say that?”

He ignored her blatant frustration, lifting his eyebrows and continuing on as if he hadn’t just dropped
that bomb of an innuendo on her. “As you were saying?”

“Um...oh, right. Last day alone.” Darcy struggled to get her brain back on track but with the way Loki was looking at her, it was beginning to feel like a fruitless effort. Staying off track sounded a whole lot better in her opinion and with that in mind she shifted tones, coyly asking, “Do you know what that means?”

“Do enlighten me,” Loki smiled, his eyes growing darker as if he already had an idea of what she was about to say.

“It means,” Darcy tugged at the front of his shirt, forcing Loki to bend down enough for her to brush her lips against his ear, “that this is our last chance to have wild, noisy sex on any and all exposed surfaces.”

Two could play the sexually suggestive game, and Darcy felt a smug sense of pride when Loki made a choked noise in his throat, obviously not expecting such a graphic response from her.

“Gods, Darcy.” His voice had grown thicker and he had to pause to clear his throat. “You never cease to surprise me with your outspokenness.”

“That’s a nice way of putting it,” Darcy replied with a small, rueful smile. “Most people just call me loud and too opinionated.”

“Listen to me,” Loki reached out, tucking one of her stray curls behind her ear before he fixed her with a deeply serious look. “You have a spark of fire within your soul. Do not allow anyone to extinguish that flame. You are utterly perfect just as you are.”

His small speech caused an unexpected surge of emotion hit Darcy square in the chest and she suddenly found her eyes growing wet.

“Dude, are you trying to make me cry?” She gave a watery laugh, blinking until her vision cleared. “I’m like the furthest thing from perfect. My mouth is going to get me into a serious amount of trouble some day. I’m always talking back, and I’m pretty sure I gave you grey hairs after the whole ‘tell me your name’ thing.”

“I would not have you any other way,” Loki said simply. “Your unrestrained confidence is refreshing. I have never met another like you, Darcy. Most Aesir women lack the courage to so freely speak their minds. In fact, such an act would often be punishable if the woman were from a particularly affluent family.”

“What?” Darcy tilted her head, giving him an incredulous look. “That’s some Grade A inequality shit right there.”

For lack of a better reply, Loki shrugged. “With the exception of a certain few in highly revered roles – queens and warriors, for instance – women of wealthier classes are taught to be seen and not heard. Complaisance is considered to be one of the most desirable qualities in a wife.”

“And how exactly do you know all this?” Darcy asked curiously.

"I have suffered through many lengthy dinners in which I was seated next to the daughters of noblemen,” Loki explained. "Those old fools refused to give up the belief that a Prince of Asgard should only choose a partner of well-bred aristocracy. A ridiculous notion, really."

"Gold diggers," Darcy declared. "Why else would they want to marry their daughters off to a Prince?" Going quiet for a moment, she chewed on her lower lip contemplatively. "Okay, I've gotta
ask: just how many of those rich and glamorous girls did you do the nasty with?” She questioned with a look of suspicion.

In response, Loki gave her a stunning grin. “Jealous, are we?”

“No,” Darcy retorted stubbornly even though her soulmate bond was going haywire. Apparently the stupid thing had a real possessive streak.

“Worry not,” Loki kissed her forehead. “They were all terribly dull. Would you believe not a single one ever cursed at me?”

Darcy widened her eyes. “Never? With all the shit that you pull? Damn, those girls had patience. Or,” she paused, narrowing her eyes at him, “you’re just being a lying fucker.”

Loki’s wide grin returned. “Ah, see? You have such an obscenely tempting mouth,” he murmured before bending his head and kissing her thoroughly.

Winding her arms around his neck, Darcy was more than okay with letting him kiss her senseless.

“So,” she panted after they’d finally parted, “what you’re saying is, you like it when I talk back to you, huh?” She nudged her hips against him teasingly. “It turns you on when a girl’s in control, giving the orders?”

Loki swallowed hard. “In a word, yes.”

“Good to know,” Darcy grinned, sliding her hands down his stomach until she reached the front of his pants where she began toying with the waistband. “Very good to know. Do you want me to tell you what to do right now?”

“Yes,” Loki said again, breaking off into a groan when Darcy’s hand dipped into his pants and gripped him, hand moving along his length.

She waited until she had him panting before she spoke again, dropping her voice to a suggestive whisper. “I want you to bend me over the first flat surface you can find. Can you do that for me?”

Loki swore in a language that was definitely not English, his eyes briefly falling shut as Darcy continued to pump him with her hand. “I was mistaken when I called you perfect,” he rasped. “You are more than perfect. You are a veritable goddess.”

Darcy couldn’t stop her wide smile. It came out of nowhere, pulling at her lips until she thought her face would split in two, and she suspected that if her soulmate bond had hands, it would be popping a celebratory bottle of champagne right now. Having Loki’s approval made it that happy, and truthfully, even without her bond, the magnitude of his compliment made her stomach flip with pleased delight.

“Get on with it, God of Mischief. Give your goddess what she wants.” Darcy grinned challengingly, withdrawing her hand and causing Loki to make a noise somewhere in between a whine and a growl.

“Gladly,” his hands closed around she swell of her hips, tugging her forward and soon proving to her that he was, in fact, very good at taking orders.
In honor of their last night alone together, Darcy dragged Loki out into the backyard that evening, insisting that he needed to spend a night under the stars in order to fully appreciate the New Mexico experience.

“You do realize that you are in a constantly state of complaint about your surroundings,” Loki pointed out when Darcy first brought up the idea.

“Okay, yes,” Darcy conceded, “but the one thing that makes up for all the dirt and heat and lack of a decent shopping mall is the nights. Just wait till you see the sky.”

The sun was setting when they stepped outside, the last of the rays slinking down over the horizon and painting the sky a soft red colour. Thankfully the sun had taken all the humidity with it and Darcy was more than happy to steal Loki’s body heat, snuggling up next to him on a lounge chair.

When the last of the light had disappeared, blanketing them in darkness, Darcy gave Loki a poke in the arm. “You ready?” She questioned with a grin.

“I am,” Loki confirmed. He made a move to roll from his side onto his back but Darcy stopped him, hooking her leg over his thigh and preventing him from turning over.

“Nuh uh,” she shook her head. “You’ve gotta close your eyes first.”

“Really?” Loki lifted his eyebrows, looking unconvinced.

“Absolutely.” Darcy gave a serious nod. “I’m going for maximum awe factor. Just work with me.”

He chuckled, obediently shutting his eyes. “I fear that there is nothing I will not do for you, Darcy.”

His voice was light, teasing her in a good-natured kind of way, but there was a current of pure honesty running through those words that made Darcy’s chest swell with emotion.

“Same,” she admitted, giving Loki a push until he shifted onto his back, his arms finding her waist and drawing her with him.

Tucked up against his side, Darcy tilted her head until she could see his face, checking to make sure he hadn’t peeked. His eyes were still firmly shut and Darcy grinned approvingly.

“Okay,” she twisted in his embrace until she was on her back, squeezed into the small remaining space on the chair beside him. She shut her own eyes for a moment (maximum awe factor dictated it) before reopening them and gazing upwards. “Now look.”

When he at last opened his eyes, she felt more than she saw his reaction. Loki’s breath hitched and his arms tightened around her, lips briefly brushing against her temple.

“Pretty awesome, huh?” She said softly.

The sky overhead seemed infinite; a deep, velvety black that stretched on and on, dotted with clusters of shining, glowing stars.

“It is most impressive,” Loki agreed. “The Orion Nebula is especially visible from this vantage point.”

He tipped his head back, staring up at the expansive sky. The movement exposed his neck and accentuated the sharp line of his jaw, and suddenly the stars were no longer the most appealing sight to Darcy’s eyes.
“How do you know that?” She swallowed hard, dragging her eyes away from him as she fought down the urge to taste the skin of his neck. Could she not make it through one conversation with him without things turning sexual?

Apparently not because her heart was hammering and a slow ache was already taking form between her legs.

“I have studied much about the skies of Midgard and the other realms.” Loki confessed, reaching to pull up the blanket Darcy had left by their feet for when the air inevitably turned chilly. He tucked the red and black checkered flannel around Darcy’s shoulders before continuing. “A bit of a hobby I suppose, though it has become quite useful for determining paths of travel between the realms.”

“A closet astronomy nerd? I never would have guessed.” Darcy burrowed under the blanket, craning her neck to grin up at him. “I thought you were just an encyclopedia know it all.”

“I am that too.”

Darcy gave a snort of laughter. “Of course you are. Okay then, smartypants: educate me. What else are we looking at?”

Loki spent the next hour pointing out various constellations and planets to her, speaking with a level of excited interest that was far too cute for Darcy to handle. He was in his element, totally relaxed, and lying under the open sky with him, wrapped up in each other’s arms, it was so easy for Darcy to imagine spending every one of her nights with Loki like this; to have him as a permanent fixture in her life.

The moment was growing way too romantic between them way too quickly, she realized with a small flare of panic, and as Loki’s hand absently rubbed her back while he went on about the history of the Canis Major, Darcy found herself dangerously close to blurting out a certain confession of feelings.

Her soulmate bond was egging her on, the urge so strong she was finding it hard to breathe, and before Darcy realized what she was doing, her mouth was opening without her consent.

“Loki?”

“Mmm?” His hand stilled on her back and he dipped his head down, giving her his full attention.

Oh God, she couldn’t do it.

The logical side of her mind went into overdrive, trying to silence her bond with a rush of panicky thoughts. It was too much too soon. What if he didn’t feel the same? Was she even sure about her feelings? Since when did people confess their love after barely a full week of knowing each other?

Her head was too much of a mess. There was no way she could come to a rational decision at the moment, so Darcy chickened out, clamping her mouth shut before she inadvertently said something stupid.

“Are you well?” Loki was watching her with a concerned look. He brushed her hair off her neck, his fingers lingering on her skin and making Darcy shiver.

She had to swallow twice before she could answer and even then, her reply of “yeah” came out far too throaty.

“You wished to say something?” His eyes were impossibly dark, face so open and expressive it...
made her breath catch in her throat, and in that moment, Darcy knew it, even if she couldn’t confess it out loud.

She had fallen hard.

She was genuinely, unarguably in love with her soulmate.

The realization hit her deeply and for a moment all Darcy could do was blink, mouth opening wordlessly as she processed the gravity of her feelings for him.

She had almost forgotten that Loki had spoken until he prompted her with a soft, “Darcy?”

She wet her lips and did her best to calm the wild beat of her pulse, pushing aside her sudden revelation in favour of instead saying, “I need you.”

His lips split into a slow, sexy grin as his hands found the edge of her blanket, sliding under and seeking out her skin.

The lounge chair wasn’t quite wide enough so it took a fair bit of wiggling and contorting before Loki managed to pull off Darcy’s pants. They fumbled like overeager teenagers, desperate to do away with the barriers between their bodies, and when Loki finally eased himself inside of her, Darcy gave a deep sigh of pleasure.

He moved in long, drawn-out movements, each slow thrust of his hips drawing a soft whine from her throat. It would have been embarrassing under any other circumstances but she was too caught up in the moment to care.

Tightening her legs around him, Darcy’s hands sank into his hair, fingers clenching the dark strands when Loki dipped his head to kiss her. His mouth moved against hers warmly and surely, stealing all the air from her lungs until she felt dizzy.

When they parted, she breathed his name, breaking off into a moan when he dragged his hand down her hip, sliding it around to the back of her thigh and giving her rear end a firm squeeze that made Darcy’s whole body flood with heat.

He held her flush against him, so close that every rock of his hips sent a small tremor through her body. The palm of his hand felt like fire on her skin, fueling Darcy’s desire to a level she’s never thought possible before she met him.

It was an insatiable, constant need, and she wondered if the spark between them - that undeniable pull of their bond - would eventually lessen with time. It was overwhelming to think that it wouldn’t, but at the same time, the thought of growing apart from Loki sounded equally frightening.

No, separation was most definitely not an option, she decided.

“Tell me,” she spoke suddenly, needing his reassurance, “will it always be like this? Will I always want you this much? Because it’s like I look at you and I can’t even breathe.”

“Darcy,” Loki’s voice was raw and when his eyes fixed on her, they were burning with an amount of sincerity and affection that made her heart skip and stutter in her chest. “That I cannot say, but I know with complete certainty that I will never stop craving you.”

Emotion clogged her throat so instead of speaking, Darcy brought her lips to his, their mouths fusing together. Loki’s slow, measured thrusts soon became harder and deeper, and it wasn’t long before Darcy was trembling beneath him.
The poignancy of the moment was almost too much for her; the way Loki was pressed against her so desperately, the glittering darkness of his eyes that seemed to match the twinkling depth of the night sky overhead, and with a suddenness that took her by surprise, Darcy reached her release with a long, shuddering breath.

Her mind went blank as she surrendered to the feeling, getting lost in the way Loki’s body fit with hers so perfectly. She locked her thighs around his hips and slipped her arms over his shoulders, needing to be as close to him as possible.

Loki was rambling incoherent words into the curve of her neck, his breath coming out in warm pants against her skin, and Darcy tightened her arms around him, canting her hips and urging him on.

“Let go,” she instructed softly. “I want to feel you let go.”

He made a choked noise, thrusting roughly once more before his hips stilled, muscles going taut as he moaned into her neck.

“Yes,” Darcy breathed, a pleasant shiver passing through her as he came.

His face remained buried against her shoulder until he had caught his breath, rolling to the side and slipping out of her. Darcy immediately missed the warmth and fullness of him, but her overly sensitized skin was grateful for the chance to recover.

Loki seemed strangely solemn as he settled beside her, adjusting their blanket to make sure it covered Darcy’s bare legs. Combined with the way he’d been acting earlier in the day, it was enough to plant a small seed of worry in Darcy’s head.

“What’s up with you?” She asked, resting her chin on his chest and watching him with a slight frown. “First you were Grumpy McCrankypants this morning and now you’re being really quiet.”

“It’s nothing,” Loki assured her, combing his fingers through her curls and making Darcy purr like a cat as she relaxed against him.

Yawning widely, she snuggled closer and shut her eyes. “Is this about tomorrow?” She murmured. “It’s okay if you’re a little apprehensive about it. I know sharing the house with Thor and Jane isn’t exactly ideal but we’ll make it work.”

“Something like that,” Loki vaguely confirmed. He smiled but it was weak, not fully reaching his eyes.

It went unnoticed by Darcy, though. She was already asleep.

Chapter End Notes

*squints off into the distance* Storm's a comin'...
An uneasy feeling hung over the house like a storm cloud the next morning.

Things had started out normally enough; when the sun’s rays had first begun to filter through Darcy’s bedroom window, Loki’s hands had sought out her skin, stripping off her pyjamas as he settled between her thighs. The problem was, after their round of lazy morning sex, he’d acted distant, giving her short answers and avoiding touching her whenever possible.

Knowing that Jane and Thor would be back in a mere matter of hours had probably put a damper on his spirits, Darcy told herself, but she couldn’t help thinking there was a bigger issue at play.

That little thought bounced around in her brain all day and by late afternoon, a queasy anxiousness had taken shape in her stomach.

“Will you stop that?” She snapped a bit more harshly than she meant to as Loki paced the length of the kitchen. Back and forth, back and forth. It was starting to give her a headache.

He stilled, blinked at her, and then resumed walking his route from the fridge to the far wall and back again.

“Hey, Magic Man! Are you even listening to me?” Darcy turned on her heels, fixing him with a hard look as she rubbed a spot of flour off her cheek. She was in the midst of making some welcome home cupcakes for Jane and Thor (vanilla with sprinkles were Thor’s favourite she’d discovered), but at this rate she’d be dumping the batter on Loki’s head out of frustration before she ever got any of the treats into the oven.

Loki finally stopped and leaned against the corner of the island behind Darcy, his shoulders slightly drooping. “How much longer?” He asked for what must have been the eight hundredth time that
day. Give or take a few dozen, maybe. Darcy had lost count.

“Chill out,” she scraped up a spoonful of cupcake batter and transferred it to the baking tin, dumping it into one of the empty cavities, “the plane lands at six. You know this already.”

“Right,” Loki sighed, pushing himself off the edge of the island and stepping forward.

Darcy felt his hand land warmly on her shoulder, lightly squeezing for a moment before she sensed him beginning to withdraw.

She quickly dropped her spoon, intending to spin around and give him what she figured was a much-needed hug, but when she turned, she found that Loki had already left the room.

Blowing out a breath, she stared at the empty space in front of her.

That anxious feeling in her stomach returned full force and suddenly her cupcakes no longer seemed cheery. The batter smelled sickly sweet and it was making a headache take shape behind her eyes. Darcy swallowed hard, fighting down an increasingly strong sense of nausea.

She was over-reacting. It was probably nothing, she told herself as she quickly dumped the rest of the batter into the muffin tray and popped it into the oven.

While her cupcakes were baking she decided to try a bit of an experiment, closing her eyes and focusing on the tug of her soulmate bond.

Normally she could feel Loki’s side of the bond reaching for hers, drawing the two of them together, and as she reached out to him now, she felt his bond respond with only a tiny pull that was gone in an instant. It felt nothing like the magnetic attraction that usually existed between them.

Frowning, Darcy’s eyes popped open and she chewed her bottom lip contemplatively. Her earlier fears weren’t unfounded, she realized with increasing dread. Something was definitely wrong.

Unsurprisingly, Loki had chosen to stay at the house while Darcy drove to the airport to pick up Jane and Thor, so she used the time alone in the Jeep to fill them in on the week’s events.

“So...yeah,” she finished, shrugging her shoulders after explaining her change of heart regarding her space prince soulmate, “being bonded is hella annoying but a lot less awful than I thought it would be.”

Jane grinned from the passenger seat. “I’m glad to hear that, Darce.”

“By the way, I checked up on the lab while you were gone - had to make sure your science hadn’t gotten lonely without you - and Loki managed to fix your spectro-doo-dad,” Darcy said, slowing as she took the off ramp for Puente Antiguo.

“The barometric spectrophotometer?” Jane’s eyes lit up with excitement.


“That’s fantastic!” Jane was nearly bouncing in her seat. “So what was the problem? Was it the micro-adapter plug? I had a feeling it was the micro-adapter plug. I knew the circuit was going to overload, but I couldn’t find another source- ”
“Woah,” Darcy help up a palm, keeping her other hand on the steering wheel, “I’m gonna stop you right there. I don’t know how he did it except...magic.”

Jane blinked. “Did you really just say magic?”

“Loki is the most skilled sorcerer I have ever known,” Thor spoke up from the back seat, a hint of pride coloring his words.

“He’s got mad Merlin skills,” Darcy agreed, “which reminds me; I’ve got a trick I want to show you later. This is no lame ‘pick a card’ bullshit either. It’s gonna blow your socks off.”

“Should I be worried?” Jane asked, looking a bit apprehensive.

“Nah, it’s harmless.” Darcy paused, pursing her lips thoughtfully. “Just to be safe though, on a scale of one to ten, how fond would you say you are of bats?”

“Who’s ready for cupcakes?” Darcy announced, enthusiastically plopping her plate of treats down onto the centre of the kitchen table before she slid back into her seat next to Loki.

He had been strangely silent and withdrawn throughout dinner, making for a slightly awkward meal, but in typical Darcy fashion, she had simply kicked him under the table while seamlessly continuing her conversation with Thor and Jane.

“Vanilla sprinkles?” Thor’s face lit up as he reached for a cupcake. “Truly Darcy, you are too courteous.”

“It’s no big deal,” Darcy waved off the compliment. “You deserve it, big guy. Consider it a little welcome back present, and now I guess they can double as celebratory Loki’s Staying cupcakes too, right?”

She smiled at the god but when he didn’t smile back, Darcy felt her stomach turn to lead, slowly sinking down until it reached her toes.

“Right?” She prompted again weakly.

Loki looked to his brother and the two stared at each other for a long, long time. Darcy assumed they were doing that sibling thing where they could have an entire conversation without actually speaking a single word, and it wasn’t helping to settle her stomach one bit.

In fact, it weirded her out badly enough that her hands had begun to shake and she accidently dropped her fork, causing it to clatter loudly on her plate. The noise snapped Thor and Loki out of their staring contest and suddenly three sets of eyes were turning in her direction.

That was one way to get their attention, Darcy supposed.

“Am I missing something here?” She directed her question at Loki, crossing her arms over her stomach and anxiously leaning forward in her chair. “You’ve been acting totally bizarre for the last two days and now you’re doing this really cryptic sibling-speak thing. Just what the hell is going on?”

When Loki finally looked at her, the amount of apologetic resignation and sorrow in his eyes made a chill run down Darcy’s spine. She had a feeling she knew what was coming but that didn’t do
anything to soften the blow, and when Loki did speak, his words hit her like a hard kick in the gut, leaving her breathless.

“Darcy, I must return to Asgard.”

“What?” The question came out thickly and Darcy swallowed hard, urging her lungs to work.

“I cannot run from Odin forever,” Loki said, looking just as sick as Darcy felt.

“Sure you can,” she argued, “we’ll help you!”

The irony of Darcy’s statement wasn’t lost on her. It had only been days earlier when Jane had pleaded with her to keep Loki in their house, and now Darcy was making the same desperate request. It would have almost been funny had it not felt like her world had just been tipped onto its side so suddenly and violently.

Loki let out a small laugh, the sound coming out sad and humorless. “There was a time when I would have gladly taken you up on such an offer, but I cannot. Not now. You have changed everything for me, Darcy. I must face my punishment and make amends if Odin is ever to grant me an audience with Idunn.”

“This is ridiculous,” Darcy shook her head, refusing to accept his decision. “Do you have any idea what kind of shitty punishment you’re going to be put through? And God only knows how long it’s going to take, so why? Why do you need to go back? What’s so important about this Idunn person?”

Loki’s eyes darkened, his face growing serious. “Apples, Darcy,” he said quietly.

She took a breath and tried to compose herself but the question still came out sounding borderline hysterical. “Fruit? You’re abandoning me for a piece of fucking fruit?”

Thor chose that moment to jump in, pushing aside his uneaten cupcake and resting his elbows on the table top. As he opened his mouth, his eyebrows pulled down as if he were thinking of how to delicately phrase his words. “Darcy, the Asgardian lifespan is much greater than that of a Midgardian. One of Idunn’s apples will ensure that you and Loki are able to enjoy many, many years together.”

Feeling slightly dizzy from that information, Darcy stared down at the table, waiting for her vision to realign itself before she finally dared to ask, “How many years, exactly?”

A beat of hesitant silence passed before Loki replied. “Roughly eight thousand.” He cleared his throat but his voice still came out raw. “You must understand, Darcy. I have to do this. I cannot lose you.”

“Oh my god.” That was all her brain was capable of coming up with at the moment, and Darcy could do nothing but stare at him like a deer in headlights.

It was Thor’s voice that shook her from her stunned state. “There is nothing to fear, Darcy. I promise you this, as I will be accompanying Loki to Asgard myself,” his eyes slid over to where his soulmate had been watching the entire exchange in shocked silence. “I have my own request of Odin. I wish to acquire an apple for Jane.”

Jane’s eyes widened and she lifted a hand to her mouth. “Thor,” her voice was choked, brimming with affection, and it took her a moment to compose herself before she spoke again, softly saying, “Let’s talk in the other room.”
As Jane passed by Darcy’s chair, she gave her friend a quick squeeze on the shoulder and Darcy smiled up at her thinly, trying to steel herself for the inevitable shit-storm of a conversation that was about to take place.

Once she and Loki were alone, a heavy quietness settled over the kitchen and Darcy felt as though the silence was sitting on her chest like a physical weight, pressing down on her rib cage and making it hard to breathe.

She had to close her eyes for a moment, pulling herself together before she could bring herself to ask the question she most dreaded.

“How long?” She paused, willing her voice not to waver before she elaborated. “You’ve been planning this whole thing, haven’t you? So for how long did you know you were gonna leave? How long did you go without saying a single word about this genius idea of yours?”

“The day in the rain. That is when I first entertained the idea,” Loki admitted, his forehead wrinkling with concern when he saw how distraught Darcy was.

He reached for her hand but she pulled away, leaning back in her chair and pressing her palms together in her lap so she wouldn’t be tempted to reach out for him.

“Why would you do that?” Her voice cracked and she knew she was on the verge of a meltdown but she couldn’t hold back any longer. The wall she’d built to try to contain her feelings was crumbling down and now the words came pouring out of her uninhibited. “Why would you lie to me?”

“Darcy, I swear to you, I spoke no lies,” Loki pleaded, a look of anguish washing over his face.

“But you withheld the truth. You hid this huge plan from me – a plan that seriously affects my life - so really, what’s the difference?” Darcy retorted.

Loki’s mouth opened but he didn’t respond, and Darcy had a feeling it was because he knew she was right.

She sighed, all the fight draining out of her in one long breath and leaving her suddenly exhausted. “I should have known, I guess. That’s just what you are. A liar and trickster, through and through. For some reason I thought you’d be different from Mythology Loki, but that just shows what a fucking idiot I was.”

Her chair scraped noisily along the floor as she stood to leave and Loki immediately jumped to his feet, catching her arm before she managed to exit the room.

“Darcy,” he implored, “I am trying to do what is right.”

“Maybe you think so,” Darcy conceded, focusing on the floor rather than on Loki’s face. She couldn’t bear to look at him; she knew exactly what kind of miserable look he’d be wearing and it would be enough to shatter her already fragile heart. “But I would have appreciated a heads up before you went ahead making major life-altering decisions for me. Did you ever stop to think if I even want to live like that?”

“I...I thought...” uncharacteristically tongue-tied, Loki stumbled for a response. His grip on her arm tightened slightly and when he finally spoke again, his voice was determined, coming out perfectly composed. “I will do anything to ensure that you are happy, Darcy. Even if that means I must harm you first.”

“So you’re leaving. No matter what I say.” It was a statement more than a question, but Loki nodded
anyway.

“I will face what punishment Odin sees fit and then return to you with one of Idunn’s apples. After that...” he paused, meeting her eyes with an unwavering stare, “the choice is yours.”

They parted on less-than-good terms.

Standing outside in the growing heat of the morning sun, Darcy shaded her eyes with her hand and squinted up at the blue, cloudless sky. A sky that would soon be filling with an awesome column of light and wind, engulfing the two Asgardians in front of her and returning them to their home.

Darcy tried not to think too much about that part, though.

She was still torn about Loki’s decision. On one hand, she was touched that he would sacrifice his freedom for her, but if she were to ignore her soulmate bond and focus solely on her rational independent side, she wanted options, dammit. Who was Loki to decide that her life should be extended by thousands of years without even consulting her first?

It was unreal, something she thought only existed in fantasy novels, and yet here she was faced with a choice of near-immortality. It made her a little nauseous to think about it. Never did she ever think she’d have such a difficult decision to make.

She was pulled from her internal musing by the sound of Thor’s voice as he finished speaking his heartfelt farewell to Jane.

“Darcy, perhaps you would like to...?” Thor nodded in the direction of his brother.

To say her goodbyes, he meant.

She’d really rather not, and more than anything Darcy just wanted to return to the house and hide under her blankets for a week. Or a month. Hell, why not a whole year? This was too much pressure and she felt like she was about to shatter into a million little pieces.

As she looked at Loki her mouth opened but the words got stuck in her throat. She couldn’t even manage to force out a short, simple goodbye, and that’s when the significance of the moment truly hit her, slamming into her all at once with an impact that made her knees wobble.

Loki was really leaving, and she had no idea when - or if - he would return.

A panicky, distressed feeling filled her chest, making her heart ache, and despite her intentions to distance herself, Darcy’s feet moved of their own accord, closing the distance between them as she threw her arms around Loki and pressed her face into his chest.

His arms automatically closed around her in return, and Darcy felt his lips press against the top of her head before he finally released her, taking a step back.
She immediately missed the warmth and security of his arms, and despite the heat of her desert-like surroundings, she found herself shivering without him.

Was that how it would always be? Would that cold, bleak feeling live in the pit of her stomach forever until the day she finally saw Loki again? The thought that yes, it would, was overwhelming depressing and Darcy found herself blinking down at the ground as a fresh round of tears threatened to spill over.

“You guys should go now,” she said, because if Loki stayed any longer she would probably start begging him not to go and that would accomplish nothing except for making a total fool out of herself.

“Yes,” Loki agreed, watching her with an unreadable look on his face. It was obviously a mask, hiding whatever emotion he was really feeling, but Darcy was grateful for it. It kept her from totally falling apart in front of him.

Loki’s eyes lingered on her before he finally rejoined his brother; the two gods standing a good distance from Jane and Darcy as they prepared to call for Heimdall.

Thor tipped his head, gazing up at the sky for a moment before he hesitated and looked back to Darcy and Jane.

“I vow to you both, we shall return,” he promised solemnly.

She could sense that Jane nodded but Darcy was barely paying attention to her friend beside her. She was too busy watching Loki, using those last few moments to greedily suck up every detail of him, trying to sear it all into her brain before he was gone.

The next minute moved all too quickly.

Thor called out for Heimdall to activate the Bifrost and then the sky opened up in a swirling pillar of light, forcing Darcy to shield her eyes with her arm and take an unsteady step backwards.

It lasted only a handful of seconds before the light disappeared, leaving nothing but silence and a large, circular scorch-mark on the dusty earth.

It was done.

Loki was gone.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

An update on updates: unfortunately I won't be posting chapters weekly anymore. Now that we're diving into the real meat of the story they're taking me much longer to write, so I'll probably be updating every two or three weeks instead. I also want to thank you all for sticking with this fic. I was blown away by how many comments I received on the last chapter! :)

Darcy didn’t leave her bed for three days.

She existed in a cycle of emptiness and heartache. She wouldn’t call it living. Living implied that she had something worth getting out of bed for, and she definitely didn’t have that, so she merely existed instead. Taking up space and breathing in air, but doing nothing more than simply being.

On the fourth day, Jane physically pulled her from her cocoon of blankets and darkness, dragging her out into the kitchen and forcing her to take a seat at the table.

When Darcy plopped down into one of the hard kitchen chairs, she immediately folded her arms on the table top, using them as a cushion for her head as she buried her face in the crook of her elbow.

“Just wanna sleep,” she mumbled into the fabric of her shirt sleeve.

“You’ve slept more than enough,” Jane stated, pushing a glass of orange juice in Darcy’s direction. “What you need is food and sunlight.”

Darcy groaned, slowly raising herself up until she was sitting in her chair properly. “How do you do it?” She asked before taking a small sip of juice to make Jane happy. “How does your bond not drive you completely crazy every time Thor leaves?”

Jane sat down opposite her, looking thoughtful as she considered Darcy’s question. “You have to find something to take your mind off the loneliness,” she replied. “For me, that’s work. You might have noticed, I can get a little obsessive over it,” Jane said with a grin.


Jane laughed, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear before her face sobered. “That’s the only advice I can give you,” she admitted. “Find something you enjoy doing and throw yourself into it. Give yourself a purpose, find something that drives you. It’s going to be hard, but I know you can do it.”

“I guess it can’t be any harder than things already are, right?” Darcy reasoned with a small, thin smile.

“All uphill from here,” Jane confirmed, reaching across the table to squeeze her friend’s hand.

“Thanks,” Darcy said emphatically, feeling a rush of affection for the other woman. “for everything. You have full permission to drag me out of bed and give me a kick in the ass any time. I really needed it.”
In all honesty, she felt like Jane was the only thing keeping her afloat at the moment, and when Jane’s grip on Darcy’s hand tightened, it seemed to silently say, *I know. I won’t let you sink.*

Taking Jane’s advice, Darcy began filling her days by helping out in the lab with much more focus and enthusiasm than ever before. It had become a two-person mission now: build an Einstein-Rosen Bridge to make contact with Asgard and, maybe more importantly, with their soulmates.

The days were long but it kept Darcy’s mind busy and every night after dinner she’d spend the remainder of her time at the little desk in her bedroom, bent over her laptop as she completed assignments and essays, determined to finish her poli-sci degree.

By the time she powered down her computer and collapsed onto her bed, most of the time she was too drained for her brain to think or dream about a single thing. Those were the good nights.

Bad nights were a different story.

On bad nights she’d lie awake for hours upon hours, fighting back a suffocating feeling of aloneness as her mind ran through an endless reel of questions. Where was Loki? Was he okay? Did he miss her as much as she missed him?

And then there was the apple thing. Immortality. Or something like it, anyway. Did she want that? Darcy wasn’t sure, but she did know that the possibility of facing a future without Loki was so frightening, it wasn’t even close to being an option for her.

So she continued to think on it, worry over her absent soulmate, and distract herself with work until a full month had passed and Thor made a sudden unexpected return.

“I have only come for a brief visit,” he explained when he had shown up on their doorstep decked out in his heavy Asgardian gear and scaring Darcy so badly she had nearly peed herself.

She gave him and Jane some privacy while they said their hellos, kissing and murmuring soft words to each other, and it took all of Darcy’s strength to ignore the painful squeeze of her heart when she saw the two of them reunited.

What she wouldn’t give to have that with her own soulmate.

Once they were all settled in the living room, Darcy couldn’t fight her overwhelming need to question Thor so she immediately asked “How is...he?”

God, she couldn’t even say his name out loud, and Darcy felt an embarrassing blush creep onto her cheeks. She was acting like a damn lovesick idiot.

Thor shook his head sadly. “He does not wish for you to know anything about his punishment.”


“I am truly sorry, Darcy. I can tell you nothing. I swore to Loki that I would honor his wishes,” Thor explained. “He hopes to keep you from worrying over him.”

“That fucking ass-face,” Darcy fumed, her hand curling into a tight fist until she could feel her fingernails cutting into the skin of her palm. “Does he not realize that telling me nothing makes me worry even more? Rhetorical question,” she added when Thor looked like he was fumbling for some
kind of response.

“But he’s alive, right? And well enough to speak to Thor. That’s something,” Jane offered optimistically.

“You’d tell me if he was in pain, right? If he was hurt?” Darcy knew her voice was growing desperate but there was nothing she could do to stop herself. She needed answers. Badly.

“That I cannot say,” Thor scrubbed his hand over his beard, looking apologetic. “But yes, he lives and I have spoken to him on more than one occasion.”

Realizing that was the most Thor could possibly offer her, Darcy blew out a long breath, offering him a weak half-smile. “Thanks, Thor.”

The God nodded, growing quiet for a moment before he spoke again. “Loki is my brother. I care for him deeply, and if he were to ever be in mortal danger, I would do everything within my power to keep him from harm.”

“I know,” Darcy replied, her lips pulling up into a genuine smile this time. “That’s what landed you two here in the first place.”

Thor laughed at that and the warm, booming noise seemed to instantly lighten the mood. “Fair point.”

“I understand what you’re saying though, and I appreciate it,” Darcy said, recognizing the subtle promise that Thor would always be looking out for her soulmate. The sweetness of his gesture made her chest fill with warmth, helping to numb the hopeless, longing pull of her bond and relieve some of the heavy stress and strain that threatened to crush her. “I’d do the same for you,” she promised Thor.

Thor smiled broadly. “You already have, Darcy. You gave my brother refuge, care, and dare I say, love, that he most sorely needed.”

Love. She had already come to terms with her feelings towards Loki but hearing Thor actually say the word out loud made it feel entirely different.

She was certainly feeling something for Loki but at the moment it was more like a boiling, emotional anger. Anger brought on by fear, if she were being honest with herself. Darcy was itching to yell at Loki for being a selfless idiot and returning to Asgard, but more than that, she was worried about him. Worried about what kind of twisted, callous punishment he was currently facing.

Darcy was no idiot. She knew enough about Asgard and old Norse myths to be able to piece together a pretty decent picture of what Loki might be enduring, and no matter what way she looked at it, even if she squinted and turned that picture onto its side, the outcome didn’t look good.

Just what kind of punishment was Odin putting his youngest son through, Darcy wondered and, more importantly, where did that punishment fall on the severity spectrum?

Unbidden, an image of Loki bruised, bleeding, and sickly came to mind and she shoved it away violently with a very emphatic no thank you. She had seen more than enough of her soulmate in pain when he’d lived on her couch for the better part of a week, and she wasn’t eager to relive that experience ever again.

Still, that quick little flash of a mental image made Darcy’s mouth dry up, her throat growing inexplicably tight, and she forced down a painful swallow before finally saying, “You might not be
Her response made Thor smile in a wistful, bittersweet kind of way. “All will be well, Darcy,” he assured her, and there was so much determination and certainty in his voice that Darcy actually believed him.

She clung to that belief, allowing a small amount of hope to bloom in her chest like a pinprick of light in the darkness. She had to believe in Thor’s words. Otherwise, what else did she have?

Asgard was much the same as he remembered, though at the same time it somehow appeared different to Loki’s eyes.

He had only been gone briefly, barely more than a full week’s time, and yet he felt like a foreigner as he stood in the ornate elegance of the throne room, about to face the man he had assumed to be his father until only recently.

Odin was not yet present, leaving Loki forced to wait in front of the vacant throne.

It mocked him, that large empty seat, but Loki refused to turn his gaze away. He stared straight ahead until his eyes burned with the need to blink, and only then did the doors to the room finally part and Odin entered.

The king took his time ascending the throne and Loki swallowed down the urge to scream at the old man to hurry up; to cease toying with him, but instead, Loki pressed his lips together into a tight line. He refused to give Odin the satisfaction of provoking even the smallest amount of sincere emotion from him.

There was a long moment of silence as Odin settled before him and then the Allfather finally spoke, his voice echoing in the silent room. “My son returns.”

“I believe Thor is in the courtyard if you so eagerly wish to see him,” Loki replied in a bored, nonchalant tone.

Odin’s good eye focused on him with a hard and steady strength. “You think you are not my son?”

Loki huffed out a short, disbelieving laugh. “You waste your breath asking such questions.”

“Though you may not be my flesh and blood, you remain my son,” Odin said matter-of-factly. “I raised you-”

“You raised me,” Loki interrupted, his voice growing sharp as a fresh dose of anger boiled in his chest, “to fear and despise the very thing that I am.”

“I intended to reveal your true lineage when you grew older; when you were of an age where you would be less prone to reacting with rash foolishness.” The last part of Odin’s statement was accompanied by a pointed lift of his eyebrows.

It was a blatant insult; a proclamation that Loki was no more than a reckless, impulsive child, and it lit an enraged fire deep in Loki’s gut.

He forced himself to take a deep, even breath before responding with as much flippant sarcasm as he could muster. “My sincerest apologies, father,” the word came out coated in venom. “Have I
embarrassed you? Made a mockery of the royal family?"

Odin shook his head. “Embarrassment plays no part in this, Loki. Your actions single-handedly caused the demise of Asgard’s relations with Jotunheim. You waged war without cause and nearly died on their soil.” He paused, giving Loki a deep look. “Your mother has been sick with worry over you.”

Loki shifted his weight on his feet, trying to ignore the uncomfortable tightness in his chest that Odin’s final comment had caused. “She is no mother of mine,” he muttered, though even to his own ears, the protest sounded weak.

“Then to what do I owe the pleasure of your return, if not your mother?” The Allfather asked, studying Loki curiously.

So there was to be no more skirting around the issue, it appeared. The pleasantries were over and now business truly began.

Loki wet his lips and for one mad, absurd moment, he wished that Darcy were with him; wished that he could take her hand in his and gain some strength from her.

“I have come to make amends for my actions,” he said, the phrase feeling strangely painful as it left his mouth. If need be he would grovel, as much as the thought sickened him. Loki could only hope that Odin would acknowledge his efforts before it came to that. “I have come to face punishment as you see fit.”

“Why?”

One simple word and yet the answer to Odin’s request was far from basic.

“I assume,” Loki began, pausing to clear his suddenly tight throat, “that you will not grant me an audience with Idunn otherwise.”

“Idunn?” Odin looked surprised by the admission and Loki took a small amount of pleasure in seeing his former father caught so off guard. “For what purpose?”

“Is there ever more than one purpose to seek out Idunn?” Loki matched the question with one of his own, raising his eyebrow.

Odin leaned back in his throne, frowning slightly. “So you seek an apple. Tell me, on whom do you intend to bestow this gift?”

This was the moment that most concerned Loki. He hated to admit his weakness to Odin; to confess that his heart had been captured by a Midgardian, but more than that, he hated the thought of Odin gaining even the slightest glimmer of knowledge about Darcy. She was a treasure he had no intention of allowing the Allfather to tarnish.

Forcing the words from his throat, Loki made his admission. “My soulmate.”

Moments of terse silence ticked by in which Odin’s face appeared unreadable, and Loki clasped his hands behind his back to hide the fact that they were beginning to shake rather unsteadily.

“You have found-”

“I have,” Loki interrupted.
“And she is-”

“Mortal,” he acknowledged, lifting his eyes and focusing a hard stare on Odin, daring him to object.

“I see,” was the Allfather’s only response.

After that, the king fell silent for a long stretch of time and Loki’s legs ached with the desire to move. Every inch of him itched with an anxious desperation to turn his back on Odin and flee the room, but he firmly remained rooted in place before the throne. He could not leave without gaining what he came for. He needed access to Idunn and her apples. For Darcy.

She was his motive in all of this, and her name repeatedly ran through Loki’s mind like a mantra, keeping him grounded and slightly calmer as the silence stretched long and endless before him until he thought he may snap from frustration.

To his relief, Odin appeared to have come to a decision then, nodding his head decisively before addressing Loki. “You will face a punishment of my choosing,” he declared, “and when you have completed your task to my satisfaction, I will allow you a means of access to Idunn.”

The feeling of pure relief that flooded Loki was so strong, his legs nearly buckled beneath him. Outwardly though, he ensured that he showed no affect to Odin’s words, arranging his face into a neutral mask. “I agree to your terms,” he replied, feeling his heart begin to punch hard against his ribcage as he prepared to force out the more difficult part of his statement. “Name your punishment.”

“Very well,” Odin inclined his head in a brief nod. “You seek a throne, do you not?” He questioned somewhat abruptly.

“I assumed it was my birthright,” Loki said bitterly. “A fool I was to believe such a thing.”

“You were born to be a king,” Odin confirmed, “and a king you will become. Your punishment shall be to ascend the Jotun throne as Laufey’s successor. You will rebuild what you have so selfishly destroyed and restore peace to both our realms.”

Loki felt his stomach twist, all the air leaving his lungs at once and making his chest burn with pain. “You cannot be serious.”

“Is this not what you sought so desperately?” Odin asked with an air of innocence that caused Loki’s blood to boil. “I am offering you a kingdom to call your own.”

“You act as though this is a gift,” Loki spat, his hands clenching into tight fists, “but I assure you, it is not. This is an exile!”

“The decision has already been made. You will depart for Jotunheim at daybreak,” Odin announced.

“And what of my need to see Idunn?” Loki asked, straining to keep any hints of desperation from seeping into his tone. Securing an apple for Darcy was the sole reason for his return to Asgard. Could the old fool not realize the importance of that?

“If you have succeeded in your role as king within a year’s time, you will be free to make your plea to Idunn,” Odin stated.

“And at that time I will be free to go where I please as well?” Loki paused to swallow roughly. “To leave Jotunheim?”

“No, Loki.” The heavy finality of Odin’s words hit Loki like a physical blow, causing him to take a
wavering half-step backwards. “What I present to you is no temporary position.”

A frantic, ill feeling poured into his chest and settled heavily on his lungs, squeezing and suffocating until he thought the organ might crumple into nothing but dust. “This...this is a death sentence,” he said, voice coming out cracked and raw.

“Jotunheim is in a state of wreckage. A firm and steady hand is required to rule such a realm. So long as you are a fair and wise king, you shall face no trouble,” Odin assured. “So what say you?”

“I think I am about to be sick,” Loki mumbled in return, raking a hand through his hair and finding that his skin was an odd combination of sweaty and chilled.

“You have agreed to face a punishment of my choosing,” Odin reminded him, “and I believe this to be quite fitting.”

“What am I to do about Dar- about my soulmate?” Loki quickly amended. “A mortal will surely not survive the harsh conditions of Jotunheim.”

Odin did not seem concerned by that at all, simply saying, “You have a year’s time to consider the implications of your bond to this mortal.”

“And if I refuse your sentence?” Loki asked, angling for a possible escape route.

He would rather face physical torture than live a lifetime trapped on Jotunheim where he would be forced to face his true heritage; to leave his soulmate behind, or perhaps even more frightening, to have no choice but to reveal his Jotun form to Darcy and see the inevitable look of horrified disgust on her face.

“It is already done,” Odin stated. “You depart for Jotunheim at first light, regardless of your desire to refuse or accept my decision. So,” he repeated again, “what say you?”

“Why speak as if I have a choice? Do you hope to train me? To break me like as though I am a troublesome colt?” Loki asked.

“I only wish for you to accept your fate of your own free will,” Odin replied, looking as though he was quickly growing annoyed with Loki’s need to always have the last word. “Now give me your answer.”

“I say no,” Loki retorted, chin raised and jaw clenched as he stared at the father he once thought he had.

“Your stubbornness shall be your downfall,” Odin warned. “I suggest you reconsider your temperament before you cause even more damage to the realms you have already torn apart.”

“You can banish me to a frozen wasteland, you can call me unfit to rule, but you cannot silence my hatred and anger over your lies,” Loki spoke in a low, deadly voice. “You make me out to be the faulty party but I assure you, my shoulders are free of the weight of guilt. That burden lies solely upon you.”

Odin paused, looking slightly shocked by the malice in Loki’s tone.

“Go now,” he spoke at last. “Rest tonight. Then gather any belongings and find yourself at the Bifrost at sunrise. Heimdall will be expecting you. Am I clear?”

Loki hid his panic by allowing an ugly sneer to take form on his face as his mind raced, calculating
and searching for any number of possible alternatives or opportunities, but finding none. He was backed into a corner. No amounts of magic or work of his silver tongue could save him. He held no options and no means of escape.

It was with a mocking bow to the Allfather that he finally replied, “Utterly transparent.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was almost four months to the day that Loki left when Darcy awoke one morning to total pandemonium.

She and Jane sat side by side on the couch in the living room, eyes glued to the television screen as every news station across the country blared some variation of the same headline: FDA APPROVES VACCINE TO SUPPRESS SOULMATE BOND.

Darcy chewed on her lip, listening to so-called Soulmate Experts engaged in heated debates, while video cameras streamed live footage of city sidewalks where Pro-Bond groups protested in mobs outside of vaccination clinics.

It was a scene of mass chaos and as the local news channel looped the same story over and over again until it all sounded like static to Darcy’s ears, she sat in stunned silence, unable to think up a single word to say.

Jane was the first to regain her voice and when she spoke, her tone was soft and hesitant. “If you want, I’ll go with you to the clinic. It’s your choice, Darcy. I’ll support you either way.”

Darcy pushed her glasses up onto the top of her head and rubbed her eyes with a frustrated groan. “God, I really don’t know, Jane.”

She would be lying if she said she hadn’t considered it. Carrying on every day without Loki, knowing only that he was alive but having no idea whether he was hurt, sick, sad, or lonely, was weighing on her shoulders like a boulder.

The constant stress had begun to show on her face as well, leaving her cheeks perpetually pale while black smudges of tiredness had taken up permanent residence under her eyes.

As tempting as the vaccine was, Darcy had her doubts. She’d done her research, hungrily devouring every article and study she could get her hands on, and from what she’d read, as soon as the suppressant drugs entered a person’s system, their link to their soulmate would immediately disappear. It would be as if their side of the bond had never even existed at all.

Loki would feel the change, she was sure of it. Instead of severing their connection on both ends her side would simply vanish, leaving Loki’s bond to reach out for hers in a futile, yearning call she would never be able to answer.

It was weak, like the soft little tug of the wind as it ruffled your clothing, but Darcy could still feel their soulmate bond resting within her. Despite the tug being distant, that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt. It was a hollow, ever-present ache but that pain had become a small consolation almost; a reassurance that Loki was reaching across realms for her just as she was for him.

As far as she knew, that aching pull was the only comfort he had right now, and to take that away from him...

God, it would break him.

It would break her.
She’d spend eternity suffering through their bond before she ever hurt him like that, Darcy decided. It was just too cruel.

“I can’t do it.” She shook her head, trying not to cry as she did every time she spent too long thinking about Loki. As soon as the tears started, she’d be a useless mess. The last time she broke down it took three full days before Jane had finally been able to coax her out of bed. Darcy didn’t want to fall into that black hole again.

“Oh, Darce.” Jane smiled warmly, giving her a pat on the knee before she stood. “I’ll make us some tea.”

Half way out of the room, Jane paused, looking back to Darcy. “You know, you can make it through this, Darce. You’re a lot stronger than you realize.”

Darcy’s eyes followed her friend as Jane walked into the kitchen, those final words triggering a memory deep in her brain. What was it that Loki had once said to her? It had been one of their final days together and he had been impressed by her bold spirit, admiring the way she so freely spoke her mind. *You have a spark of fire within your soul,* he’d said. He had called her perfect. Begged her not to change.

The reminder caused Darcy’s lips to automatically draw up into a smile as a sudden sense of purpose and determination filled her chest, making her feel lighter than she’d felt in months.

Yes, she decided, she was done falling apart. She would continue on, keeping that spark alive and enduring whatever fate decided to throw her way. She would do it for Loki but more than that, she would do it for herself. Because that was just the kind of person she was.

When seven months had passed, Darcy was holding her poli-sci diploma in her hands.

She had finished her courses online so there was no fancy graduation ceremony to attend and no rowdy after-party to drink herself sick during. Still, Jane insisted that they celebrate her accomplishment so the pair ate pizza and drank their best bottle of wine out in the backyard under the setting sun.

The question of *what now?* weighed heavily on Darcy’s mind and after another month’s worth of deliberation, she decided to stay on as Jane’s assistant. To her surprise, she had taken a real interest in their lab work and although she was far from reaching Jane’s brilliantly smart astrophysicist status, Darcy was proud of the amount she’d learned over the span of their time in New Mexico.

Not wanting to put her new diploma to waste, she sent off dozens of copies of her resume to a few nearby businesses and was thrilled when she heard back from La Puerto Sun-Times, eagerly snapping up their offer to be a part-time contributor.

She knew that she was on the verge to working herself into the ground but the focus of having a job to do was the only thing that kept her from snapping, so Darcy toughed it out through ten hour days in the lab while devoting her evenings and weekends to writing political news columns for the Sun-Times website. Funnily enough, the bulk of her stories ended up focusing on the still-raging debate over the soulmate vaccination.

It was a good life, Darcy decided, and she was actually content. Borderline happy, even. The only thing keeping her from achieving that completely peaceful state was the lonely, aching tug in her chest. It never truly went away but by now she’d grown used to it. Like a chronic pain.

What she really disliked were the dreams.
They had started about a month into her soulmate-less state; incredibly vivid dreams that would wake her up in the middle of the night, leaving her panting, sweating, and disoriented with a painful, throbbing ache between her legs.

Oh yes, the dreams were all dirty. And she always woke up before they got to the good part. The frustration was enough to make her want to pull her hair out.

As close as she was with Jane, Darcy never shared that little piece of information with her friend. What if it wasn’t a side-effect of the bond and Darcy was just an embarrassingly horned-up freak? Or, and this was her favourite theory, what if Loki’s magic allowed him to pop in and out of her dreams at random?

Either way, Darcy figured some things were just better kept a secret.

At the twelve and a half month point, Darcy’s world came to a screeching halt.

Loki returned.

She wasn’t expecting it at all. It was a lazy kind of Sunday morning and she was still dressed in the pair of boxer shorts and oversized t-shirt she had slept in. So when her soulmate bond had suddenly perked up, easing to life like a bear coming out of hibernation, she simply rubbed her chest and frowned, ignoring the feeling.

She had to hand it to him, the God sure knew how to make an entrance, and she shrieked at an ear-splitting level when he suddenly materialized right next to her where she stood in front of the bathroom mirror with her toothbrush shoved in her mouth.

At first she thought it was a dream. A hallucination. Some awful trick of her sad, tired brain. But when he took a step towards her, reaching out to skim his fingers lightly down her forearm, she realized that he was, in fact, very real.

“Oh my fucking god,” she garbled around her toothbrush, immediately dropping it into the sink and spitting out her mouthful of toothpaste before she launched herself at him.

The force of her body colliding with his caused Loki to lose his balance and he instinctively took a step back, hitting the bathroom wall behind him. A picture fell off its hook (Darcy vaguely heard the glass crack as the frame hit the floor) and there was probably a Loki-sized dent in the drywall, but she didn’t care about any of that.

She hugged him hard enough that it had to be painful but Loki didn’t complain. He only wrapped his arms around her equally tight and buried his nose in her hair.

“How I have missed you,” he whispered, his hands roaming over her as if he’d never touched her before; running along her back, pressing into hips, and moving up to cradle the back of her head.

“Oh my god,” she repeated again because really, what else was there to say? Her brain was still trying to process the fact that Loki was here. Right in front of her. Touching her. It was unbelievable.

“Are you angry with me?” Loki asked, and the sound of his voice, the deep vibration and silky accent, had Darcy almost in tears. She hadn’t realized exactly how much she missed that voice until she’d finally heard it again.
“Of course I’m angry. You’ve been gone for over a year, Loki. I’m fucking furious.” The retort lacked any real bite; Darcy didn’t have the energy to inject even the smallest amount of actual anger into it. She was too busy pressing her face into his chest and trying not to bawl.

“I’m sorry,” Loki’s response came out sounding like a question and when Darcy pulled back to gaze up at him, he seemed puzzled by the contrast between her angry words and her display of emotion.

The look he wore was too much for her to take, so standing on her toes, Darcy reached up and kissed that adorably confused expression right off his face.

All she could taste was the mint of her toothpaste but as their mouths began to move together, falling back into a familiar rhythm, the smell and taste of him slowly returned, invading her senses in a way that threatened to completely overwhelm her.

As her arms slid around his neck, Loki’s mouth began moving against hers more urgently, hungry and desperate while his hands snaked under the hem of her shirt, palms pressing into the small of her back and holding her flush against him.

She could feel that he was hard beneath the flaps and layers of leather that made up his Asgardian outfit, and when Loki shifted his hips, pushing himself lightly against her, Darcy reluctantly pulled back.

“Wait,” she panted. She had to pause to swallow and when she did, it felt like her heart was lodged in her throat. God, had she ever missed him. “We should talk first.”

Loki nodded, not trying to dissuade her, and for that Darcy was grateful. She was already too close to caving in and tearing his clothes off. If Loki were to turn on the charm, what little willpower she had would be gone in an instant.

“You are alone?” He asked as they settled on the couch in the living room.

It was surreal seeing him back on that piece of furniture he had practically lived on a year ago. He seemed to take up much more space now, appearing taller and broader. Maybe it was the intimidating outfit. Or the fact that he wasn’t half-dead this time, Darcy thought.

“Yeah,” she confirmed, sitting with her fingers twisted together in her lap so she wouldn’t be tempted to get handsy with him. “Jane pulled an all-nighter at the lab.”

“I see.” Loki seemed to be fidgeting, his own hands clenching and unclenching where they rested on the tops of his thighs.

“Yeah,” she confirmed, sitting with her fingers twisted together in her lap so she wouldn’t be tempted to get handsy with him. “Jane pulled an all-nighter at the lab.”

“I see.” Loki seemed to be fidgeting, his own hands clenching and unclenching where they rested on the tops of his thighs.

“You okay?” Darcy questioned, watching his fingers as they continued to flex.

Loki shook his head, voice coming out hoarse. “I need to touch you, Darcy.”

Well, fuck.

He didn’t have to tell her twice, and Darcy immediately crawled into his lap, eager to bring herself as close to him as possible.

Once she was sufficiently enveloped in his arms she immediately started grilling him. “Tell me everything. What happened? Where did you go? You weren’t like...tortured or anything, right?”

“I received no physical reprimand,” Loki confirmed and although it sounded like good news to Darcy, his face turned sour, telling her there was more to the story than he was letting on. “There is
something I must tell you,” he admitted. “My punishment...it is not yet finished.”

“Oh,” Darcy chewed on her lip as disappointment smothered the remains of her excitement over seeing him again. “So you’re only here temporarily. You have to go back.” Her voice was flat, making her question come out as more of a statement instead. “For how much longer?”

“Darcy...” Loki broke off, swearing under his breath in a foreign language. “There is no end to my sentence. I have been named king of Jotunheim and I must hold the position until I have a proper successor to take my place.”

Darcy gave him a skeptical look. “You’re shitting me.”

“I shit you not,” Loki replied, and the way he very primly pronounced the curse word was almost enough to make Darcy laugh if she weren’t so shocked by his admission.

“You’re a king?” She gaped at him. “What the hell kind of punishment is that?”

“Believe me,” Loki grimaced, “I would have much preferred the physical torture.”

“No no no,” Darcy shook her head. “I mean, that doesn’t sound like a bad thing at all. You rule a whole freaking realm, Loki! Besides, you were already a prince so you had to know this would be coming eventually, right?”

“I sought the throne of Asgard. I want nothing to do with the wastes of Jotunheim,” Loki snarled, his eyes growing dark with rage.

“Um, okay. Tone down the anger for sec and remember that your very mortal, very breakable soulmate is in your lap,” Darcy said, trying to pry his fingers off her arm where his hand had unconsciously begun to tighten.

Both his face and his grip instantly softened and Loki let out a tired sigh, eyes going shut as he let his head fall back against the couch. “I am sorry, Darcy,” he murmured. “I know not what to do.”

“Hey, it’s okay.” Darcy cupped his cheek with her palm, stretching up to press a soft kiss to the corner of his mouth. “We’ll figure it out. What if we can find you a successor? Then you can step down, right?”

Loki’s eyes slowly reopened, fixating on Darcy with a warm but sad look. “It is not that simple. The Jotun throne can only be held by one with royal blood. I have no biological siblings nor children, so there is no one to take my place.”

Damn.” Darcy frowned, tapping her fingers against her lips as she tried to think of another option. “Okay, what if-”

“Darcy,” Loki cut her off gently, “While I appreciate your attempts to assist, I assure you, there is no exit strategy, no loophole, which I have not already considered. Simply put, I have no way out.”

“I’m not giving up yet,” Darcy told him, leaning her cheek against the soft leather covering his chest, “there’s got to be some way to get you out of it. In the meantime though, what happens to us?”

“In that respect, I have some good news,” Loki’s mouth quirked up into a grin, “I was granted an apple of Idunn.” There was a note of pleased accomplishment in his voice before he paused, sounding more hesitant as he added, “If you still wish for there to be an ‘us’."

Darcy’s stomach sank as she thought of the damned immortality question. She still hadn’t figured out
an answer to that dilemma.

Half of her was desperate to be with Loki for as long as possible and through whatever means necessary, while the other half feared giving up her normal life. Or what was left of it, anyway. Her definition of “normal” had been totally skewed ever since Norse gods started falling out of the sky.

As hard as it was to admit, the fact that Darcy hadn’t immediately jumped at Loki’s offer made her answer pretty damn clear. If she couldn’t bring herself to say yes then there was only one other choice. She would have to say no.

“I...I can’t,” she forced the words out, feeling a twinge of pain in her chest when she saw Loki’s face fall. “I’m not saying never,” she assured him, “just not right now. It’s too big of a decision. I need more time. Hang onto that apple for me though, okay?”

“I shall wait until you are ready,” Loki confirmed, though he still looked slightly disappointed by her response.

“So is that it then? You head back to your ice kingdom and I stay here for God knows how long, until I’m ready to use the apple?” Darcy asked, running her fingers along a pleat in the leather of Loki’s clothing.

“No,” he spoke emphatically. “I will not suffer the loss of your company again. The last year has been...” he trailed off, searching for an appropriate word.

“Crap-tastic?” Darcy offered helpfully.

Loki chuckled, lips stretching into one of his amused grins that she had so missed seeing. “Have I told you how much I have missed you?”

“You did,” Darcy confirmed with a slight smile, sliding her arms up around his neck, “but if you want it say it again, I won’t stop you.”

Loki dipped his head, catching her lips in a swift kiss. “I have missed you,” he said, kissing her again, “every moment,” he moved to press his lips to the sensitive skin below her ear, “of every day,” he finished, bringing his mouth down the side of her neck and kissing a warm, wet trail towards her collarbone.

Darcy sighed, nearly melting in his arms when she felt his tongue dip into the hollow of her throat.

“So that was a good talk, right?” She said weakly while Loki tugged aside the neck of her shirt and began pressing hot, open-mouthed kisses to her bare shoulder. “We can work out the rest of the details later. Re..con...vene...oh,” any further attempts at finishing her sentence immediately vanished when Loki’s hand snaked its way under her shirt, the warmth of his palm feeling like fire on her bare skin.

“Later,” Loki confirmed, eyes dark as they roamed over her. “Right now the only talk I wish to hear is you saying my name, over and over again.”

Darcy made a noise somewhere in between a whine and a groan, letting her forehead fall against his chest. “Fuck, Loki. Some day my lady bits are going to give up the fight and when they’re nothing but a pile of dust, it’ll all be your fault.”

Loki blinked down at her, the lust on his face giving way to a look of confusion. “I did not understand any of what you’ve just said.”

“Probably for the best,” Darcy mused, beginning to work free the various straps and zippers
adorning his outfit. “My brain can be a wild and crazy place. I don’t recommend diving into it unprepared.”

“Duly noted,” Loki said wryly, helping her along by shrugging out of his heavy jacket.

“That reminds me; I wanted to ask you something. Have you been rooting around up here?” Darcy asked, waving her hand next to her temple.

Loki’s eyebrows pulled down in a worried look. “What makes you ask that?”

“I had some uh, dreams.” Darcy cleared her throat. “Like, really vivid dreams. It got me wondering if you were actually in my head.”

Loki gave a negative shake of his head. “I cannot access the minds of others.” After a brief pause, his mouth curled up into a knowing smile as he asked, “Would you care to describe the nature of these dreams?”

“I would not,” Darcy answered succinctly, focusing her attention on a strange overlapping panel of leather that kept her from accessing Loki’s pants.

Damn. So much for her theory that he had been dream-traveling. It looked like her libido was just operating on an off-the-charts level after all.

Her comment made Loki chuckle and the depth and warmth of the noise caused a pleasant shiver to run down Darcy’s spine, filling her with a fresh dose of desire.

“How the fuck do I get this off?” She asked, tugging uselessly at the edge of his shirt.

“Allow me,” Loki made quick work of the complex series of straps and closures, his clothing gradually falling away into a pile on the floor. When he was nearly bare he reached for Darcy, easily stripping off her shirt and tugging down the boxer shorts she still wore.

He really was a sight for sore eyes, Darcy thought as she ran her hands along the lines of his collarbones before dragging her nails down his chest and causing Loki to release a long, shuddering breath.

He wasn’t nearly as gaunt and sickly looking anymore, though a reminder of his old injury still remained in the form of a thin pink scar on his side. When Darcy ran her fingertip over it, she felt Loki’s muscles quiver under her touch.

Seeing that scar brought back a whole slew of emotions from their time together and with an urge so strong Darcy couldn’t ignore it, she slid off the couch, kneeling before him and leaning forward to press a soft kiss against the thin line of healed skin.

Loki made a small noise of surprise, his hand coming to rest on the back of her head and fingers gliding into her soft strands of hair.

“Darcy,” he groaned, pulling her back onto his lap until she was straddling him, gripping his shoulders for support.

He was sitting with enough of a slouch that Darcy’s face hovered a few inches above his and Loki had to crane his neck in order to look up at her.

It was a thrilling feeling to have him under her like that; to see the want in his eyes and hold him completely at her mercy, and when Darcy positioned herself over him, slowly sliding down until he
filled her completely, Loki made the hottest moaning noise she’d ever heard, tipping his head back as his eyes slammed shut.

They moved so perfectly in sync, it made Darcy wonder why she’d ever had such hateful thoughts about finding her soulmate. Sure the bond had its frustrations and drawbacks, but nothing in the world could compare to the feeling of being with Loki. The heat of his skin against hers was pure bliss and the rough warmth of his voice as he groaned a string of unintelligible words into her ear was by far the best sound she’d ever heard.

It had been so, so long since they’d been together, it only took a few languid rolls of Darcy’s hips before she could feel a hot pressure building low in her belly, threatening to burst like a bubble.

Loki’s eyes found hers, his voice strained and heavy with unspoken emotion. “Gods, Darcy. I missed this. I missed you, so...,” he seemed to lose his train of thought then, hands slipping down to the curve of her ass and squeezing when Darcy increased her pace, rising and falling above him in an erotic rhythm, “so damned badly,” he finished with a slight crack in his voice.

A hot, liquid happiness poured into Darcy’s chest and the feeling was so strong, she thought her heart might burst straight out of her chest. His heartfelt admission, the look of absolute pleasure and open affection on his face; it was all too much, and as moisture gathered in her eyes, she absently noted that Loki’s own eyes looked suspiciously wet at the moment.

If she had any breath left in her she would have commented on it, but Darcy was too far gone, too lost in the moment, and as she felt that bubble of pleasure come to a peak, seconds from bursting, she breathed out “I love you” a moment before she came undone.

There was no delay; Loki immediately shuddered against her, his fingers digging into her hips as he encouraged her to keep moving, keep dragging out both their climaxes, while his mouth found hers in a hard, messy kiss that was all tongue and desperate neediness.

She was limp and exhausted as she came back down from her high, letting her head rest on Loki’s shoulder and shivering pleasantly when she felt his palms glide down her back.

“Come with me.” Loki spoke suddenly, the urgency in his voice making Darcy lift her head to blink at him.

“Um, I thought I just did,” she quipped, teasingly poking him in the ribs.

Loki shook his head, giving a short chuckle. “No, silly girl.” He reached up, brushing the damp hair off her temple and allowing his fingertips to linger along the side of her face as he studied her.

His eyes were filled with a warm tenderness that made Darcy’s chest squeeze, and when he wet his bottom lip in a show of apprehension, her pulse doubled in pace. She instinctively knew that whatever he was about to say, it was going to be big.

“Darcy, I feel the same. I love you, and that is why I wish for you to return to Jotunheim with me.”

Chapter End Notes

Lots happening in this chapter! And to the little parka kiss fandom that started itself in
the comments, I miiight have made some changes to chapter 12 to add a little somethin' somethin' for you guys ;)}
I feel like I need to add a disclaimer here that parka kisses may actually be cloak kisses instead, because the cloak is necessary for a future chapter. But hey, people wanted fluffy kisses so I did my best to deliver in true fur-wearing Loki fashion ;)

“Hold on a second. I must be hearing things because it sounded like you just asked me to go all ‘in a land far, far away’ with you.” Darcy tilted her head, looking at Loki like he’d just sprouted another head.

“You heard correctly.” Loki took her hand in his, gripping so tight Darcy was distinctly aware of every little bone in her fingers as they grinded together. “Will you consider it?”

“I have a lot of questions first,” she replied, “like won’t I turn into a human icicle?”

“I know of an enchantment to regulate body temperature,” Loki told her. “The cold will do you no harm.”

“Okay,” Darcy conceded, “but what about the Frost Giants? I’m pretty sure they’ll be pissed when they find out their king brought a mortal back with him.”

Loki’s face darkened at the thought. “You will be under my protection,” he promised. “If anyone so much as looks at you improperly, they will pay dearly for their mistake.”

“Er...alright then.” She had a feeling he was talking about something much worse than a slap on the wrist and a night or two in the slammer. “And would I be, um...” she wasn’t quite sure how to word her next question without it sounding like an insult to his birthplace, “stuck there? Not stuck like ‘ahhh get me out of here’ but stuck like I couldn’t come home – uh, I mean, come back here to visit Jane and all that,” Darcy babbled.

The edge of Loki’s mouth twitched like he was trying to hold back a smile and Darcy was relieved to see that he looked more amused than insulted.

“I will arrange for you to visit Midgard as you please,” Loki said. Meeting her eyes, his voice took
on a solemn tone as he vowed, “Darcy, I would do anything to ensure your safety and happiness. My position as King will always come second to your needs, and despite whatever selfish thoughts I may have, I do not expect you to give up your life on Midgard for me. I know that is asking too much of you. All I request is that you consider my proposal.”

It certainly was a lot to consider, Darcy thought. A true turning point in their relationship, only she wasn’t sure which direction they were moving in yet. For now, the compass was still spinning.

Even though the idea of moving to a frozen foreign realm was scary, it was also incredibly exciting. Not only would they be able to stay together, but Darcy would also be living it up in an actual ice castle with the very real possibility that some day she’d be the queen of said castle.

She was the furthest thing from royalty and the thought of taking on all that responsibility was frightening to say the least, but one thing Darcy was absolutely certain of was that she couldn’t watch Loki leave again. She couldn’t bide her time waiting for him to maybe-hopefully-eventually-someday return to her. The first time had been hard enough and if she had the power to prevent that from ever happening again, then dammit, she would do it.

Blowing out a long breath, Darcy made her decision. “You’ll be there. That’s all the reason I need to say yes.”

The look of shocked surprise on Loki’s face nearly made her laugh. “Yes?” He questioned, obviously thinking he must have misheard her.

“Yes,” she nodded, biting her bottom lip to hold back her desire to grin.

“Darcy,” Loki’s voice went hoarse with emotion, “you are far too good to me. I do not deserve you.”

“But you do,” Darcy argued softly, bringing her hands to his face and forcing him to look her in the eyes. “You deserve everything I can give you and more. You gave up your freedom, your happiness, everything, to get me an apple that I don’t even have the balls to use, and even then, you didn’t pressure me. You said that you’d wait for me to be ready. God, Loki, you’ve done so much for me.”

She couldn’t explain the full extent of her feelings with words so instead she kissed him, their mouths moving together until Darcy was breathless and could hear nothing but her own heartbeat pounding in her ears.

“I love you,” Loki moaned the admission against the soft skin below her ear, nuzzling and kissing along the side of her neck.

She has been so wrapped up in their conversation, Darcy had forgotten that they were still joined until she felt Loki begin to grow hard within her, sliding his arms around her and shifting to bring her onto her back beneath him.

It was slow this time; drawn-out and unhurried as they became reacquainted with each others bodies, and when they had finished, they shared a shower before collapsing on Darcy’s bed.

“I was only granted one day of leave from my sentence,” Loki told her with a regretful look, “just long enough to inform you that I had retrieved Idunn’s apple. I – we,” he corrected, “must return to Jotunheim tomorrow.”

“That soon?” Darcy squeaked, mind reeling from the sudden information. That was barely enough time to talk to Jane, give her notice at the Sun-Times, pack her bags, let her crazy decision actually sink in...there were a million things to do, really.
“I am sorry,” Loki murmured, drawing her closer. “I know that is not sufficient time to prepare.”

“We’ll make it work,” Darcy said, trying to reassure herself just as must as she was him. “We always manage to make it work. That’s our thing.”

“Our thing?” Loki echoed, sounding confused.

“Yep,” she leaned in and planted a quick kiss on the tip of his nose, causing Loki to squirm and look mildly embarrassed in the cutest way. “That’s what makes us such a kick-ass couple. We can take on anything.”

Her voice may have come out sounding strong but on the inside, Darcy was feeling distinctly less confident.

She sincerely hoped that ‘anything’ also happened to cover foreign realms, the bitter cold, and a legion of unfriendly Frost Giants.

Jane took the news much better than Darcy expected.

“Of course you would want to stay together. You’re soulmates,” Jane explained when Darcy had gaped at her friend’s calm reaction.

“I thought you’d be upset. Or at the very least, give me some kind of strict ground rules,” Darcy admitted, tracing her finger along a particularly obvious scratch in the table top where Thor had gotten a little too enthusiastic with his steak knife during dinner one night.

“Oh, I’m still going to do that,” Jane confirmed, watching Darcy’s finger slide along the scratch mark. The small reminder of Thor caused a fond smile to cross her face but it soon faded as she fixed Darcy with a stern look. “Promise me you’ll be careful, Darce. No sneaking around in places where you shouldn’t be, no starting fights with the Frost Giants, and no ignoring what Loki says. He’s the only one who can protect you out there, so even if you think he’s wrong, swallow your pride and listen to him.”

“I promise to try,” Darcy responded, “but that’s a tall order, Jane.”

Jane laughed, nodding her head in acknowledgement. “Maybe it is. What I’m trying to say is: stay safe. Okay?”

“I will,” Darcy pushed her chair back, motioning for Jane to also stand. “Now come here. I’m gonna hug the crap out of you.”

“Likewise,” Jane enveloped her friend in a hug, squeezing Darcy tightly. “Promise to visit?” Her voice was slightly higher pitched than normal; a sign that she was close to tears.

“Duh,” Darcy choked out, feeling her own eyes grow wet. “Promise you’ll visit me when Thor finally decides to put a ring on that and haul you off to Asgard?”

“Of course,” Jane laughed. “God, could you imagine? You on Jotunheim and me on Asgard. How strange is it to think that we might each rule a realm one day?”

“Pretty fucking bizarre,” Darcy confirmed, “but if it’s going to happen, there’s no one else I’d rather be space princess sister-in-laws with.”
“Me too, Darcy.” Jane pulled her in for one last hug. “Me too.”

Loki hadn’t been exaggerating when he called Jotunheim a frozen wasteland.

It was perpetually overcast; the sun never seemed to shine and the winds were so brutally strong, Darcy had almost lost her balance the first time a gale had hit her. Even in the centre of the city (if you could call it a city - it was more like a crumbling formation of ice-covered rocks), everything was the same dull shade of grey.

Darcy pulled her fur cloak tighter around her shoulders, shivering despite her layers of heavy clothing.

Under the cloak she was bundled up in a thick woolen sweater and a pair of soft, leathery pants Loki had given her. They were similar in style to his own and to her delight, Darcy found that they were surprisingly warm and wind-proof.

The cloak around her shoulders had also been provided by Loki. It actually belonged to him and the fact that it still held his scent, combined with the fact that he was currently standing next to her and squeezing her hand, were the only things keeping Darcy from spiraling into a full-fledged panic attack.

“Are you ready?” Loki turned to face her, gently tugging the fur-trimmed collar of the cloak tighter around her neck.

They stood in the snow at the base of the palace entrance, fluffy white flakes falling around them in a way that reminded Darcy of the inside a snow globe. The snow never seemed to let up, always falling in big fat blobs that might have looked nice if you were gazing out through a window, but actually spending an extended amount of time under those heavy, wet clumps of snow was a totally different story. The whole ‘winter wonderland’ appeal got real old real fast.

“I don’t know,” Darcy admitted, blinking the snowflakes from her lashes as she gazed up at Loki. She felt jittery; stomach somersaulting with nervous energy.

“You will be magnificent,” Loki assured her, closing what little space remained between them and bending to rest his forehead against hers. “You will charm the Jotuns just as you charmed your way into my own heart.”

“Sentimental cheeseball,” Darcy rolled her eyes though she couldn’t help grinning at his words. The corner of Loki’s mouth quirked up into a half-smile before he leaned in and kissed her, slow and gentle until the chill in Darcy’s veins was replaced with a sense of warmth that made her breath catch and her skin tingle pleasantly.

She slid her hands up his chest, winding them around his neck and kissing him back fervently until they at last broke apart, panting and staring at each other with identical heated looks.

“Later,” Loki promised, and the hunger in his tone made Darcy’s pulse race with anticipation.

As it turned out, Loki’s vow (in combination with that bone-melting kiss) made for a hell of a pep talk, and Darcy was feeling significantly calmer when they finally began to make their way up the wide set of stairs leading into the palace.
The palace was, in a word, intimidating. It was built of jagged icicles and stone with spires stretching so high Darcy couldn’t see the peaks no matter how far back she craned her neck.

Inside, the church-meets-cave look continued. The ceiling was vaulted, making every little noise echo ominously, and large pillars all carved of the same one-dimensional shade of grey stone supported the impossibly high ceiling overhead.

“Woah,” Darcy breathed in awe. “It’s like Dracula’s castle or something.”

Her comment made Loki crack a smile before his demeanor changed to one of stern business. “You,” he looked to one of the guards positioned at the edge of the room, “ensure that everyone has gathered in the throne room immediately.”

The guard inclined his head in an understanding nod and once he had left, Loki spoke again, this time softening his voice as he addressed Darcy. “Would you like to see our chambers?”

“Lead the way.” Darcy followed him down the cavernous hallway, gawking at the sheer size of the palace and nearly running into Loki’s back when he suddenly came to a stop in front of a set of tall double doors.

“The room has been spelled to grant access to only you and I,” Loki told her. “Should you ever find yourself in trouble, come here. You will be safe inside.”

“Okay.” Darcy sincerely hoped she’d never have to test that theory. “How does it work?”

“Simply place your hand on the door,” Loki laid his palm flat on the stone and a moment later, the door opened with a whoosh of air.

“Nifty,” Darcy commented.

She hesitated in the doorway before taking a short, reluctant step into the room. A part of her dreaded what she would find there. Were there icicles hanging from the ceiling? More of those scary, jagged rocks sprouting from the ground? Was everything the same drab shade of grey she’d already seen a million times over?

“Oh. My. God.” She breathed, blinking as she crossed the threshold and tried to take in all the detail around her.

“I hope you like it,” Loki said, looking a bit embarrassed as he clasped his hands behind his back. “I took the liberty of copying a few items from your bedroom on Midgard.”

“Fuck, Loki. This is...” Darcy trailed off, having no words to describe what she was feeling.

The room was impressively warm and cozy. Loki had attempted to hide the dreary stone walls by hanging long drapes of purple silk from the ceiling, softening the cold severity of the room, and beneath Darcy’s feet was a large, thick fur rug that warded off the chill of the floors.

There were even more amounts of fur on the bed (a bed big enough to comfortably sleep a family of eight, she guessed) and enough fluffy throw pillows to drown in. To top it all off, Loki had even matched the bedspread to the same polka dot duvet that had covered Darcy’s bed back in New Mexico.

He’d tried so hard to make the room homey for her, it made Darcy want to cry.

So she did.
“You don’t like it?” Loki asked, looking panicked when she began to sniffle. “I will have it fixed immediately, I-”

“No, you big dummy,” Darcy cut him off, her voice wobbling with emotion. “It’s perfect.” She threw her arms around him, intending to bury her face in the front of his shirt, but instead she promptly smacked her head on a piece of his armor.

“Ow.” Pulling back, she made a face and rubbed her forehead. “I keep forgetting that you’re doing the whole leather and armor thing now. I got so used to seeing you in sweatpants. That chest plate thingy really isn’t soft.”

Loki chuckled, his hands skimming down her back and dragging her closer. “I promise that when it is just the two of us, I will do away with all of this,” he said, glancing down at his elaborate outfit.

“We’re alone now,” Darcy replied suggestively, running her index finger along the criss-crossed pieces of leather covering his stomach.

Loki groaned, shaking his head. “You make it extremely tempting, but there is no time. We must go; I am expected to make an announcement in the throne room shortly.”

Ah. Right. Darcy tried not to let her disappointment show on her face. He had his kingly duties to attend to now; responsibilities that couldn’t be shirked no matter how badly they may want to ignore them.

“Rain check?” She offered, hoping her smile looked a little more real than it felt.

“Yes,” Loki quickly dropped his mouth to hers. When he pulled back, he took a deep breath. “Now, let us introduce you to Jotunheim.”

Darcy had never really thought of herself as a nervous person until she found herself standing next to Loki on the raised platform at the head of the throne room.

Having hundreds upon hundreds of Frost Giants eyeballing you (most with cautious intrigue, some with outright hostility) could really do a number on your self-confidence, she discovered.

It was horribly awkward; she wasn’t sure what to do with her hands (shove them in her pockets? Hang onto Loki’s arm like she always saw royalty do in the movies?) and she had a sinking suspicion that the two Frost Giants who kept snickering in the second row were actually laughing at her.

She was dying to call them out but instead Darcy clenched her jaw and ignored the burning desire to speak. Jane had asked her not to make any dangerous enemies and Darcy would try her damnest to keep that promise.

To relieve her anger, she settled on daydreaming about punching those Giants right in their big frosty noses, and she was so caught up in her elaborate fantasy she had tuned out most of Loki’s speech until he suddenly said her name, jerking her back to the present.

“...Darcy Lewis of Midgard,” Loki was saying. “She is my soulmate, and, perhaps one day, she shall be your Queen.”

There was an eruption of surprised murmuring at that and Loki waited until the crowd had quieted
before be continued, face growing deadly serious and voice as sharp as a blade. “Darcy belongs to me. You are to address her as Lady Darcy with the utmost amount of respect, and should I hear of anyone laying a single finger upon her, frightening her or causing her harm in any way, you will be begging for the mercy of death by the time I am finished with you.” He paused to let the full extent of his threat sink in. “Have I made myself clear?”

An uneasy chorus of agreement came from everyone in the crowd. *Almost* everyone, Darcy noted with a slight tinge of discomfort, except for the two Giants she had been keeping her eye on.

She could feel their stares on her and when she bravely made eye contact with the taller of the two, holding her chin high and narrowing her eyes, the vicious grin he gave in return made her stomach turn just as icy cold as the room she stood in.

She’d tried. She’d really, really tried. That had to be some kind of record, though. Darcy hadn’t spoken a single word – hell, she’d barely even been on Jotun soil for more than an hour – but there was no mistaking the dark sneer on the face of that Frost Giant.

*Sorry, Jane.* Darcy sent a silent apology to her friend. *Enemy made.*
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

We're kicking off this chapter with plenty of nsfw-ness and ending it with...stuff. Things and stuff. ;)

“That was some speech,” Darcy said once they’d returned to their bedroom for the evening. “So I belong to you, huh?”

Loki paused unbuttoning his tunic to wince apologetically in her direction. “I did not mean to imply that you are my property,” he explained, “but the Jotuns...they are rather crude in their understanding of these things. I thought it best to put it in terms they would not misunderstand.” He locked eyes with her then and in the flickering candle light, his pupils glittered darkly. “Your safety is far too important to leave to any amount of chance.”

“Yeah?” Darcy commented as she watched him continue to undress. When he turned to hang his shirt on a chair in the corner, the dim lighting cast shadows along the bare expanse of his back, accentuating his lean strength, and Darcy wanted very badly to drag her tongue along the cords of muscles that shifted beneath his skin as he moved. “Maybe you should prove it. That I’m yours,” she clarified.

Loki stilled, dropping his shirt and turning around to face her. “Don’t say that unless you are certain,” he warned, his face taking on a heated, hungry look.

The past two days had been such a whirlwind of preparations as they worked out the details of Darcy’s move to Jotunheim, there had barely been any time for the two them to steal away a few moments alone together. The lack of physical contact was driving Darcy crazy and by that point, she could practically feel the neediness developing between them, hanging heavy in the air and making her shiver in anticipation.

“I’m more than certain,” she pulled her sweater over her head, letting it drop to the ground. The remainder of her clothes soon followed, falling into a puddle of fabric on the thick rug.

Loki stared at her with burning eyes and when he finally spoke, his voice was rough and far deeper than usual. “On the bed.”

Darcy eagerly scrambled onto the mattress, hiding her grin by biting her lower lip as she laid back, propping herself up on her elbows. Her grin slowly turned to a confused frown when Loki made a disapproving noise, shaking his head.

“That will not do. On your knees,” he commanded.

The authoritative tone of his voice caused all the air to leave Darcy’s lungs in a rush of excitement as she switched positions, rolling onto her stomach before pushing herself up and balancing her weight on her hands and knees.

“Better?” She asked, unable to resist teasing him by wiggling her bum as she repositioned her legs further apart.
Loki moved toward her like a predator, each of his steps slow and calculated until he was standing next to the bed, lifting his hand and gliding it softly down her spine. “Much,” he replied throatily.

When he made no further move, Darcy gave a frustrated whine, needing him to touch her again. Somewhere. Anywhere. “Dammit, Loki. Why do you still have your pants on?”

Loki huffed out a small laugh. “Patience, love,” he murmured, hands going to the front of his pants at such an achingly slow pace, Darcy could feel her annoyance steadily growing.

“Now,” she demanded, throwing him an irritated look.

“I thought I was to be giving the orders,” Loki raised an eyebrow, finally releasing the clasp on his pants and pushing them down.

“Yeah well, you’re taking too long,” Darcy grumbled.

She felt the mattress dip, and in the next instant, Loki was grabbing her thighs, tugging her towards him and bending his body over hers until Darcy could feel the warm heat of his chest pressing against her back.

“Is this better?” He spoke the question on a whisper, pushing her hair aside and making her moan when she felt his lips start to move along the side of her neck.

“Ah...yes,” Darcy’s breath hitched as he nudged her knees further apart before the hard pressure of him brushed against her entrance.

“I am going to devour you, Darcy; bring you to the verge of breakdown and then watch as you come apart for me,” he breathed, scraping his teeth along the skin of her shoulder.

“Loki,” his name came out on a gasp as he finally pushed into her, causing her fingers to automatically clench in the soft fabric of the bedspread beneath her hands.

“Do you need me to stop?” Loki’s hips stilled, his voice sounding strained as he kept himself in check, waiting for her response.

“Like hell you’re stopping,” Darcy pushed back against him and in return Loki inhaled sharply, making a low noise of pleasure in his throat.

He resumed his actions then, moving with long and steady thrusts that left Darcy panting as though she’d just run a marathon, and when Loki tilted his hips, hitting a particularly amazing spot inside her, her arms nearly gave out on her.

“Oh god,” Darcy moaned, dropping down onto her elbows before she wound up falling face-first into the mattress.

In her current position Loki’s body was fully draped over hers, covering her almost completely. The heat of his skin and the feeling of having him so close, caging her beneath him, was overwhelming in the best possible sense. She could feel the vibrations of each of his harsh breaths; hear the soft groans of pleasure that came from deep in his throat, and it was enough to push her to the brink.

“I’m not gonna last,” she gasped out as he continued to move inside her. “Fuck, Loki.”

“Don’t fight it,” Loki’s voice was hoarse, his breath hot on her neck. “We have all night, Darcy, and I am far from finished with you yet.”
The sinfully dark promise made her shiver and with the next hard, purposeful rock of his hips, Darcy found herself clutching at the bedsheets and crying out as an orgasm swept through her, sudden and intense.

She had barely regained her breath when Loki withdrew, pulling away and urging her over onto her back before the hot length of him was sliding into her once more, and it wasn’t long before he was causing her to fall apart all over again.

It was late when they finally finished. Or maybe early. Darcy was so exhausted - in that pleasantly limp and sated kind of way - she could barely think of what day of the week it was, let alone figure out the time.

Loki was curled around her, leisurely leaving a series of hickeys along her breasts (“you told me to prove that you are mine,” was his excuse when Darcy had made a half-hearted complaint about the red marks dotting her skin).

She threaded her fingers through his hair as Loki’s mouth worked its way up towards her collarbone, eventually breaking the comfortable quiet between them as she asked, “What was it like?”

Loki paused his actions, looking up at her with mild confusion.

“When you first came here,” Darcy elaborated. “What was it like?”

“Why do you ask?” He questioned, a brief look of apprehension flickering across his face.

“You were gone for an entire year, Loki. I can’t imagine how awful it must have been to be stuck here all alone.” Darcy lifted her shoulder in a small half shrug, watching her fingers continue to slide through his dark hair. “I just...I want you to know that you’ve got me. If you ever want to talk about it.”

“You truly wish to know?” Loki’s eyes slid shut in pleasure when Darcy scratched her nails along his scalp.

“I do,” Darcy confirmed. “We’re soulmates after all. Partners. That means that we can lean on each other when we need to, and right now, I think you should let yourself lean on me. Get everything off your chest, you know?”

“Very well.” Loki sighed, squirming under the blankets until he’d gotten himself comfortable, laying his head on Darcy’s stomach and wrapping one arm around her hip.

“It was...difficult. Damned difficult. It still is,” he confessed. “Upon my arrival here, I felt as though I had been exiled to Hel instead. The Jotuns looked upon me as if I were the monster, the aberration. I fear a great number of them still do.”

At first, he was hesitant to admit his fears and shortcomings to her but as Loki continued to speak, the words began to flow freely as he told Darcy everything about his year long absence, all the feelings of hopelessness, anger and isolation he’d fought as he struggled to rule a realm that was just as damaged as its new king.

Unconsciously their hands found each other, fingers entwining as he talked. Darcy squeezed reassuringly each time she heard his voice grow thick with emotion or tight with anger, and at last, when he ran out of energy, she felt him exhale in a slow, long breath as she rubbed his back with her other hand.

“Feels better to talk about it, huh?” She asked, feeling the stiff stress in his shoulders gradually lessen
under her touch.

“Perhaps,” Loki admitted with a more than a little reluctance.

The stubbornness in his tone was just so unmistakably Loki, Darcy couldn’t help but laugh and when she felt Loki smile against her skin, a feeling of happy relief swept through her. His Jotun heritage had always been a touchy subject so she was glad to see that reminiscing over the past year hadn’t left him in a brooding, dejected mood. If anything he was the exact opposite; content, relaxed, and so adorably affectionate, Darcy’s brain had a hard time functioning around this version of Loki.

“Hey,” she spoke softly, feeling the sudden, pressing need to tell him just how much she cared.

“Hmmm?” Loki responded, nuzzling his face against her stomach.

“I really fucking love you.” It may not have been poetic but it was the best Darcy could do. There were no words to articulate just how deeply and completely she loved him, and when Loki lifted his head to smile at her, his grin was so brilliant it made her heart skip in her chest.

“And I you, Darcy,” he replied, squeezing her fingers.

“Come here,” Darcy urged, tugging at his arm until Loki moved up to the head of the bed to lie next to her.

Rolling onto her side to face him, she took a moment to study his face; the bright, ever-changing colour of his eyes, his pale skin (now slightly flushed, probably thanks to the fact that she was staring at him so intently), the sharpness of his jaw and that mouth that got him both into and out of all sorts of unimaginable amounts of trouble.

That mouth had been her undoing. Somehow that mouth managed to irritate her, make her feel unbelievably loved, and bring her to heights of pleasure she hadn’t even known existed. Yeah, Darcy was definitely a fan of that mouth, so with that in mind, she leaned into him, kissing him long and deep.

The pleased, rumbling noise that came from Loki’s chest made her shiver and when he slid a hand down the chilled skin of her arm, feeling the raised goosebumps on her skin, he slowly pulled back.

“Are you cold?” Loki inquired.

“A little,” Darcy admitted. Despite the bed’s heavy blankets, she could still feel the iciness of the stone room begin to seep into her bones.

“The heat charm is likely wearing off,” Loki mused, sitting up and straightening the blankets across his lap. “It seems as though I will have to repeat the spell more often than I first thought.”

“It’s gonna be a daily thing?” Darcy frowned, laying still and resisting the urge to fidget as Loki ran his index finger over her sternum, drawing an invisible pattern on her skin. A rune, he had called it the first time he put the spell in place.

“It appears so,” Loki murmured a bit distractedly. His attention was focused on the motions of his hand, and it wasn’t long before Darcy felt the hot tingle of magic spread through her chest, instantly warming her up from the inside out.

“God, that feels good.” Letting her eyes flutter shut, she stretched her arms above her head and gave a content sigh.
When her eyes reopened, she found Loki watching her with a sly smile pulling at his lips. “Does it?”

“It does. Like getting into a hot bath,” she explained, feeling a grin of her own spread across her face. She could see the wheels spinning in his head and whatever thoughts he was currently entertaining, she knew from that cunning look on his face that they would be damn good ones. “What are you thinking?”

“I think,” Loki replied slowly, “that it would be best for us to experiment with this heat charm,” he paused, dragging a finger down her stomach, “to see just how much I am able to manipulate it.” A second finger joined the first as he slipped them between her thighs.

A look of concentration passed over his features and in the next moment, his warm fingertips were blazing even hotter, making Darcy arch off the bed.

“Oh my god,” she panted, legs falling open in encouragement. “Yeah, we should definitely experiment. For purely scientific reasons, of course.”

Loki’s answering grin was brimming with mischief. “Of course.”

Darcy was surprised by how quickly she’d fallen into a routine on the frosty realm that had become her new home. That’s not to say it didn’t have its downsides of course, and Darcy’s main complaint would forever be the bitter cold.

Every morning Loki would give her another jolt of magical heat to keep her warm throughout the day, but the chore was more than a little annoying. It reminded Darcy of the winters she’d had growing up, back when her mom would bundle her up in every sweater, scarf, and pair of mittens she owned before Darcy would totter out the door to catch the school bus, feeling like a big, puffy marshmallow man.

The only difference was, now she was being smother-mothered by her six-foot-three Norse god of a soulmate.

“I’m fine!” Darcy said with an exasperated roll of her eyes as she tried to wiggle free of Loki’s grasp. His arm was like iron around her waist, keeping her held firmly against his chest as he slid a second heavy cloak over her shoulders.

“The more fuss you make, the more layers I will add,” Loki warned, fastening the cloak and finally releasing her.

“I feel like I’m drowning,” Darcy stuck her arms out, shaking the thick, billowing layers of wool and fur that hung down to her wrists. “How the hell am I supposed to function in this? It’s a whole new level of impractical.”

“Nevertheless, it is warm,” Loki reminded her with a serious look. “You must ensure that you keep additional layers of clothing with you in the event that I am not able to repeat the heat charm when you require it.”

“I know, I know,” Darcy mumbled. Loki’s duties as king kept him busy for the better part of the day and it wasn’t unusual for her to go up to six hours without laying eyes on him.

At first her biggest worry had been boredom and generally feeling useless while Loki was off
handling his royal responsibilities, but after a few initially long and lonely days, she’d slowly begun to find her place in the palace’s day-to-day activities.

She mostly divided her time between Loki’s study and the apothecary. Her mornings were spent sorting and reading the formal correspondence Loki received daily from rulers and high-ranking lords of other realms (how he even received those notes, Darcy had no idea. Was there such a thing as an intergalactic postal service?)

As she read through the letters, she’d make notes in the margins of the pages, offering a few little thoughts, suggestions and reminders that Loki might find useful. It felt good to be putting some of her poli-sci skills to use and Darcy liked to think that she’d become a bit of an inter-realm relationship pro.

The afternoons had been distinctly less exciting. They were flat out boring really, until a giant named Gyda had taken pity on her and invited Darcy to help down in the damp, creepy cellar that functioned as a makeshift doctor’s office.

Darcy was no medical expert, least of all on the anatomy of Frost Giants, so she mainly organized and restocked all the little glass bottles that housed Gyda’s herbs and other remedies.

It was nice to feel useful; to feel like she had a purpose on Jotunheim, and it was particularly nice to have made a friend. Especially when said friend came in the form of a seven foot tall blue giant with biceps the size of Darcy’s head. When she wanted to be, Gyda was downright terrifying in an impressively badass ‘I will rip you to pieces while barely lifting a finger’ kind of way, Darcy had decided, and God help the poor sucker who ever landed himself on her bad side.

As Darcy’s distinct lack of luck would have it, it was on her way down to meet Gyda on one particular afternoon when she unexpectedly ran into him.

One of the giants from the crowd. Darcy recognized him instantly; she’d never forget the eerie, dangerous glint in his eyes as he’d stared at her.

He was blocking the stairs, wide shoulders nearly spanning the entire width of the corridor from one wall to the other, and Darcy tried to squeeze past him with a quickly murmured s’cuse me, but he hadn’t budged.

Patience wearing thin, she finally planted her hands on her hips and glared up at him. “Hey! You mind?”

He ignored her still, watching her with an unreadable look but not uttering a single word and what precious little space remained on Darcy’s crap-tolerance meter instantly flew out the window.

“If you’ve got a problem with me, say it to my face,” she challenged, straightening her spine and trying to look as intimidating as possible despite the fact that she was swimming in oversized robes and the top of her head barely reached the giant’s elbow.

The giant released a low chuckle. “Take heed, little mortal. You are far from home and I see no king present to function as your guard.”

Darcy swallowed roughly, ignoring the thinly veiled threat. “He issued an order. No one’s supposed to touch me.”

“I answer to no one, let alone a reluctant king who allows his judgement to be clouded by a mortal girl,” the giant sneered, looming over her in a way that made Darcy’s stomach flip with fear.

She did her best to hide her worry, though. He was nothing but a bully trying to intimidate her and
she wouldn’t let him have the satisfaction of seeing her afraid. It was a stupid move probably, and Darcy knew that if Loki could see her right now he’d be losing his shit, but she refused to let herself be pushed around by some overgrown snowman.

“Look, guy. Like it or not, I’m here. There’s no changing that so I figure you ignore me, I ignore you, and we’ll get along just fine,” she stated. “Okay? Good. Now I’ve gotta go.”

She quickly slipped around him, darting towards the stone steps leading down into the cellar.

“Know this, little mortal,” the giant called after her, causing Darcy to pause on the first stair and give a wary glance back. “You say there is no changing your presence here, but you are sorely mistaken. Time always brings upon change. You would do well to remember that.”

With those final words the giant left, but his ominous warning echoed in Darcy’s head long after he had gone.

The moment he disappeared from sight, the last of her bravery faded away, leaving Darcy more rattled than she cared to admit as she leaned her weight against the chilly stone wall, taking a few deep and shaky breaths to steady herself.

Each exhale left her lips in a little puff of white mist that visibly hung in the air, and as Darcy watched each cloud of breath curl upwards and gradually disappear, she suppressed the strong desire to shiver, knowing that this time, it had nothing to do with the cold.
Chapter Notes

At long last, an update! I figured I would post this early since I won’t have a chance to update on the weekend (Sunday is comic con day and I’ll be in Montreal attempting not to faint at Hayley Atwell’s feet!)
Anyway, buckle up because more twists and turns lie ahead!

Darcy did her best to ignore the parting words the Frost Giant had spoken to her during their awkward encounter in the hallway, but a few days later it became obvious that she should have told Loki about it. Hindsight always was 20/20.

It was too late to do anything about it now, though.

She’d already gotten herself kidnapped.

They ambushed her after breakfast - the two Frost Giants who’d been eyeballing her since her arrival - cornering her on her way to Loki’s study and trying to force her down onto her knees with her hands behind her back, like they were some kind of absurd Jotun police officers.

She fought them off to the best of her ability, screeching and kicking until one of the Giants had apparently grown fed up with her amount of attitude and decided to shut her up by shoving her hard against the wall.

Her skull hit the stone with enough force to make her vision go blurry; pain exploding in her head until she actually saw stars. Darcy tried to blink away the spots before her eyes but her fuzzy head refused to clear. After that, the struggle to stay alert didn’t last long before the Giants were picking her limp body off the floor.

She came to when she was being unceremoniously dumped onto the ground some time later.

Darcy immediately scrambled to her feet, wincing at the throbbing headache that had settled itself behind her eyes. It felt like an ice pick stabbing at her brain; a weird combination of hot and cold pain that made her feel sick.

“Fuck that hurts,” she muttered, fighting back an unexpected bout of nausea as her head continued to pound. She reached her hands out and steadied herself against the rough, crumbling rock behind her until the riot in her head had quieted enough that she could finally focus on her surroundings.

It was dim and far colder than any wing of the palace Darcy had ever been to before. In fact, it was so unfamiliar she likely wasn’t in the palace at all, Darcy realized. Judging from the frost-covered ground underfoot and the raw stone against her back, it felt more like she was in a cave.

“Do you have any idea who I am?” She buried her fear under an agitated glare, staring up at the two Frost Giants towering over her. It couldn’t hurt to try playing the haughty importance card. It seemed to work for celebrities back on Midgard all the time.
“Of course,” the taller of the Giants, the one who had threatened her in the hall, spat his response with a look of disgust. “We are not imbeciles. There is a reason why we chose to take you, soulmate of Loki Laufeyson.”

“You’re making a huge mistake,” Darcy told him. “You’re gonna be really fucking sorry when Loki gets here.”

“Spoken as though there is hope of him finding you,” the second, shorter Giant spoke with a frightening grin that made Darcy’s stomach churn. “You are truly naive.”

Oh god, this was bad. She needed an escape plan; she knew that much, but Darcy had no idea how to go about it. Especially when her head was still aching and she didn’t have the slightest clue as to where she was. Very far from the palace; that much was clear from the Frost Giant’s ominous words.

Sliding down onto the ground, she drew her knees up to her chest and clutched her cloak tighter around her, suddenly glad that Loki had insisted on her wearing the extra layers.

The Giants hadn’t even bothered to tie her up or anything. Classic rookie kidnapper mistake. Then again, they did have frozen skin that could burn through her flesh, so they probably thought that was a good enough deterrent to keep Darcy from fighting back. It was more than enough, in her opinion.

The logical thing to do was wait it out, she thought. Someone would soon notice that she was missing and even if they didn’t, in a few hours Gyda would be suspicious when Darcy didn’t make her usual trip down to the cellar that afternoon. The female Giant would tell Loki for sure. Yep, someone would definitely be coming for her, Darcy firmly told herself, trying to shake off her nagging doubts.

In the meantime, she would keep the Giants talking; keep them distracted until help finally arrived.

“So why do you hate me so much?” Darcy asked, glancing up at her kidnappers. Maybe she could get them going on a nice long-winded rant to kill some time. Villains always seemed to like that kind of thing.

In response to her question the larger of the Giants laughed, voice dark and sinister in a way that brought goosebumps to her skin. “You are of little interest to us, girl. Merely a means to an end.”

“So you want to hurt Loki,” Darcy clarified, a sickening dread filling the pit of her stomach as she began to piece together their plan. “Why?”

“He attempted to slaughter our race and now we are expected to bow down to him as our king,” the Giant’s red eyes seemed to burn even brighter as he spoke, voice filling with outrage. “He has no desire to rule! It is plainly written on his face. His disgust for Jotunheim insults us all.”

Damn. The Giant had a point, not that Darcy ever planned on telling him that.

“But how does kidnapping me factor into any of this?” She asked, ducking her head and burying her cold nose in the thick fabric of her cloak. She could feel Loki’s heat charm slowly wearing off and Darcy silently willed him to hurry the fuck up and find her.

“The death of his soulmate will be a loss from which he will not recover,” the Giant replied. “He shall suffer just as he has caused our people to suffer, and should he not take his own life out of grief first, then I will kill him by my own hand.”

“Oh,” Darcy responded weakly. Her hands were trembling now, but it was impossible to tell whether it was from the cold or the knowledge of what the Giants planned to do with her.
Maybe she’d been wrong to think that keeping her mouth shut about Loki’s faults was the best plan. Darcy had worried that it would only anger the Giants more, but now seemed like as good a time as any to change her mind and go a different route. She was willing to try just about anything if it would buy her more time, and in this case, that meant sympathizing with her captors.

“You’re right,” she spoke up suddenly. “Loki’s been a terrible king. He’s unworthy and ungrateful and your realm deserves way better than him.”

Her words had the intended effect and the two Giants stared at her, unsure of how to respond.

“Just don’t kill me yet,” Darcy continued, struggling to think up anything that vaguely resembled a plan. “Let him worry a little longer. Toy with him first. Then, after you...” she paused, swallowing the sudden lump in her throat, “do it...take me back to the palace. Leave me - my body, I mean - right on the front steps.”

It was beyond strange to be planning out her own murder. Darcy just hoped that she could convince the Giants to wait long enough that Loki would interrupt before any of her gruesome suggestions could actually be put into action.

The larger Giant seemed skeptical, watching Darcy with a hard look in his eyes. “Is this the work of Loki? I am well aware of his title of trickster.”

The Giant was no dummy, Darcy would give him that. He seemed to be the real brains of the operation, she decided, and the other Giant was his lackey judging from the way he hung back and barely spoke.

“No tricks,” she assured him. “Besides, what could I possibly do to you? I’m just a mortal.” She blinked up innocently, slumping her shoulders and trying to make herself look as little and harmless as possible.

The Giant grunted, turning to his partner and murmuring lowly while Darcy strained to hear what they were saying.

“...far from subtle. It would surely start a war,” the second Giant was saying.

“Is that not what we seek?” The larger Giant questioned. “The girl’s plan has merits. I say we slit her throat at sunrise, leave her as she says and let her blood taint the palace grounds. We will send the king a message that is impossible to ignore.”

There was more murmuring that Darcy couldn’t quite make out and then the Giant was turning towards her, addressing her with a dark, cruel smile. “Enjoy your last hours, mortal, and take pride in knowing that come morning, your death will bring upon a revolution.”

Waiting was the hardest part.

Darcy didn’t know if it had been hours or only minutes but eventually the larger Giant returned to the palace, leaving his lackey with instructions to guard the cave entrance on the chance that Darcy might try to escape.

She feigned sleep for a long time, curled up on the hard ground with her cloak pulled tight around her shoulders, and when she was finally sure that the remaining Giant’s attention was no longer on her, Darcy quietly sat up and stripped off her outer layer.
As a teenager, the old pile-of-pillows-under-a-blanket trick hadn’t exactly worked to fool her parents, but she hoped it would be enough to deceive her guard. He didn’t seem to be the brightest crayon in the box anyway.

It wasn’t easy to move all the rocks into position without making a suspicious amount of noise but Darcy thought that she managed fairly well, and by the time she finished draping her cloak over the vaguely human-shaped pile of rocks, a fine layer of sweat was covering her skin and her stabbing headache had returned tenfold.

She couldn’t afford to stop and recharge, though. She’d have to leave now while she was still going unnoticed by the Giant.

With a last glance back, Darcy took a deep breath and turned away from the wide mouth of the cave entrance. No matter how dim-witted her guard may be, she couldn’t possibly outrun or outfight him. That meant she’d need to look for an alternate exit, and that meant venturing deeper into the cave.

She really wished she had a flashlight. It wasn’t long before the already dim light faded out into such a pitch-black darkness, Darcy couldn’t even see her hand in front of her face.

Going on touch alone she blindly continued on, pushing down the fear that threatened to spill over and overwhelm her. There was the fear of being found by her kidnappers, the fear of getting hopelessly lost and dying of exposure, and the fear that something much worse than a Frost Giant lived deeper inside that cave.

“You got this. You are a badass ninja warrior,” she told herself, huffing as she hiked up a particularly tricky incline where loose gravel beneath her feet felt like it would give away at any moment and start a landslide.

It was impossible to tell how long she spent navigating the dark maze and after coming to her third dead end, claustrophobia was slowly setting in and Darcy’s panic started to build. Each of her shallow breaths made her chest ache; heart thrumming hard and loud until all she could hear was the sound of blood rushing in her ears.

As her distinct lack of luck would have it, her panic chose the worst possible time to overtake her. She was trying to work her way over an uneven group of boulders when she lost her concentration, limbs frozen in a sudden, dread-filled moment of ‘I can’t do this’. Her balance was lost soon after and she fumbled, immediately throwing her arms out and trying to steady herself.

It was a bad move on her part.

Her foot slipped into a crack and as she scrambled for something to hang onto, she cut her palm on the sharp edge of a particularly jagged rock. Because everything in that damned realm had to be pointy and deadly, apparently.

“Fuck,” she breathed as a hot pain sliced through her hand. “Fuck, fuck fuck.” Her voice wobbled as her anxiety began to give way to hysterical fear. She’d screwed up. Badly. And now she was going to die in the belly of a cave, lost and alone in the middle of nowhere.

She was a moment away from giving up, a moment from succumbing to the crushing fear and hopelessness when she saw it: a faint pin prick of light just visible out of the corner of her eye.

Using her uninjured hand, Darcy brushed away the wetness in her eyes and squinted into the blackness. The light was distant but she wasn’t dreaming; it was definitely there.

The amount of relief that poured into Darcy’s chest at that moment was almost enough to make her...
cry all over again.

It was a slow, difficult trek toward the light (she snorted at the sudden, silly thought that people were normally encouraged to not go toward the light) and to make it there, Darcy had to climb over another series of large jagged boulders, almost falling at one terrifying point after her bloody palm had slipped and she lost her grip.

“Please let there be no more rocks,” she panted as she stopped to catch her breath after her last scary climb had ended. Her voice sounded small in vast emptiness of the cave, echoing eerily and making a shiver run down her spine.

Time to keep moving, she decided as she threw a quick look over her shoulder. She had a creepy suspicion that finding company in the cave at that point would be more harmful than helpful.

Still mostly blind, Darcy carefully shuffled forward in the direction of the light, coming to a stop when her boots squished in something thick and wet.

There was no way around the sludge; from what she could tell it stretched from wall to wall of the cave, so with a deep breath, Darcy began wading into the waist-deep pool of ...something. She really hoped was just slushy water.

“Ew ew ew. Oh God, I hate this,” she muttered, face screwed up into a look of disgust. Complaining seemed to help so as she trudged along, she kept up a steady stream of chatter to distract herself from whatever nasty, thick substance was currently soaking through her pants and getting way too intimate with her.

To her relief the pool wasn’t very long and when she emerged on the other side, she shook herself off like a dog before pausing to look around.

It was marginally brighter now, enough that Darcy could map out a clear path towards the gap in the wall where light was filtering into the cave.

To get there took a great deal of cursing and contorting. After many unsuccessful attempts, she finally managed to squeeze herself into a narrow opening barely wide enough for her hips to pass through (if she survived this ordeal, she’d be wearing one hell of a set of scrapes and bruises tomorrow).

On the other side of the opening the light was substantially brighter and so was Darcy’s mood when she found herself standing in front of a crumbling hole in the cave wall.

The hole was only a few inches wide but the rock had eroded enough that after a few solid kicks with the sole of her boot, she managed to break away enough of the brittle stone to create an opening wide enough for her shoulders to fit through.

There was no better feeling than crawling through that hole and moments later, Darcy finally, blessedly emerged from the cave.

She collapsed face-first into the snow, giving herself a minute to savor her victory and recover some of her energy as she sucked in greedy lungfulls of the fresh outdoor air.

“Oh my god, I did it. I fucking did it.” she whispered, feeling a bit awestruck as she pushed herself up onto her elbows and looked around.

Unfortunately, her celebration didn’t last long. She may have made it out of the cave but there was still the monumental task of finding her way back to the palace.
Now that she was out in the elements, feeling the harsh wind blow straight through her bones while snow pelted her in the face, Darcy could truly feel just how much Loki’s heat charm had worn off. The fact that she’d had to abandon her extra cloak didn’t help matters either.

The snow squalls made it nearly impossible for her to see more than a few feet in front of her, leaving Darcy at a loss as to which direction to take. She settled on going to her left, mainly because that kept the wind at her back and she’d already had more than her fill of miserable experiences for one day. No need to add the stinging cold of the wind in her face on top of everything else.

The walk was brutal. The wind almost immediately froze her still-wet boots and pants, leaving her legs feeling like stiff icicles. Every step took much more effort than it should have but Darcy was too tired to even complain at that point. Not to mention, her head still ached and the gash in her hand was burning with pain.

Her legs were growing more and more reluctant to move but Darcy forced herself to keep slowly trudging along, pushing her way through snow so deep it came up to her knees. She walked until her feet refused to take even a single step more, until her breathing grew labored and her eyelids felt heavy with fatigue.

At some point she found herself on her knees, hunched over into a shivering ball though she couldn’t remember exactly how she got there. All she knew was that she was tired. So damned tired. It couldn’t hurt to stop and rest for just a few minutes, could it?

Sleep was calling out to her, luring her with the promise of much needed rest and relief from the cold, and despite the voice in her head telling her that she shouldn’t close her eyes, Darcy ignored the warning. She was exhausted; physically and mentally drained while her limbs ached with fatigue. Her body was shutting down without her consent, refusing to put any more effort into finding the palace no matter how badly she wanted to get back to Loki.

Loki.

She’d tried not to think of him earlier, intending to keep her mind clear and focus solely on escaping the cave, but at that point her escape plan didn’t seem to matter much anymore. She had fought her hardest, gained some ground by sneaking away from her would-be kidnappers, but lost it just as quickly once she’d started her impossible trek through the snow.

Resigning herself to defeat, Darcy sat in the snow, letting her mind drift back to Loki. He was probably a mess by that point; a violent mixture of anger, fear and worry, and knowing that made Darcy’s heart hurt with a dull, hopeless pain.

He’d probably never find her now.

As she curled up on her side, tucking her hands between her knees and trying to warm her numb fingers, Darcy wished she could do something to ease his pain, something to reassure him that she was alright.

Could her soulmate bond be used like some type of S.O.S. signal, she wondered. There was already a magnetic attraction between her and Loki; a gentle pull that had been living in her chest for a long time now, so maybe if she concentrated on that feeling, she could reach out to him.

It was probably a long shot but it couldn’t hurt to try, so Darcy made a final, weak effort to reach out to him. She poured all her feelings into their bond, telling him that she loved him, that everything would be okay, and when she felt his side respond in the form of a warm tug in her chest, it gave her such a sense of calm relief, she gave up the fight to stay alert and sunk into sleep with a smile on her
face.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

A few exciting announcements:
1) I spoke to Hayley Atwell. She smiled at me. My soul momentarily left my body. It was amazing. I wrote about her Q&A on my blog here if you’re interested.
2) Yesterday I wrote 2500 words of angry/confused Loki, which means...a fourth chapter of All The Time in the World is in the works!

And now, on with the story! :)

Darcy woke up gradually; first becoming aware of the distant hum of noise around her and then forcing her heavy eyelids to lift when her curiosity got the better of her and she couldn’t hold back the need to know where she was.

She fully expected to be assaulted by painfully bright lights but when she opened her eyes, a blob was blocking out the worst of the fluorescent glare. A blob with a distinctly Loki-like shape to it, she then realized.

After many long and lazy blinks to clear her fuzzy eyes, the face that loomed over her finally came into focus, showing her dark eyes shining with barely restrained emotion, lips set into a hard, unhappy line, and pale skin made even paler by stress and worry.

“Darcy,” Loki choked out her name, reaching for her hand and squeezing until Darcy could feel the heat of his skin seep into her, returning some life to her chilled fingers.

“Knew you’d find me,” she murmured, sighing contently when she felt his other hand come to rest warmly on her forehead, brushing back her hair.

The soft, gentle action had almost lulled her back to sleep until a high pitched beeping in her ear became too annoying to ignore and Darcy turned her head to the side, frowning as she studied the jumble of medical equipment beside her. “Huh. Something tells me we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

“If you are referring to Jotunheim, you are correct,” Loki confirmed. “We are on Midgard.”

She tried to roll onto her side to bring herself closer to Loki but the tangle of wires and IV tubes strapped to her arm made it nearly impossible, so with a frustrated huff, Darcy gave up and settled for simply squeezing his hand in return. “Why?”

“Why?” Loki gave her an incredulous look. “Is the answer not obvious?” He asked, gesturing to her bedridden condition.

“I’m fine,” Darcy insisted. “We didn’t have to leave.”

It was definitely the wrong thing to say, that much was obvious from the mixture of astonishment and irritation crossing Loki’s face. Even in Darcy’s worn out, drugged-up state she could tell that he was a breath away from losing his temper.

“You are anything but fine,” he snapped, voice steadily rising in volume. “What in the nine realms
were you thinking, Darcy? You should have stayed put. I searched for you...” he trailed off with a heavy sigh, dragging a hand over his face. When he spoke again, his anger had faded in a softer, more miserable tone. “When I found the cave it was empty. I thought I was too late. I thought...”

He thought she was already dead. Those were the words he couldn’t bring himself to speak, Darcy realized.

“I’m really sorry.” The look on his face made guilt creep into her stomach but at the same time, her stubborn side was rearing to start an argument and defend her actions. “I never meant to make you worry,” she told him sincerely, “but I couldn’t just sit there. I had a chance to get out, so I took it. I didn’t know if you were ever going to come for me, plus those Giants were totally ready to off me.”

“You didn’t know if I would come?” Loki shook his head, barking out a rough, humorless laugh. “Gods, Darcy. Of course I was looking for you. When Gyda alerted me to your absence, I sought you out immediately. How could you think that I would not?”

So the female Giant had been the one to tell Loki when Darcy had first gone missing. Darcy smiled faintly, sending a silent little thank you to her Jotun friend.

“I’m not saying that I thought you abandoned me,” she assured Loki, “I was just being realistic. It made more sense to get the hell out of there than to wait around and play the damsel in distress.”


“I escaped,” Darcy countered. “I outsmarted the bad guys and saved myself. Don’t I deserve some credit for that?”

Maybe it was her adrenaline wearing off, or maybe it was the fact that talking about her ordeal made it feel much more real, but either way, the reality of what had almost happened chose that moment to sneak up behind her and hit Darcy all at once.

When it started with weak little sniffles, the angry look on Loki’s face softened, and when she dissolved into watery, gasping sobs, he came to sit on the edge of her hospital bed, pulling her close and murmuring soft words into her hair until she’d cried herself dry.

“Darcy, you cannot know how sorry I am,” his voice wavered as he wrapped his arms around her tightly. “It was selfish and foolish of me to bring you to Jotunheim. You cannot possibly stay there; I see that now.”

“It’s not your fault.” She pressed her cheek into the soft fabric of his shirt, voice still thick with emotion.

The amount of grief and regret in Loki’s voice made her heart ache and Darcy wished that she could slide her arms around him, but her IV left her with a severe lack of options in the mobility department. She settled for slipping her free arm around his side in an awkward half-hug, but it wasn’t nearly enough.

Loki went silent then, eventually leaning away from her while his lips pulled down in thought, and when he finally spoke, his voice was oddly hollow. “I have heard word of the vaccine.”

Darcy stared up at him, blinking a few times as she tried to process what he’d just said. “You know,” she spoke bluntly, “for a God supposedly known for being clever, you can be a real idiot sometimes.”

Now it was Loki’s turn to stare at her. “I beg your pardon?”
“How can you even suggest something like that?” Darcy exclaimed. On the scale of utterly ridiculous and terribly bad ideas, that one took top spot (and considering all the crazy shit she and Jane had done in the name of science, that was really saying something).

Loki’s cheeks flushed, though Darcy couldn’t tell whether it was from embarrassment or irritation. He was frustratingly good at hiding his emotions when he wanted to. When he didn’t want to be read, he wasn’t just a closed book; he was a diary kept under strict lock and key, tucked away where no one would ever find it.

“Often I think that you would be better off without me,” he admitted at last. “You deserve far more than I am able to offer you.”

“So you’d let me get the vaccine,” Darcy stated, “you’d throw away everything you’ve worked for over the last year. Everything you’ve sacrificed for me.”

“If it would make you happy,” Loki confirmed, reaching up to cup her cheek as he met her eyes, “I would do anything.”

The weight of his words brought tears to her eyes all over again and Darcy tilted her chin up, lips just barely grazing his. “You’re unbelievable,” she murmured because she had no other words at that moment. There was way to describe exactly how deeply his admission truly affected her.

“Am I?” Loki’s eyes darkened, hand sliding from her cheek down to her jaw as the pad of his thumb swept across the corner of her mouth, catching her bottom lip and making Darcy’s stomach clench with need.

“Yeah,” she breathed, “now kiss me.”

He did, angling her head back and deepening the kiss until Darcy was breathless and desperate for more.

She leaned into him, mouth moving eagerly against his as she nudged him backwards until he was lying on the bed and she could slide one leg over him.

Loki groaned, hands automatically reaching for her hips, but instead of pulling her closer, he held her still and reluctantly broke their kiss. “We should stop,” he said, though the tone of his voice made it clear that he had no desire to follow through with his suggestion.

“Why?” She dropped her mouth to the side of his neck, sucking on the skin there until his hands tightened on her hips and he made a soft, gasping noise that sounded utterly delicious to Darcy’s ears.

“I suspect your machinery may not be able to handle much more,” Loki replied, his voice an attractive mix of lust and amusement as the edge of his mouth pulled up into a grin.

Darcy turned to look at the monitors behind her. They were going haywire; her pulse and blood pressure readings both spiking and causing the machine to voice its concern with a series of loud, shrill beeps.

“Ugh, fine.” With a dramatic sigh, she rolled off of him and flopped back onto the mattress. “But as soon as I get discharged, we’re having some serious, uninterrupted alone time. I really need it.”

“As do I,” Loki admitted, running a hand through his hair and ruffling the already messy strands.

Darcy was itching to push him back down and be the one to run her fingers through that dark mess
of hair, and as her fingers curled with the unconscious need to touch him, she realized that the pain in her injured palm had completely disappeared.

Sitting up, she unraveled the white gauze that had been wound around her hand, finding nothing but healthy, unblemished skin underneath.

There was no cut. No scar, even.

“You wouldn’t have anything to do with this, would you?” Darcy held up her hand, wiggling her fingers at Loki.

He took her wrist gently, turning her palm over and examining it carefully. “It has healed quite nicely,” he said, sounding pleased.

“What the hell, Loki! You have magical healing powers too?” Darcy gaped at him.

“I know of a number of healing spells,” Loki corrected. “That is quite different from having healing ‘powers’ as you say.”

“But you can fix cuts,” Darcy observed, looking at her palm again.

“In a word, yes,” he confirmed.

Darcy let her hand drop back down into her lap, tilting her head and giving Loki a curious look. “So why didn’t you heal yourself when you first showed up in New Mexico? You probably could have been back on your feet within hours, but instead you spent a week barely moving from my living room. I think the couch was starting to slowly absorb your body. Like a giant, mutant furniture amoeba. That would make a pretty great horror flick, actually. Some campy 70’s thing, like ‘Attack of the Killer Amoeba Couch’.”

“You have strayed woefully off course with whatever point you are attempting to make,” Loki noted.

“Right, I did have a point,” Darcy frowned, trying to remember exactly what it was. “Oh yeah, the healing thing. You could have sped up your recovery but you didn’t. Why?”

“I had every intention of healing myself,” Loki explained with a small, reminiscent smile, “until we touched and I discovered that we were bound as soulmates.”

“You’re saying you let yourself almost bleed out because you wanted to spend more time with me?” Darcy wasn’t sure whether to be flattered or annoyed.

“Naturally I wished to gain knowledge of my soulmate,” Loki said, as if he had made the obvious, logical choice by not healing the serious gash in his side. “How else was I to ensure that you would not immediately dismiss me? If I recall correctly,” he added dryly, “you were not exactly fond of me.”

“Understatement of the century,” Darcy leaned back against her pillows, laughing when Loki narrowed his eyes at her. “Wow. So from day one you were ready to jump right in and try to make our bond work? I had no idea.”

“What is the saying? The heart wants what it wants?” Loki stood then, beginning to pacing along the side of the bed. “And often times what it wants, it is not destined to have. A rather perplexing notion, really.”
His mouth pulled down into a thoughtful frown and when the back-and-forth of his strides were starting to drive Darcy nuts, she eyed him suspiciously, asking, “What’re you planning?”

Loki stopped to look at her. “You assume I am planning something?”

“More like scheming,” Darcy amended. “I can practically hear the hamster wheel spinning in your head.”

“Hamsters?” Loki looked thoroughly confused now. “I am beginning to believe that I will never truly understand your Midgardian colloquialisms.”

“That one’s more of a Darcy-ism really,” she replied with a small grin, “but seriously, what’s on your mind?”

“Merely thinking, is all.” Loki sighed, moving to sit in the chair opposite her bed.

Hospital chairs were really not equipped to hold Asgardians, Darcy thought as she watched him. He overpowered the small piece of furniture; legs spread wide and one elbow propped up on the arm rest as he brought his hand up to his mouth, looking contemplative.

“And...?” Darcy prompted him to continue when he made no further move to speak.

“You cannot return to Jotunheim,” he spoke slowly, as if he were thinking out loud, “and we do not wish to be apart from each other again...”

He sat up straighter then, eyes flicking up to meet hers as he thought of something. “This S.H.I.E.L.D. organization; do you imagine they still wish to have me?”

“Coulson and the rest of his Men in Black buddies? Nope.” Darcy shut him down immediately, shaking of her head. “Not happening. They wanted to use you as a weapon, Loki!”

“But if I were to join S.H.I.E.L.D., Odin would have no choice but to amend my sentence,” Loki pointed out.

“Really?” Darcy raised her eyebrows, feeling unconvinced. “He would let you leave Jotunheim to protect Earth instead?”

“That I doubt,” Loki acknowledged. “I am still unable to step down without a successor, but at the very least this may allow me to divide my time between realms.”

Darcy had to admit, that did sound good.

“But is it really worth the risk?” She asked him. “We have no idea what kind of dangerous, shady stuff S.H.I.E.L.D. is involved in. They could get you killed!”

Loki lifted his shoulder in a casual shrug, seeming unconcerned. “I would sooner accept what fate lies with S.H.I.E.L.D. that resign myself to a slow, forsaken death upon Jotunheim. Your captors were neither the first nor the last to wish ill upon me. Further attempts will be made on my life; of that I am certain.”

“I never even thought to ask what happened to them,” Darcy remarked, thinking back to her two Frost Giant kidnappers.

Loki looked down at his hands, his face darkening with some emotion Darcy couldn’t quite place. “They will cause no further harm to you.”
“Because...they’re dead?” She guessed.

When Loki didn’t reply, that was answer enough for her.

“Okay then.” Darcy suppressed a shiver, trying not to imagine exactly what had become of the Giants. “Where do we go from here?”

She was more than a little nervous about what may lie ahead. They were gambling, really; speaking with a lot of ifs and speculation, assuming Odin would agree to change Loki’s sentence and also assuming that S.H.I.E.L.D. was still interested in him after all this time.

How much of their plan would actually fall into place? That was the million-dollar question Darcy wished she held an answer to.

“I think it best to contact S.H.I.E.L.D. first,” Loki mused. “Once we have ensured that they will accept me into their program, then I will speak with the Allfather.”

“Better to seek forgiveness than ask permission, huh?” Darcy grinned at him.

“Indeed.” Loki’s mood visibly brightened as he returned her grin with a smile so wicked, it was the very definition of mischief and trickery. “Now, shall we see about having you discharged?”

Once Darcy had been given the all-clear by her nurse, she quickly dressed while Loki informed her that Jane had taken up residence in the lounge down the hall, and when Darcy stepped into the waiting room, she was almost knocked off her feet by the force of her friend’s hug.

“Oh my god, Darcy. What was the one thing I asked you not to do?” Jane asked once she’d pulled back, gripping Darcy by the shoulders.

“Get into trouble,” Darcy answered.

“And what did you do?”

“Get into trouble,” she repeated before giving Jane a small, sheepish smile. “I tried, Jane—honestly! – but trouble just follows me. Like a really obedient dog. Or one of those baby ducks that imprint on people.”

Jane sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. “Well as long as you’re okay, that’s all that really matters I suppose.”

“I’m all good,” Darcy confirmed, taking a quick glance around the otherwise empty room. “Hey, where’s your other half?”

“I wanted to talk to you about that actually.” Jane led her over to the row of chairs that lined the wall of the waiting room, taking a seat and wetting her lips nervously before continuing, “I’ve decided to use Idunn’s apple.”

Darcy’s mouth dropped open as she sputtered out a response. “Wait, what? Oh my god, Jane!” She slapped her friend on the arm excitedly. “This is huge! This is...just wow. I’m speechless, and that never happens.”

“Trust me, I know.” Jane’s smile was brief, quickly fading into a concerned look as she worrily wrung her hands in her lap. “Thor’s gone back to Asgard to see about getting the apple for me.
It’s...it’s not an easy thing. He’s been there for over a week already, facing some kind of test of worthiness that Odin’s given him.”

“We’re not talking multiple choice or essay questions, are we?” Darcy frowned, wondering exactly what kind of test Jane was referring to.

Jane laughed though it was more of a high, nervous sound than a genuine show of amusement. “We’re not. We’re really not.” She took a steadying breath then, knee bouncing anxiously as she spoke. “I can’t stop wondering what I’ve gotten him into. What kind of dangerous, impossible task he’s facing all because of me. The guilt’s eating me alive.”

“You needn’t worry.” Loki appeared in the doorway, leaning against the wall and regarding Jane with a sober look. “If there is one thing I know about my brother, he lacks neither bravery nor determination. As terribly annoying as those qualities may be, nevertheless I am certain that he will not fail in his task.”

Jane stared at him, attempting to formulate some kind of response. “Um, thanks Loki. That’s...really nice, actually.”

Loki shrugged off her gratitude, saying, “I am all too familiar with the difficulties of separation from one’s soulmate. I understand your worry.”

“Aww, look at this!” Darcy interjected with a wide grin, looking back and forth between Jane and Loki. “My bestie and my soulmate are bonding! God, I wish I had a camera right now.”

The look Loki gave her could have been classified as murderous but Darcy knew there was no real threat behind it, so she simply beamed at him sweetly. The action caused him to roll his eyes while the side of his mouth pulled up, fighting off the urge to smile. It was all kinds of attractive, and suddenly Darcy couldn’t wait to get him alone.

Maybe it was a bond thing but as soon as she started thinking about getting him naked, Loki’s body seemed to tense and he locked eyed with her, the amusement on his face quickly morphing into something much more heated.

“Are you two in the middle of something here?” Jane questioned curiously, watching the way they were staring at each other.

“No,” Darcy replied just as Loki answered with an emphatic “Yes”.

Jane shifted in her chair, looking more than a little uncomfortable as she grimaced. “Please Darce, can you at least wait until I’m not in the room?”

“Sorry,” Darcy tore her eyes away from Loki to instead focus on her friend. “Bond thing,” she explained. “You know how it is.”

“Unfortunately I do,” Jane murmured.

“While we’re on the topic of separation and bonds...” Darcy seized the opening, speaking with a combination of hesitance and hopefulness, “I think we’ve got a plan to keep Loki from spending eternity in frosty-land, but we’re gonna need your help.”

“What kind of help?” Jane eyed her curiously.

“Information,” Darcy clarified. “Anything and everything you can remember from your trip to D.C.”
“You mean when Thor and I visited S.H.I.E.L.D.?” Jane’s eyes widened. “You’re not considering...?”

“It’s not ideal,” Darcy admitted. “It’s really not if you ask me, but we’re kinda out of options. Loki’s pretty stuck on the idea that it’s too dangerous for me to go back to Jotunheim, so finding a reason to keep him here is the next best thing.”

“I dare say that I am more than pretty stuck on such an idea,” Loki drawled, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Okay, so more like majorly determined,” Darcy amended, making a face in Loki’s direction before turning back to Jane. “So what do you think?”

Jane blew out a long breath, studying her friend before finally answering, “I think we have a lot to talk about.”
This chapter developed a mind of its own and firmly decided that it wanted to be nothing but smut. So I rolled with it. Lots of nsfw-ness ahead :)

As it turned out, S.H.I.E.L.D. was still very, very interested.

After speaking with Coulson, Darcy felt a bit silly for ever doubting his interest in Loki. Apparently super-secret sketchy organizations were always looking acquire trickster gods, regardless of how long they may have to wait to get their hands on one.

Coulson had even gone so far as to offer a private jet to collect them, but Darcy turned him down. She was still wary of S.H.I.E.L.D.; enough that she didn’t want to accept anything from them that could possibly cost her a favour in the future.

They flew commercial instead, which was an absolute nightmare once she realized that trying to travel with Loki was worse than flying with a three year old.

He’d been snarky and cranky as soon as they’d boarded and Darcy suspected that under his layers of attitude, he was probably just nervous. Whether his nerves were due to flying or the fact that he would soon be offering himself to S.H.I.E.L.D., Darcy didn’t know. She’d never manage to wrangle that kind of a confession out of him anyway.

They really should have taken the private jet - strings and hidden conditions be damned - and she quickly regretted their travel choice about twenty minutes into the flight as she watched Loki fidget in his too-small seat.

“Do you want pretzels?” Darcy offered him her snack bag, hoping to placate him with food.

“I do not want pretzels,” Loki grumbled, cursing under his breath as his knees banged against the seat in front of him.

“Want water?”

“I am not thirsty.” He shifted again, this time knocking his head against the overhead luggage compartment. “I hate this,” he complained. “It would have been far more convenient to travel via the Bifrost.”

“Ye-ah,” Darcy gave him a cynical look, “because that wouldn’t have looked weird at all, popping out of the sky and landing right on S.H.I.E.L.D.’s front lawn. They would have arrested our asses before you could even say ‘I come in peace’.”

“A risk worth taking, I do believe,” Loki muttered, turning his head and staring bleakly out the narrow plane window.

“Well, I don’t believe,” Darcy replied. “Until we know exactly who these S.H.I.E.L.D. people are, I think it’s best for you to lie low in the magic department. Don’t let them see the full extent of what you can do. It’s safer that way.”
Loki mumbled something in response, continuing to stare out the window.

“What was that?” Darcy leaned closer.

“You make a compelling argument,” Loki admitted reluctantly.

“So you’re saying I’m right,” she nudged him with her elbow, making him scowl.

Loki sighed loudly. “Yes, you are right.”

“Say that one more time? I want to remember this moment,” Darcy grinned, resisting the urge to laugh while he sulked in his seat.

“I suggest you make do with the admission I have already given you. That is all you will be receiving,” Loki retorted, shifting in his seat as his agitation grew.

“Hey,” Darcy’s voice softened, all traces of teasing gone, “just hang in there a little longer.” She took one of his hands in hers, rubbing his palm with her thumb. When his shoulders relaxed a small amount, she smiled, leaning against his side and continuing to play with his hand.

He had such long, elegant fingers; strong but impressively light and nimble when they needed to be. Like when they were gliding over the curve of her shoulder or teasing the inside of her thigh.

That thought was an abrupt reminder that they still hadn’t gotten any of the alone time Darcy had been so desperate for earlier, and as a hum of desire worked its way through her, making her skin grow warm, she pressed herself flush against Loki, sliding one hand onto his knee while she stretched up to kiss the side of his neck.

Loki’s breath hitched at the contact. “What are you doing?” He whispered as her hand continued to inch further up his leg.

“Helping you relax,” Darcy murmured, nuzzling along the skin of his neck.

Loki gave a short laugh, the sound breaking off into a choked groan when Darcy grew bolder, pressing wet, open-mouthed kisses to underside of his jaw. “Trust me when I say that I am far from relaxed at the moment.”

His voice was gravelly, sending a pleasant shiver through Darcy as she let her hand slip to the inside of his thigh.

Loki swore under his breath when her hand made contact with him, rubbing slow circles against the growing hardness in the front of his pants. “Darcy…” he swallowed hard as her fingers moved towards his zipper.

“Say the word and I’ll stop,” she whispered, slowly working the zipper down until she could slide her hand inside and grip him gently.

“Fuck.”

He didn’t often use Midgardian curse words so hearing the expletive leave his mouth was unbelievably hot, and Darcy quickly decided that her new goal in life was to make him swear as often and as dirty as possible.

“So...?” She prompted, stroking her fingers along the length of him.

Loki’s jaw clenched as he bit back the desire to groan. “No, don’t stop,” he replied in a tight voice.
With a satisfied grin, Darcy reached for her for her discarded coat, pulling it out from where she was half-sitting on it and laying it across Loki’s lap to better hide their current activities.

When she cuddled up against his side again, squeezing him with more pressure this time, Loki made a noise of pleasure in his throat as his eyes went shut.

“Stay quiet for me,” Darcy breathed, unable to look away from him.

She loved his face when he was aroused; the way his lips parted as he breathed ragged breaths, the slight flush that spread across the tops of his cheeks, and the dark, burning need in his eyes when they slowly re-opened and focused on her.

That blush on his cheeks was working a path all the way down his neck, disappearing under the collar of his dress shirt, and seeing him slowly fall apart under the work of her hand was so incredibly attractive, it caused Darcy to momentarily lose focus. Her hand lost its rhythm but she quickly recovered, deciding that it was time she turned things up a notch.

She sped up her tempo then, all traces of her earlier teasing gone as she stroked him in earnest, feeling a satisfied rush of pride when Loki’s hips jerked, pushing upwards and automatically trying to bring himself closer to her touch, wanting more.

He was hard and hot in her palm, close to completion judging from the way she could feel his whole body trembling, and when she swept her thumb over the moisture leaking out of his head, he choked out her name in a hushed warning.

“Darcy, I cannot...”

“I know,” she said softly, bringing her other hand to the back of his neck and pulling him down to her height. She kissed him hard, swallowing his low moan when he bucked against her hand one more time before she felt a rush of warm wetness spill onto her fingers.

When they parted, he pressed his face into her hair, stifling his ragged gasps while he caught his breath.

“I must be dreaming,” he murmured, nose brushing against her ear in such a sweet, affectionate manner, for a moment Darcy’s lungs forgot how to work. “Did that truly just happen?”

“Damn right it did,” Darcy kissed him once more, taking a moment to admire the flush on his cheeks and the clear, vivid colour of his eyes before she bent to reach under her seat, pulling a few tissues from her purse. “Better clean up before we land.”

“We’re nearly there?” Loki looked surprised by that.

“Yep,” Darcy confirmed, offering him a tissue with a cheeky grin. “See, I told you flying wasn’t so bad.”

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived in D.C.

Loki’s mood had turned sour again thanks to the stress of trying to find their luggage and navigating their way out of the crowded airport, so Darcy decided their best plan of action was to check into their hotel room right away. Besides, S.H.I.E.L.D. wasn’t expecting them until the morning.
If she was being honest, the dark cloud over Loki’s head was only half of her excuse for wanting to go straight to the hotel. On a more selfish note, Darcy was dying to relax in their swanky accommodations before having to meet up with Coulson and his boss.

During her internship with Jane, their budget had been practically non-existent (unsurprisingly, the whole self-employed scientist thing didn’t exactly come with a reliable paycheck), so Darcy rarely got the opportunity to stay in anything nicer than a skeevy, run-down, side-of-the-highway motel.

So when Loki had magically produced a black credit card (which, he had assured her, was absolutely not stolen – she still wasn’t quite sure if she believed that statement) and told her to book any room of her choosing, Darcy did what any rational person would do: she decided to carpe the hell out of that diem. You only live once, and all that.

“Do you think we’ll get fluffy bathrobes?” She wondered as they made their way down the cushy, carpeted hallway of the fourth floor, trying to locate their room. “Or maybe a Jacuzzi tub. God, that would be amazing.”

Loki gave a noncommittal grunt as he followed her, wearing an expression that Darcy chose to classify as ‘I am so done with this shit’. He really did not travel well.

“After our meeting tomorrow, we can Bifrost it back to New Mexico from here,” Darcy suggested as she swiped her key card through the reader and opened the door to their room. “I won’t subject you to the horror of those flying tin-can death machines again.”

“You did manage to make the experience less awful than I initially expected,” Loki admitted, his face softening as he stepped closer. “Thank you for that.” Leaning down, he pressed a kiss to her temple, and as his mouth lingered against her skin for much longer than necessary, he murmured, “I hope to return the favour shortly.”

At his words, Darcy’s stomach did an excited little flip while a hot rush of need pooled between her thighs, making her legs turn to jelly.

She was more than ready to take him up on his offer. The alone time she had been craving so badly was about to start right that very minute, she decided, and as soon as the door to their room had closed behind them, she jumped him, shoving Loki up against the wood.

She kissed him hard, pouring all her hunger and impatience into it while she rolled her hips against him, seeking out friction. He felt so fucking good, all lean muscle and heat, and as she pressed him harder against the door, Loki hissed in pleasure, his hands finding the button on her jeans and easily popping it open.

His hands began tugging down the denim with an urgency that made Darcy’s blood hum in her veins as if it were cheering him on, chanting an encouraging chorus of yes, yes, yes.

“Oh,” she gasped a little as his fingers slipped between her legs, immediately seeking her out even though her pants were still bunched around her knees and her underwear was, very annoyingly, still in place.

“Spread your legs for me,” Loki ordered, dark eyes fixing on her with an intensity that left Darcy breathless.

She did as he asked - as much as her skinny jeans would allow her to, anyway - and Loki dropped down onto his knees, impatiently pulling off her jeans and panties before he spun her around until she was the one with her back against the door.
Darcy barely had time to register his next move before she felt his tongue drag a long, hot line up her centre.

“Oh my god,” her voice was a thin and needy whine, one of her hands going to his shoulder to steady herself while the other threaded into his hair as she leaned back against the door. “You really weren’t kidding about returning the favour, were you?”

Instead of replying, Loki nudged her legs further apart before his tongue delved into her core, making her hips jerk from the sudden shock.

“So that’s a yes?” Darcy asked breathlessly, voice wavering as her fingers tightened in his hair.

Loki pulled back just enough to look up at her with a sly smirk. “A resounding yes,” he confirmed before returning to his task.

His mouth was relentless and Darcy couldn’t help but think that yeah, the whole Silver Tongue title didn’t even begin to cover the half of it. He knew exactly how much pressure to deliver, how to perfectly alternate between deliberately slow licks that drove her wild, and fast, determined flicks of his tongue that had her gasping and grabbing at him desperately.

He built her desire steadily, winding her up until Darcy was swimming in pleasure and didn’t even remember that they were in a hotel, much less plastered right up against the door, until her cries started growing in volume and Loki shushed her with a ridiculously sexy half-grin and a whisper of “Not so loud, love.”

Darcy had no fucking clue how she was supposed to tone it down after that because in the next moment Loki’s head was between her legs again and when he curled two fingers inside her, she instantly shattered, back arching while she bit her lip, trying to contain the high cry that was threatening to escape.

She was shaking and panting as she came down from her high, feeling totally disoriented, so she was grateful when Loki returned to his full height and let her lean into him as she caught her breath.

“Holy shit,” she breathed against his shoulder, fingers tightening in the fabric of his shirt. “You do payback really, really well.”

Loki chuckled, running his palms over the curve of her ass and pulling her forward. He was rock solid in his pants, causing Darcy to make a surprised, pleased noise when he began to grind against her.

Through the thin material she could feel exactly how much he wanted her and even though she’d barely recovered from her orgasm, she was already so ready to go again. She always was when it came to him, and something told her that regardless of their bond, she always would be.

She told him as much, murmuring, “I can never get enough of you,” as her hands trailed down his back, tugging up the hem of his shirt and seeking out more of his skin.

“And I you,” Loki returned huskily, dropping his mouth to hers and deepening the kiss until Darcy could taste herself on his tongue.

He kissed her like he was a starving man and she was his feast. It was pure eagerness; endearingly clumsy and lacking his usual finesse, but Darcy didn’t mind one bit. She wanted it rough, she wanted bruised lips and aching lungs and wild heartbeats.

“Bed,” she mumbled against his mouth, not daring to break contact.
Loki made a noise of agreement, trying to steer them towards the mattress and succeeding only after banging into the wall once or twice first. Or maybe it was three times. Darcy wasn’t exactly paying attention. She had more important things to focus on, like getting him out of his pants.

He pushed her down onto the bed with enough force that Darcy bounced when her back hit the mattress, and as she settled amongst the pillows, Loki paused for a moment, studying her with burning eyes.

“You do not wish for me to be gentle, do you.” It was a statement, not a question.

“I don’t,” Darcy confirmed, wondering whether their bond had told him that or if the desire was just plainly written all over her face. She suspected it was a bit of both. It was impossible to hide how badly she wanted him and she could physically feel the soulmate bond simmering in her chest; a needy, aching pull that made her lungs stutter and her skin go warm.

“I feel it too,” Loki told her, voice low and full of desperate want. “It very nearly hurts, doesn’t it?” He rubbed a hand over his chest where Darcy assumed he was feeling the same strong ache as she was.

“Yeah,” Darcy agreed throatily, squeezing her thighs together and attempting to ease the steady throbbing between them. “I’m really gonna need you to do something about that.”

“Gladly,” Loki responded with what Darcy could only describe as a growl and then he was on top of her, kissing her hard and pressing the length of his body against hers.

They parted just long enough to shed their remaining clothing before Darcy was pulling him back down to her with single-minded purpose.

Loki pushed her knees apart, settling between them while Darcy locked her thighs around him, needing him as close to her as possible.

Just as she’d wanted, he wasn’t gentle.

With a snap of his hips he filled her completely, making them both cry out at the sudden, sharp intensity of their bodies joining.

One of Loki’s hands found her hip, his palm warmly sliding down her thigh and pulling her leg up higher around him before he began to move, hips rocking at a swift and steady pace that had Darcy instantly panting.

She dug her nails into his back, provoking a deliciously low, growly noise from him as he continued to move above her.

“I want to try something,” Darcy spoke breathlessly. “Reach for me. Use the bond.”

Loki stalled for a second, looking slightly confused before he resumed his pace, eyes darkening with understanding. “I felt you, earlier,” he confessed, bending to kiss her long and hard before he continued. “I suppose that explains why I was able to find you so quickly amongst all of the snow...” he paused then, swallowing roughly at the memory.

Darcy’s arms closed around him, tugging him closer. “I felt you too, and I want to feel that again; right now, right here with you,” she urged. “Reach out.”

Loki’s jaw tightened in concentration as he locked eyes with her and a moment later, Darcy felt the telltale pull of their bond alive in her chest, drawing her to him like a magnet.
Overwhelming was the only way she could think to describe it, and even then, that seemed like a massive understatement. When she felt Loki’s side of the bond stretch to meet with hers, it was like a live circuit sparking and crackling with electricity. It only served to amplify the already intense link between them, and Darcy unconsciously tightened her arms around Loki, feeling like she needed an anchor to hold her together before she fell apart at the seams.

“Do you feel it?” Her breath hitched when Loki’s movements grew urgent and Darcy struggled to keep her hazy, pleasure-filled brain focused on maintaining the link of their bond.

“Yes,” Loki choked out, eyes going shut as he bent to rest his forehead in the curve of her neck, groaning against her skin.

As he lowered his head, Darcy’s hand found the back of his neck and slid upwards into his hair, clenching in the black strands as Loki thrust up at a new, sharper angle, knocking all the air out of her lungs.

“God, Loki. Don’t stop, don’t stop, oh my god, ohmygod,” she babbled into his ear until it all grew to be too much and she couldn’t even speak, her words dropping off into a soundless gasp as the ball of pleasure burning low in her stomach burst like a firework, making her back arch off the mattress.

“Darcy,” Loki’s voice was a low moan; the pure, unrestrained need in his tone making her shiver, “oh gods, Darcy, yes,” he hissed through clenched teeth, the muscles in his back going tight as the last thin strands of his composure snapped and he fell apart, managing two final, hard thrusts before he joined her.

Panting and boneless, they laid together for a long time afterwards, until Darcy’s arm went numb from the way Loki was half-draped over her, his head resting on her chest and cool breath tickling her skin with each exhale.

“Need up,” Darcy finally spoke, pushing at his shoulder weakly until Loki rolled over with a short, discontented groan, settling on his stomach but leaving one arm outstretched to rest across her ribs, reluctant to fully release her.

Darcy slid out from under the weight of his arm, pausing to drop a kiss on his bare shoulder before she padded towards the bathroom, intending to enjoy a long shower while sampling all the fancy little hotel soaps and toiletries that had been laid out beside the sink.

It was her sudden, high shriek that roused Loki from their bed and had him barreling into the bathroom, a look of panic drawn across his face.

“What’s the matter?” He was completely, unapologetically naked; the beginnings of a hickey blooming on his throat while his hair was a mess of wild black strands, sticking up at odd angles.

His eyes fixed on Darcy, moving over her critically and inspecting for any injuries, but when he found none, his mouth pulled down in confusion.

“Look,” Darcy announced happily, holding up the bundle of soft white material she’d found folded neatly on the edge of the tub. “They do have fluffy bathrobes!”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki was unnaturally quiet over breakfast the next morning, not making even a single complaint when Darcy slid her half-eaten bowl of Froot Loops towards him (a move that normally earned her a serious amount of side-eye). Instead, he simply picked up the spoon and began methodically shoveling the remaining sugary circles into his mouth, looking like he was a million miles away.

“I’m too nervous to eat,” Darcy explained, giving a forlorn glance towards the hotel’s breakfast bar. “All the free food I could ever stuff in my face, and I can barely choke down cereal. Figures.”

Her voice seemed to startle him back to the present and Loki set down his spoon, abandoning the last few pieces of cereal floating aimlessly in the shallow bowl.

“I will not say that I don’t have a number of my own concerns regarding S.H.I.E.L.D.,” he admitted, leaning his elbows on the table top, “but this is the best option available to us at the moment.”

“Yeah, I know,” Darcy heaved a sigh, “but that doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

Their meeting with S.H.I.E.L.D. was only a stepping stone, really. There was still the nearly impossible task of convincing Odin to change Loki’s sentence, and if that actually worked out in their favour, they would then have to figure out some kind of dual living situation where Loki could split his time between Jotunheim and Midgard.

All of that was assuming, of course, that S.H.I.E.L.D. wasn’t just a bunch of nutjobs and Loki did accept a position with them. For all Darcy knew, they could turn out to be some kind of wacky cult run by conspiracy theorists, and in that case...well, they would be back at square one. Royally screwed, to put it mildly.

“We should go,” Loki observed, glancing to the clock hanging high on the wall behind Darcy. He stood, running a hand down the front of his dress shirt and smoothing away non-existent wrinkles.

When he reached for her hand, Darcy gratefully accepted it, threading her fingers into his as they left the dining area and made their way through the hotel lobby towards the main doors.

“Here goes nothing,” Darcy murmured as she pushed open the door and stepped out onto the sun-warmed sidewalk.

That was probably the wrong choice of words, she thought to herself as she looked up at Loki, catching his eye and squeezing his hand a little tighter. It was more like here goes everything.

S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters was not at all what Darcy expected. It was such a standard, nondescript office building, she’d almost walked right by it until had Loki grabbed her elbow and led her through the set of revolving doors.

Before Darcy could take more than a few steps across the marble floor of the large, sparsely
furnished lobby, she and Loki were pulled aside by security. They were put through both a metal detector and airport style pat-down. The security guard was only doing his job, checking her for any possible weapons by patting along her arms, torso, and then legs, but when his search on Darcy became a little too long and thorough for Loki’s liking, she had to hold back a laugh as his eyes narrowed dangerously, giving the guard a look that put the term ‘deadly glare’ to shame.

The level of dark irritation in that look had probably wilted every plant within a five mile radius, Darcy thought. She wouldn’t have been surprised if there were a couple stunned pigeons lying out on the sidewalk too.

When the guard finished with Darcy he moved to Loki next, eying him warily and moving much more briskly as he repeated the process on the tall Asgardian.

Getting actual access to S.H.I.E.L.D. was a bit like entering Fort Knox, Darcy soon realized. It was turning out to be much more of a time-consuming endeavour than she’d originally expected, and she was glad they had left their hotel as early as they did. Otherwise, they’d probably be a whole hour late for their meeting, and despite still being suspicious of S.H.I.E.L.D., Darcy didn’t want to start things off on a bad note by making the Director wait. Pissing off a shady organization like S.H.I.E.L.D. definitely didn’t fall under the category of Good Ideas.

After finally passing through security, they signed in at the front desk where she and Loki were each issued visitor ID badges. Just as Darcy was clipping the plastic card to her shirt, Coulson finally appeared, enthusiastically shaking each of their hands before leading them down a series of winding corridors.

“The Director was very pleased to hear that you had reconsidered our offer,” Coulson was saying as he turned down yet another hallway. It looked identical to the four others they had already been down and Darcy began to wonder whether Coulson even knew where they were going. It looked like they were walking in circles from what she could tell.

“Where is this Director dude anyway?” Darcy asked, craning her neck as she looked further down the stark white hallway.

“Second office to your left,” Coulson replied, at last coming to a stop once they were in indistinguishable hallway number six (Darcy had been keeping count). “Oh, and a word of advice,” he paused, giving her a smile that held a faint trace of humor, “I imagine she wouldn’t appreciate being called dude.”

With that, he turned and tucked his hands in his pockets, heading back down the empty corridor and leaving Darcy and Loki to glance at each other with bewildered confusion.

“Well, that was unnecessarily dramatic,” Loki commented.

Darcy suppressed the urge to snort. He was one to talk; if anyone would be winning a prize for flair and dramatics, it would be Loki.

Pushing that thought aside, she took a deep, sobering breath before releasing it slowly; head tilting back as she found Loki’s eyes. “You ready for this?”

“As ready as I shall ever be,” Loki replied, stepping closer as his palm came to rest reassuringly on the small of her back.

The warmth of his touch gave Darcy the extra nudge of courage she needed to lift her hand and
 deliver three solid knocks on the plain white door.

It opened a moment later, revealing a tall, slender woman with dark hair pulled back into a low, no- nonsense bun. With a small, welcoming smile she ushered them inside, shutting the door firmly behind them.

“Maria Hill, S.H.I.E.L.D. Director,” she said by way of introduction, extending a hand to Loki. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr...?”

Loki hesitated as if he were unsure of the answer. “Laufeyson,” he finally supplied.

“Then you must be Miss Lewis,” the Director turned to Darcy, shaking her hand as well. “Coulson’s told me about you.”

“All good things, I hope,” Darcy replied lightly, “but I wouldn’t be surprised if he secretly calls me ‘that annoying iPod complaint girl’...still haven’t gotten that back, by the way,” she added under her breath.

Her attempt at lightening the mood (and retrieving her precious piece of hardware) fell flat when Hill didn’t offer a response.

“I assume you’re wondering exactly what it is that we do here,” the Director dove straight into business, taking a seat behind her large desk and leaning forward, folding her arms on the paper-scattered surface. “Come, sit.”

Darcy slid into one of the seats opposite the desk while Loki settled into the chair on her right, giving her a quick, furtive look that seemed to say are you ready?

It was a little too late to say no, so Darcy wordless replied with a subtle nod of her head before returning her attention to the Director, unconsciously holding her breath as the older woman began to speak.

“I’ll be blunt with you, Mr. Laufeyson,” Hill said, “we’ve asked you here because S.H.I.E.L.D. needs your knowledge.”

“Is that so,” Loki commented in a neutral tone as he studied the woman across the table.

“I’m not naive,” she continued, “I know that things exist outside of our planet that we can barely imagine, let alone protect ourselves against. Our agents have investigated and catalogued hundreds of anomalies in the last year alone, and we’re well aware that there are realms outside of our own; that weapons and hostile races exist on a scale that we would be powerless to stop.” She paused, letting her words sink in before her gaze moved between Loki and Darcy with a grave seriousness. “What I’m trying to do is give Earth a fighting chance.”

Alien invasions? Darcy thought incredulously, not realizing she’d made the comment out loud until Hill nodded in her direction.

“It’s a strong possibility,” she confirmed.

Darcy was used to strange. She’d seen gods appear out of the sky. She’d set foot on a frozen realm a billion miles from Earth. She’d pestered Loki into teaching her some simple magic even, and if she were honest, long before finding her Norse god of a soulmate, working with Jane had already set Darcy’s life veering down the path to crazytown.

So in other words, she liked to think that she was pretty damn unflappable by now. It took a lot to
shock her these days, but having Hill verify that it was a very real possibility for their planet to be seized by an alien race...well, that freaked her right the fuck out.

“I’m looking to put together a group of specially trained S.H.I.E.L.D. agents,” Hill continued explaining, oblivious to Darcy’s internal panic. “A task force whose sole purpose is to defend our planet from large-scale threats, and you would be an invaluable member of that team,” she finished, looking to Loki and gauging his reaction.

The god’s face was arranged into a carefully composed, unreadable expression. Apparently he didn’t find the Director’s news all that surprising but if he did, he was certainly hiding it well.

“If I were to accept your offer,” he spoke slowly, cautiously choosing his words, “what would that entail?”

“You would begin the training program immediately,” Hill replied, “and we would have proper ID badges made up for you both,” she gestured to the visitor passes clipped to their shirts. “You’ll also need those to gain access to the living quarters in the east wing. We recommend that all official S.H.I.E.L.D. agents remain on-site for practicality and security purposes.”

Loki barely contained his snort of amusement. “You think S.H.I.E.L.D. is capable of offering sufficient protection to a god?”

“I think,” Hill countered, her voice low but not argumentative, “that you’re more than capable of looking after yourself, but when the consequences of our actions can come to affect those closest to us,” her eyes slid to Darcy and Loki stiffened almost imperceptibly in his seat, “one can never be too careful.”

“How big of a risk is it?” Darcy spoke up, a jumbled ball of stress churning in her stomach. “The task force, I mean,” she clarified. “From what you’re saying, it sounds like you’re painting a giant bull’s-eye on the back of anyone who joins. Does Earth really have that many enemies?”

“We aren’t aware of any impending threats,” Hill advised, dryly adding, “but then again, enemies have never really been known to call ahead before dropping in. As I said, we can’t be too careful.”

It was a valid point and Darcy nodded, leaning back in her chair and glancing towards Loki.

With his head down and his brow furrowed it was impossible to tell what he was thinking, but he’d already made it abundantly clear to Darcy that he had no intention of going back to Jotunheim permanently, so she suspected that he would accept Hill’s offer no matter how dangerous it might end up being.

Darcy found that to be equal parts comforting and frightening. He wouldn’t willingly leave her again, but at what cost?

He must have felt the heat of her stare because Loki’s eyes suddenly snapped up to meet hers, and when they did, Darcy’s suspicions were immediately confirmed. He had that determined glint in his eyes that he usually developed whenever he’d been issued a challenge, and she instantly knew that his mind had been made up.

“What would you have me do?” Loki inquired, turning to meet the Director’s gaze unflinchingly.

“That depends,” she replied without missing a beat, “what skills can you offer us?”

The S.H.I.E.L.D. Director was certainly sharp, and when Darcy peeked over at Loki’s face again, she saw a quick flicker of surprise cross his features. It soon disappeared but the corner of his mouth
remained pulled up into a smirk, clearly saying that if the Director wanted to play that game, he was more than happy to oblige.

Darcy eagerly leaned forward in her seat, curious to watch the exchange between Loki and Hill play out. Although she was intimately acquainted with Loki’s silver tongue (on more than one level), it wasn’t often that she got the opportunity to witness him putting it to use, using words as a weapon to win a verbal war. This was something she wanted to see.

Loki casually leaned back, smirk still present as he tossed the ball back into the Director’s court. “I would be curious to know exactly what you think me capable of,” he drawled.

Hill frowned as she formulated a reply. “Let’s see,” she said slowly, “King of Jotunheim, Prince of Asgard, brother of Thor – oh yes,” she confirmed when Loki raised his eyebrows at that, “I remember meeting your brother and Dr. Foster when S.H.I.E.L.D. was first interested in acquiring your...unique services.”

“If I recall correctly,” Loki commented, “they were rather opposed to the idea of your so-called task force.”

“That was nearly two years ago. A lot has changed since then,” Hill responded. “We have better resources now, a solid training program, and a team of recruits already in place. This time around, our task force is happening with or without your help, Mr. Laufeyson. Though we would infinitely prefer to have you on our side.”

Loki gave a noncommittal hum, going silent for a moment.

He was toying with Hill, Darcy realized. His mind had already been made up; he would be accepting her offer regardless of what else she might say, but he didn’t want to give in too quickly.

Whether that was part of some elaborate plan to hide his true motive for wanting to join S.H.I.E.L.D. or if he was just being an ass, taking some kind of perverse glee in keeping the Director guessing, Darcy didn’t know.

Hill certainly seemed to be holding her own, though. She looked as calmly composed and unruffled as ever as she waited for Loki to make the next move. Subtle bad-assery at its finest.

Darcy was impressed, not to mention relieved that she could cross ‘nutjob cult’ off her list of concerns. She wouldn’t be putting all her trust in S.H.I.E.L.D. just yet, but for now, it felt damn good to have the heavy load of worry on her shoulders lighten just a little.

“Exactly whom does this team consist of?” Loki finally spoke to the Director, drawing Darcy from her thoughts.

“I’m afraid that’s classified,” Hill gave a thin, apologetic smile. “Until you’re officially on record as an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., I can’t disclose any of the specifics.”

“Well then, I suppose you will have to amend your records,” Loki replied just as casually as if he’d commented on the weather.

Despite knowing that it was coming, Darcy’s heart still jumped, lodging itself uncomfortably in her throat as she shifted in her chair. Talking about Loki’s commitment to Hill’s task force and making it official were two very different things.

“Should I take that to mean you’re in?” Hill questioned.
Loki’s eyes sought out Darcy before he cleared his throat, firmly saying, “I am.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Hill’s answering smile was wide and genuine this time. “We’ll start on the paperwork immediately. You’ll have a week to get your affairs in order. After that, training begins each morning at 9 sharp in the gym. Don’t be late. Coulson will give you a formal timetable on your way out.”

She stood from her desk then, and taking that as their cue to leave, Darcy got to her feet as well, eager to head for the door.

They couldn’t get back to New Mexico fast enough, in her opinion. She was dying to talk things over with Loki in private, far away from S.H.I.E.L.D.’s headquarters. Besides, there would be plenty of time for her to get familiar with the building later, she thought, recalling Director Hill’s comment about agents living on-site.

Ugh.

The last thing Darcy wanted was to be calling that place home; getting lost in those bland, identical hallways on the daily. In the big picture of things, she supposed that was a small problem compared to the next task that lay ahead: speaking to Odin. She’d just have to cross the gross housing bridge when she came to it.

She was pulled from her thoughts when she felt Loki shifting beside her, standing as he reached across the span of the desk to shake Hill’s hand, sealing their agreement.

“Wellcome to the Avengers Initiative, Mr. Laufeyson,” the Director said, “we look forward to working with you.”

Chapter End Notes

so that happened ;)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! Thanks so much for sticking with this fic. Your comments make my day :)
To summarize this chapter, Loki unloads some feels and Jane surprises Darcy. Enjoy!

It was strange to be standing back in her little bedroom of the rental house in New Mexico. Darcy felt as though she’d been gone for years when in reality, she’d only spent two months on Jotunheim before her abrupt departure.

She hadn’t taken much with her to the other realm so for the most part, her room looked the same as it always had; bed haphazardly made (why go through all the effort of making it properly only to crawl back into it a few hours later?), laptop slightly dusty but still situated on the desk in the corner, and a few discarded items of clothing littering the floor.

She was currently swapping her meeting-with-S.H.I.E.L.D. outfit in favour of some comfy lounge clothes while Loki sat on the foot of the bed, hands linked and head bowed down, lost in thought.

“What’s up?” Darcy asked over her shoulder as she rooted through her closet, looking for a pair of stretchy yoga pants.

“It’s nothing,” Loki murmured a bit absently.

Darcy snorted. “Yeah right. Something’s definitely up. I mean, I’m pants-less over here and you haven’t stared at my butt even a little bit.”

At that he finally looked up, eyes taking a moment to linger on her rear end before climbing up to focus on her face. “Would you believe I was exercising my manners?”

“Manners never stopped you before,” Darcy replied as she grabbed a pair of pants, pulling them onto one leg then the other. “That’s a pretty weak excuse, God of Lies. I expected more from you,” she teased.

That earned her a crooked half-smile, though Loki still looked distracted.

“What’s on your mind?” She crawled onto the bed next to him, sitting on her knees and regarding him with a small frown.

“Very much at the moment,” Loki admitted.

Darcy shuffled closer to him until their shoulders touched. “Talk to me,” she urged.

When Loki sighed it was a long and weary noise, like his body was physically deflating under the weight of his thoughts. “I am tired, Darcy.”

The admission was simple but held such a sad amount of truth, Darcy felt her heart squeeze painfully. She hated to see him like that.

“I tire of Odin’s games,” Loki continued, looking down at his hands. “I tire of feeling as if I am a
bargaining tool, a piece of property to be shuffled between owners. I am already a prisoner upon Jotunheim, and now I am resigned to the same fate with S.H.I.E.L.D."

“If that’s how you feel then we’ll call S.H.I.E.L.D. right now,” Darcy said, her hand automatically landing on his forearm and squeezing emphatically, “we’ll pull out of the Avengers thing. You don’t have to do this.”


“So I’ll go back to Jotunheim with you,” Darcy suggested.

The look Loki gave her was equal parts horrified and incredulous. “Absolutely not.”

“Well, what do we do then?” Her frustration bled through into Darcy’s voice, causing the question to come out sounding angrier than she’d meant for it to as she flopped back onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling.

Loki lowered himself down onto his side next to her. He didn’t offer her an answer; instead turning to bury his face in the side of her neck while his arm wound around her waist.

“We could run away together,” Darcy suggested after a few quiet minutes had passed, “just say ‘fuck it all’ and disappear to Malta or something.”

She felt Loki’s amusement in the form of a soft chuckle against her skin and when he pulled back, propping himself up on one arm, his eyes looked brighter and a little less dejected.

“As tempting as it may be, we cannot run. Believe me when I say that makes for a difficult life,” he said, “and I don’t wish that upon you. What we require is a permanent solution.”

“So we stick with the original plan?” Darcy asked.

“We do,” Loki confirmed, dropping his head to slant his mouth over hers.

The kiss was briefer than she would have liked and just as Darcy was beginning to slide her fingers into his hair, intending to pull him closer and deepen it, Loki sat up.

“Speaking of evading responsibilities,” he said, sliding off the edge of the bed, “I have been absent from Jotunheim for far too long. I must return. Only briefly,” he added when Darcy made a noise of complaint from her prone position on the mattress. “Will you be alright while I am gone?”

“Yeah,” Darcy pushed herself up onto her elbows, watching him straighten out his slightly rumpled clothing. “I should go find Jane and tear her away from her science for a while.”

The house looked like it had barely been touched since Darcy left and she was willing to bet anything that Jane had been virtually living in the lab during Darcy’s absence.

The thought of that made Darcy’s stomach churn with an uncomfortable, guilty feeling. She knew just how hard it was to carry on without having her soulmate present, and that had even been with Jane’s help. Now Jane was in the same situation, anxiously awaiting Thor’s return from Asgard, only she was going it alone.

Darcy definitely needed to fix that situation.

“I will be no longer than a day,” Loki told her as his armour began to take shape over his body, the
golden light of his magic fading to reveal that his plain pants and dress shirt had been transformed into black leather and green moleskin.

“While you’re there, you should totally give Gyda a promotion,” Darcy said as she tried to tear her eyes away from him. He wore the fully-armoured look very well.

The corner of Loki’s mouth curved up with a touch of humor. “A promotion? She is a resident of Jotunheim, Darcy. Not an employee.”

Darcy shrugged. “Either way you should do something nice for her, and tell her I say hi too.”

“I will pass along your greetings with an appropriate gift,” Loki promised, bending to give her a swift kiss.

This time, Darcy didn’t give him a chance to escape and she grabbed the lapels of his long jacket, keeping him bent at her level as she kissed him back.

Loki made a soft noise of surprise, seeming to be torn between stepping back and moving forward to push her down onto the mattress.

Unfortunately he went for option one, but not before he murmured against her lips, “I will have you as soon as I return.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Darcy replied a bit breathlessly, releasing her grip on his jacket and allowing him to move away from the bed. “See you soon?”

“Soon,” he confirmed with a nod of his head, and then he was gone. Just up and vanished like a freaky magic trick.

The action startled Darcy enough that she actually jumped, squeaking out an exclamation of “holy crap!” as he disappeared.

Laying a palm on her chest she tried to calm her frantic heartbeat, staring at the empty space that had been occupied by her soulmate only moments before.

“I’ll never get used to that,” she muttered to no one.

Unsurprisingly, not much had changed at the lab. It was still a virtual oven full of semi-organized chaos and as Darcy pushed open the door, she grimaced as she was hit in the face by a wall of heavy, humid air.

“Seriously Jane, next time can’t we do research in Antarctica instead?”

At the sound of Darcy’s voice, the astrophysicist’s head snapped up, a wide smile blooming across her face. “Darcy!” She set down her tools, dusting her hands on her jeans as she approached her friend. “I wasn’t expecting you to be back.”

“I wanted to check in on you,” Darcy explained. “Gotta make sure you’re not sciencing yourself into the ground. You have been eating more than just the emergency granola bars you keep in your desk, right?”

Jane’s eyes dropped guiltily to the drawer where her stash of snacks was hidden. “Um...”
“That’s what I thought.” Sliding her bag off of her shoulder, Darcy stuck her hand inside, rummaging around until she’d produced two plastic-wrapped turkey subs.

Jane gratefully accepted one of the sandwiches, pulling the plastic off and taking a big bite. “Thanks for that. What would I do without you?” She said once she’d swallowed her mouthful of food.

“Hmm, let’s see,” Darcy cleared a spot off the corner of Jane’s desk, perching on the piece of furniture, “forget to change your clothes, keel over from lack of sleep, develop scurvy from eating nothing but junk food for every meal. I could go on,” she added before digging into her own sub.

“You really don’t need to,” Jane replied, trying to hold back the urge to laugh. “Of all the things to worry about, you went with scurvy?”

Darcy shrugged a shoulder. “I stand by my decision.” After her next bite of food, she asked, “So how’re you holding up?”

“I’m...managing,” Jane replied slowly, eyes dropping down as she picked at the lettuce on her sub.

“You’re more than managing,” Darcy assured. “Managing is lying face-down on the floor and making noises like a deflating balloon. I’ve been there; I know. You’re doing so much more than that. You’re still out here in the lab, working on the same research and theories you started on years before you ever knew Thor.”

Jane sighed. “I know. I’m screwed up, right? Obsessive. Normal soulmates don’t do this,” she said, indicating to the messy lab with a sweep of her arm.

Darcy snorted, shaking her head. “Since when have you ever been normal?” When her reply earned her a small, crooked smile from Jane, Darcy continued, “I don’t think it means there’s something wrong with you. I think it’s a testament to your strength. Science is your life. Nothing - and no one - will ever change that. Not even an extremely good looking space god with abs you could break bricks on.”

That particular comment got her an outright laugh.

“I really needed that, Darce. Thanks,” Jane told her gratefully, finishing off her sandwich and crumpling the plastic wrapping into a ball.

“The sandwich or the pep talk?” Darcy questioned with a quirk of her lips.

“Both, actually,” Jane confessed.

“Hey, I know what it’s like to be without your soulmate,” Darcy sympathized, growing serious for a moment. “You pretty much kept me sane while Loki was gone, so the least I can do is return the favour.” She tossed her sandwich wrapper into the trash can beside the desk before hopping back onto her feet. “So boss, how can I help?”

Jane grinned. “Feel like cataloguing some barometric readings?”

Darcy matched the look with her own wide smile. “Do I ever.”

It didn’t take long for her to feel like she’d time-warped back to her days as an intern. As Darcy booted up the old computer and began inputting Jane’s readings, she swiftly slid into the groove of working alongside the astrophysicist again.

As they worked - Darcy at the computer and Jane tinkering with some homemade device that looked
like a weird, clunky old calculator - an easy, companionable silence stretched between them until Jane eventually spoke.

“Can I ask you something?”

“’Sup?” Darcy responded, barely looking up as she continued categorizing old data. Jane had definitely fallen behind in the record-keeping department and trying to organize the mess of information was bordering on nightmarish.

“When Thor comes back...” Jane hesitated, pausing for long enough that it prompted Darcy to look up from her work.

“Would it be completely ridiculous if I proposed to him?” Jane finished, cringing as she braced herself for Darcy’s response.

The reply never came. Darcy was too dumbstruck to do much more than stare wordlessly at her friend.

“I mean,” Jane was quick to fill the silence with a rush of awkward rambling, “I’m about to use Idunn’s apple anyway, so logically it makes sense to do it all at once. Two birds, one stone. Right?”

At that, Darcy’s shock wore off and she gave a snort of laughter. “Oh my god. Just when I thought you couldn’t get any more practical.” She shook her head, giving Jane an amused smile. “Only you would call marriage and immortality killing two birds with one stone.”

“So it’s a bad idea?” Jane chewed her bottom lip nervously.

“Are you kidding me? It’s an amazing idea!” Darcy countered, face lighting up with enthusiasm. “Can I be there when you pop the question? I so need to see the look on Thor’s face when you get down on one knee.”

Jane gave a pained groan. “See, this is why I need your advice. I have no idea what to do. I don’t have a ring, I have absolutely no idea what to say, and what if there are special Asgardian customs I’m not aware of? What if I screw up the whole thing-”

Darcy held up a hand, cutting her off. “Woah there. I think you’re massively overreacting. If you’re worried that he might say no, don’t be.” She leaned back until the old office chair protested with a squeak. “I mean, have you seen the way Thor looks at you? His face lights up like a freaking Christmas tree on steroids. The guy loves you, Jane.”

Jane visibly relaxed as some of the tension left her body, but she still looked largely unsure of her decision. “Alright,” she exhaled slowly, nodding as she made up her mind, “I’m going to do it. As soon as he comes back.”


Jane laughed. “Thanks for that. You know, I would really like for you to be there,” she told Darcy, “and I think it would mean a lot to Thor if Loki were there too.”

“We’ll definitely be there,” Darcy confirmed with a nod. “Gah, this is so exciting! Ten minute science break to talk about proposal ideas? Because I’ve already got like, fifty of them.”

Abandoning her research, Jane came to stand by Darcy’s desk. “Good,” she said with palpable relief,
“I need them all, but no sky-writing airplanes or singing flash mobs, okay?”

Darcy frowned. “Well that really narrows down my options. Kidding, kidding,” she added when Jane gave an exasperated roll of her eyes. “We’ll keep this hella classy. I promise. I’m thinking late night, under the stars...”

“You might actually have something there.” Jane looked intrigued, leaning on the edge of Darcy’s desk as a small smile played on her lips. “So would this also be the time to ask whether you’ll be my maid of honour?”

Darcy’s eyes went wide. “First of all, hell yes. Secondly, please tell me the ceremony’s going to be on Asgard.”

When Jane nodded, Darcy gave an excited squeal. “This is going to be epic,” she declared, turning back to her computer and quickly saving the last of the data she’d been working on before spinning around in her chair and giving Jane her full attention. “Alright bride-lady, we’ve got a whole production to plan so let’s do this thing.”

Timing was a funny thing. Coincidentally, the day after Darcy’s conversation in the lab with Jane, Thor arrived.

Darcy didn’t notice at first; it was only the sudden stiffening of Loki’s body that alerted her to the fact that something had happened.

She was lying across the couch with her feet in his lap when he grew still, frowning as he closed his book (an incredibly thick volume on mechanics that he’d borrowed from Jane). It looked like the world’s driest reading material, but he’d had his nose buried in it all night since his return from Jotunheim earlier that evening.

He was like a sponge when it came to that stuff; eager to soak up as much knowledge as possible. Darcy found it equal parts adorable and attractive. Never let it be said that smarts weren’t sexy.

“What?” Darcy asked when a strange look passed over his face.

“My brother is here,” Loki replied, setting the textbook aside.

“And how do you know that?” Skeptical, Darcy raised her eyebrows, pushing herself up from her sprawled-out position on the couch.

Loki shrugged. “A side effect of my magic, I suppose. I can sense a faint shift in the air, usually meaning that the Bifrost has been in use.”

“Oh okay mister sixth sense,” Darcy commented, still not fully believing him as she swung her feet off his lap and stood.

Sure enough, just as she took her first step towards the entryway, there was a knock at the door.

“If you say ‘I told you so’ I’m going to punch you in the nose,” Darcy threatened, giving Loki a warning glance over her shoulder as she went to answer the door. There was a smug expression on his face while he kept his lips pressed together firmly, and she suspected that it was taking all of his willpower not to say those four little words.
As she pulled the door open, Darcy chirped, “Hey Thor. Welcome back. How’s space?”

“Darcy,” Thor acknowledged, looking a bit bewildered by her quick greeting. “You were expecting me?”

“As of about thirty seconds ago, yeah,” Darcy replied, stepping aside to let Thor into the house. “Your brother has some really freaky tricks up his sleeve.”

Thor smiled as he followed her into the living room. “I would expect nothing less from Loki.”

“I’m flattered,” came Loki’s dry reply as he stood from the couch, hesitating for a second before extending his hand to Thor. “Brother.”

Ignoring the offer of a handshake, Thor pulled Loki into a hug, giving him a solid clap on the back before releasing him. “You look well,” Thor noted, “the soulmate bond suits you.”

Loki blushed – honest to god *blushed* – and Darcy bit her lip to avoid laughing at how insanely cute he looked.

“Yes, well,” he coughed, trying to hide his embarrassment, “I see that you appear to be in good spirits. You succeeded in your task then?”

“The apple? Aye,” Thor confirmed, a wide grin taking shape on his face. “Speaking of which, is Jane here?”

“She’s pulling some overtime at the lab,” Darcy said, trying to keep her voice neutral despite the excitement bubbling inside her. This was it. Time to put the proposal plan into action. “My phone’s in my room so I’ll go call her. Sit tight!” She ordered before rushing down the hall and shutting the bedroom door behind her.

She really hoped that Thor hadn’t noticed the phone-sized rectangle tucked into in the back pocket of her jeans. A little white lie was excusable when it was all in the name of love, right?

Pulling her phone out, Darcy eagerly dialed Jane before blurtling, “Thunderpants is in the building. I repeat, Thunderpants is here. Do you copy?”

“Darcy,” Jane groaned, “are the code names really necessary? It’s a proposal, not a covert spy operation.”


Jane’s sigh came through the phone loud and long. Finally, she replied, “I copy. I’ll be waiting on the roof.” There was a slight waver to her voice; a mixture of nerves and excitement.

“Good, we’ll be there soon,” Darcy confirmed before ending the call and returning her phone to her pocket.

“Jane still has some stuff to finish up so she asked if you could meet her at the lab. She’s taking some readings up on the roof,” Darcy announced as she rejoined Thor and Loki in the other room. “Loki and I can take you over there, right Loki?” She narrowed her eyes at her soulmate, silently telling him to play along.

“It would be my pleasure,” Loki remarked flatly, making Darcy wonder whether he ever spoke without sarcasm when it came to his brother.
Apparently not, because the entirety of their trip to the lab consisted of Thor attempting to hold a conversation while Loki continually shut him down with a series of one-word answers.

Finally Darcy took pity on the big guy and chimed in with a few questions she’d been dying to have answered, like did Asgard have different seasons? (Winter did not exist upon their realm, Thor explained), and could Heimdall really see everything? (Verily, Thor confirmed, and Darcy didn’t know whether she’d ever be able to comfortably pee again after that).

When they reached the lab, she ushered Thor up the metal steps of the fire escape and onto the roof where Jane was waiting.

She hung back while Jane and Thor did their mushy reunion thing, giving them a little privacy before the couple parted and Darcy deemed it safe to approach, poking Loki in the ribs and encouraging him to follow. Judging from the pained expression on his face, he looked like he was a minute away from jumping straight off the ledge of the roof.

“‘You look like a five year old who’s all grossed out from seeing his parents kiss,’” Darcy murmured to him, a note of amusement in her tone.

Loki made an indecipherable noise which Darcy took to mean that yes, he was thoroughly disgusted by his brother’s PDA session.

“Beautiful night, isn’t it?” Jane commented, looking up at the dark, twinkling sky overhead. “It kind of reminds me of the evening we spent together when you first came here.”

Thor gave her an affectionate smile. “I remember it well. You were quite keen to learn all there was to know of the nine realms. I was bewitched by your intelligence and beauty,” he admitted.

“And I was fascinated by everything about you,” Jane replied softly, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear.

It was a nervous gesture; a dead giveaway as to what was coming next, and Darcy held her breath as she watched Jane reach for Thor’s hands, entwining her fingers with his as she looked up at her soulmate.

“Thor...” Jane paused, swallowing before continuing, “I love you, more than I ever thought it was possible to love someone, and when I take Idunn’s apple, I would like to do it not only as your soulmate, but as your spouse.” She took a steadying breath, exhaling slowly as she met his eyes and asked, “Would you marry me?”

It was like the world stopped spinning for a moment as Jane’s question hung in the air between them, and when Thor replied, his voice had lowered an octave, brimming with emotion. “You are a true warrior in your own right, Jane Foster; fearless and good-hearted, and I would be truly fortunate to call you my wife.”

Jane blinked, taken aback by the amount of unreserved devotion in his tone. “Yes?” She asked unsurely.

“Yes,” Thor confirmed with a brilliant grin, using their linked hands to pull her forward and into his arms.

At that point, Darcy couldn’t conceal her excitement any longer. With a little squeal of happiness, she elbowed Loki, leaning into him as she whispered, “Did you see that?!”

“How could I not?” He replied in his typical surly fashion. There was a distinct lack of malice to his
words though, and although the darkness made it hard for her to clearly see Loki’s face, Darcy could have sworn that he was smiling as he watched his brother embrace his new fiancée.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Yikes, I can’t believe it’s been a month since I updated! This chapter contains feels +
sexytimes, so I hope it makes up for the delay :)

When had her life gotten so hectic?

That was the question running through Darcy’s mind as she stood in the Great Hall, elaborately
dressed and shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot as she waited for the wedding rehearsal to
finally come to an end.

She felt like she’d gone from Jotunheim to Midgard to Asgard in the blink of an eye and although
her inner adventure junkie was loving it (a trait she picked up from Jane she figured, since before
interning for the scientist, Darcy sure as hell wasn’t the type to dive head-first into danger for the
sake of satisfying her curiosity), it was all beginning to get a little exhausting.

The wedding had been planned in a rush; Loki had told Thor not to hurry on his account, but the
older brother insisted that the ceremony had to take place before Loki was required to return to
Midgard and begin his training with S.H.I.E.L.D.

“I would not dream of marrying without my brother - my best friend - at my side,” Thor had said,
squeezing Loki’s shoulder in a show of affection.

Loki had looked surprised by that, regaining his composure a second later and murmuring a soft “oh”
as his usually sharp tongue abandoned him, leaving him otherwise speechless.

That left Darcy with only two days to spend on Asgard before she and Loki would be heading off to
D.C. to move into S.H.I.E.L.D.’s headquarters.

It was a lot for her to wrap her head around but for the time being she pushed it all aside, instead
focusing on Jane’s wedding. More specifically, she was trying to focus on her role in Jane’s
wedding.

The ceremony was elaborate to say the least and despite two rehearsals, Darcy still felt like she was
going to screw it up. If she was honest with herself, there might have been a second cause for her
nerves too. She couldn’t help comparing her situation to Jane’s and seeing her friend about to bind
herself to her soulmate in both marriage and lifespan made a little troubling voice pipe up in back of
Darcy’s head.

Jane was all in, committing to Thor with everything she had, while Darcy couldn’t even begin to
come to a decision about the apple Loki had worked so hard to acquire for her.

It was after the second wedding rehearsal ended when the feeling of guilt became too heavy for
Darcy to bear, and the minute she was dismissed from the Great Hall, she grabbed Loki by the arm
and tugged him out into the empty corridor.

“Can I talk to you?” She asked a bit hesitantly, adjusting the skirt of her fancy Asgardian dress
before sitting on a nearby stone bench.
From her unusually subdued tone, Loki clearly sensed that something was off and he gave her a curious look, lowering himself onto the bench next to her. “Are you well, Darcy?”

She was slow to answer, nibbling her bottom lip before she finally blurted, “If you were annoyed with me you’d say something, right?”

“Annoyed?” Loki echoed with an expression of mixed surprise and confusion. “Why would I be annoyed?”

Darcy sighed, looking down at her feet rather than at him. “It’s just that Jane’s about to use her apple and she now she’s marrying Thor too, and meanwhile I keep making you wait. It has to be frustrating for you.”

“Darcy,” Loki interrupted, his fingers finding her chin and gently tilting her head until she was forced to look up at him. “Do not doubt my love, my utter devotion to you.” He replied, eyes burning with a fierceness that made her heart skip in her chest.

His gaze flicked down to her lips then and when he spoke again, his voice was as rough as loose gravel. “I will wait a lifetime if you so desire, and should you not wish to use the apple, I will remain by your side for the entirety of your natural life. For as long as you will still have me as yours.”

The promise instantly brought tears to her eyes and Darcy felt one slip down her cheek as she breathed, “Fuck, do I ever love you.” Jerking her chin up, she closed the remaining space between them, her mouth landing hard on his.

The kiss was messy and desperate; long and thorough until Loki broke away, panting as he leaned his forehead against hers and whispered, “Don’t cry, love.”

“Then stop saying such beautiful poetic shit,” Darcy replied, voice hitching with a small, watery hiccup before she kissed him again.

It was softer this time, so slow and careful it made her heart ache, and Darcy could have very happily lived in that kiss forever. Unfortunately her lungs felt differently and when they began to protest, she was forced to lean away for air.

“Believe me when I vow that I could never be angry with you for wishing to wait,” Loki’s voice was full of concern as he reached up to smooth back a stray curl of her hair.

Darcy nodded, letting out a long breath now that her tears had stopped. “Yeah, I believe you.”

“Good,” Loki responded, pulling her into his lap and reaching for her hand, placing her palm flat against his chest.

“Do you feel that?” He asked quietly, eyes dark as they focused on her. “Do you feel what you do to me?”

Beneath her fingers, Darcy felt the strong and steady thrum of his heart beating at a quick pace.

“Yes,” her voice was barely more than a whisper when she spoke.

Loki’s arms curled around her then; lips brushing against the sensitive skin below her ear. “You will be my undoing, Darcy Lewis. I would have you right here,” he murmured, making her shiver. “Lay you down and slowly push your skirts aside, revealing you to me inch by agonizing inch until I go mad with the need to claim you,” he paused, pressing a hot kiss to her neck that had Darcy biting her lip to hold back a moan, “then and only then would I lower myself between the softness of your
thighs and pleasure you with my mouth until you cry for me in ways that have nothing to do with sadness."

Darcy’s reply came in the form of a garbled version of something vaguely resembling oh my god; her brain too far gone to form any other kind of response. The rest of her was still in perfect working order though, so she slipped her arms around Loki’s neck and kissed him long and deep.

Behind her, the soft sound of a throat being cleared interrupted Darcy all too soon.

Scrambling off of Loki’s lap was annoyingly difficult thanks to the long skirts she wore and Darcy swore under her breath as she finally managed to extract herself from him, smoothing down her dress and hoping her face didn’t look as red as it felt as she turned to face their visitor.

It was Frigga.

Of course it had to be Frigga.

“Um, hello,” Darcy greeted, feeling even more mortified if that was even possible (her original level of mortification was pretty high up there on the scale of ‘oh god please let the ground open up and swallow me whole’).

“Darcy,” the queen’s reply was warm and friendly though it didn’t do much to relieve Darcy’s embarrassment, “Jane is asking for you. The seamstress has finished your gowns and wishes to perform a final fitting.”

“Dresses. Yes. Good. Great.” Darcy nodded, beginning to inch her way down the corridor before she managed to embarrass herself any further. “I’ll just, uh, go do that now. Okay, bye!”

After Darcy's quick departure, a few quiet minutes stretched between mother and son before Frigga spoke again, addressing Loki while her eyes continued to follow Darcy’s retreating form. “She is good for you, but you fear that she will choose her mortality over you.”

Startled, Loki blinked at his mother. His voice felt as if it was stuck in his throat; the accuracy of her words striking him harder than he cared to admit. “Yes,” he finally confessed, the word sounding slightly cracked, “and I cannot say that I would blame her. I have not much to offer her and she deserves the very best; a man of worth, a true Asgardian warrior, not a disgraced half-blooded Jotun.”

“Do you think,” Frigga said gently, taking a seat beside him, “perhaps what she wants and what you believe best for her are not the same thing?”

“Wanting and needing are vastly different concepts,” Loki pointed out. “I wish to care for Darcy’s needs, despite however much our bond may protest,” he spoke with a small frown, absentely rubbing a hand over his chest. It would pain him to do so, but the hollow ache of ignoring his soulmate bond would be a small price to pay if it ensured that Darcy lived a rich, full life. He would not hinder her growth by keeping her chained to him in any way.

“Oh my sweet son,” Frigga smiled affectionately, “you have a kind heart, no matter how hard you may try to conceal it.” She patted his knee reassuringly before rising from the bench. “Worry not,” she replied with a wise look, “for patience never goes unrewarded.”

With that, she disappeared down the corridor, leaving Loki to mull over the meaning of her parting words.
She’d done a whole lot of worrying for nothing, Darcy soon discovered. The wedding had gone off without a hitch.

Jane had looked gorgeous in her gown, a long Grecian-style dress adorned with gold accents that made her skin look like it was glowing. Maybe it actually was; she’d eaten Idunn’s apple after all.

When Jane had taken the first bite, Darcy’s stomach somersaulted. Of course she was happy for her friend, but a little piece of her couldn’t help feeling like she was being abandoned. There was a dash of envy thrown in there too as the same question kept repeating itself inside her head: why couldn’t she make up her damned mind about her own apple?

She needed to quiet that annoying little voice; it was Jane’s big day and Darcy wasn’t about to spend it moping around in sadness.

Lucky for her, an Asgardian wedding meant an Asgardian wedding reception, and if the sheer volume of booze being brought out by the servants was any indication, Darcy would have no trouble forgetting about her apple issues for one night.

She was pleasantly buzzed when the dancing began and between her and Thor, they actually managed to cajole Loki out onto the floor for one song.

It was a slow, pretty melody of stringed instruments and as the music played, Darcy leaned her weight against him, cheek resting on his chest as they shuffled in a slow circle.

“You smell nice,” she mumbled, securing her arms more firmly around his neck. “I wanna lick you.”

Loki’s answering laugh made his chest vibrate beneath her cheek. “Darcy, dare I say that you are drunk?”

“Tipsy, not drunk,” she insisted, craning her neck until her lips brushed the underside of his jaw.

“Is there a difference?” Loki’s grip on her hips tightened as his voice dropped to a low murmur; soft and smooth in a way that made Darcy unconsciously press herself closer to him.

“Yeah,” Darcy confirmed. “Drunk means random babbling that I won’t remember in the morning, but tipsy means that I’m brave enough to say exactly what I’m thinking...and fully capable of following through with it.”

“My dear, you are always brave,” Loki replied, “and you need not be inebriated in order to freely speak your mind to me.”

Darcy hummed as one of his hands left her hip, dragging across the soft material of her dress and slipping further around her until his fingertips were resting dangerously close to her backside.

In reply she bucked her hips teasingly; the brief pressure making him quietly groan.

“What’s the minimum amount of time a girl needs to spend at her best friend’s wedding before she can bail guilt-free and have sex with her insanely hot soulmate?” She wondered out loud, panting a little when Loki’s hand dipped lower, entering full groping territory.

“Whatever length of time that may be, I would say you have more than surpassed it,” he responded in a strained voice.
“Good,” Darcy breathed, a warm tingle of anticipation running through her. “Your room or mine?”

On their arrival, she and Jane had been directed to a set of suites on the opposite end of the hallway from Thor and Loki’s own bedchambers. Apparently not seeing the bride before the wedding was a tradition that extended to Asgard as well (though Darcy didn’t see why her sex life had to suffer because of it).

“Mine,” Loki quickly determined. “I wish for you to see...” he seemed to change his mind then, refusing to finish the thought as he cleared his throat, looking mildly embarrassed.

“Aww,” Darcy grinned up at him, “you want to show me all your stuff?”

“It was my childhood room,” Loki confessed. “I would very much like for you to see it.”

Between his words and the painfully sweet look on his face, Darcy’s chest flooded with warmth. He’d told her bits and pieces of his upbringing, mostly lighthearted stories of all the trouble he and Thor had gotten into as kids, but when it came to the more serious topics, namely his parents, he would slide into a foul mood, refusing to say anything. The wounds Odin’s lies had left behind were still fresh on his heart, Darcy sadly realized.

Loki wasn’t one to open up easily, so she fully understood the gravity of his invitation now. He wasn’t just allowing her inside his personal space; he wanted to show her the hidden pieces of himself that he’d kept from her before.

With her arms still wound around him, Darcy let her fingertips slide up the back of his neck, delighting in the way he shivered at her touch. “Good, because I really want to see it,” she said truthfully.

Loki’s eyes slid shut as her fingers continued their journey up the column of his neck, only stopping once they were lost in his hair. He made a low noise of pleasure in the back of his throat; the rumbling tone making Darcy’s skin flush as she imagined eliciting a dozen more of those noises from him as soon as they were behind closed doors.

They didn’t make it as far as Loki’s bedroom. Not initially, anyway.

Hands linked, Loki led her through the hallways towards the far wing of the palace. Technically there was no need to be sneaky about it since everyone was still celebrating in the Great Hall, but they tried to be stealthy anyway. The key word being tried, Darcy thought. She felt so light and happy, still riding the high of Jane’s wedding and feeling the effects of that Asgardian booze, she couldn’t contain her absurd urge to giggle as they darted down the corridor.

Her good mood seemed to be contagious and it drew the most gorgeous, charming grin from Loki, leaving her momentarily breathless as she tried to memorize exactly how perfect he looked in that moment with his bright eyes and a boyish, playful expression on his face.

“Wait wait wait,” Darcy breathed out between laughs, tugging at Loki’s arm and forcing him to come to a stop as she paused to take off her shoes. She was feeling distinctly uncoordinated thanks to the wine she’d helped herself to earlier, and combined with the long hem of her dress, the whole thing felt like a disaster waiting to happen.

She slid off one heel then the other, and once she was barefoot, Loki took advantage of the moment and pressed her up against the wall, her shoes slipping out of her grasp and falling forgotten to the floor as Darcy’s hands automatically looped around his neck.

There was a slight dip in the stone behind her back, a shallow alcove that provided just enough cover
to hide their bodies from view, and Darcy had a sneaking suspicion that Loki had planned the route back to his room just so they would pass through that specific hallway. There was no such thing as a coincidence when it came to him.

She would have questioned him but Loki’s lips were already on her neck and any remaining thoughts flew out of Darcy’s head when he sucked on her pulse point, causing a needy whimper to escape from her throat.

“Someone’s eager,” Loki murmured, his lips curving up into an amused smile against her skin.

“Says the guy who couldn’t even wait to get back to his bedroom,” she accused, tilting her head to the side and allowing him to more thoroughly explore her neck with his mouth.

Loki’s answering chuckle was warm and rich, making Darcy’s legs go weak. “Perhaps if you did not look so enticing in that gown, I would not find myself so lacking in self-control.”

His eyes dipped to her cleavage and Darcy had to admit, she did look pretty awesome in her formal Asgardian wear. Her dress was a deep plum colour; the material criss-crossing over her waist in a flattering pattern while the bodice was dotted with little shimmering diamonds. Something told her those were no cheap little craft-store rhinestones either.

“Yeah well, perhaps you should... oh,” she gasped when she felt Loki nudge her knees apart, his leg pressing firmly between her thighs. That little bit of friction shot straight to her core, driving her wild. Gripping his shoulders, she began to move her hips, shamelessly grinding against his thigh in an attempt to relieve the intense ache between her legs. She needed more. Just a little more...

When Loki pulled back, Darcy made a frustrated noise. Thankfully her disappointment was short-lived as he bunched up the hem of her dress and quickly replaced his leg with his hand.

“Darcy,” he swallowed roughly, “you are not wearing...”

“Panties?” She supplied helpfully. “Yeah, I didn’t want the lines to show through my dress.”

“Is that so?” Loki murmured, giving her a heated look.

“That’s one of the reasons anyway,” she grinned cheekily.

If possible, Loki’s expression grew even more intense before he dipped his head and kissed her hungrily.

When they parted, he breathed against her lips, “My beautiful, bold minx.”

“Please Loki,” she whined, tilting her hips in encouragement. Teasing touches weren’t enough anymore; she needed him now.

His hands sought out the button on his pants before shoving them down his hips just far enough to work himself free from the leather confines. “You beg for me so sweetly,” he spoke in a silky tone, “worry not, love. I will give you exactly what you desire.” He punctuated his words by returning one hand to her lip, his palm curving down to her ass and cupping it firmly.

With one smooth step forward he had her completely pinned against the wall; the contrast of the cool stone and the warmth of Loki’s body instantly knocking the air from Darcy’s lungs.

“Yes,” she moaned, head falling back against the rough stone behind her.
“So vocal and I have barely yet begun,” Loki murmured approvingly, nuzzling the skin below her ear before both palms found the backs of her thighs and lifted enough for Darcy to wrap her legs around his waist.

Despite his earlier eagerness he went slowly now; sinking into her at such an agonizingly languid pace, Darcy could do nothing but breathe incoherent curses into his ear as her thighs unconsciously tightened around him.

It was torture, but fuck, how she loved it.

When he was fully sheathed inside her he paused, head pulling back and eyes focusing on her face as he studied her intently, like he was imprinting every little detail of the moment into his memory.

It was too much of everything, Darcy thought; a sensory overload. She might have been half-drunk on wine, but she was entirely drunk on him.

She leaned in to kiss him and as she drew away, she nipped at Loki’s bottom lip with her teeth hard enough to provoke a low, growly noise from him.

“Move right now,” she ordered breathlessly.

He did; rocking into her until Darcy was panting and squirming against him, desperate for more.

He turned his attention to her chest then; teeth grazing lightly over the thin, silky fabric covering one breast, and in response Darcy arched her back, silently encouraging him to pull the top of the dress down.

Loki obliged, baring her breasts and making her shiver as the cool air hit her skin.

“Perfect,” he whispered so lowly he probably wasn’t even aware that he’d spoken out loud before he bent, taking one nipple into his mouth and sucking in the most obscenely hot way.

“Oh my god.” The exclamation was so thick and throaty, Darcy hardly recognized it as her own voice.

He repeated the act on her other breast until Darcy’s fingers clenched hard in his hair, forcing him to tilt his head back until their eyes met. The action left his neck on full display for her and having him at her mercy, throat bared and completely vulnerable, brought a surprisingly powerful, primal sense of satisfaction to Darcy.

Not able to resist, she leaned in, pressing open-mouthed kisses to the column of his throat before her tongue darted out, tasting him just as she’d confessed she wanted to earlier during their dance in the Great Hall.

Given the choice though, Darcy had to say that she much preferred this type of dancing; erotic and unrefined as each of Loki’s thrusts became faster, harder, deeper.

“God, yes,” she moaned, eyes fluttering shut in pure pleasure as their bodies rocked together.

She felt the warmth of Loki’s breath on her lips a moment before his mouth came crashing down onto hers, hard and needy. There was no elegance to it this time; desperation making them clumsy as they sought out relief, chasing down orgasms that were so near, Darcy could feel hers simmering at the corners of her consciousness, ready to overtake her at a moment’s notice.

A long, low moan slipped from between her lips as Loki changed pace; hips rolling in such an
exquisite, achingly slow kind of way, each thrust drew another soft noise from her throat as she lost herself in the feeling.

“Not quite so fast,” he spoke between ragged breaths, “I wish to have you like this for as long as possible.”

“Oh fuck,” Darcy’s reply was accompanied by a half-strangled groan of pleasure. “Whatever you’re doing right now, don’t stop.”

“Never,” Loki promised, dropping his head to kiss the corner of her mouth. “Gods, Darcy, how I love you.”

Her thighs were trembling now as she grew closer and closer to falling off the edge. “Say it again,” she breathed, wanting to hear more of his voice; more of that deep velvety tone that seemed to wrap around her a like cozy blanket.

“I love you,” Loki repeated, voice full of raw honesty, “I love you, Darcy. Min kjære...” he murmured the words in her ear, lapsing back into a foreign language that Darcy couldn’t quite make sense of. It didn’t matter though; the tone of his voice conveyed his meaning clearly enough.

It was that warm affection that did her in, tipping her over the edge as Darcy clung to him, face pressed into the curve of his neck while her mind went utterly blank aside from the single, overwhelming feeling of pleasure rolling over her.

Loki followed her a moment later; hips bucking one final time before his grip tightened; squeezing and pulling her closer until they were firmly pressed together, every inch of him snug and hot inside her.

His release sent little aftershocks through her, leaving her whimpering soft noises of satisfaction as her body went limp; limbs weak and heavy.

In fact, Darcy was so unsteady that when Loki finally lowered her, he only released his hold on her for a second, just long enough to scoop her shoes off the floor, and then he was lifting her back into his arms bridal-style before continuing down the hallway towards his chambers.

“You know, I thought you said this was supposed to be a shortcut,” Darcy accused, looking up at him with a playful grin. “We just wasted a solid half hour back there.”

“I would not call that wasted time,” Loki replied; skillfully dodging her accusation as a sly smile pulled at the corner of his mouth.

Darcy hummed in agreement, pressing her cheek against his chest. “Yeah, can’t say you’re wrong about that.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

This chapter is all Loki. Enjoy!

Loki woke early but didn’t rise straight away. Instead he relaxed back against his pillow, lazily rolling his head to the side and studying Darcy’s still-sleeping form.

It came as no surprise that she would still be exhausted after their previous evening’s activities. It had been late when they finally arrived at his chambers and rather than immediately crawling into the bed, they had stayed awake until the wee hours of the morning as Loki showed her around his old childhood room.

Darcy had been genuinely interested in everything, pestering him with questions and listening with rapt attention as he told her stories of how he’d come to acquire certain items or master particular illusions. Her curiosity and eagerness to learn more of his past had quite frankly shocked him, and until that moment, Loki hadn’t truly realized just how deeply he missed feeling such a level of companionship.

He wasn’t particularly social like Thor but he considered himself to hold a small group of acquaintances upon Asgard, though the warriors three and Sif had always been first and foremost his brother’s friends; often only conversing with Loki by association. It had been that way since childhood and while he had grown accustomed to it, Loki had always remained a bit lonely, he supposed. He had resigned himself to playing the part of solitary outcast, but that didn’t mean he enjoyed taking up such a role.

That was of no matter now, though. Now there was Darcy, with her sharp humor and strong will and radiant beauty, who worried over him and cared for him when he was unwell, who loved him despite his faults and looked at him as though he were greater than any God.

She wasn’t just his soulmate, Loki realized. Yes, she was the woman with whom he shared his heart and his bed, but she had also established herself as his most treasured friend.

Loki snorted to himself. The notion of selecting a best friend was childish, but foolish or not, he would undoubtedly give that title to Darcy.

He gazed at her again now as the early morning sunlight slanted across her bare shoulder, bathing her skin in a warm glow. The sight of her like that made Loki’s heart constrict with emotion.

The simplicity of the moment, lying there listening to his soulmate’s soft, sleepy breaths, left him feeling so content and secure, for a moment it was as though all the complications of life had slipped away. He could forget the lies he had been fed by the man masquerading as his father; forget that he had never been a true, proper prince of Asgard; forget what duties now awaited him both on Jotunheim and Midgard.

For that one moment it was almost as if he were nothing more than a man in love.

And it was utterly perfect.
Darcy stirred then, making a soft noise in her sleep as she rolled onto her stomach and buried her face in her pillow. As she moved, the blanket slid off her back, revealing the line of her spine and generous curve of her hip, and Loki wanted more than anything to kiss that lovely pale skin, to nudge her thighs apart and slowly coax her to consciousness until she was writhing beneath him and begging for more.

There was no time for that, though. He needed to seek out Odin before she woke.

She would most certainly be angry with him for leaving her behind, but the thought of Darcy standing before the Allfather, prepared to bargain and plea on Loki’s behalf, brought such a sick feeling to his gut, he couldn’t possibly allow her to accompany him.

His Darcy was so strong-willed, stubborn and brave, there was nothing she would not do for him. Even after all this time, he could scarcely wrap his head around the extent of her feelings towards him (how lucky, how undeserving he was of her), but that knowledge also frightened him. He knew she would not hesitate to sacrifice her own happiness for his sake, and for that reason, it was far too dangerous to allow her before Odin’s throne.

Leaning in, Loki pressed a single soft kiss to Darcy’s forehead before rolling out of bed and preparing for his meeting with the Allfather.

In the doorway he paused, looking back at his soulmate where she was curled on her side in the middle of the bed. His bed. In his chambers. Gods, seeing her there made him feel proud, aroused, and extraordinarily happy all at once.

“All will be well,” he whispered before slipping out of the room, not truly knowing whether those words of assurance were meant for Darcy or himself.

If Odin was surprised to see him, he did a rather good job of hiding it.

The Allfather appeared quite indifferent as he sat upon his throne, but Loki knew that the old man would not have come at all were he not at least mildly curious to discover why Loki had requested such a formal meeting.

“Loki,” Odin addressed him with a cool detachment that was more aptly suited for greeting a business associate than a so-called son, though Loki supposed that it suited the occasion; by that point he was little more than an acquaintance to Odin anyway.

“Allfather,” Loki returned in greeting, ensuring that his words were coated in a heavy dose of sarcasm, “how very generous of you to spare me a moment of your time. I will not keep you for any longer than strictly necessary, I simply wished to make an appeal.”

At the amount of dry bitterness in Loki’s tone, Odin frowned. “In what regard?”

“Midgard most urgently requires protection,” Loki replied, “and in view of their dire need for assistance, I have offered my services to a defensive organization known as S.H.I.E.L.D.” He directed a steady, level gaze at the Allfather, adding, “I am to begin aiding their realm in a few days time.”

It was a slight exaggeration; a touch of embellishment to make his cause appear more worthy, but there was no need for Odin to know that.
“And so you wish to be relieved of your duties upon Jotunheim,” Odin concluded with an unreadable look.

“I do.” Loki swallowed down the anxious worry taking shape within him; causing his throat to squeeze tight and making it rather difficult to hold his neutral tone.

“Why do you deem Midgard more worthy of protection than Jotunheim?” Odin questioned. “The Jotuns continue their struggle to recover from the damage which you have inflicted, may I remind you, while last I received word from Heimdall, Midgard is managing quite fine without your interference.”

“I have already made a pledge to assist Midgard,” Loki retorted, barely refraining from grinding his teeth at the accusatory tone of Odin’s voice. “I will not go back on my word.”

Odin appeared rather skeptical as he studied his former son. “The very Loki who once prided himself on cunning wordplay and boldfaced trickery now says that he will not break a promise?”

“I am not the man I once was,” Loki replied, not daring to say more than that for fear of revealing too much about depth of his feelings towards Darcy. He refused to provide Odin with any information of value; any true emotion that the Allfather could possibly exploit and use against him.

When Odin spoke, it was with undisguised curiosity. “Perhaps you could explain where this sudden fixation on Midgard has come from, considering that there are any number of other realms in far more vital need of aid.”

Did the old man ever tire of talking in circles, Loki wondered, pressing his lips into a firm, thin line as he held back the urge to groan out of frustration. He had not made a complicated request and yet Odin continued to drag it out almost as if he were spitefully testing the limits of Loki’s tolerance.

“I see not why it matters,” he bit out. “Is the fact that I am trying to do some good worth nothing?”

“No, not nothing,” Odin agreed, “but I fail to see why such efforts cannot be directed to Jotunheim in keeping with the terms of your original punishment.”

That was the tipping point, the final nudge Loki needed, and his patience broke; swift and brutal as he cast aside any last appearances of composure.

“Because I am in love,” he snapped, voice rising in volume, “there is your answer. Are you satisfied now?”

He was very nearly trembling now, irritated both with Odin and himself for so thoughtlessly abandoning his self-restraint. Loki hated to pull Darcy into their discussion but it had been impossible to hold in his annoyance any longer. Odin knew precisely where to direct his attacks and exactly which buttons to press in order to leave Loki fuming.

That was all very well and good, Loki thought darkly. If it was a dirty fight the Allfather desired, then he would have it.

“You would be so cruel as to forcibly separate your son from his soulmate?” He spoke the question in a venomous tone.

Odin’s eyebrows lifted. “Ah, so now you call yourself my kin? You are my son only when it suits your purpose?”

“I merely appeal to whatever blackened remains of a heart still reside within your chest,” Loki spat in
“Time has not cooled your temper,” Odin observed, frowning thoughtfully. “If anything, you have grown more impassioned with age. I find it rather strange as I seem to recall that it was a young Thor who was often driven by impulse and emotion, yet you now grow more like him with each passing day.”

“Do not,” Loki spoke in a low, deadly voice, “compare me to him.”

“Then tell me why you have changed,” Odin responded calmly.

Loki gave a hollow, humorless laugh. “If you cannot answer that yourself, I must question whether you are fit to even feed yourself, let alone sit upon that throne.”

“I assure you,” the Allfather said somewhat dryly, “my mental faculties have not left me as of yet. I am well aware of the cause of your hatred; I acknowledge my shortcomings, both as a king and a father to you. I only ask you this now because I wish to hear of the hardships you have faced. I wish to understand your pain. I wish, simply, to listen.”

“I seek no shoulder to cry upon,” Loki retorted.

“And I did not offer one,” Odin responded in a level tone. “Now speak.”

Odin’s appeal was baffling to say the least, but Loki found that he could not remain silent for any longer. He ached to unload the heavy weight upon his chest, to finally tell Odin to his face everything that Loki had dreamed of saying to the Allfather for years now.

So he did.

“You fed me lies for centuries,” his voice began to break under the mass of his emotions; frustration, hurt, anger, and sadness most prevalent in both his tone and the expression on his face. He couldn’t be bothered to hide his true thoughts any longer. “You raised me to fear and loathe the very thing that I am; to view the Jotuns as lesser beings that must be slain for the protection of Asgard, and so I did just that! I waged war against their realm, I sought to extinguish their race, but did that make you happy, father? Did it?” Loki paused to gather more breath, chest heaving before he lowered his voice to a darker, more controlled tone. “No, no it didn’t. As if my Jotun blood were not punishment enough, I was chastised for those actions as well. You called me foolish and rash, but I was only carrying out that which I had been taught. So when you say that the wreckage upon Jotunheim is my doing, I think it wise for you to reconsider who is truly at fault.”

His hands were shaking now and Loki clenched them into fists at his sides, his heart beating painfully quick in his chest as he awaited the Allfather’s response.

It came only after a lengthy delay that likely lasted mere moments, but those empty, wordless minutes stretched on like hours within Loki’s mind.

Eventually Odin cleared his throat, announcing, “Six months.”

Loki scoffed, pushing down the thick emotion in his tone. “This is all you have to say to me? Six months?”

“For now, yes,” Odin confirmed.

At that moment, the Allfather looked especially weary and aged in a way that sparked a small, spiteful hope in Loki’s chest. If he were to fall into Odinsleep, there would be nothing to stop Loki
from doing as he pleased and ignoring Odin’s orders.

Of course, Darcy would be all too ready to berate him if he were to choose such a petty course of action. Knowing that she would disapprove if he were to continue pressing the Allfather so ruthlessly; egging him on and adding additional strain to an already tense discussion, was the only thing keeping Loki’s anger in check.

“One month upon each realm,” he negotiated as calmly as he could manage.

Odin appeared pleased but wary of the sudden amount of civility in Loki’s voice. “No less than four,” he countered. “The Jotuns require stability in their leader; you cannot travel to Jotunheim only to rule for a fortnight and vanish just as quickly as you arrived.”

There was an edge of finality in the Allfather’s tone that relayed his growing impatience and Loki pressed his lips together, thinking furiously. If Odin tired of being so adamantly tested, it wouldn’t be long before he revoked his counter-offer and left Loki empty-handed. That wouldn’t do at all. Permanently returning to Jotunheim was entirely unacceptable.

With that in mind, Loki came to his decision. Four months was...manageable, he supposed. Far better than the alternatives, which were virtually non-existent aside from playing the part of the villain and forcing the Allfather into Odinsleep. In the past he would not have hesitated to choose such a course of action, but that was far from being an option now. He could only imagine the depth of the disappointment in Darcy’s eyes if he were to pursue such an unsavory path.

Darcy looked at him as if he were the sun, the very centre of her universe, and for her sake, he would not cloud his morality any further. He would do what was right, however unappealing that decision might be.

It all sounded rather Thor-like, those thoughts of honor and integrity, and Loki was alarmed to find that perhaps Odin was correct. Did he truly grow more akin to Asgard’s faultless golden prince? It was a frightening thought.

“Very well,” Loki nodded. “A division of four months upon Midgard followed by four upon Jotunheim.”

“Dependent, of course, upon the condition that you select an interim leader to hold rule over Jotunheim during your absences,” Odin stated.

Loki blew out a long breath, some of the hard tension leaving his shoulders now that a plan was beginning to fall into place and they neared the end of their discussion. “Fine. I will ensure that an appropriate journey to Jotunheim is made prior to my return to Midgard.”

“Good.” Odin leaned back, looking both relieved and tired.

“Am I dismissed?” Loki raised an eyebrow.

“Yes, yes,” Odin waved his hand absently, appearing as if his attention were elsewhere.

Turning on his heels, Loki quickly strode towards the tall doors of the throne room, eager to return to his chambers. It was rather early yet. Perhaps Darcy still slept, in which case he could indulge himself and return to bed with her. He was in desperate need of her warmth, her touch and her voice to ground him and calm him.

“Loki,” the Allfather’s voice stopped him just as he reached the doors.
Turning back to Odin, Loki gave him a rather unimpressed glare.

“Will you ever speak of her to me?” The Allfather asked as if he had known exactly who occupied Loki’s thoughts. “It did not escape my attention that she took part in Thor’s marriage ceremony. I presume that she means a great deal to both you and your brother, and yet you have not so much as uttered her name in my presence.”

“I will not.” There was no hesitation in Loki’s reply; his voice dropping low as he spoke seriously, all traces of his earlier snide exterior gone. “I love her, and I will endeavor to do everything within my power to protect her,” he said with a meaningful look.

“You think me a threat?” Odin spoke with mild surprise.

Loki’s lips quirked in a faint, amused smile that was gone almost as quickly as it first appeared.

“Trust me when I say that you do not wish to know what I think of you,” he replied before turning his back on Odin, pulling open the heavy door and stalking out of the room.

After Loki’s rather bleak departure, Odin continued to sit upon the throne, submerged in a pensive, thoughtful silence. It was some time later when he finally made move to leave, but first he signaled to the palace guard stationed at the far corner of the room.

“I have a task of great importance for you,” Odin instructed in a stern, sober voice. “You will speak of this to no one, do you understand?”

The guard kneeled before his king on one leg, head bowed respectfully. “Yes, Allfather.” He hesitated briefly before finally looking up and asking, “If I may be so bold, what would you have me do?”

Odin’s answering smile was a mere wrinkle around his eyes, so faint one would have never noticed the action unless specifically looking for it.

“Research.”
As Loki’s date with S.H.I.E.L.D. draws nearer, Darcy gives him some wise advice (and threatens bodily harm). Jane and Darcy say their goodbyes.

Darcy was stirred from her sleep when she felt the mattress dip as Loki slid into bed next to her, the contrast between her warm cocoon of blankets and the slight chill of his body making her shiver.

“Where’ve you been?” She mumbled sleepily, giving a half-hearted attempt at batting the tangled hair out of her eyes. Her wild case of bed-head would have to be tackled later after a hot bath and multiple cups of coffee.

“I spoke with Odin.” Loki admitted, wincing slightly as he awaited her response.

He was smart to brace himself because Darcy’s reply came in the form of a swift swat in the face with her pillow.

“You went without me? Not cool!” She gave him another solid thwack with the pillow for good measure.

“Please, Darcy,” Loki groaned, pushing her fluffy weapon aside and reaching for her, securing his arms around her waist and pulling her in tight against his chest until he was spooning her. “By all means be angry with me later but right now, I need this,” he said quietly.

Darcy went silent, relaxing in his arms as a slight frown formed on her face. Whatever happened in that throne room had definitely left an impact on him. Normally Loki was all too eager to get playful with her in bed, and on any other day, her pillow fighting tactics would have earned her some form of retaliation, usually of the incredibly awesome sexual variety.

“Okay,” she relented, “but you’ve got a serious round of butt-kicking coming your way later, got it?”

“Mmm, I look forward to it,” he replied, voice slightly muffled as he pressed his face against the back of her shoulder.

That affectionate, needy version of Loki tugged hard on her heartstrings and Darcy gave him a few more minutes of comfortable silence, waiting until she could feel the tension leave his body and hear his breathing even out before she spoke again.

“You want to tell me what happened?” She gently prodded.

“We...negotiated,” Loki said slowly.

“You negotiated like a normal person or you did the Loki version of negotiating with lots of frowny faces and arguing?” Darcy questioned, twisting in his arms until she could face him.

Loki gave a tired sigh. “The latter I suppose, though we did manage to reach an agreement of sorts.”
“Really?” Darcy perked up. “Awesome, lay it on me.”

“I was granted allowance to aid S.H.I.E.L.D. on the condition that I divide my time between realms,” Loki explained. “I am to spend a term of four months upon Midgard followed by four upon Jotunheim, but first I must select an interim leader to hold the Jotun throne during my absences.”

“Oh,” Darcy said for lack of a better response. Four months wasn’t the spectacular news she’d secretly (and yes, very naively) been hoping for, but it sure as hell beat having to spend a whole year apart from one another. She’d been there, done that, and it had hardcore sucked.

“That’s...something,” she finished lamely, hoping her voice sounded more optimistic than she felt.

Loki gave her a thin, mildly amused smile. “My thoughts precisely. Even so much as a day apart from you feels as though it is a century.”

“Aw, I love it when you get all sappy romantic on me,” Darcy grinned, leaning in to give him a quick kiss. “The time apart is gonna suck, but we’ll make it work. I promise. Where there’s a will there’s a way, and let me tell you, I’ve got will coming out the ying yang. No will shortage here.”

Loki chuckled, reaching up to tuck some of her hair behind her ear. “No, certainly not,” he agreed. “Consider that one of the many things I find so utterly charming about you.”

His fingers rubbed a slow circle on her hip and Darcy snuggled closer until their legs were entwined and she had stolen most of the space on his pillow. “So you’re okay? I imagine that meeting with Odin wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows.”

“Far from it,” Loki confirmed with a grimace, hesitating before he quietly confessed, “I hate him, and yet I still desire his approval.”

He shook his head then, releasing a laugh that was humorless but thick with a sad, self-deprecating quality that made Darcy’s heart ache for him.

“Of course you do,” Darcy sympathized, reaching up to glide her fingers over his cheek and across the hard set of his jaw. “It’s natural to want your parents to be proud of you, and blood or not, he is your father.”

“You make it sound so simple.” Loki commented, eyes briefly falling shut as her fingertips continued to explore his face.

Darcy gave a one-shouldered shrug. “Maybe it is that simple. Not everything has to be one of your complicated brain puzzles,” she said with a small, teasing smile. “Sometimes a feeling’s just a feeling.”

Loki captured her wandering fingers with his hand, bringing them to his mouth and kissing them softly. “Allow me a moment of foolish sentiment,” he murmured, meeting her eyes. When Darcy gave a slight nod, he continued. “You complete me, Darcy Lewis. You keep me sound and stable, and I fear that I would be lost without you.”

“Nothing foolish about that,” she said, feeling her heart pick up speed when his gaze turned heated. “Any time you want to profess your undying love, I’m all ears.”

If there was one thing Darcy was an expert at it was breaking the mood after a tense, serious moment, and sure enough Loki laughed, swooping in to kiss her thoroughly.

“At the moment, I would rather show than tell,” he purred, breath warm against her lips as he slid his palms down her back, drawing her closer.
“Showing is good,” Darcy replied weakly when he suddenly rolled over, pinning her beneath him. “Yeah, showing is freaking spectacular.”

The wedding festivities carried on throughout the rest of the day (Darcy suspected they’d be lasting all month really; Asgardians sure loved a good celebration) and it was late in the afternoon when she finally managed to pull Jane aside for a few minutes to say her goodbyes.

It felt like the end of an era to Darcy and at the thought of leaving her friend behind, a sad sense of nostalgia swept through her. It was downright weird to be heading back to Earth without Jane by her side, and Darcy didn’t quite know what to say to her long-time friend and boss. Hallmark didn’t exactly make a ‘so you’ve gone to space to become a princess’ card for those types of occasions.

“You’ll be okay, right?” Jane asked once the two of them had snuck away from the rowdy celebrations still going on in the main dining hall.

“I think so?” Darcy’s voice was unnaturally high, her reply coming out sounding like a question. She’d be lying if she said she wasn’t at least a little overwhelmed by the number of unanswered questions running through her head. Would she really be fine? What would she do in D.C., especially now that her safety net - the familiarity and comfort of Jane’s lab back in New Mexico - was gone?

“I dunno Jane,” she finally admitted, rubbing her forehead as a stress-induced headache began to settle behind her eyes. At least she assumed it was stress-induced. It could have also been a hangover now that she was drying out after all the wine she’d downed over the last two days. “Hopefully S.H.I.E.L.D. can hook a girl up with a decent job, cause I’m sure as hell not going to sit on my ass all day while Loki’s out training.”

“I still have a couple of contacts from a conference I went to in Washington a few years ago,” Jane said. “I’m sure I could pull some strings, see if anyone’s hiring.”

Darcy shook her head. “I appreciate the offer but I feel like this is something I’ve got to figure out for myself,” she explained. “It’s like all this stuff’s been happening around me, pushing me in certain directions, but I’m not in control of any of it. Now that D.C. and this Avengers thing are really happening, I have to take control and start making some hard decisions, you know?”

Jane nodded, catching the deeper, unspoken meaning of Darcy’s words. “The apple,” she said softly, “have you given it any more thought?”

“I don’t know what the hell I’m doing,” Darcy groaned out of frustration. “Loki said that he’d wait for as long as I needed - and I believe him - but that doesn’t help me from feeling like the world’s biggest douchebag for stringing him along. I swear, when it comes to that fucking apple I’m the most indecisive person on the planet...or technically off the planet right now.”

“It’ll all work out,” Jane assured with a warm smile. “When the timing is right you’ll know, but until then don’t rush it. This is no small decision.”

“Aw Janey, always my voice of reason,” Darcy threw her arms around her friend, pulling her into a hug. “Damn, I’m gonna miss you.”

“Me too,” Jane said, giving her a tight squeeze, “but believe it or not, I get full cell reception out in Frigga’s gardens, so really I’m only a text or phone call away whenever you need to talk.”
“Seriously?” Darcy pulled away with a look of surprise.

Jane nodded. “Thor explained it as some type of thinning between realms, a natural weak spot in the barriers separating one from the other,” she said, eyes lighting up with science-induced excitement. “I need to study it more before I can come up with any proper theories but it’s pretty amazing, right? I mean, what if those weak spots exist back on Earth as well? If I could find one, it would make a perfect test site for the Einstein-Rosen Bridge. This could be a huge breakthrough in the field of inter-dimensional travel.”

“Yeah and huge for your phone bill too,” Darcy added. “How much do you figure the roaming charges are all the way out here on Asgard?”

Jane grimaced. “I’m not even going to think about that right now. Can’t we focus on the exciting scientific development part instead,” she pleaded.

“Sure thing. You’re the princess,” Darcy replied with a grin. “What kind of guest would I be if I ignored an order from the newest member of Asgard’s royal family?”

Jane gave her a skeptical look, rolling her eyes good-naturedly. “So the princess title changes everything, does it? When I was your boss, I never got half that much respect from you.”

“That was because I was a bored, semi-reluctant unpaid intern,” Darcy pointed out. “Besides, once we got used to working with each other I started being only half as annoying.”

“Only half?” Jane echoed, shaking her head. “I’d call it more like three-quarters.”

Darcy pressed her hands to her chest with a mock hurt expression. “You wound me, Jane. I was nothing but a total sweetheart to you.”

“Sure, when you weren’t screwing with my ringtone and replacing my computer background with weird cat photos,” Jane replied, a slight grin tugging at her lips.

“I was just trying to keep you hip,” Darcy defended, “lolcats were all the rage back then, and I know you kept that Jay-Z song as your ringtone even after you figured out how to change it.”

“Okay, okay. Guilty,” Jane admitted with a light laugh, sobering as she added, “I really will miss you, Darcy. You know, once all of this settles down,” she waved her hand in a gesture encompassing the surrounding palace and her fancy Asgardian robes made up of rich reds and golds, indicating her new royal status, “when I get a chance to look into those inter-realm weak spots and do some further tests with the Bridge, I could really use some help. Can I count you in?”

Darcy grinned, feeling some of her earlier sadness begin to lift. That was the beauty of having a true, solid friendship. Nothing ever changed unless you let it, and neither she nor Jane had any intentions of letting that happen.

“Damn right,” she replied. “Don’t you dare go planning any crazy science adventures without me.”

She took the Bifrost back to New Mexico alone.

Loki had gone straight to Jotunheim, intent on picking out a replacement King as soon as possible, probably so he wouldn’t have to set foot on that realm any more times than strictly necessary, Darcy assumed. He was still largely uncomfortable with that side of himself, so much so that she had never
even seen his Frost Giant form. No matter how many times she begged and pestered and pleaded, his answer was always a distinctly firm no.

Someday they would get there; Darcy was sure of it. Slowly but surely Loki continued to offer up more and more about his past, and the night spent in his old Asgardian bedroom had been yet another guard let down, another layer peeled away, bringing her closer to the very core of who he was as a person. She was certain that he would show her his Jotun side when he was ready, but in the meantime she would just keep prodding him along. There was no shame in taking baby steps.

While he was gone she tidied up her room, pulling her old suitcases from the closet and stuffing all her belongings into them while trying to ignore the nervous gymnastics competition going on inside her stomach. Somersaults and cartwheels didn’t even cover the half of it; it was more like a whole Olympic-worthy routine, complete with tumbling and a few fancy, stress-induced backflips too.

She had no idea what to expect in D.C. but at least meeting with Director Hill had lowered Darcy’s anxiety from ‘seriously freaking out’ to somewhere around ‘cautiously optimistic’ instead. The woman definitely had a plan, not to mention an iron will and epic amounts of determination to back it up, and Darcy figured that if she had to put her trust in anyone to scrape together a rag-tag team of heroes to save the planet, it would be Maria Hill.

It was just as Darcy was considering the Director’s abundance of badassery when a soft knock made her turn to find Loki standing in the open doorway, casually leaning his weight on the doorframe. As much as he may have tried to hide it, right away she could tell that he was feeling equally as nervous about their move to D.C. Normally he never would have knocked. No, the mischievous little shit much preferred to use his magic to scare the ever-loving daylights out of her, randomly popping in and out of rooms on a whim.

“Everything settled back at the snowflake kingdom?” She asked, planting her hands on top of her overflowing suitcase and trying to smoosh it down enough that the zipper would close.

“For now, yes,” Loki spoke with visible relief. “With any amount of luck, my presence there will not be required again until my time upon Midgard comes to an end.”

“Let’s hope so,” Darcy replied, feeling a little pang in her chest at the thought of inevitably having to part ways with him in a few months’ time. Not wanting to dwell on that she shook off the feeling, saying, “So, will we be hitching a ride to Washington on Loki’s Amazing Technicolor Bifrost?”

Loki gave her a strange look. “I can only assume that you are trying to be clever.”

“I am clever, thank you very much,” Darcy replied, grabbing a balled-up pair of socks from her suitcase and chucking them in the general direction of his head. “All my best one-liners are wasted on you,” she complained.

Loki easily caught the sock projectile, grinning as he casually tossed it in one hand before lobbing it back in her direction. It landed perfectly on top of her suitcase and Darcy resisted the urge to roll her eyes at him in all his agile, coordinated perfection.

“My time would be wasted on such frivolous things as the learnings of popular Midgardian culture,” he said, slowly approaching until their bodies were nearly brushing and Darcy could practically feel the heat radiating off of him.

She wet her lips, fumbling for some kind of smart-ass comment but coming up dry. The hungry glint in his eyes was too damn distracting. “Funny, I never heard you complain any time Wheel of Fortune
came on,” she finally retorted.

“Ah, well that’s different.” Loki’s hands found her hips, pulling her flush against him.

“How?” Darcy breathed, rocking her hips forward and shivering when she was rewarded with a low noise from Loki as he bent his head, lips grazing the shell of her ear.

“Because...Gods, Darcy,” his voice faltered as she pressed herself more firmly against him, grinding in a slow, circular motion, “because...”

“Yeah?” She prompted, nudging her suitcase out of the way before easily pushing him down onto the mattress, swinging one leg over his hips and leaning her weight on her hands as she bent over him. “Tell me.”

“I’m trying,” Loki groaned, sounding pained as she resumed rocking her hips; the better angle bringing them in closer contact, “but you make it rather difficult to focus.”

“So you admit defeat?” She lowered her head until their noses brushed, biting her lip to conceal her grin.

Loki’s eyes narrowed. “You play dirty, my dear.”

“And you don’t?” Darcy countered, the end of her reply coming out on a gasp when his hands locked on her waist, holding her in place as he thrust up against her.

Her reaction brought a pleased smirk to Loki’s face and he repeated the movement, rolling his hips up until Darcy’s breath was coming out in short pants. “I do so enjoy the way you challenge me.”

“Well someone has to keep you on your toes,” she said before closing the remaining space between them and dropping her mouth to his.

Loki gave an appreciative hum, his hand sliding up the back of her neck and fistling in her hair as he deepened their kiss.

Just as Darcy’s hands were creeping towards the closure on the front of his pants, intent on getting her hands on the skin underneath, she was interrupted by the chime of the reminder alarm on her phone.

“Shit,” she muttered, reluctantly rolling off of Loki. “We’re gonna be late.”

“S.H.I.E.L.D. can wait,” he said, making a grab for her.

Darcy dodged him, quickly hopping off the bed before he could pull her back down. “Nope, they’re expecting us and you’ve got a good first impression to make,” she reminded him. “Don’t want to be late for your first day of Avenger training.”

Loki groaned, dragging a hand over his face rather dramatically. “The training does not begin until the morning.”

“Yeah but we have to move all our junk into the apartment first and on top of that, Director Hill probably has a mountain of non-disclosure agreements, waivers, and whatever else waiting to be signed,” Darcy said, ignoring his little show of displeasure and turning her attention back to her neglected suitcase. She threw her weight onto it and when she finally managed to pack it down enough that it successfully zipped shut, she blew out a tired breath, hauling it over to the door.
“Okay. One down, two to go,” she said, surveying the remaining pair of over-stuffed suitcases she hadn’t gotten around to tackling yet.

“No need for that,” Loki spoke as he got to his feet, easily waving his arm and causing Darcy’s luggage to briefly flicker before it disappeared completely.

“Um...what did you just do?” She questioned with a lift her eyebrows.

“Your belongings are safe and secure,” Loki assured. “I have merely placed them into an inter-dimensional pocket. I will retrieve them once we reach S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters.”

Darcy crossed her arms over her chest, giving him an exasperated look. “You couldn’t have done that ten minutes ago when I was on the losing end of a wrestling match with that suitcase?”

Loki shrugged; a small grin tugging at his lips. “I could have,” he agreed, “but you look so endearing when you struggle.” He laughed then, skillfully dodging the pillow Darcy hurled at him.

“Ass,” she muttered, trying to hide her smile.
Their accommodations were, in a word, awesome.

While S.H.I.E.L.D. outwardly appeared to be fairly bland and unmemorable, the interior of their assigned living quarters were anything but.

“Woah, sweet digs,” Darcy said, gawking as she stepped into their new apartment.

It was surprisingly spacious; complete with two bedrooms, a bath, and a joint kitchen and living room that put her and Jane’s little New Mexico house to shame.

With all its glass, stainless steel and sleek, dark-stained wood, she felt a bit like she’d stepped into some futuristic alternate dimension. Not even the Jetsons had it this good.

Loki appeared far less impressed by their surroundings, taking a quick glance around the space before offering a noncommittal shrug. “I suppose it will suffice.”

Darcy rolled her eyes. “Well it’s no golden space palace but it’ll have to do, your highness,” she said dryly.

A slow, wicked smile spread across Loki’s face. “Say that again,” he ordered.

“Your highness?” Darcy raised her eyebrows in question. “I think you missed the all the sarcasm thrown in there.”

“No, I certainly caught that,” Loki replied. “I simply chose to ignore it in favour of hearing you address me with such a proper title.”

“Oh, I see. You like that, do you?” Darcy grinned, turning to make her way down the fancy hallway towards the bedroom while Loki trailed after her. She would have described it as puppy-like, only the way he stalked towards her was anything but sweet and wholesome. Instead he moved with slow and sure intent, like a predator calculating his attack.

It was hard to ignore the spark of heat in his eyes and even though Darcy was glad to see that he didn’t seem so stressed anymore, she still did her best to pay as little attention to it as possible. There was a ridiculous amount of organizing and unpacking to be done and if she gave into him now, their whole afternoon would be lost and she’d be wearing wrinkled clothes straight from her suitcase for the foreseeable future.

“Can you do the magic-magic thingy and make my luggage appear?” She asked once she’d opened
Of course,” Loki replied with a smile that was equal parts devious and charming as he added, “if you ask nicely.”

There was an incredibly attractive edge to his tone; a wicked flirtatiousness that made Darcy’s pulse quicken. She knew exactly where he was trying to steer their conversation. A test of willpower was really not what she needed at the moment so she huffed out a sigh before planting her hands on her hips.

“Alright, alright,” she relented, clearing her throat and putting on her brightest, sweetest voice; the one that always used to work on Jane whenever Darcy had begged off early on Friday afternoons. “Oh mighty god of mischief, would you pretty please pull my suitcases out of your weird space travel pocket?”

Loki briefly considered her request before shaking his head. “No,” he decided, “that will not do.” He paused then, suddenly grinning so widely, Darcy could practically see the lightbulb switch on above his head. “I think I shall like to see you kneel as well,” he declared.

“What?” Darcy’s heart skipped a beat and she wet her lips, wondering if she misheard him. The logical part of her brain hoped that she did, while her annoyingly insatiable bonded side was secretly wishing that she hadn’t.

“I would have you pay proper respect to your king,” Loki instructed, gesturing to the floor with a tilt of his chin. “Kneel.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Darcy stared at him, feeling a slow, warm heat begin to creep over her skin.

Loki made a soft *tsk* noise, shaking his head as he took a step closer. “Such a disobedient girl. It seems you are in need of a lesson in manners as well.”

“Look, I’m not gonna lie, this roleplay thing is really hot but we don’t have time right now,” Darcy insisted, holding her palms up as if that might stop his advances. “The apartment’s a total disaster and there are a million things to get done before you start training in the morning, and...and...”

The rest of her little rant died on her lips as Loki closed the distance between them, watching her with dark eyes. “We were interrupted by your telephone earlier,” he murmured, his gaze flicking down to rest on her mouth, “and I have no intentions of allowing that to happen again. I want you, Darcy. Now will you kneel for me?”

Well, hell. How was she supposed to resist that? The answer, Darcy suspected, was that it was physically, biologically, straight-up impossible.

She knew she couldn’t argue with science (who’d have ever guessed that her work with Jane would come in handy at a time like this?) so Darcy gave in, standing on her toes and bringing her mouth up to meet his, only Loki stopped her a moment before their lips could make contact.

“Not yet,” he said, tracing her bottom lip with his thumb and making her pulse go wild. “First, you kneel.”

Darcy made a frustrated noise in the back of her throat, quickly dropping to her knees on the floor before him. “Fine, but you know you’re not actually *my* king, right?” She tipped her head back, craning her neck to look up at him. “Born and raised Earthling here, in case you’ve forgotten.”
“Practically speaking, you are correct,” Loki acknowledged. “I have no hold over you nor your realm, but I am yours in many other respects, regardless of whether I wear the title of prince, king, god, or man.”

Darcy blinked, trying to process what he’d just said. “Okay, this feels weird,” she admitted. “I’m the one doing the kneeling but it sounds like you’re saying that you belong to me? Is that what I’m getting out of all that fancy talk?”

“Yes,” Loki’s answering grin was so stunningly attractive, Darcy had to remind herself to breathe.

“Well, that’s...wow.” Her brain stalled, leaving her momentarily speechless as she gathered her thoughts. “You know,” she mused, “the world is damn lucky that I’m a pretty decent person because having a totally smitten Norse god at my disposal is basically begging me to go all supervillain and have you do my evil bidding.”

“Oh?” Loki’s grin turned into an outright smirk. “Care to take over a realm, darling?”

Darcy laughed, shaking her head. “This has got to be the worst timing ever to be having a conversation about potential world domination. S.H.I.E.L.D. probably has this place totally wired up with bugs and cameras.”

“Four to be precise,” Loki said and when Darcy raised her eyebrows, he elaborated, “one camera over the main entrance, two voice recorders in the kitchen and lounge, and one in the bedroom. Of course, I dismantled them all within moments of our arrival.” From his tone, Darcy couldn’t quite tell whether he was bragging or trying to assure her that Big Brother no longer had eyes on them. Probably a little of both.

“Seriously? In here?” She automatically glanced up at the corners of the room, feeling her skin crawl at the thought of S.H.I.E.L.D. keeping tabs on them in the bedroom of all places. “Ew.”

“It was to be expected, really.” Loki reached for her hand, pulling her back up onto her feet now that the mood had been dampened. “I would have to question S.H.I.E.L.D.’s competence if they were not concerned with monitoring my activities. As you may know, I can be rather dangerous.” He smirked, tugging on Darcy’s hand to guide her in close to his body.

“Yeah I’m really gonna need to sit in on one of your training sessions by the way,” she said, letting her fingers slide up the expanse of his chest. Just thinking of Loki in action, all suited up in leather and armour, totally immersed in the heat of the moment and moving with perfectly orchestrated attacks, was almost more than her imagination could handle.

She must have been wearing her thoughts pretty clearly on her face because Loki gave a short chuckle as he pulled her closer, securing his arms around her waist. “Does that excite you, Darcy?”

His voice was a rich murmur in her ear, making her shiver.

“The thought of you in sexy ass-kicking mode? You could say it’s doing a little something for me,” Darcy replied, popping up onto her toes to bring their mouths closer together, “but right now, I’ve got something else in mind. It’s your turn,” she said, gaze flicking up to meet his. Once he caught the full meaning of her words, his eyes went wide with surprise and something else that she couldn’t quite identify. Definitely arousal. Maybe a little admiration too.

“Truly?” He murmured, hands dragging down her back until they rested on her hips.

“Oh yeah,” Darcy pulled herself up to her full height, trying to look as stern as possible despite the smile tugging at her lips. “This works both ways, hot stuff. Now kneel for me.”
He went about it in a painfully slow manner, first dropping to one knee and then glancing up to
gauge her reaction. When she visibly swallowed, tongue darting out to wet her lips, he brought his
other knee down to the floor before sitting back on his heels and looking up at her again.

“Will this suffice?” His voice was rough and husky in a way that made Darcy shiver as a warm pulse
of desire stirred low in her stomach.

“Just one more thing,” she added. “I want to hear you say that you’re mine.”

From the heat of the look Loki gave her, she felt like the temperature of the room had just rocketed
up to a hundred degrees. Her breath was coming out in shallow exhales and her hands were itching
to touch him, so she forced herself to press them flat against her thighs.

“I am yours,” Loki spoke with a serious, genuine sincerity that made her heart squeeze tight in her
chest. “Always, Darcy.”

To hell with willpower; she was on the floor in an instant, pushing Loki down and kissing him
fiercely while her hands tugged up the hem of his shirt.

“Your unpacking?” Loki reminded her, biting back a small noise of pleasure when Darcy’s lips
moved from his mouth down to his jaw and the column of his throat.

“You’re gonna do it for me later,” she replied breathlessly, hands gliding up under his shirt before
she lightly scraped her nails down his abs, making him shiver as her fingers dipped low to the
waistband of his pants, “seeing as how this is your fault anyway, Mr. Can’t-Keep-Hands-To-
Himself.”

“I don’t recall touching you,” Loki noted with a sly grin. “I merely asked you to kneel.”

“But you knew exactly how that would end,” Darcy accused, narrowing her eyes playfully. She
knew him well enough by now to understand that he was always calculating, always planning,
always acutely aware of every possible outcome his words could produce.

When her hand traveled lower, sliding under the soft black material of his pants, Loki gave a low
hiss as his hips instinctively lifted.

“Gods, Darcy,” he groaned, body tensing as she began to tease him with slow, long strokes. “Am I
to consider this my punishment?”

“Yeah, I think you should,” she grinned, bending forward to kiss him briefly. Once they parted,
Darcy dropped her mouth to his ear, softly whispering an order of, “you don’t come till I tell you to.”

Loki swore in a language that was definitely not English, and then his hands were tangling in her
hair, pulling her back down to him.

He immediately deepened the kiss, tilting his head and sweeping his tongue into her mouth until her
heart was pounding loud in her ears and she felt dizzy with want.

She couldn’t even call it want, Darcy realized; it was a need. A constant, aching pull that drew her
towards him. It wasn’t even a sexual thing (although she certainly couldn’t complain about that
aspect of their relationship). Even the simplest little touches - the brush of his fingertips against the
back of her hand or the way he would tuck her hair behind her ear and stare at her like she was the
greatest thing he’d ever laid eyes on - warmed her from the inside out, giving her a feeling of total
contentedness. Of wholeness.
She took her time undressing him, first encouraging him to sit up so she could pull off his shirt, and then tugging his pants down, occasionally stopping to press kisses to the thin scar on his side as she worked her way lower.

Once he was bare Loki reached for her wrist, gently pulling her back up the length of his body until she was sitting on his thighs, straddling him. He returned the favour then, sliding his palms under her shirt, trailing them up her ribs and taking the fabric with him as Darcy instinctively lifted her arms, allowing him to work her shirt up over her head and toss it aside.

He was obviously in no hurry and rather than reaching for her jeans next, he propped himself up on one arm while the opposite hand traveled upwards, stopping between her shoulder blades and holding her in place as he leaned in and dragged his tongue across the swell of her breast.

Her breath hitched as Loki continued his exploration along the top edge of her bra. The teasing was almost unbearable and she gave a soft whine of frustration, fumbling to undo the clasp and pull it off before she brought her hand to the back of his neck, guiding him down to exactly where she wanted him.

His mouth was gentle, wet and impossibly warm as it closed over one nipple, making Darcy shiver and arch up to meet him, and when he repeated the action on the opposite side, she outright moaned, shifting her hips and pushing against him in an attempt to relieve some of the burning ache between her thighs.

Her hands slid off his shoulders and down his chest, intent on moving towards the button on her jeans, but Loki caught her hand before she could make it that far, threading his fingers with hers and keeping her still.

“Oh my god, Loki. Sometime this century please,” she gave a short huff of irritation.

“Are you eager, darling?” He grinned, watching her with dark, heated eyes. “I thought I was to be the one begging for mercy.”

Darcy quieted him with a firm, fast kiss. “Shut up and get me out of my pants,” she instructed.

With that stupid, gorgeous grin still in place, he helped her tug off her jeans and panties before Darcy settled over him, planting her palms on his stomach and lowering herself down slowly, biting her lip to hold in a groan.

In response, Loki made a low, choked noise, his hands finding her waist and squeezing gently when she rocked her hips in small, short movements, adjusting to the size and feel of him.

She kept up the maddeningly slow pace until Loki was panting and his grip on her had tightened to the point where Darcy expected she’d find a series of fingertip-shaped bruises running along each hip tomorrow.

“More, Darcy. Please.” His voice was a rough, throaty growl that automatically brought goosebumps to Darcy’s skin. He sounded way too good when he was begging her. She needed more of it.

“Tell me what you want,” she replied softly, rocking her hips again and delighting in the way his eyes fell shut and the muscles in his neck tensed as he held himself together.

He could have easily taken control of the situation, rolling her onto her back, overpowering her in strength and size, but he chose not to. He was pushing aside that base instinct and letting her lead, and in Darcy’s opinion, it was all kinds of hot.
“I need – ah,” he pulled in a sharp breath when she leaned forward, subtly shifting angles and forcing herself to continue that drawn-out, relaxed pace. She wasn’t quite ready to give in just yet; she wanted to tease him a little longer. “Faster,” he managed to get out.

She sped up only a bit as she leaned in to kiss him and when she pulled back, Loki followed her up, chasing her mouth with his own. The pure neediness of the action caused Darcy’s resolve to break; it was way too hard to hold back when she wanted this just as much as he did.

She brought her lips down to his again and Loki made a noise of pleasure deep in his throat, tangling a hand in her hair as he pushed his tongue into her mouth. Then he moved, thrusting his hips up, and Darcy almost bit off his tongue.

“Holy fuck,” she gasped once she’s torn her mouth away from his.

Loki’s lips still lingered on her jaw and as soon as she was done voicing her surprise, his mouth was on hers again. She could quite happily give him every ounce of breath in her lungs, Darcy thought as she angled her head and deepened the kiss. Who needed air anyway?

The pleasure coiling low in her stomach was burning hotter now, and with a needy whine she started moving in earnest, raising herself up and met each of his thrusts with a roll of her own hips.

“Darcy,” Loki was breathing heavily, watching her with an expression that made her heart – and a few other choice areas – give a sudden, heavy throb. “I must-”

“God yes,” she breathed out the response before he’d even finished the question, and Loki immediately flipped her onto her back, grabbing her thigh and pulling it up high over his hip.

The first sharp thrust left Darcy breathless. The second pulled a long, throaty groan from her that probably qualified as obscene, and by the third she was too far gone to do much else but cling to him, riding out each wave of pleasure.

“Now,” she spoke urgently, feeling her thighs start to tremble around him, “come with me right now.”

Loki moaned, dropping his weight down onto his elbows and pressing his face into the curve of her neck as he let go, losing all rhythm as he moved with a few final, rough thrusts. “Oh Gods. Darcy.”

She came on a broken cry, back arching up as she felt Loki join her, and when it was over they remained in their tangled heap on the floor, breathing slowly evening out.

Loki nosed along her ear before pressing a kiss further up on her temple. “Perhaps the bed might be more comfortable?” He asked wryly, eyes sliding to the spacious king-sized bed that sat just a few feet from them.

“Sure,” Darcy mumbled, “just give me an hour to get my legs working again.” She was feeling deliciously warm and boneless at the moment, swimming in a semi-dreamy state of bliss.

Loki chuckled, easily picking her up and depositing her on the bed before he stretched out next to her. They gravitated towards each other like magnets; Darcy immediately curling into his side and Loki’s arm curving over her back to hold her close.

“Are you nervous about tomorrow?” Darcy asked, cushioning her head on his shoulder.

“Not particularly,” Loki replied. “I daresay that we have S.H.I.E.L.D. at an advantage. I hold a great deal of knowledge of the other realms, not to mention physical and magical abilities that I suspect
they would be quite keen on acquiring.”

“True, you’re basically a library and superhero all rolled into one,” Darcy mused. “Like if the Dewey Decimal System and Clark Kent had a baby together.”

Loki’s mouth pulled down into a confused frown. “What?”

“Never mind. You’ll do great,” she assured him, “because you’re smart and charming and talented and your butt’s really nice.”

At that, Loki outright snorted. “And that will be of use to me how?”

“I dunno,” Darcy admitted, “I just got carried away listing all the stuff I like about you.”

She felt his chest move with silent laughter as he shook his head, eyes bright with amusement as he pulled her closer. “How I love you, Darcy Lewis.”

Her heart skipped in her chest as Darcy turned her head, grinning into the slope of his shoulder. “Love you too.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Lo and behold, it's a new chapter! Are you guys still with me or did the release of that Loki in furs deleted scene hit you with a fatal feels overload? (The significance of the red cape kills me every time.)

“I feel like a mom sending her kid off for the first day of school,” Darcy said as they stood by the door to their apartment. Popping up onto her toes, she straightened the collar of Loki’s shirt before fixing him with a stern look. “Be nice to the other kids. Don’t get into any fights – y’know, except with the bad guys you’re supposed to punch.”

“It’s nothing more than a training exercise,” Loki reminded her. “I will hardly be engaging in fist fights.”

In response, Darcy simply shrugged one shoulder. Loki was hardly the entitled prince he’d been back when they first met, but he was still a god after all, and a competitive one at that. She was certain that he’d manage to stir up a little - or, more realistically, a lot – of friction between himself and his fellow trainees.

“You never know,” she said vaguely before planting a quick, parting kiss on his cheek and giving him a push towards the doorway. “Now go – you’re gonna be late!”

She could practically see him struggling not to roll his eyes, but nevertheless Loki started down the hallway towards the elevators that adjoined their apartment to the rest of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base.

“Remember, be good!” She called after him, leaning half way out the doorway.

“And may I remind you that this is strictly a training exercise,” he returned, throwing her a cocky grin over his shoulder. “I shall return without so much as a scratch.”

“Hand to hand combat,” Agent Romanoff announced, “engaging your opponent with nothing but your body as your only means of offense and defense. As an Avenger, it will be one of your most important lessons to learn. Guns can run out of ammo. Knives can be taken from you. You are the most reliable weapon you have.”

Loki groaned. Of course Darcy had to be right in her assumption. He would never hear the end of it from her after this.

“Something you want to share with us, Laufeyson?” Romanoff raised an eyebrow, pausing her lecture to turn her eyes towards him. Apparently his groan was not quite as internal as he had originally thought.

“No,” he muttered, flexing his hands at his sides and feeling utterly ridiculous in the flimsy Midgardian clothing he wore.
He had been issued a plain black t-shirt embellished with the S.H.I.E.L.D. logo, a pair of thin sports shorts and some odd footwear Agent Romanoff had explained to be running shoes.

He didn’t see why he couldn’t train in his standard Asgardian wear – after all, he had fought many a battle upon Asgard, Vanaheim and elsewhere in those garbs – but Romanoff had immediately dismissed the idea, insisting that his current outfit was a necessity.

“First you train light for better speed and mobility,” she had told him. “We’ll introduce uniforms later.”

“Uniforms?” Loki had questioned, crossing his arms over his chest. “Put me in that,” he nodded towards the tall, blonde candidate adjacent to him who sported a shirt so tight it bordered on the obscene, “and I will walk out these doors immediately.”

The corner of Romanoff’s mouth had then quirked up into an amused half-smile. “No one’ll be forcing you to share a wardrobe with Rogers,” she promised.

Their team was relatively small compared to what Loki had initially imagined. There were only four recruits - himself and the tight-shirted Rogers included - and they were all to be trained under the guidance of both Agent Romanoff and another Agent by the name of Barton, whom Loki had yet to meet.

For the most part they all looked rather unimpressive, Loki thought, save for the recruit they called Barnes. He seemed to be in possession of a rather unique piece of equipment. Though he mainly kept it hidden beneath the long sleeve of his sweatshirt, Loki had caught flashes of the smooth shine of metal comprising the man’s left arm.

The machinery certainly appeared to put him at more of an advantage than the other recruits –Rogers and another man Romanoff had introduced as Wilson - so Loki thought it best to keep a keen eye on him. Partly out of simple curiosity. Mainly out of distrust.

“Rogers, Wilson, pair up,” Romanoff called, drawing Loki’s attention away from the unusual bionic man. “Laufeyson, you’re with Barnes. Hit the mats and show me what you’ve got.”

“I fail to see why this is necessary. Are we not to be working together?” Loki raised an inquisitive eyebrow at the Agent. “Is that not the entire purpose of this so-called Avengers team?”

“Do you know what makes a good team?” She countered, not giving him the chance to reply as she continued without pause, “Balance. Knowing each others’ strengths and weaknesses and using that to your advantage. So first you fight each other, you get an idea of where each of your teammates excel and where their weaknesses lie, and then we’ll work from there.”

It all seemed like a rather large waste of time in Loki’s opinion, but if Romanoff wanted a sample of his talents, he was more than happy to oblige.

“Very well.” He stepped onto the training mat opposite Barnes, planting his feet and feeling a slight smirk settle across his features. This would be far too easy.

“Whenever you’re ready,” the Agent said with a brief nod towards them.

Despite Romanoff’s authorization, neither of them moved.

Loki was not stupid enough to issue the first attack; he would hold off, wait until a pattern in Barnes’ movements became clear to him, and then take his opponent down swiftly and with minimal effort.
Unfortunately, it seemed that Barnes has a similar plan in mind. He had not so much as shifted from his original position on the mat as he observed Loki carefully, angling his body in order to further conceal his metal arm, and Loki began to wonder whether Barnes considered the appendage to be more of a hindrance than any sort of help.

Behind them, the sharp squeak of sneakers on the vinyl mats and a muffled grunt indicated that Rogers and Wilson’s own match had gotten underway. At the sound, Barnes turned his head slightly, just a fraction of an inch in the direction of the noise, but for Loki, it was all the opening he needed.

Bending his knees and gathering power in his legs, he struck out like a snake, darting forward in one quick, sharp stride and intending to catch his opponent with a blow to the solar plexus.

Barnes’ attention snapped back into place almost instantly and he immediately blocked the attack with his forearm before lightly side-stepping Loki with a surprising amount of ease and agility.

Frowning, Loki quickly calculated his next move and feigned left, pausing at the last minute to redirect his attack to the opposite side where he then crouched low and extended his leg in the hopes of knocking Barnes off balance.

It worked; he caught his opponent’s ankle and Barnes took a staggering step backwards before he completely lost his footing. He tucked and rolled into the fall, landing effortlessly on one knee with his metal hand braced on the mat.

Loki gave a grim smile as their eyes met. Perhaps this would be more of a challenge than he first thought. That was fine though; it had been too long since he’d engaged in a good physically demanding fight.

With that, he launched himself forward and tackled Barnes without finesse, pinning the man’s flesh arm behind his back while pressing a knee sharply into his back, holding him down on the mat.

Barnes went lax for barely a moment before his leg came kicking up, catching Loki in the chin with enough force that if he were to be mortal, Loki would likely be facing a multitude of broken bones. Even as it was, the pain remained enough to knock him senseless for a brief second as lights exploded in his head, and by the time he’d regained his bearings, Loki found himself flat on his back in the centre of the training mat.

“One for Barnes,” Romanoff noted from where she stood on the sideline.

Loki sat up slowly, rubbing his still-tender jaw. “You were lucky,” he said shortly, looking to Barnes. “It won’t happen again.”

Barnes shrugged a shoulder, offering a faint trace of a smile. “Let’s find out.”

The second round was much of the same, and with a great deal of mounting frustration, Loki found himself staring at the ceiling yet again after a heavy blow from Barnes’ metal arm had left his head swimming and his lungs devoid of oxygen.

“Again,” Romanoff ordered.

With a growl of annoyance, Loki pushed himself to his feet determinedly. He would not be on the losing end of another match; that was for certain.

While Barnes prepared for round three, rolling his shoulder and flexing his metal fingers, Loki spread his own fingers wide, feeling his hand tingle with energy as he gathered magic in his palm, coaxing
forward a pale, swirling gold mist not unlike a small storm cloud.

He was growing impatient with this foolish exercise. It was time to bring their little skirmish to a close.

Eyeing his hand, Romanoff stepped forward with a firm shake of her head. “Put it away, Laufeyson,” she directed. “You can’t always rely on your magic to save you. Not in this job.”

He wanted to argue; to point out that it would be only fair since Barnes’ arm put him at an advantage, but pride would not allow him to complain. He was a god. He had faced far worse than this.

A certain incident involving a nearly fatal axe blow immediately came to mind and Loki suppressed a shudder, feeling a slight prickling of the skin on his side where the aftermath of that event still remained in the form of a long pink scar.

“Young man,” he spoke in a clipped tone, closing his fist and smothering the growing ball of magic.

“You want, I’ll go easy on you this round,” Barnes offered with an infuriating smirk in Loki’s direction.

“I will kill you,” Loki replied bluntly, scowling back at him.

Barnes seemed unconcerned by the threat. If anything, his smile seemed to widen. “You can try.”

“Play nice, boys,” Romanoff warned, taking up her position at the edge of the mat as she folded her arms over her chest.

They circled each other slowly this time, careful to watch for the slightest twitch of a foot or tremor of a hand that would give away the others’ intention.

The desire to produce an illusion at that moment was overwhelming; he could so easily create a simple copy of himself to distract Barnes, Loki thought, but he pushed the urge aside, deciding to abide by Romanoff’s rules. He would prove himself more than capable without the aid of magic.

Deciding on a different, more subtle plan of attack, Loki fixed his gaze just over Barnes’ right shoulder, ensuring that it lingered long enough for the other man to take notice. In the short amount of time that Loki had been able to study him, it was already apparent that Barnes had a sharp, observant eye. He was not an imbecile; he would recognize the slight action and rightly interpret it as an impending assault.

Surely enough, he did.

Barnes moved quickly, guarding his weaker flesh-and-bone side on the assumption that Loki was about to direct a hit to that area, which was exactly what the trickster wanted him to believe.

Instead of attacking to the right, Loki made himself stand in place, waiting a breath longer until Barnes was dangerously close and every ounce of self-preservation that Loki held was screaming at him to move.

Only then did he spin out of the way, twisting in a crisp, tight circle that brought him around to face Barnes’ unguarded back.

Immediately realizing his mistake, that he had left himself unprotected, Barnes reacted with a violent strike of his metal arm, but he wasn’t quite quick enough. Loki was already shoving him face-first
onto the mat, ensuring that both his feet and arms were fully restrained this time.

The impact made Barnes grunt, a grimace set on his face as Loki twisted his flesh arm behind his back.

“That’s one for Loki,” Romanoff called. “Back on your feet, guys.”

“Again?” Loki questioned, not bothering to hide his surprise.

“Again,” the Agent confirmed with a short nod. “This isn’t gym class; we’re not just breaking a light sweat here, Laufeyson. I’m training you to stay alive, and you can bet I sure as hell won’t make it easy for you.”

“Duly noted,” Loki murmured, looking back to Barnes who was slowly rolling onto his side with a hiss of pain. “Shall I go easy on you this time?” He asked, repeating Barnes’ earlier words back to him mockingly as he impulsively reached out, offering a hand to the man on the mats.

Barnes stared at his outstretched palm for a moment, finally giving a low, wheezing chuckle as he accepted Loki’s hand and the god hauled him up onto his feet.

“Not on your life,” he replied with a crooked smile.

Just like that, it was as if some invisible tension had been broken between them and they returned to their original positions on the mat, settling in for yet another round.

“Ready?” Barnes inquired with an expression that could best be described as fiercely dangerous, but yet it somehow felt playful as well. It was a look that Loki was all too familiar with - that underlying, reckless desire for combat - and it brought a dark, genuine smile to his own face.

Perhaps he and Barnes were not so different after all.

“Ready.”

When she heard the door open, Darcy tossed her phone aside, hopping up from the couch and running towards the entryway.

At the last minute she slowed to a more relaxed stride so she wouldn’t look like some desperate, overly-excited puppy waiting to greet its owner.

“Hey! How was your first da–holy hell, what happened to you?” She blurted, eyes widening as she took in Loki’s appearance.

There was a nasty gash over his left eye and a second, smaller split in the skin on his bottom lip. Sweat shone on his face and neck, and the grim set of his mouth suggested that he wore a pretty serious collection of bumps and bruises elsewhere too.

“Training,” he replied as Darcy followed him down the hall and into the bathroom.

When he started stripping off his t-shirt, pulling it over his head and tossing it into the nearby laundry hamper, she audibly gasped.

“Fuck, Loki. Is that a boot print?” She exclaimed, eyeing the angry red mark that stretched across a portion of his lower back.
“Probably,” he said with a shrug. He took a step towards the shower but Darcy caught his arm, stopping him.

He still hadn’t shifted out of ass-kicking Asgardian warrior mode; she could tell from his short, withdrawn answers and the tenseness that seemed to be radiating off of him in waves.

“Sit,” she instructed, pointing to the edge of the bath tub. “I’ll fix up those cuts.”

“They will heal shortly in their own time,” Loki insisted, hissing when her fingers grazed the injured skin at the edge of his brow bone.

“Humor me,” Darcy replied flatly, meeting his eyes with a look that dared him to object.

He made a grumpy noise but did as she asked, sitting on the ledge of the tub while Darcy grabbed the first aid kit that was stored away in the cabinet below the sink.

“Kind of like old times, huh?” She commented, spreading the kit out on the floor beside her as she settled onto her knees in front of Loki. Grabbing a cotton ball and dousing it in rubbing alcohol, she began dabbing at the cut over his eye. “I can’t believe you made me undress you when we barely even knew each other. I thought I was gonna die of embarrassment.”

“I hardly made you,” Loki retorted, gradually relaxing under her touch as his voice warmed, returning to that affectionately teasing tone that Darcy loved. “If I recall correctly, you seemed rather eager to rid me of my clothing.”

“Hey, that was all the soulmate bond, not me,” Darcy insisted, gently taking a hold of his chin and turning his head to the side as she disinfected another smaller cut further up by his hairline.

Loki chuckled, breaking off with a short, sharp intake of breath once Darcy had turned her attention to his busted lip.

“Sorry,” she murmured apologetically, “I know it stings.”

“It’s fine,” Loki replied, but the tightness in his voice made it clear that it hurt a whole lot more than he was letting on.

She pressed the cotton ball to his split skin as lightly as she could, working with sure and gentle motions until Loki eventually spoke again.

“I wanted you,” he said quietly. “That day in the washroom. I wanted you more than I had ever wanted anything,” he admitted.

Darcy paused, cotton ball hovering over his face as she wondered whether it was physically possible for a person’s heart to actually melt. It sure felt like hers was.

Making sure to avoid the cut on his lower lip, she leaned in, kissing him softly and carefully on the corner of his mouth.

“I lied,” she whispered once she’d pulled away. “It wasn’t all the bond. I wanted you too.”

“I know.” Loki grinned, cupping the back of her head and drawing her in for another kiss.

It left her distinctly weak in the knees and Darcy put a hand on his thigh, balancing herself so she didn’t fall over as she leaned into him. When her hand shifted, sliding up a little further, she made a sudden, surprised noise.
“Oh my god, you just went like eight rounds with some dude who beat the shit out of you. How do you have the energy to...?” She trailed off, waving her hand in a vague gesture over his lap.

“Ah, but I won five of those rounds,” Loki replied with a wide grin. “Is that not cause for celebration?”

Darcy snorted, shaking her head. “You Asgardians and your violence boners. How was it, anyway? The training, I mean.”

Loki went quiet as he considered her question. “It was...enjoyable. Thor and I sparred quite regularly on Asgard,” he told her. “I often miss that.”

“Yeah? You should tell him sometime,” Darcy replied, gathering up her used cotton balls and throwing them in the garbage can beside the toilet. “He probably misses it too.”

“You think so?” Loki murmured, seeming a bit surprised by the idea.

“Absolutely,” Darcy confirmed. “I know things got a little rocky between you two after the whole ‘surprise you’re adopted’ thing, but he’s still always going to see you as his brother. The day he brought you to the house back in New Mexico? You should have seen his face. He was seriously worried about you. Like, worried enough to totally disobey your father and go through all the trouble of finding a place for you to hide out so Odin couldn’t get his hands on you. He wouldn’t have done that for just anybody.”

“It could have been an act to gain leverage,” Loki pointed out as Darcy packed up the medical kit and got to her feet. “Now I owe him a rather large debt in return.”

She snorted, stepping over to the sink and cranking on the hot water before washing her hands. “Um, hello – have you met Thor? There’s no way the guy’s keeping tabs on who owes who what. He did it because you’re family; because he loves you.”

“Oh,” Loki said, apparently at a loss for any other words. His forehead went all crinkly with confusion in a ridiculously adorable way, causing Darcy to laugh as she made her way back over to him.

Brushing back a few sweaty strands of his hair, she bent down and kissed away the lines on his forehead. “You’re so cute when you’re trying to work stuff out in your head,” she said fondly, rubbing her thumb along his cheek. “You’ll figure it out. Just try talking to him sometime. You might be surprised by what can happen.”

"Wise words from one so young," Loki remarked, curling his fingers around her wrist to keep her from stepping away again.

"Hey, any time you need a little wisdom, I'm happy to deliver," Darcy replied with a grin. "Consider me your personal Gandalf. But hotter. And less bearded."

Loki's lips quirked with amusement. "Should I even ask the meaning of that?"

Darcy shook her head, letting out a soft, disappointed sigh. "Your serious lack of pop culture awareness hurts my soul. My soul, Loki."

"I suspect that might be a slight exaggeration," he said, rising from the edge of the tub and dropping a kiss onto her cheek before turning on the shower and beginning to strip off the rest of his clothing.

"My soul," Darcy repeated, although she was already quickly forgetting about rings and middle-earth
because Loki was now totally naked and stepping under the spray of water, leaving the shower door very invitingly wide-opened. To say that it was a bit of a distraction would be the understatement of the year.

"Since you remain so deeply distraught, perhaps I can ease your suffering." The suggestive grin he directed at her had Darcy biting her lip as a little thrill of anticipation shot down her spine.

"Okay, you win this time," she conceded as she started yanking her shirt over her head, "but some day I'm gonna educate you on everything you never needed to know about Midgard."

The look on Loki's face clearly said that he was humoring her. "We shall see," he said, which was Loki Code for ‘fat chance’.

"Oh it's happening," Darcy assured, struggling out of her skinny jeans and tossing them on the floor.

"And just how do you intend to force these so-called lessons upon a God?" Loki asked, watching her with hungry eyes as she finished pulling off her bra and panties before slipping into the shower.

The water was pleasantly warm but Loki’s skin felt even warmer as his hands sought out her hips, pulling her under the spray with him.

"I have my ways," Darcy replied with a smile, and whatever other arguments Loki had planned on making instantly flew from his mind as she sunk down onto her knees in front of him.

Loki swore under his breath, head tipping back as his eyes fell shut. “Yes,” he panted, "you certainly do."
“So what’s on the agenda today?” Darcy asked over breakfast.

It had been nearly two weeks since their move to D.C. and so far, Loki seemed be settling into their new routine fairly easily. He was growing surprisingly passionate about the Avengers program, though Darcy wasn’t really sure whether that was out of a moral desire to protect the Earth or his ego’s desire to never fail a challenge. Either way, it was cute to see him enjoying his training.

...well, if you ignored all the violent bits that went along with it.

“We are using knives today,” Loki said gleefully as he dug into his scrambled eggs.

“Fun,” Darcy deadpanned.

Her sarcasm seemed to go right over his head as he nodded, swallowing another bite of food before continuing. “I promised to teach Barnes a number of techniques in exchange for his knowledge on firearms.”

“Aw, you made a friend?” Darcy grinned, tearing off a piece of her toast and popping it in her mouth. Most people just swapped music or recipes with their friends, but then again, Loki wasn’t most people.

“An associate,” Loki corrected, “and that is only because Agent Romanoff insists on having us train as if we are attached at the hip.”

“Yeah, that’s called teamwork. Better get used to it, babe,” Darcy replied, sliding out of her seat and stopping to drop a kiss on the top of his head as she walked around the table, depositing her empty mug in the sink.

On her way back, Loki caught her by the arm and pulled her down into his lap. “What did you have in mind for today?” He asked conversationally, rubbing his fingers down each bump in her spine and working away the tension until Darcy practically melted against him with a content sigh.

“I think I’ll call Coulson and see if they have any use for a lab intern slash poli-sci major around here. I can’t sit around playing Rich Housewives of DC all day. I want to feel useful,” she confessed.

“You have a sharp mind and a strong will; they will be lucky to have you,” Loki said, pressing a light kiss to her cheek, the corner of her mouth, and then finally her lips.

He tasted faintly like peanut butter toast, along with that unique, distinctly Loki flavour that she could
never get enough of, so Darcy shifted in his lap, drawing closer and letting her lips part for him as he kissed her thoroughly.

“Fuck, Loki.” She broke away with a gasp, trying to get her ragged breathing under control. “You should go soon before we do something that’s totally not appropriate for a Tuesday morning at the breakfast table.”

“I can transport myself to the gymnasium in hardly any time at all,” he said, voice a low purr as he nuzzled the skin below her ear. “That gives us the better part of an hour before I must leave. Shall we see how many times I can make you call my name before then?”

His hands were warm and heavy on her thighs as they dragged upwards to catch her hips, encouraging her to grind down on his lap.

“Well,” she panted, finding it hard to think of any kind of excuse when she could already feel him hard and ready under her, “if you insist.”

“I do.” His voice was honey in her ear as he pressed a final kiss to the side of her neck. “Can you stand for me, Darcy?”

“Not when you say it like that,” she complained weakly, climbing off his lap on shaking legs and leaning her weight against the table behind her.

Loki pushed his chair back and then he was sinking down onto his knees, reaching for the tie on her pyjama pants (like hell she was bothering to get dressed that early), and a sharp bolt of desire shot down Darcy’s spine when she realized exactly what he intended to do.

He pulled her pants down slowly, taking care to pause and press warm, wet kisses to her inner thighs with each inch of thin fabric he worked down her legs. Then he returned to her waist again and repeated the whole process with her panties until Darcy was achingly wet and desperate for relief.

His hands found her thighs, curling around them warmly as he encouraged her to widen her stance, and then his head was dipping in between her legs and his breath hit her core, making her hips jerk as she gripped the edge of the table for support.

“Oh,” she gasped, not really capable of saying anything else since he’d moved on to teasing her with the tip of his tongue and it was quickly turning her brain into total and complete mush.

Her fingers automatically slid into his hair, gripping the dark strands and holding his head in place as her hips started their own slow, slight rocking motion in time with the work of his mouth.

When Loki paused, drawing back before licking a long, firm strip up her centre, a low, throaty noise slipped out of her mouth.

“Holy fuck,” she breathed, tightening her fingers in his hair to the point that a distant part of her brain thought it might be painful for him, but Loki didn’t seem to mind. If anything, it spurred him on, his hands tightening on her thighs while his mouth grew more urgent against her.

He slipped his tongue between her folds, pumping in and out, fucking her slowly, and she went totally boneless; his hands securely holding her hips being the only thing keeping her upright.

He pushed his mouth more firmly against her then, taking as much of her as possible with a hungry desperation that had Darcy gasping out his name as she wondered the thousandth time how she’d ever managed to be so lucky to find him, to be able to call him hers and know without a doubt that what he felt for her was just as strong as what she felt for him.
The muscles in her thighs trembled as Loki dragged his mouth upwards, pressing his tongue flat against her clit and evoking a breathy, drawn-out moan from her.

“That’s it,” he murmured against her skin encouragingly, making her shiver. “Come for me, Darcy.”

That voice was like magic, sliding over her skin in a warm, erotic wave, and with her back arching, Darcy did exactly as he asked.

The moment he felt her body tensing, Loki was up on his feet, shoving two fingers inside her and helping her ride out the orgasm.

“I need to see you,” he murmured, voice ragged as his eyes roved over her. “There is no sight in all of the nine realms more beautiful than your face when you are coming for me.”

“Loki,” she keened, arching against him as her hips stuttered, “oh fuck, yes.”

He kissed her then, wet and clumsy and so perfect, all she could do was return it with equal fervour, hoping he understood the words that her puddle of a brain couldn’t seem to formulate at the moment.

When they broke apart, Loki was breathing heavily, eyes black and glittering in a way that send a fresh round of desire pumping through her veins as she unconsciously wet her lips.

“That was one,” he announced, voice husky as he stared at her mouth, and then he took her by the hips, spun her around, and bent her over the table top.

“Fucking hell,” Darcy gasped out, hands searching for something to hang onto as she heard Loki shuck his own pants before his hands were warmly exploring her backside, dipping low to gently urge her legs further apart.

“Loki.” His name caught in the back of her throat as he slid into her, immediately setting a swift, firm pace that had her breath stalling.

He bent his body over her, voice a low whisper in her ear as he continued rocking his hips forward. “Breathe, Darcy,” he spoke quietly, somehow so in tune with her body that he knew she needed the reminder. Maybe it was a bond thing. Maybe it was a them thing. Darcy really liked the idea of that.

She focused on making her lungs work, drawing in a breath and exhaling in one long, extended sigh of pleasure when she felt him brush her hair aside and press a kiss to the nape of her neck, the top of her shoulder blade, and then the side of her throat where her pulse fluttered wildly.

The heat and weight of his body over hers was overwhelming in the best kind of way, enveloping her warmly as she pressed back against him, wanting more, and when his hips snapped forward again, a streak of pleasure shot through her and Darcy voiced her approval with a soft, breathy noise.

“So beautifully responsive,” Loki murmured almost absently. “You make the loveliest noises for me.”

Darcy hummed low in her throat, meeting each of his thrusts with a push of her hips. “Keep talking,” she ordered in a soft, husky voice. “I can feel...god, it feels so good.” With his chest pressed tight against her back, each of his words were a delicious, low rumble that seemed to vibrate through her whole body, leaving her greedy for more.

Loki’s response came in the form of a faint chuckle that quickly morphed into a deep groan when Darcy ground against him firmly, urging him on, and when he spoke again, his voice was low and raspy, making her shiver.
“Very well.” He brought his mouth to the shell of her ear, panting slightly. “What shall I tell you, Darcy? How exquisite you look when you are flushed and naked beneath me? How deliciously warm and tight you feel around me? How being with you, inside you, feels like more of a home than any I have ever known before?”

It was a simple confession but the raw honesty behind it felt especially weighty and significant in a way that Darcy couldn’t quite describe.

She swallowed thickly, hoping her voice didn’t crack with too much emotion as she whispered, “You feel like my home, too.”

Something seemed to shift then, the mood growing more desperate and feverish as he pulled out of her, pausing just briefly enough to turn her back around to face him, and when Darcy locked eyes with him, the look of pure, uninhibited affection on his face made her heart constrict.

“I love you so much,” she breathed, pulling his mouth down to hers as Loki lifted her to sit on the edge of the table, matching her kisses hungrily.

She automatically parted her thighs, encouraging him to step in between them, and Loki needed no further prompting as he closed the distance between their bodies, easily sinking into her again. The contact made him moan into her mouth and Darcy immediately arched against him, thinking that it was quite easily the hottest noise she’d ever heard.

“Wait.” Panting, Loki tore his mouth away, his voice sounding oddly pained as he stilled against her.

“You okay?” Darcy asked with concern, rubbing her thumb in small, soothing circles at the base of his neck.

He nodded, exhaling slowly before explaining, “I merely need a moment.”

His hands were tight on her hips, holding her completely still, and as she studied the way his body had gone rigid and his jaw clenched tight, understanding suddenly dawned on her.

“Oh! Oh.” She tried not to squirm against him, but knowing that he was a second away from losing it was only turning her on even more. “Okay, how is that both seriously hot and completely adorable at the same time?”

He groaned, shooting her a weak glare. “Darcy, you are not helping.”

"Sorry," she said lightly, feeling anything but.

After three long, measured breaths, she felt one of his arms come up to wind around her back, holding her close and helping to keep her upright as he rocked forward a bit experimentally, easing back into a steady rhythm.

Mimicking the motion, Darcy slid her arms around his neck to draw him in as her mouth slanted over his again.

Even when her lungs began to burn for air, she never fully withdrew, and neither did Loki. Instead he pressed his forehead against hers, faces so close their noses brushed as they alternated between ragged gasps and wet kisses.

“Are you close, love?” He spoke in a quiet, gravelly voice; eyes never leaving hers as his hips continued their amazingly torturous pace.
Darcy’s reply came in the form of an embarrassing little whimper that sounded vaguely like a yes. She couldn’t give a proper answer, and even if she’d wanted to, her mouth was otherwise occupied as she leaned in, taking his bottom lip between her teeth in a rough imitation of a kiss.

Loki gave a grunt of pleasure, his hips jerking from the combination pleasure-pain of the action, and it sent a little spark of heat down Darcy’s spine.

She tightened her thighs around him, feeling the rising wave of pleasure inside her building to a peak, perilously close to crashing over and sweeping her away with it.

“A little more, just a little more,” she rambled a string of encouragements in his ear, not really paying attention to the words that came tumbling from her mouth since she was too busy chasing that wave, and when she caught it, all she could do was drop her head and moan long and low against Loki’s shoulder.

She felt him let go a moment later, practically crushing her to his chest as he murmured a combination of curses and praises into her hair.

They spent a few long minutes breathing in sync with each other until Darcy lifted her head with a reluctant groan, arms still looped around his neck as she leaned her weight against him. “Oh god, what time is it?”

“Too late for my liking,” Loki replied, brushing back her messy curls as his eyes found hers. “I must leave shortly, though I would much prefer taking you back to bed.”

“You and me both,” Darcy said, giving him a light shove. “Okay, go. Shoo before I’m any more tempted to kidnap you for the day. I really don’t need an army of disapproving S.H.I.E.L.D. agents coming to the door looking for you, especially when I have sex hair and half of my pajamas are missing.”

“You look breathtaking,” Loki told her.

“Nope. Don’t even,” she warned, narrowing her eyes at him. “I will totally throw cold toast at you.” He could sweet talk her all he wanted, but she wasn’t about to let him shirk his S.H.I.E.L.D. duties. Avengers training was more important that a day spent in bed, however much her bond may disagree.

“I welcome being pelted with breakfast foods if it means that I am able to enjoy the company of such a lovely woman,” Loki purred, eyes lazily traveling over her from top to bottom.

“Ugh,” Darcy rolled her eyes, trying not to grin too obviously. “You know that you’re the worst, right? Like, the worst.”

In response, Loki smirked. “I love you too, darling.”

Once the insatiable nuisance that was her soulmate had finally left for his training, Darcy treated herself to an extra-long hot shower to work away the lingering kinks and soreness in her muscles before planting herself in the living room, curling into the corner of the couch as she pulled up Agent Coulson’s number on her phone.

“Miss Lewis,” he greeted her cordially, sounding slightly out of breath. He was probably in the middle of walking those winding Labyrinth-style mazes that S.H.I.E.L.D. called hallways. “What
can I do for you? I hope you’re finding your accommodations to be sufficient, but if you have any issues—"

“No no, it’s nothing like that,” Darcy assured him. “The apartment’s great. Like, really great. Super great. Maximum greatness achieved.” And thank God S.H.I.E.L.D. was footing the bill for it all, she thought, biting her tongue before she accidentally said that part out loud. Just imagining the actual cost of renting a place that swanky in the middle of the city gave her a good case of the financial sweats.

“Glad to hear it,” Coulson replied. “I assume there’s another reason for your call then.”

“There is,” Darcy confirmed, taking a breath before deciding that it would be easiest to just dive in and get straight to the point. “I want a job...uh, please?”

Wow. Talk about professional. With a brilliantly worded request like that, they’d be making her S.H.I.E.L.D. Director in no time.

Darcy grimaced into the phone, wishing that she had even half of Loki’s silvertongued smooth-talking abilities right about then.

To his credit, Coulson didn’t comment on her awkwardness, instead saying, “I’ll see what I can dig up. We’re always in need of more help down in the labs. I know you previously assisted Dr. Foster, so you’ll probably be familiar with how we operate. Do you have much experience with biochemistry?”

“None,” Darcy admitted, quickly adding, “but I’m a fast learner. And a damn good problem solver. I used to work out a lot of the kinks in Jane’s research for her.”

She suddenly felt like she was being interviewed and Darcy adjusted her grip on the phone as she sat up a little straighter, feeling her palms grow damp.

There wasn’t much that could make her nervous, but interviews always tended to do that to a person. There was something inherently scary about the whole process; trying to sell yourself like a commodity, being evaluated on your wits and brains by a virtual stranger, someone whose opinion shouldn’t have really mattered to you, but it did. It mattered a whole lot. Even the unflappable Darcy Lewis wasn’t immune to that.

She was so busy internally freaking out, she almost missed Coulson’s reply.

“Well, the spot’s yours if you want it,” he said. “I’ll talk to Director Hill and have the paperwork drawn up. Welcome to the team, Miss Lewis.”

“Thanks,” Darcy bit her lip, trying to contain her elated grin.

She held it together for all of three seconds, and as soon as Coulson ended their call, she fist-pumped the air with a badly-contained squeal of excitement.

Yep. So professional.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Amidst all the smut, plot emerges!

Much to her delight, working in the S.H.I.E.L.D. lab was seriously fun. Minus the occasional handling of infectious diseases and bacteria that could probably (read: definitely) eat her eyeballs out, that was.

So while Loki was out happily throwing knives all day, Darcy was getting giddy over spore-filled petri dishes. When she thought about it like that, they really were a perfectly matched pair of weirdos.

Her boss slash supervisor was a young, bright, and unwaveringly competent biochemist called Dr. Simmons, and working for her wasn’t all that much different than the time she’d spend with Jane, Darcy found. They were both incredibly passionate about their work, only Dr. Simmons – Jemma, she’d insisted on being called – was borderline OCD about the state of her lab, whereas Jane preferred to live in a data tornado of unorganized chaos.

Darcy didn’t mind it though; at least when Jemma asked her for logs and reports, she could actually find them without having to search through a mountain of old paperwork first, but it did make her nostalgic for the days of burnt coffee and Jane’s homemade scientific doo-dads.

“Have you had a chance to look at that soil sample Coulson brought in?” Darcy asked without looking up from the screen of her laptop as she continued typing her latest S.H.I.E.L.D. report.

They had a good system going; the two of them working together with an easy sense of companionship like a well-oiled, science-spewing machine. Agents brought in all kinds of obscure and unusual samples for analysis, Jemma did her science thing, and then Darcy would log the results in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s database before organizing them into something a bit more readable and firing off the data in an email to the appropriate S.H.I.E.L.D. personnel.

“Working on it right now,” Jemma answered from across the lab, head bent over a large microscope as she fiddled with the lense adjustments. “Huh. That’s strange. Are you sure this is the right sample?”

“Yeah, why?” Darcy glanced up curiously, immediately noticing Jemma’s deep frown and the way her forehead wrinkled in confusion. That wasn’t good. The biochemist was a walking encyclopedia of all things brainy; she didn’t do confusion.

Pushing back her chair, Darcy stood and wandered to the opposite side of the lab.

“Look right here,” Jemma said, stepping back so Darcy could peer into the microscope. “I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Yeeehah,” Darcy drew out the word, a sudden nervousness stirring to life in her stomach as she
studied the slide containing Coulson’s soil sample. “I’m no scientist, but I’m pretty sure that dirt’s not supposed to move like that.”

Behind her, she heard Jemma snatch up her tablet from the nearby countertop, fingers flying over the touch screen with practiced ease.

“It gets stranger,” the scientist spoke grimly. “There are faint traces of an organic compound in the soil – DNA, if you will, so in theory, running a scan of the cellular structure should tell us what it is...only it’s not matching up with any records in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s database.”

She turned the screen of the tablet towards Darcy, showing off the flashing red message of ‘NO MATCH FOUND’.

“You’re sure it would be in the database?” Darcy asked, taking a nervous half-step away from the microscope. “Maybe it’s just really rare or not native to America or something.”

“It would be there,” Jemma assured, running the scan again and frowning when it produced the same identical error message, “I personally curated it myself. That database holds a record of every known microorganism on the planet; every type of bacteria, fungi and genetic material in existence.”

“Okay,” Darcy acknowledged, worriedly chewing her lower lip, “so if we rule out all of that, what are we left with?”

Jemma reached up, brushing the errant strands of hair off her forehead with the back of her wrist since her hands were still clad in blue medical gloves. Gloves that could now be contaminated with God only knows what, Darcy thought. Without the help of their database, there was no way of telling what kind of nasty substances were living in that soil.

“Nothing good, I imagine,” Jemma responded. “I do have a theory, but I don’t think you’ll like it.”

“Well, you’re not wrong there,” Darcy muttered. From the tone of Jemma’s voice alone, she already didn’t like where this conversation was going.

“Whatever is in this soil,” Jemma tapped the base of the microscope, "I'm willing to bet that it isn’t human.”

“Fan-fucking-tastic.” Darcy’s eyes slid warily to the glass slide that sat innocently on the microscope in front of her. “Just where the hell did Coulson get this weird-ass dirt from anyway?”

Jemma reached for the plastic sample baggy on the counter, checking the label. “New Mexico,” she read.

Oh shit.

Darcy’s heart leapt into her throat as she snatched the baggy from Jemma’s hands, quickly scanning the rest of the information that had been scrawled on the ID label.

The sample was collected only two weeks ago, she discovered; long after Thor and Loki had last been there. So if it wasn’t the Bifrost leaving some kind of foreign, magical residue behind, whatever (or whoever) did was brand new to Earth and probably not Asgardian.

Well. Wasn’t that just peachy.

Darcy wet her lips, feeling her throat go dry as she turned to Jemma. “When I worked for Jane, we did all our research out of New Mexico. Puente Antiguo,” she explained. “There were a shit-load of
anomalies around there. Jane always thought it had something to do with the atmosphere being different – lower pressure, less pollution, something like that – but now...

Jemma, who was still furiously typing on her tablet, stopped to glance up when Darcy paused. “What do you think?” She asked with interest.

“I think Jane was half right,” Darcy spoke slowly, piecing together an idea in her head. “I think there is something different about New Mexico, but it’s not a weaker atmosphere, it’s some kind of weakening in whatever barrier separates Earth – er, Midgard, from the other realms.”

Jemma’s face lit up with understanding and she clutched her tablet tighter. “A thinning in the fabric that separates our realm from the others. It’s certainly a possibility. You think that the soil’s abnormalities could be a side effect of that?”

Darcy nodded, feeling the knot of worry in her stomach grow tighter. “Okay, so hear me out: before I left Jane, she was talking about weak spots that allowed for things to pass from one realm to another, like cell phone signals,” she said, recalling their conversation about roaming charges and Frigga’s gardens. “I think that one of those spots exists in Puente Antiguo. That would explain why weird shit is using New Mexico as its easiest point of entry to Earth, like a freaking alien superhighway.”

“Bloody hell,” Jemma breathed, eyes widening as she stared at Darcy’s hands where the harmless little bag of soil didn’t seem so innocuous anymore. “I need to call Coulson right now.”

Feeling distinctly unsettled herself, Darcy tossed the sample baggy back onto the counter, curling her arms around herself to ward off the sudden chill that ran down her spine. “Yeah, and I’d better call Jane.”

As expected, Jane practically blew a gasket when Darcy laid out her whole New Mexico theory.

She could hear in her friend’s voice that Jane desperately wanted to make the trip back to Earth to science the shit out of it all, but with still being a newlywed (and a newlywed princess, at that), she had too many important social and political obligations that couldn’t be ignored.

So instead, the astrophysicist rattled off a dozen different websites, textbooks, and scientific journals for Darcy to consult, and Darcy dutifully scribbled down all the names and titles, repeatedly assuring an anxious Jane that she would look into them right away.

Between searching through all the resources she’d gotten from Jane and pouring over old S.H.I.E.L.D. case files for any references to New Mexico, the case of the unusual dirt sample was quickly turning into a fully fledged Roswell-style mystery (it also hadn’t escaped Darcy’s notice that the capital of all things unexplained - Roswell itself - was only a couple hundred miles to their south, either).

Was it just a coincidence or something more? Darcy wasn’t sure how to answer that particular question yet. All those small, interconnecting details couldn’t be ignored, but at the same time she was starting to feel like she was one UFO-sighting away from sporting a tin foil hat.

The heavy amounts of research continued to occupy her time and thoughts to the point where it felt like in the blink of an eye, the remainder of their first four months in D.C. had suddenly flown by.

Meaning, Loki was about to leave.
They kept their goodbyes short, not wanting to make it any harder than it already was, but Darcy still couldn’t help sniffling against his shirt when he pulled her in for a tight hug.

“The time will pass quickly,” Loki assured her, but there was a perceptible sadness to his words that didn’t really do much to comfort Darcy. He never could bring himself to outright lie to her, but for once she kind of wished he would. Maybe that would make it hurt less.

Luckily her days in the lab kept her busy enough that work stayed in the forefront of her mind, causing Loki to linger at the edges of her thoughts instead of totally consuming her and turning her into a useless wreck.

Just like the last time he’d left, she still dreaded going to sleep at night though. That was when the loneliness really crept in and it was impossible for Darcy to ignore.

It was on a Thursday – her fourth day without him – as she was reluctantly pulling on her pajamas before bed when she suddenly heard a muffled noise behind her.

She jumped, whirling around to confront whoever had the balls to randomly show up in her bedroom without knocking (they wouldn’t be in possession of those balls for much longer if she had anything to say about it), only to find none other than her soulmate standing there.

“Oh my god. Make some noise next time, would you? I almost had a heart attack.” She pressed her palm to her chest, trying to calm her frantic heartbeat. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“I wished to see you,” Loki said, remaining oddly still by the foot of the bed.

That’s when Darcy noticed that something was...off. Despite him standing right in front of her, her soulmate bond wasn’t reacting. (Her heart and certain other areas sure were though. God, he looked impossibly good.)

“You sent a double?” Darcy guessed, taking a few curious steps towards him.

Loki nodded. “I am not truly here. Unfortunately, sending a projection is the most I am capable of at the moment. It is too difficult to send a solid form across realms.” His eyes were glued to her with a frustrated, longing look. “The distance between Jotunheim and Midgard is too great. Were I on Midgard, I would have the ability to send a tangible version of myself.”

“If you were on Midgard,” Darcy countered, crossing her arms over her chest, “I wouldn’t need a projection of you at all. You’d be magicking your ass into my bed every night.”

Loki laughed, closing the distance between them as his eyes continued to steadily hold hers. “How I wish I could touch you,” he murmured, raising a hand to hover over her shoulder before he dropped it back to his side.

Up close, Darcy could now see the way he seemed to faintly glow, appearing slightly fuzzy around the edges like some kind of ghostly hologram.

She brushed her fingers against his experimentally, but they passed right through his hand with no resistance.

“Damn,” she said emphatically.

“Indeed,” Loki agreed with equal disappointment in his voice.

“How long can you stay?” Darcy asked with a hopeful glance towards her bed. “Can you just sit
He nodded, shifting a bit restlessly like he was tempted to touch her again. “I would like nothing better.”

Once she’d crawled onto the mattress, Loki laid down beside her, stretching out his long limbs as he settled down on his side. It felt so familiar having him beside her, it was almost like he was really there, Darcy thought. The hard part was ignoring how weird it was to not hear him breathing or feel any heat coming off his body.

“Why didn’t you visit before? The first time you left,” she asked, cushioning her head on her pillow.

Loki swallowed, wearing an expression that Darcy couldn’t quite place. Something close to shame or embarrassment passed across his face as he wet his lips. “Given how we parted ways, I thought that you would not wish to see me,” he spoke softly, reluctant to meet her eyes.

Darcy wanted to reach for him - to touch his cheek, to wind their fingers together - and she almost did before remembering that her hand would simply pass through him. Stupid projections.

“Just because I was mad that didn’t mean I wasn’t missing you desperately,” she told him, “because I was. I missed you every single day.”

“I’m sorry, Darcy.” The pain and regret in his voice brought a sudden tightness to her chest and Darcy had to swallow twice before she could reply.

“Don’t, you’ve apologized enough for that. You were only trying to do something selfless for me, even if I couldn’t see it at the time,” she murmured, scooting her fingers closer to where his were lying on the mattress in between them. “Besides, that’s ancient history.”

The hint of a smile pulled at Loki’s lips. “I believe it’s time that you re-evaluated your use of that phrase.”

Darcy rolled her eyes, feeling a grin spread across her own face. “Meh. It’s all relative I figure, but thanks for reminding me of exactly how ancient you are, Mr. I’m So Old I’ve Partied With Dinosaurs. Wait – have you actually seen a dinosaur?”

“I am not millions of years old, Darcy,” Loki replied, sounding half exasperated and half amused.

“That didn’t sound like a no,” she replied, laughing when Loki made a face at her, attempting to scowl even though a smile still lingered at the corner of his mouth.

He raised himself up on one elbow, leaning towards her like he wanted to roll right over and trap her body beneath his, but after a moment of deliberation, he sighed and let his non-existent weight drop back down onto the mattress.

“Sucks, doesn’t it?” Darcy murmured. “I want to kiss you so bad.”

“As do I.” Loki’s voice was husky as he watched her with a deep look of longing.

Darcy cleared her throat, pushing away the thought of how good his voice sounded as she made an effort to change the subject, trying to lighten the mood. “Hey, since you’re here can I pick your brain about something?”

“Oh of course.” Loki’s expression shifted from dejected to inquisitive as he entered what Darcy liked to think of as his Know-It-All Professor Loki Mode.
“This weird dirt sample came into the lab and we’ve been trying to analyze it, but it’s...well, basically it looks alien,” she explained. “We can’t trace its origin and I’m starting to think that might be because it’s magical.”

“A fair assumption,” Loki said, nodding for her to continue.

“Right? Here’s the real kicker though,” Darcy paused, watching his face in order to gauge his reaction, “the sample came from New Mexico.”

Loki’s eyebrows lifted in surprise. “Interesting,” he murmured to himself. He fell silent for a moment, seemingly lost in thought before finally speaking again. “Perhaps Thor or I might have left it behind?”

Darcy shook her head. “See that’s what I thought at first, but the soil was only collected a few weeks ago. Even if you or Thor had left traces of some funky Asgardian DNA behind, the weather would have totally erased it long before then. I was hoping you might have an idea of what else could have left something like that in the ground.”

Loki frowned. “To my knowledge, it would not be Aesir or Jotun in nature. Though the Bifrost leaves behind a physical stamp, it is devoid of any magical residue, and as for the Jotuns, they have no direct access to Midgard. It would be impossible for them to step foot upon your realm without the aid of the Bifrost.”

“Greeeat, so it’s definitely alien and definitely nothing we’ve ever dealt with before,” Darcy sighed, rolling over and flopping onto her back dramatically. “I never thought I’d say this, but I hate being right.”

Loki offered her a small, supportive smile. “If I were to wager on anyone solving this mystery it would be you, Darcy,” he said, face turning serious, “only promise me that you go about this carefully.”

“I will,” Darcy replied, letting her head loll to the right so she could study him rather than the ceiling, “and can you keep your ears open for me? Let me know if you hear about anyone who might be making impromptu road trips to Earth?”

“Rest assured I will.” Loki scrubbed a hand over his face, and for a minute Darcy almost forgot that he wasn’t really there with her. It must have been instinctual on his part; a force of habit since projections didn’t exactly have sensory perception. “If I were truly here, I would be able to confirm whether the contents of the soil are in fact magical in nature, but as it is, I am afraid I am little help to you.” His earlier look of frustration returned tenfold as his jaw tightened.

“Hey, don’t worry about it,” Darcy spoke gently. “Besides, I don’t want to spend the little bit of time we have together talking work. Tell me about Jotunheim instead. Is everything still as dark and pointy as I remember it?”

Loki laughed, shaking his head as he gave her a bemused look. “It remains as dark and pointy as ever, my dear. Though that does remind me, I carry news of your friend Gyda. She has been appointed to the role of Royal Healer. I thought you would be pleased to hear of that.”

“I’m totally pleased, but that wasn’t exactly what I was asking,” Darcy pointed out, realizing that he’d just completely dodged the bulk of her question without even batting an eye. Sometimes she forgot exactly how sly he could really be. “I’m more concerned with how you’re doing,” she clarified.
In response, one of Loki’s shoulders raised in a slight shrug. “I dislike the climate, the palace is enormously dull, and I miss you terribly,” he paused in consideration before adding, “though I am pleased to report that no further attempts have been made on my life.”

Darcy snorted. “Yeah, always a good day when no one’s actively trying to kill you,” she said dryly, making him chuckle. “I miss you too, but we’ll make it through this. Before you know it, your four months will be up and you’ll be back in this bed muttering about my cold feet touching you and how my hair somehow always ends up in your mouth. I think that’s because you’re one of those open-mouthed snore sleepers, by the way. If you just closed that giant fly trap for a change, you wouldn’t be choking on a Darcy hairball every morning.”

“I don’t snore,” Loki replied, looking offended that she’d even suggested such a thing.

“Don’t worry, it’s cute,” she assured him, “like a little baby.”

If anything, that only seemed to offend him more. “So now you are equating me to a crying, drooling infant? How charming.”

“Totally charming.” Darcy confirmed as she bit her lip, holding back her desire to grin like an idiot. “In fact, I’ll show you just how charming I think it is when you finally get your solid butt back here in another few months.”

Loki smiled faintly, his gaze slowly lowering to study their hands where they still rested near each other on the mattress, fingertips so close that on a glance, they could almost imagine that they were actually touching.

“That,” he spoke quietly, “I most certainly look forward to.”

After that first night, Loki began the incredibly sweet routine of visiting her every Thursday around the time that she was getting ready for bed. Date night, Darcy had started calling it, and she’d be lying if she said their brief visits weren’t the highlight of her entire week.

They never did much, typically just lying beside each other on the bed, talking about anything and everything until a bleary-eyed Darcy would finally look at the clock and find that it would be past 2 am. Sometimes they wouldn’t say anything at all, content to just be near each other, quietly enjoy each other’s company before Darcy eventually drifted off to sleep.

God, she loved those nights, and on one particular occasion about a month and a half into their new routine, she decided that it was time to turn things up a notch. There were ways to get around the whole ‘no touching’ problem, Darcy figured. She’d just have to be a little creative about it. Loki couldn’t touch her, but that didn’t mean there was anything stopping him from giving directions while she touched herself.

Oh yeah. Things were about to get all sorts of kinky. She couldn’t wait to see his reaction when she sprung that idea on him.

Darcy was a ball of antsy excitement all morning as she willed the work day to hurry the hell up, waiting for the hours to tick by until Loki would arrive for his usual visit, and when the clock finally hit five that evening, she called a quick goodbye to Jemma before sweeping out of the lab in a rush, eager to prepare for her little surprise.

Back at their apartment, she took the time to curl her hair, pull out her best matching bra and panty
set, and even make the bed up all nicely with way more attention to detail than she normally gave the boring task.

So at midnight, when Darcy quietly changed back into her regular pyjamas and curled up on the edge the empty bed, jaw clenched tight as she tried not to cry, she couldn’t even begin to describe the aching sense of disappointment she felt when Loki never came.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Sorry I left you guys hanging for so long. Hopefully this makes up for it :)

By Midgardian timekeeping standards, Loki had determined that it was currently a Thursday.

Thank the Norns.

He shut the door behind him as he entered his chambers that evening, shrugging out of his long leather jacket and tiredly collapsing onto the bed.

As he lay there, staring up at the cold, grey ceiling, he found himself absently rubbing the fabric of the polka-dotted duvet between his fingers, recalling the look of surprised elation on Darcy’s face when she had first entered the room upon her arrival on Jotunheim all that time ago.

He hadn’t changed a thing since she left, not daring to alter even the slightest, most insignificant detail of the room. The patterned bedspread and colourful tapestries hanging from the walls reminded him of her, and on some particular occasions, lost in the warm, comfortable haze of an early morning dreamlike state, he was almost able to imagine that he was back in her tiny New Mexico bedroom, curled up with Darcy in the too-small bed he had somehow grown so fond of.

To his relief, it was very nearly time to visit her now.

He hadn’t felt such a thrill of anticipation since he was a child, Loki thought. A feeling of anxious excitement seemed to vibrate through him as he settled back on the mattress, preparing to cast out an illusion of himself.

Gods, he missed her. Even though he would not be able to touch her in his incorporeal form, he could still see her face, hear her voice, and that would be enough to give him strength; to tide him over until his time upon Jotunheim ended.

He closed his eyes, gathering the necessary magic in order to perform the spell that would send his duplicate form to Midgard, only his preparations were rather rudely interrupted by a sudden knock at the door.

Shifting against his pillows, Loki tried to ignore it but it soon came again, louder and more insistent this time.

With an angry snarl deep in his throat, he pushed himself upright and stalked towards the door, throwing it open.

“I thought I made it clear that I was not to be disturbed,” he spoke sharply, eyes narrowing at the Jotun who stood before him.

“Apologizes, sire.” the Frost Giant inclined his head in a small act of respect. “I bring news from Asgard. The Allfather has summoned you at once.”
“You may tell him that I am otherwise engaged,” Loki retorted in a short tone, turning away as he began to close the door, only his efforts were halted when the Giant reached one arm out, laying a heavy palm on the stone panel and effectively blocking Loki’s attempt at pushing it shut.

“IT is most urgent,” he insisted. “The Allfather was very clear in his demands. Your presence is required immediately.”

Loki exhaled, feeling his jaw tighten with a combination of anger and annoyance. “Fine.”

He dismissed the Jotun with a curt nod of his head and after the messenger had left, Loki allowed his expression to drop, the true extent of his weariness showing through as he leaned a shoulder against the doorframe, scrubbing a hand over his face.

What in the nine realms could Odin possibly want with him? As far as Loki was concerned, their business was done. They had come to an agreement regarding the terms of his stay upon Jotunheim and now he held no reason to ever lay eyes on his former father again.

With a quick, longing glance back into his chambers, Loki sighed, attempting to push aside the weighty sense of disappointment that came with knowing he would now be unable to spend the evening in the company of his soulmate. He could only hope that she would understand and forgive him for his absence.

“I am sorry, Darcy,” he whispered to the empty space before pulling himself up to his full height, forcing a cold expression onto his face as he magicked his formal armour into place and strode out into the hall.

“What,” Loki said, tone as sharp as one of the daggers he so favoured, “is so enormously important that you thought to summon me in such a manner?” He tilted his head, studying the Allfather with no small amount of contempt. "Am I to be reprimanded? Or perhaps you wish to gloat, is that it? Shall I stand here while you rub my failures in my face once again?"

“Mind your tongue,” Odin warned. “I called you here not out of hatred or spite, but from a desire to aid my son; to offer a small token of apology.”

An apology?

Of all the scenarios, all the possible causes that Loki had envisioned surrounding the sudden need for their meeting, that was most certainly not one of them.

His heart beat rapidly in his chest and for one single, fleeting moment, he felt strangely hopeful until he shook himself from that foolish fantasy, returning to his senses.

Any last wisps of optimism were immediately squashed; replaced instead with wary skepticism as Loki’s expression hardened. There had to be more to Odin's words than it appeared at first glance.

“You have been a fine ruler, Loki,” Odin continued. “Jotunheim grows more prosperous with each passing day while, in turn, you continue to show a great deal of growth in your role. For this reason, I have undertaken a...project, of sorts.”

Loki snorted. "Should I be flattered?" He asked, falling back into a cynical tone laced with bitterness.
This was far more familiar; more comfortable. He did not know what to make of Odin's words of apology and praise, but creating friction, orchestrating frustration and anger...Loki could navigate those emotions with absolute ease.

"You should be grateful," Odin countered, shifting on his throne with mild agitation. "Now I ask that you set aside your petty anger so that I may speak unreservedly."

Though his hands remained clenched into fists at his sides, Loki gave a brief, sharp nod, falling silent. If he were to open his mouth now, nothing but vile words would spill forth, and as much as he may have longed to yell and scream, his curiosity outweighed his resentment in that moment. He wished to know exactly what so-called gift Odin saw fit to bestow upon him.

A long moment passed in which the Allfather appeared pensive, seemingly gathering his thoughts before he spoke at last. "You have family, Loki."

"You are not my family," Loki muttered without heat. It was a phrase spoken so often, so deeply engrained within him, there was scarcely any tangible emotion behind it any longer.

"True family," Odin amended, his voice taking on an unusually gentle and sober tone, "of full Jotun ancestry."

Loki froze, feeling as if the ground had violently shifted beneath his feet, tossing him off balance. His stomach lurched and he swallowed hard, throat gone suddenly dry. Though his mind raced, he took his time formulating a reply, trying to ensure that his voice did not waver too noticeably. "Do you not think that you have lied to me enough?"

Odin's expression shifted into something vaguely resembling pity and Loki clenched his jaw until it ached, forcing down the urge to lash out.

"I speak only the truth," the Allfather answered, "and as I have said many times before, it was always my intention to disclose the details of your true lineage. I never sought to give you cause to distrust me-"

"Let us not waste our breath reviving that particular conversation," Loki cut in abruptly. "As it stands, my time is being rather poorly wasted and I have much to attend to on Jotunheim, so I thank you for so kindly enlightening me," there was no mistaking the dry sarcasm in his tone, "but I do believe that I will take my leave now."

Odin seemed almost amused by that, head tilting as the corner of his mouth twitched in a faint approximation of a smile. "Never did I imagine that I would see you so eager to return to your duties."

“Only as I consider it the lesser of two evils,” Loki easily replied, accompanying the remark with a bland, tight-lipped smile.

Frowning, Odin rubbed a hand over his beard, all traces of earlier humor gone. “In that case, I shall not keep you. I merely wished to divulge what I believed to be a rather important piece of knowledge.”

At that Loki raised his eyebrows, failing to see why any of their exchange would qualify as important in Odin’s eyes. “How so?” He questioned. “Kin or not, I do not care to associate myself with the Jotuns.”

“Were I you, I would not be so quick to dismiss this information,” Odin advised. “You may very
well find yourself grateful to be in possession of such a fact.”

Skeptical and growing increasingly impatient, Loki made a show of rolling his eyes upwards. “And do you plan on ever revealing the significance behind this information, or shall we continue to speak in circles until the tedium brings about my own fit of Odinsleep? How convenient it must be to dismiss one’s worries with a nap -”

“Cease your barbs and listen,” Odin interrupted; clearly at the end of his patience. “You have a cousin, Loki.” Despite the volume of his voice, his tone still managed to hold a rather surprising amount of delicacy as he made his reveal.

Loki blinked, thrown for a moment before his lips curled with disdain and he gave a short, sharp laugh that sounded particularly harsh as it echoed through the large room.

When he opened his mouth to reply, the Allfather immediately raised a hand to silence him, continuing before Loki could meet that statement with any vitriol.

“One of full blood relation,” Odin clarified, “and before you accuse me of spinning lies, I would direct you to the library to consult the archive of Jotun war records. You will find that such a relation is quite clearly indicated in the texts concerning the Laufey clan.”

Loki instantly sobered, feeling oddly ill as he realized that the Allfather was in possession of true evidence to support his claim. “You do not jest.”

Odin shook his head. “I do not,” he confirmed, voice serious but not unkind.

All at once the air was knocked from his lungs, leaving Loki dizzy and unsettled as he swallowed down the large and painful lump in his throat.

He longed for a place to sit until some of the steadiness returned to his legs, but he would sooner face a lifetime of exile upon Jotunheim than fall to his knees before Odin, so he forced aside the shakiness in his limbs, wetting his lips as he struggled to process the full weight of Odin’s words and form a reply that was at least somewhat articulate.

"How did you find this?" He finally settled on asking, at a loss for any other words as he blinked up at the Allfather with no small amount of shock.

Odin smiled faintly. "It was no easy feat."

Undisguised surprise showed on Loki’s face, but he could not be bothered to muster the energy to hide it. There were more pressing matters that demanded his attention at the moment, mainly extracting an explanation from the King who sat before him.

Quite frankly, Odin’s news was absurd, laughably ridiculous, and largely unbelievable. Logic reasoned that it did not hold a fraction of the truth as it appeared on first glance. There had to be a caveat; some small, hidden detail that Loki had not yet uncovered.

"Why then? Why do all of this?" Why for me, was the question he truly wished to ask, but he refused to voice it for fear of sounding too childish. Too caring.

"You have a right to know," Odin spoke simply. "Do with this information what you will." He fixed his gaze directly on Loki then, and the pointed look on his face spoke volumes, leaving Loki feeling rather light-headed as the significance of the Allfather’s words began to fully sink in.

A true gift, indeed.
There was another who was able to sit upon the Jotun throne. That was Odin's unspoken declaration, and Loki swallowed thickly, momentarily losing himself in an onslaught of conflicting emotions. Relief and wariness fought for supremacy as he focused on pulling in a deep, grounding breath before arranging his face into some semblance of a neutral, composed expression.

"Should I step down," he paused to collect his thoughts, choosing his wording carefully as he crafted his response, "I would face no repercussions, neither here nor upon Jotunheim."

He purposely spoke the phrase as a declaration of fact, not a question, and when Odin nodded in conformation, a heavy sense of worry lifted from Loki's chest.

"No tricks and no lies," he added, ensuring that he had closed every avenue of escape, every loophole that could cause Odin's words to return to haunt him at a later date. Surely the Allfather would not freely give this information without seeking something in return, Loki reasoned, and so long as there was still breath in his lungs, Loki would never allow himself to be in debt to the King seated before him.

"No," the Allfather easily agreed, "wit and wordplay are far more your specialties than my own. Why would I be so foolish as to attempt to trick a trickster at his own game?"

Loki had to bite the inside of his cheek to refrain from letting his amusement show. At least the old man hadn't gone entirely senile as of yet. "That may be the most intelligent phrase you have uttered in centuries," he commented with a wry lift of one eyebrow.

To his shock, Odin released a brief chuckle, dismissing him with a wave of the hand. "Be on your way. If I am not mistaken, your soulmate awaits you upon Midgard."

Still largely bewildered by the outcome of their discussion, Loki nodded wordlessly, turning towards the doors. He would be a fool to continue to quarrel with the Allfather any longer now.

After a single step he found himself hesitating though, looking back to Odin, the man he had once called his father, and, after the evening's turn of events, for the first time in a long time Loki considered the possibility that perhaps with time, one day he might actually call him a father again.

"Thank you," he murmured, looking away as a sudden rush of heat traveled to his face.

"Loki."

At his name, he forced his gaze to lift, eyes returning to the head of the room and widening as he was met with the sight of Odin climbing down from his throne, descending the short set of steps and crossing the ornate stone floors, bridging the gap between himself and Loki in what was, perhaps, more than just a literal sense.

Odin did not speak at first, instead taking the time to simply lay a palm on Loki's shoulder before he cleared his throat and withdrew his hand, quickly tucking away that rare display of emotion and returning to a more traditional, dispassionate expression.

"I am proud," the Allfather began quietly, "of the man - the king - you have become." His voice was gruff with something akin to respect, maybe even fondness if Loki had been willing to indulge in such a thought.

He pressed his lips together firmly, not daring to speak as an unfamiliar sense of warmth flooded his chest, and though he said nothing in reply, Loki knew that the way his throat worked as he swallowed, that the slight shine of moisture in his eyes, would speak his response clearly enough.
"Touch me."

"Holy shit!" Darcy exclaimed, spinning around to find Loki standing in his usual projection spot at the foot of their bed. "Okay, new rule: you have to show up outside the door and say 'knock knock' so you don't give me a premature heart attack. Because seriously, what the hell? It's not even Thursday. Not that I'm complaining or anything since you totally ditched me last week - and trust me, we are going to have some words about that -"

"Darcy," he lifted a hand, interrupting her babbling. "Touch. Me."

"Sheesh, alright." She rolled her eyes, crossing the room and exhaling in a small huff of annoyance as she went to swipe her hand in his direction.

She fully expected it to pass right through him, so when she ended up smacking him hard on the shoulder, she made an incomprehensible noise somewhere in between a gasp and a squeal, jumping back with surprise.

"Oh my god! Oh my god. Wow, that really hurts." She shook out her stinging hand, eyes wide as she stared up at him. "You're really here! Wait – why are you really here?"

The expression on Loki’s face looked just as dazed as her own, Darcy imagined. Whatever had happened to him, it was clear that the shock hadn’t fully worn off yet.

“Apparently,” he spoke slowly, sounding a bit baffled, “I have a cousin.”

“What do you mean?” Darcy crossed her arms over her chest, mouth pulling down into a faint frown. “Like some super secret dude that you and Thor never speak of? The black sheep of the family?”

Loki shook his head, smiling faintly. “If anyone were to wear such a title, I believe it would be I.” He took a step forward and reached for her hand, threading their fingers together. “No, what I speak of is far different. By all appearances, it seems I have a relative of full Jotun blood.”

Darcy’s brain came to a screeching halt as she tried to wrap her head around that piece of news. “Holy shit. Part of your birth family is still alive?”

Her response provoked a short laugh from Loki. “Don’t you see, Darcy?” He paused, eyes brighter than she’d seen them in a long time as he gazed down at her. “I have been fully relieved of my duties.”

At that, Darcy’s heart gave a wild, hopeful thump in her chest. “Are you kidding me right now?”

Loki shook his head; the beginnings of a slow grin tugging at his lips from the absurdity of the whole situation as he began to relay the entirety of his meeting with Odin.

“I can scarcely recall having ever seen such sincerity from him,” he finished. “He has essentially given me his blessing to step down from the throne.”

“Wow. You know, he would’ve had to do a serious amount of digging around to find that information,” Darcy pointed out. “You don’t just stumble across long-lost cousins every day.”
“Why he would devote such considerable amounts of time and effort to such a task remains beyond my knowledge.” Loki’s brows pulled down in confusion and Darcy squeezed his hand a bit tighter.

“Do you think it could be because he loves you and he’s sorry?” She suggested gently.

Loki didn’t answer right away and Darcy didn’t press him, instead patiently waiting for him to sort out his thoughts.

“It is too soon to say for certain,” he said at last. “Odin’s lies altered the very state of who I am, or rather who I thought I was,” he corrected, voice slightly bitter. “I do not know whether I can ever forgive him for that.”

He looked so conflicted, the urge to hug him was overwhelming so Darcy closed the distance between their bodies, wrapping her arms around his waist snugly.

With their contrasting heights it probably looked a bit silly for her to be trying to comfort him in that way, but nonetheless Loki seemed to appreciate it, returning the hug as he bent to bury his face in her hair.

“You have time,” Darcy spoke softly. “Just remember that. You don’t have to forgive him right away. You don’t have to forgive him ever, if that’s what you want. The choice is totally up to you.”

To say that Darcy was not a fan of the Allfather would be putting it lightly, and even though she didn’t trust him as far as she could throw him - what was stopping him from changing his mind at some point down the road, sending Loki away and tearing him down all over again in the process? - from her soulmate’s emotional, slightly shaken state, it seemed like Odin was truly stepping up to fix his disastrous relationship with his youngest son.

She could only hope that this was the first small step down a better path for Loki, and knowing that his long stretches of lonely time on Jotunheim were now over and done with left Darcy feeling like the weight of the world had just been lifted off her shoulders.

“You realize this is pretty amazing though, right?” Darcy bit her lip in an effort to contain her grin. “You’re a free man now, and maybe this is just the greedy soulmate part of me that wants you all for myself talking, but honestly, I’ve never been happier for you.”

Loki pressed his forehead to hers, gratitude clear in his eyes. “I could kiss you senseless right now.”

“I would let you,” Darcy murmured, breath hitching when he cupped her cheek and softly brushed his thumb over the fullness of her bottom lip.

The tenderness of the action left her weak in the knees and she had to steady herself against him, curling her fingers in the fabric of his shirt while Loki’s fingers dipped lower to graze along the line of her jawbone. When he found her chin, he stopped to tip her face up, allowing him to slant his mouth over hers, kissing her soundly.

She would never quite grow accustomed to his kisses, Darcy thought. They were warm and firm and dizzying in a way that left her breathless, but they didn’t just steal away the air in her lungs; at the same time it also felt like they were breathing life into her body, aiding the beat of her heart and igniting a spark of fire in her bloodstream.

When they broke apart it was with heavy, panting breaths and it took Darcy two attempts before she could get her voice in working order again.

“You know this also means that there’s nothing keeping us here anymore,” she said, pulling back
just enough for her eyes to find his face. With Jotunheim out of the picture, that meant they no longer needed S.H.I.E.L.D. as an excuse to keep him on Earth. “So,” she prompted gently, “what do you want to do?”

Loki wet his lips, brow furrowing as he gave that some thought.

The possibilities were endless, Darcy realized, in the most literal sense of the word. Aside from Jotunheim, which Loki clearly had no intention of ever returning to, the entirety of the nine realms was on the table. They could do whatever they wanted. So, when Loki eventually voiced his response, his answer surprised the hell out of her.

“I do not wish to leave.”

Darcy blinked at him. “Seriously?”


Hearing him say that made her chest bloom with warmth and Darcy had to swallow hard, throat clogged with emotion. “Me too,” she confessed, leaning into him.

She felt Loki’s arm come up to rub her back and after a moment he dipped his head, frowning when he noticed that she’d buried her face in his chest. “Darcy, are you crying?”

“No,” she choked out, voice muffled as she spoke into his shirt. “Shut up. There’s just something in my eye.”

Loki chuckled, voice warm with affection as he drew her towards the bed, taking a seat on the edge of the mattress and murmuring, “Come here, love.”

Honestly, Loki hugs could solve world wars, Darcy thought as he pulled her down into his lap, arms closing around her securely as she pressed her face into the curve of his neck, breathing in his scent. They never failed to calm and comfort.

“They’re happy tears, I promise,” she mumbled against his skin, pressing a kiss to the base of his throat that made Loki release a soft hum.

“I thought you weren’t crying,” he accused, voice coloured with warm humor as his fingers carded through her hair.

Darcy sniffed, resting her cheek against his chest. “Just cuddle me, smartass.”
Things have been a little too good for too long, don’t ya think? ;)

Darcy sighed, stretching her arms over her head in an attempt to work out all the kinks in her back that came from sitting stooped over her laptop for too long.

She’d been sifting through S.H.I.E.L.D.’s database for most of the morning, looking for any more clues that might shed some light on her New Mexican alien highway theory. After hours with no break (or breakthrough, for that matter), her eyes were starting to go a bit blurry, and when she couldn’t make sense of the words on the screen any longer, she figured it was time to call it quits.

Jemma was gone for the day; Coulson had pulled her away to take part in some field research thing upstate, so without any other pressing work to be done, Darcy figured she would finish up early and surprise Loki by popping into the gym on her way out. She’d been dying to watch him train anyway, so this seemed like the perfect chance to finally see him in all his butt-kicking, leather-clad glory.

In all their time together, Darcy had never actually seen her soulmate take part in a physical fight, but she suspected that he approached it with just as much confident ease and dangerous, predatory appeal as he did with everything else. Just the thought of watching him move like that was already making her stomach flip with a warm, pleasant feeling. It also didn’t hurt that he’d been in a particularly good mood for the last two weeks, full of more heart-stopping smiles and carefree laughter than Darcy’s ovaries could handle ever since he’d passed on his title and the Jotun throne.

The transition was quick and simple in theory, but Loki had insisted on taking the time to do it properly, even going so far as to spend an extra few days on the frozen realm, working with his newly discovered relative to find a way to repeal the antiquated law that only allowed the Laufey bloodline to rule.

The fact that he was willingly spending his time there, trying to build a democracy rather than simply washing his hands of the matter, said a whole lot about how far he’d come and how much he’d grown, Darcy thought, not just as a reluctant king but also as a person. A part of her wondered if that was Odin’s plan all along or just a happy, accidental side-effect.

Either way, Loki was noticeably happier, which led to even more blatant flirtation and teasing touches than usual, which usually (...okay, always) led to astronomically amazing bedroom activities. Of course their regular bedroom activities weren’t exactly lacking in that department, but now it was spirited in ways that Darcy didn’t even know were possible.

Yep, an epic round of sweaty post-work out sex was most definitely in their immediate future if she had anything to say about it.

Finding her way to the gym was relatively easy (she was slowly starting to make sense of all those confusing white hallways) and when Darcy slipped through the gymnasium doors, she found that Loki and another man were still engaged in a round of sparring in the far corner of the room.
Not wanting to distract them, she stayed where she was, leaning back against the white cinderblock wall and watching as Loki ducked, spun and attacked with what looked like an effortlessness amount of power and grace.

He fought like it was an art form; lethal, refined, and downright gorgeous. It was striking to see that other side of him, Darcy thought. She couldn’t believe that that tall, dark and deadly God was the same man who would kiss her so sweetly each morning, play with her hair out of boredom, or cling to her like a koala bear in bed whenever he was feeling particularly sleepy and affectionate.

She was so lost in following the movement of his body, she didn’t even notice when someone came up beside her, and it was only when the man cleared his throat that Darcy jumped, suppressing a short squeak of surprise.

“Ah, sorry,” the guy said, ruffling a hand through his choppy brown hair. “Mind if I wait with you?”

“No, yeah. That’s fine. Pull up some wall.” Darcy gestured to the empty stretch of cement next to her. “You’re with him?” She asked, nodding in the direction of the blond man that Loki was still sparring with.

“Steve? Yeah,” he replied, copying her position by leaning a shoulder against the wall.

They lapsed into a stretch of silence for a few minutes, watching as Steve executed an impressive duck-and-punch maneuver, until Darcy finally remembered her manners.

“Oh, duh. I’m Darcy by the way.” She turned back to the guy beside her, offering a friendly smile and a somewhat awkward wave.

“James,” he replied, looking slightly amused by her attempt at an introduction, “but my mother’s the only one who ever called me that.”

“So then what should I call you, James-not-James?” Darcy asked, raising her eyebrows in question.

In response, he gave a short, pleasant-sounding chuckle. “Bucky’s fine.”

“Bucky?” Darcy stared at him. “You’re that Bucky? Oh my god, Loki talks about you all the time.” Realizing her slip up, her eyes widened and she immediately snapped her jaw shut, making a face. “Shit, don’t tell him I said that. He hates it when people know he has feelings like an actual human being.”

Bucky laughed. “Don’t worry about it,” he said, leaning towards her with a conspiratorial grin. “Secret’s safe with me.”

His smile was contagious and Darcy found herself returning it as she let her attention wander back to the ongoing match on the other side of the gym. From the corner of her eye, she could see Bucky settle back against the wall again, looking just as focused on the fight as she was.

The round came to a close only a few minutes later as Loki managed to catch Steve off guard with a move that knocked the other man flat on his back. From his position on the mats, Steve said something in response and they both grinned as Loki extended a hand, helping him back up onto his feet.

Once he was upright, Steve immediately looked in their direction, catching Bucky’s eye. Something seemed to silently pass between them and beside her, Darcy watched as Bucky pushed himself off the wall, shooting her a parting grin.
“Guess that’s my cue. See you around, Darcy,” he said, nodding to her.

She gave a little mock salute, making him laugh again before he shoved his hands in his pockets and followed Steve out the door.

Once the door had swung shut behind them, Darcy felt a spark of excitement skitter down her spine when Loki finally turned towards her; dark eyes pinning her in place.

Flushed and sweaty, he looked beyond good as he approached her, but to Darcy’s confusion, he didn’t seem the slightest bit pleased by her impromptu visit.

“What was that?” He took up Bucky’s empty spot at her side, mouth set in a firm line as he frowned down at her.

“Well hello to you too,” Darcy replied, rolling her eyes, “and if you’re referring to me and Bucky, we were getting to know each other. He’s nice. I like him.”

Loki’s frown immediately deepened. “Do you now?”

“Yes, mister grumpy-pants,” she teased, poking him in the chest. “What, am I not allowed to be friends with your friends?”

Loki offered no response to that, instead mumbling, “I didn’t like the way he was looking at you.”

Darcy’s eyebrows shot up with surprise. He was starting down a dangerous path with a comment like that. “Wow, okay. And just how was he looking at me?”

“If you must know,” Loki spoke tightly, “he regarded you with far too much interest.”

Darcy snorted, crossing her arms over her chest. “Of course he looked interested, we were having a conversation,” she said, giving a slight, disbelieving shake of her head. “Are you seriously going to turn this into a thing? Because I can guarantee that you’re making a big deal out of nothing here.”

“It didn’t look like nothing,” he countered.

Straightening up from her spot against the wall, Darcy felt a slight stir of annoyance as she matched his frown with one of her own. Why wouldn’t he let this go?

“So what,” she tried to keep her voice from sounding too testy when she spoke, “now I’m not allowed to make eye contact with any guy I talk to?”

“Ideally,” Loki muttered and if Darcy didn’t know any better, she’d almost say that he was pouting. “Oh my God.” Just like that, his odd behavior began to make sense as she stared up at him, declaring, “You’re jealous.”

Clearly offended, Loki’s eyes narrowed with a mixture of agitation and stubborn disagreement. “I am not.”

“You totally are!” Darcy accused. “Honestly, what did you think I was going to do? Drag him into the locker room and have my way with him?”

Loki’s face grew dark at that suggestion. “Do not make light of this, Darcy.”

“Why not? This whole argument is one giant joke anyway,” Darcy replied, all traces of humor gone as she leveled him with a hard look. “I can’t believe we’re even having this conversation right now. I
don’t need you going all raging protective over me. I’m a big girl, I can make my own decisions and that includes talking to whoever I want.”

“I am not questioning your judgement, I simply do not want you associating with Barnes,” Loki spoke sharply, eyes alight with growing frustration. “I don’t trust him to keep his hands off of you—”

“That doesn’t even matter,” Darcy interrupted, cutting him off. “If you can’t trust him, at least trust me.”

“I do trust you,” Loki argued, raising his voice to match hers.

“Obviously not,” she shot back.

“Darcy, you don’t—”

“For fuck’s sake, Loki,” she finally blurted, “he’s soulmates with Steve!”

Loki blinked at her, mouth hanging open as he’d been about to prepare his next retort. “What?”

Darcy huffed out a short, frustrated laugh. “Bucky had his eyes glued to Steve the entire time you two were training. The dude is totally smitten, you’re just too blind to see it.”

Loki at least had the grace to look a bit sheepish at that. “Oh.”

“Oh? That’s all you have to say?” Darcy wet her lips, pausing to pull in a few measured breaths and collect herself before she completely lost her patience. “Honestly,” she spoke quietly now, fighting to keep her voice from wavering, “how could you think I would ever want to cheat on you?”

Loki seemed to visibly deflate against the wall, shoulders slumping as he ruffled a hand through his already messy hair. “I apologize, Darcy.”

It was too little too late, in her opinion. The sharp, accusatory tone of his voice still felt like a hot knife in her chest and in response, Darcy shook her head wordlessly, retreating out the door and leaving him standing alone in the empty gym.

The mood in their apartment remained tense, to say the least.

Darcy couldn’t let go of the lingering sense of hurt that their earlier argument had brought on, so after dinner she threw on a movie, settling down on the couch and keeping her eyes glued to the screen so she would have something other than her soulmate to focus on.

About forty minutes into it Loki joined her, sitting stiffly by her side with his hands clenched in his lap.

Darcy was grateful that he didn’t try to say anything. She wasn’t in the mood to hear any more excuses or apologies; what she needed was time to cool off, to look at things from his perspective and wrap her head around the real reason behind his anger and jealousy.

She had a feeling that she already knew the primary cause. Loki was still coming to terms with his Jotun ancestry; he didn’t see it as anything but a flaw, something that made him defective and inadequate, and Darcy suspected that deep down, he fully expected her to realize that and eventually leave him because of it.
Odin had sure done a number on his self-esteem, she thought sadly. At least the Allfather seemed to be slowly trying to mend the rift between them now. Darcy just hoped that it would be enough to eventually rebuild Loki’s sense of worth and repair at least some of the damage done to both his head and his heart.

“It’s late,” Loki eventually murmured, drawing Darcy from her thoughts as she realized that she’d completely zoned out for the remainder of the movie and the credits were now rolling on screen. “Come to bed, Darcy,” he urged, voice soft and pleading in a way that caused her chest to constrict with a guilt-filled, painful squeeze.

“I think I’m gonna stay up a little longer.” She slouched down, pulling her knees up to her chest and busyling herself with queuing up another movie so she wouldn’t have to make eye contact. The brief look of hurt that had flashed across his face already left her feeling heartsick; there was no need to add any more to that.

Her stomach twisted when Loki stood without complaint, eyes lingering on her a few seconds longer before he turned and walked away.

They’d never done this before - never gone to bed angry - and the thought of him lying in there by himself brought another swift stab of guilt to her already tight chest.

Darcy ignored the feeling, fighting the desire to give in to the ache of her soulmate bond and follow after him.

As bad as her bond may have felt for Loki, she was determined to let this play out on its own. Loki needed to realize that she loved him just as fiercely as he did her; that no matter how friendly Darcy got with anyone else, at the end of the day, her heart would always belong to him. Until he finally got that through his head, there wasn’t much else she could do, and she certainly wasn’t going to waste her breath trying to convince him. He knew her better than almost anyone else - knew just how loyal and fierce she could be - and after everything they’d been through, how could he even think of questioning how strongly she felt about him?

Then again, a small, annoying voice in the back of her head piped up, you still haven’t given him the sign he’s been waiting for.

Darcy sighed, pushing her glasses up so she could rub her eyes. She didn’t want to give that voice any attention, but it wasn’t exactly wrong. Here she was waiting for Loki to come to his senses, but what if he really was doubting her affections? Sure she threw out casual ‘I love yous’ all the time, but the biggest act of commitment she could give him - Idunn’s apple - still sat untouched.

She couldn’t keep putting off that decision forever; it wasn’t fair to either of them, Darcy knew, but it still felt like such a monumental choice to make, she wasn’t sure if she’d ever be brave enough to make up her mind and give Loki the answer he deserved.

Absently chewing her bottom lip, she continued to stew on that until movie number two had passed in an unmemorable blur and sometime around midnight, Darcy finally turned the television off, flopping down onto her side and curling up into a ball as she hugged a stray throw pillow to her chest, letting out a long exhale as she closed her eyes.

The room was pleasantly dark and the sofa cushions were incredibly comfortable, yet sleep wasn’t coming easy. In fact, it felt like one of the most God-awful restless nights she’d ever experienced. Worse than those first few days in New Mexico, all that time ago when she’d refused to let herself get close to him. Worse than that long and lonely year apart after he’d left and gone back to Asgard. Worse because she knew that they had the power to easily fix things this time around. This wasn’t
distance or obligations keeping them apart, it was their own stubbornness, and that, Darcy thought, both her and Loki had in spades.

After another hour of restless tossing and turning, fatigue and steadily crumbling willpower had her pushing herself off the sofa and quietly navigating the dark hallway towards their bedroom. It was impossible to ignore the insistent tug of her soulmate bond any longer; it was time to make things right, and at that point, Darcy felt like she had just as much of an apology to make as Loki did.

She crept into the room as soundlessly as she could manage, pausing at the edge of the bed as her eyes roamed over Loki while he slept. Even though he seemed to be out cold, there was still a pinched look of unease on his face; mouth pulling down in a soft frown and two little worry lines forming between his eyebrows.

He looked so vulnerable in that moment, the need to wipe away the troubled expression he wore hit Darcy with such an overwhelming punch of emotion, it was like her lungs could hardly function when she looked at him.

Rounding the bed, she pulled back the blankets and carefully crawled into the empty space beside him.

The slight shift of the mattress had Loki rolling over to face her as his eyes cracked opened, still heavy-lidded with lingering sleepiness.

“You need to trust me,” Darcy spoke quietly. “I love you and I wouldn’t leave you.”

“I am sorry, Darcy.” Loki’s voice was hoarse with a combination of sleep and regret as his eyes found hers. “I was a fool. I acted rashly and you deserve far better than that. If you will permit me another chance, I will never doubt you again.”

Darcy pressed her cheek into her pillow, watching the way the room’s shadows fell over his face in a way that accentuated the green flecks in his eyes and the sharp lines of his cheekbones.

She wet her lips, eyes sliding away guiltily as she answered, “I’m sorry too. I’m the one who gave you a reason to doubt me. I mean, I still haven’t used the apple and you sacrificed so much—”

“Look at me, Darcy,” Loki interrupted. His voice was soft in volume, but the tone was as hard and sharp as steel. “Never apologize for choosing to wait. It is I who should be seeking your forgiveness; you have done no wrong here.”

“Well I still feel crummy about it,” Darcy said, reluctantly meeting his eyes again. “I owe you an answer.”

“And you shall provide one,” Loki acknowledged, “but all in due time, darling. There is no need to rush.”

He reached for her then, moving to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear before his fingers hovered uncertainly over her shoulder, tempted to touch but unsure of her reception. Finally he seemed to change his mind, letting his hand drop to rest flat on the mattress between them.

Darcy’s eyes followed the action, stopping to stare at his hand for a few moments (long, talented fingers that made her throat go dry just from thinking of all the things they could, and have, done to her) before she slowly reached for his arm, picking it up and positioning it snugly around her waist.

Once she was satisfied with her makeshift cuddle-hug, she shifted closer, stealing the corner of his pillow until their noses bumped and she could study every fine detail of his eyes. They were dark
and openly expressive, glimmering with a bit of a faint shine. Darcy couldn’t tell if that was from the moonlight or something else, but she had a pretty good guess.

Wetting her lips, she spoke softly, “I do, you know. Forgive you, I mean.”

In response Loki dipped his head down and Darcy felt her pulse spike when his lips just barely brushed over hers. “I love you.” His voice cracked part way through, making tears prickle in Darcy’s own eyes.

Tilting her chin up, she closed the remaining space between them and when her mouth found his, Loki responded immediately, matching the movement of her lips with a slow tenderness that left her breathless. 

Like it always did it soon escalated, deepening until their mouths were fused together and they were impatiently tugging at each others clothing.

“Yes,” Darcy breathed, arching against him when his teeth scraped along the column of her neck. 

His breath was hot against her skin as he murmured her name in return, and when she raked her nails down his back, Loki moaned aloud, hips jerking forward to rub against her.

From there it was a rush of fumbling hands and greedy mouths; neither of them patient enough to bother undressing completely.

Loki helped her slip out of her pants and in turn Darcy shoved his pyjamas down his hips, just far enough for his erection to come free, and the sight of it, large and heavy and straining upwards, had Darcy’s head swimming with lust as her heartbeat echoed loud in her ears.

Desperately needing to touch him, her fingers slipped between their bodies to wrap firmly around his base, eliciting a choked groan from Loki as he shamelessly thrust into her hand.

It was a heady feeling to have so much control over him, to see him drop his guard for no one but her; trusting her with the sight of that raw, vulnerable side of him that was so often hidden away under thick layers of smooth charm and extravagant confidence.

She worked him like that for a while, until he was panting and grinding against her palm, until the ache of Darcy’s own need was building to a height that was too strong to ignore.

He made a slight noise of protest when she released him, but it quickly morphed into a long, satisfied groan when she pushed her tongue into his mouth, pulling him down with her as she settled back against the pillows, legs falling open wide.

When he realized what she was doing, Loki instantly broke their kiss as his eyes found hers, gaze holding steady. “You would grant me this,” he paused, voice so soft it almost bordered on shy, “after all that I have done?”

No matter how long they’d been together, no matter how many times they’d done this before, every time he looked at her like that – like he couldn’t quite believe that she was real and willing and loved him – caused a fresh round of overwhelming love to pour into Darcy’s chest, spreading outwards and warming her whole body.

Bringing one hand up, she stroked her fingertips along the side of his face, answering simply, “I love you.”

Loki grabbed her wrist, halting the action, and for a minute Darcy thought he was about to turn her
away, but her worries were unfounded when instead he turned over her hand, pressing a warm kiss to the inside of her wrist. It was only a light brush of lips against her skin, but his touch still felt like a bolt of electricity moving through her, stealing her breath and causing her heart to beat erratically.

“C’mere,” she whispered, tangling her other hand in the mess of dark hair at the base of his neck, pulling him down for another kiss.

As his mouth moved with hers, he finally settled his weight between the valley of her thighs, and when she felt the hot, hard length of him finally brush against her, her hips instinctively jerked up to meet him.

He sank into her inch by inch, drawing a low moan of relief from Darcy as her head tipped back, lips parting in pure pleasure when he finally began rocking forward, setting a slow but deep pace.

It was the best kind of torture, Darcy thought; each movement so deliberately long and drawn out, it was like she could feel him in her soul, in each rapid beat of her heart and shaky, panting breath.

“Gods, you feel exquisite,” he rasped out, bending his head to release a low string of curses into her hair before dropping even lower, aligning their mouths until his lips were hovering over hers, sharing ragged breaths.

“I’m yours,” Darcy breathed, holding his eyes and making sure that he understood exactly how much she meant those words. “Only yours.”

“You are my world, Darcy,” he murmured, voice low and husky as he rolled his hips in a way that made her gasp. “Forgive me if I am selfish; if I seek to hold you close and shelter you from all others.”

“Just have faith in me,” she replied, palms trailing down his spine and stopping at the small of his back to urge him harder; deeper. “Know that you’re the only one I’m ever gonna want.”

His promise came in the form of a kiss so achingly sweet, it made Darcy’s heart kick hard in her chest as she kissed him back with every ounce of feeling she had, only tearing her mouth away when her body began to tremble and the force of her climax rolled over her in a sudden, intense wave, leaving her gasping and breathless.

With an urgent desperation, Loki’s movements grew more disjointed until he was moaning in time with each push of his hips, reflexively closing one hand around her thigh and pulling it higher around his waist as he settled himself as deeply inside of her as possible.

The subtle shift in angles had Darcy crying out, still so sensitive that she found herself clenching around him all over again when Loki rocked firmly against her, coming on a throaty gasp that sounded like a mangled version of her name.

It was like a white hot firework had burst in her bloodstream, leaving Darcy hazy and panting as little shivers traveled down her spine and small, fluttering aftershocks had her unconsciously squeezing her thighs around him.

Loki bent forward, forehead pressing against the base of her throat and mouth open as he caught his breath. Darcy could feel each of his exhales gliding hotly across her skin and she brought a hand up to cradle the back of his head, fingers sinking into his hair.

After a few peacefully quiet moments, he seemed to recover enough to press a swift kiss to her cheek before rolling over, pulling Darcy with him so she remained laying along the long line of his body.
He felt so good; all hard, smooth heat beneath her, her hips automatically rolled against him, greedily trying to pull a little more pleasure from the last few tendrils of her orgasm. The action caused Loki to release a low hiss as he twitched inside her, making Darcy shiver at the sensation.

They were a mess, flushed and sweaty and she could feel the warm slipperiness between her thighs beginning to pool on his abdomen, but when she tried to move Loki made a soft noise of protest, sliding his palms down her back to cup her ass, holding her in place.

“Allow me a moment longer to enjoy this,” he murmured, voice sounding warm and throaty and so thoroughly sated, how could she possibly say no to that?

With a sleepy hum of agreement, Darcy let her eyes fall shut. With him still snug and warm inside her, she wasn’t particularly eager to move at that moment either, and now that she was close to him, it felt like she could get a decent night’s rest.

She must have drifted off because sometime later she felt Loki slowly ease her body down onto the mattress, murmuring something as the heat of his palm swept from her ribcage down to her thighs, taking with it all the slight soreness that had begun to settle in her muscles and the lingering wetness between her legs.

“Did you just give me a magical bath?” She mumbled, only half awake.

Loki’s response came in the form of a soft chuckle that was breathed into her ear as he pressed a kiss to her temple, pulling her hips towards him so that her back rested tight against his chest. “Rest now, Darcy.”

His voice was hypnotic; deep and rich and so comforting, she immediately breathed out a sigh, melting against him and letting the lure of sleep pull her back under.
Weekly updates have returned! I finally finished off the last few chapters, so I figured there’s no sense in making you guys wait long periods of time for something that’s already written. I’m not that evil (she says, right before beginning this chapter with UH OH ALL HELL’S ABOUT TO BREAK LOOSE)

It was on a completely average Wednesday morning when everything went to hell.

Darcy awoke to the shrill noise of a chirping alarm, letting out a tired groan of annoyance as she pulled her blankets up to her chin, squeezing her eyes shut as she tried to ignore the steady beeping. The room was still pitch black, telling her that it was way too early to even think about being awake.

Behind her, she heard Loki made a quiet, sleepy noise as he pressed his nose into the back of her shoulder. One of his legs was resting in between her thighs and he had an arm flung over her, hand resting possessively on her chest in a way that somehow managed to be sweet and innocent instead of perverted. A tired Loki was a clingy Loki, and Darcy had a soft spot the size of Asgard when it came to clingy, affectionate Loki.

Rather than shaking him off, she snuggled closer, pushing back against him and biting her lip when she felt him react, hardening against her bum and unconsciously shifting to press himself tighter against her.

It might have been too early to be awake, but as far as she was concerned, there was never a bad time to engage in some sleepy, lazy touches.

“What is that?” Loki’s voice was soft and groggy when he fully woke a few moments later, breath tickling her shoulder blade as he tilted his head, trying to place the source of the beeping sound.

“Ignore it,” Darcy murmured, covering his hand with her own and encouraging him to squeeze her breast while she pressed back against him again.

A deliciously warm, drowsy feeling of arousal poured through her when he met the action with a soft thrust of his own, releasing a rough sound of pleasure as his hand sought out her waist, pulling her snugly against him.

“I find myself a lucky man to awake to this each morning.” His voice was rich and low in her ear, breath hitching slightly with each rock of Darcy’s hips.

“Mmm, you’re not the only lucky one,” she replied, eyes fluttering shut as she continued to grind against his erection. “More boobs, please.”

Loki gave a quiet chuckle, working his hand underneath the hem of her shirt. “Better, darling?”

“Yeah,” Darcy breathed, her reply melting into a throaty, needy noise when he began circling his thumb over one nipple. “Can you get your pants off without stopping what you’re doing?”
“One of the many wonders of magic,” Loki replied dryly. “An area in which I am most exceptionally skilled, might I remind you, since you appear to have so easily forgotten.”

“Hey, I’m barely awake,” Darcy mumbled in return, arching against him when his hand began to slide down the slope of her stomach. “Cut a girl some slack.”

His fingers had just barely brushed the waistband of her panties when the sound of the chirping alarm grew louder, raising to an annoying, urgent screech that seemed to be coming from right next to her head.

It was her phone, Darcy realized a moment later, and across the room where Loki had left his S.H.I.E.L.D.-issued cell phone on top of the dresser, his has begun beeping just as persistently as her own.

Loki released her with a reluctant groan, sitting up and dragging a hand over his face. “That certainly doesn’t sound good,” he muttered. “The time?”

Darcy rolled over, blindly stretching out an arm until her fingertips finally came into contact with her noisy phone and she snatched it up from the bedside table.

“Ten after four,” she reported, squinting from the sudden brightness of the screen before she silenced the alarm and collapsed back on the mattress with a huff. “Have we seriously just been cock-blocked by S.H.I.E.L.D?” she complained. “They’d better have one hell of a good reason for this.”

Loki made a noise of agreement, untangling himself from their blankets before he slipped out of bed.

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Darcy rolled onto her side to face him, watching as he dressed himself in a simple shirt and pants with a quick flick of his hand. “What do you think it is? Fire? Flood? Grizzly bear attack?”

“Nothing quite so dramatic, I should think.” He paused to roll up the sleeves of his shirt (a deliberate move, Darcy suspected – he could have easily done that part magically, but he was well aware of just how much she liked seeing that look on him) before he bent over the bed, dropping a kiss on her forehead while simultaneously plucking the phone out of her hand.

Darcy took a moment to admire his nicely muscled forearms and the generous amount of neck that the V of his shirt collar showed off before she yawned widely, snuggling further under the blankets in an attempt to make up for the missing warmth of her soulmate’s body.

Loki’s mouth pulled down as he studied the screen of her phone, eyes roaming over the lines of text before he leaned over the bed again, this time pulling back all of the blankets, much to Darcy’s displeasure.

“Noooo,” she whined, reaching vainly for the fluffy comforter that he’d dragged down to her ankles. “Too cold. Too early.”

“Up, Darcy. Now.” The unusually curt tone of his voice, combined with the fact that he was in the midst of converting his casual outfit into his full Asgardian armour, had Darcy scrambling to sit upright as a heavy, apprehensive feeling settled in the pit of her stomach.

“Shit. It’s worse than grizzly bears, isn’t it.” Her eyes followed Loki’s movements as he patted down his leathers, likely doing a mental tally of his current weapons supply.

At the sound of her voice he stopped, looking back to her. He did a good job of hiding his unease but by now Darcy knew him well enough to see through that false, calm exterior. She could pick out each of the little tells that gave away his tense state; the rigid back, firm set of his mouth, and that
steely, closed-off look in his eyes.

“I’m afraid so,” he confirmed, voice weighted with a grim seriousness. “You’d best be getting dressed. I suspect that Director Hill is in no mood to be kept waiting.”

Maria Hill’s office - a normally sparse and quiet room that didn’t see much traffic aside from the odd S.H.I.E.L.D. junior agent dropping off paperwork – was already nearing maximum capacity by the time Darcy followed Loki through the door, taking one of the last remaining seats off to the side of the Director’s desk.

As she settled into her chair, Darcy glanced around, instantly recognizing Jemma, Bucky, Steve and Coulson amongst the crowd. The red-headed woman off to her right looked familiar too (she’d seen Agent Romanoff in passing a few times), but the remaining occupants were virtual strangers to her, and from the matching stiff expressions they all wore, it was immediately apparent that whatever had brought them to Hill’s office was far from good.

“Alright.” Director Hill was standing at the head of the room with her weight leaned back against the edge her desk, the rapid drumming of her fingers on the wood being the only indicator of her stress level. “Before we begin, let’s get some introductions out of the way. Our Avengers recruits Rogers, Barnes, Wilson and Laufeyson. S.H.I.E.L.D. training officers Agents Romanoff and Barton. Lab specialists Simmons and Lewis, and lastly, the reason why we’ve gathered you here this morning, our eyes in the sky, Commander Carol Danvers.”

The tall blonde woman next to Agent Coulson nodded in greeting, smiling somewhat grimly as she folded her arms over the front of her navy blue uniform. Was she Air Force, maybe? Darcy wasn’t exactly up to speed on her military dress codes.

“The Commander runs S.H.I.E.L.D. Station Watchpoint One,” Hill continued, “our first line of defence against foreign intruders.”

“Hold up - just how foreign are we talking?” Wilson asked, face serious as he leaned forward in his seat, rubbing a hand over the stubble on his jaw. “Something tells me this is bigger than a bunch of lost tourists from Jersey.”

“It doesn’t get any more foreign than this,” Hill confirmed with a note of regret in her voice. “We’re dealing with what we believe to be an impending large-scale crisis of unknown origin.” She nodded her chin towards Danvers. “Commander, care to take the floor?”

The blonde woman stepped forward, addressing the room. “Watchpoint One functions as an orbital surveillance station consisting of six different satellites recording readings every three minutes,” she explained. “Now normally our radars pick up nothing more than a few passing satellites or fragments of space rock that burn up long before they actually pass through the Earth’s atmosphere. This morning however, the set of readings taken at three thirty-eight were found to be...unusual.”

“In what way?” Loki asked from where he was standing at the edge of Darcy’s chair.

“There was a blip in the radar,” Commander Danvers replied. “We have a four minute gap of dead time where something interrupted the readings, preventing the satellite signals from transmitting back to our station. The satellites didn’t come back online until three forty-two, and when they did, we had visual of something entering the atmosphere - confirmed to be neither S.H.I.E.L.D. nor NASA property - and since it didn’t disintegrate on entry...”
“We think it’s alien in nature,” Hill finished, “and if that’s true, then we need to find it and contain it before it causes any harm.”

“Um,” Darcy raised her hand meekly, feeling slightly out of place in the room full of agents, soldiers and scientists, “do we know where this happened, exactly?”

In reply, Danvers grinned at her, looking largely delighted by the question. “Take a wild guess.”

Well, shit. If she’d needed any more proof to confirm the existence of an alien desert superhighway, there it was, Darcy thought, slumping back in her chair as she worried her bottom lip between her teeth. God, Jane was going to flip the fuck out. Darcy looked forward to that future phone call with equal parts excitement and dread.

“I owe you and Dr. Simmons a thank you, actually,” Danvers continued, eyes flitting between Darcy and Jemma with gratitude. “Once you brought your portal theory to S.H.I.E.L.D.’s attention, we reduced the delay time between our satellites. Readings were being recorded every twelve minutes, but for safety’s sake we’ve now cut it down to three. If not for that, there’s a fairly good chance we wouldn’t have caught this morning’s anomaly until it was too late.”

“Oh, well, you’re quite welcome.” Jemma blushed prettily, looking pleased as she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “We’re glad to be of help, aren’t we Darcy?”

“Yes. Right. Totally glad,” Darcy gave an emphatic nod. “Um...two quick questions though. One: does this mean that you’re sending me back to the butt crack dust hell that is Puente Antiguo, and two: are we seriously talking about honest-to-God, real-life aliens right now?”

“You say that like it’s a surprise,” Agent Romanoff drawled from where she was leaned against the wall, arms casually crossed over her chest.

“Well...yeah, I mean, it’s freaking aliens!” Darcy sputtered, not caring if she sounded slightly hysterical. They were talking about a very real alien invasion happening right under their noses. If anything, she figured she was overdue for some hysterics at that point.

Romanoff simply shrugged a shoulder in response, studying her nails.

“I think what she’s saying is, you’re...you know,” Bucky gestured in a vague and completely unhelpful manner.

“Shacking up with an alien,” Barton filled in from his place at the back of the room.

“I am a God,” Loki cut in abruptly, turning to direct a narrow-eyed glare at the Agent.

“But,” Clint held up an index finger, “by definition—”

“Can we please attempt to keep this meeting on track?” Director Hill interrupted with an arched eyebrow. “At the moment we have more important issues than arguing over semantics. The longer we wait, the more potential damage – and casualties – we have to deal with later.”

“So...Puente Antiguo is a no?” Darcy asked hopefully, accompanying the question with a sweet, somewhat apologetic smile. She had to give the Director serious props for patience considering how quickly their meeting was derailing, but Darcy couldn’t let her question slide by without an actual response. She was in no way eager to ever call that little New Mexican town home again, especially without Jane there with her.

“You’re staying here, Miss Lewis,” Hill promised, and Darcy deflated in her seat with a relieved
“But you will be dispatching a field team, yes?” Jemma spoke up, clutching her ever-present S.H.I.E.L.D. tablet with a hopeful look.

“Absolutely,” the Director confirmed, gaze flicking down to check the time on the simple watch encircling her wrist. “In fact, I’d like us to be in the air within the hour.”

“If I may, Director, I think it would be best for the team to collect fresh soil samples on site,” Jemma spoke eagerly. “We can compare them to our previous sample and confirm whether this new activity is similar to the alien DNA we’ve already encountered.”

After a thoughtful moment, Hill nodded. “Can you and Lewis ready the necessary equipment in the next fifteen minutes? We’ll be flying out immediately. The Avengers program is going into full effect as of this moment.”

“You’re sending us?” Steve asked, sounding surprised and a little bit pleased as he glanced over to Bucky.

“Ideally you’d have more training before we put you in the field, but there’s no time,” Hill replied. “In fact, we’re lucky we got any warning at all.”

While the rest of the Avengers recruits exchanged varying degrees of worried and excited looks, Darcy sat up a little straighter, looking over her shoulder to Loki in an attempt to study his face, trying to gauge his reaction to the news.

When their eyes met, he gave her a comforting smile, allowing himself a rare moment of public affection by smoothing back her hair and then squeezing her shoulder.

The action caused some of her anxiety dissipate and Darcy could breathe a little easier as she looked back to the Director, catching the tail end of the woman’s speech.

“Remember to stay smart,” Hill was saying. “Watch your teammate’s backs. There’s a fine line between bravery and reckless heroics; know which side you stand on. Agents Barton and Romanoff will be accompanying you. Any questions?”

She looked pointedly to each of her four recruits and when no one voiced a complaint, Hill gave a pleased smiled. “Good. Time to suit up, Avengers.”

True to Hill’s word, barely a half hour later, the quinjet was loaded and airborne.

Loki had only been given a handful of seconds to say his goodbyes to Darcy, planting a hard, fast kiss on her mouth before he had pushed her towards Coulson with a growled warning of, “Keep her safe or you will answer to me.”

She was remaining on-base with Coulson, Dr. Simmons and a small number of other agents, and for that Loki was grateful. They would neutralize this so-called alien threat long before it ever reached S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters and his soulmate. He would make certain of that.

“How’re you doing?” Barnes murmured to him a few quiet minutes into the flight.

They were seated on a long bench running along the side of the jet’s cargo bay; Loki, Rogers and
Barnes occupying one side while on the opposite wall, Romanoff, Barton and Wilson sat in similar positions.

The two Agents appeared to be in deep conversation, bodies turned towards each other as they spoke lowly, and, from the white earbuds he wore, it was clear that Wilson’s attention was elsewhere entirely as he tapped his foot, eyes closed as he listened to music of some sort.

“Well enough,” Loki replied simply, “and yourself?”

Bucky lifted a shoulder, grinning. “Ready to punch some stuff.”

From his seat on Barnes’ right, Rogers didn’t even attempt to hide the roll of his eyes.

Noticing the action, Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve with mock annoyance. “Don’t think I won’t start with you,” he said, metal fingers curling into a fist.

Steve chuckled, leaning back comfortably against the wall of the jet. “Save it for the aliens, pal.”

Loki watched their good-natured exchange with open curiosity. “The Director,” he voiced his enquiry quietly so as to not be overheard by Barton or Romanoff, “she has no qualms about placing you on assignment together?”

“Considering how we’re soulmates?” Bucky voiced the unspoken half of Loki’s question. “Nah,” he shook his head, “even if she did, there’s nothing she could do about it unless she wanted to put her reputation on the line and risk being labeled a hypocrite.”

Loki frowned. “Why is that?”

Steve wordlessly dipped his head, subtly nodding across the bay towards Romanoff and Barton.

The meaning behind the act was not lost on Loki. “Is that so,” he murmured with mild surprise, eyeing the two Agents in a new light as he filed away that important piece of information.

“How could Hill turn away a pair of soulmates when two of her best Agents already are,” Barnes commented. “Besides, me and Rogers go way back. This isn’t our first time on the front lines together, eh Stevie?”

“Not the first and unfortunately not the last,” Steve replied, grinning as he just barely managed to twist away and dodge a punch in the shoulder from Barnes.

“Punk.”

“Jerk.”

“The both of you are positively nauseating,” Loki remarked with a grimace. “May the Norns take pity and relieve me of this misery.” His eyes flicked up to the ceiling overhead in mock prayer, causing Barnes to snort with amusement.

“Like you and Lewis aren’t?” He countered, both eyebrows lifting. “I saw you making eyes at her in Hill’s office.”

Any amount of embarrassment Loki may have felt was instantly concealed behind an easy, wide smirk. “I’m afraid I must agree with Rogers,” he stated coolly, “you are a jerk.”

Steve laughed and Loki was fortunately saved from any further conversation on the matter when the bay’s overhead speakers crackled to life, transmitting Commander Danvers’ voice from her location.
in the cockpit.

“Three minutes to descent, team.”

Loki shifted on the bench, feeling the heavy, assuring weight of one of his daggers press against his ribcage.

If would be a refreshing change of pace to put his weeks of training and scrimmages to use, especially on an opponent other than his fellow Avengers; one he could truly unleash the extent of his strength and magic upon.

The heat and chaos of a challenging fight felt as though it were a distant, long forgotten memory to Loki. He had not set foot on a battlefield since his hasty journey to Jotunheim all that time ago, when he had rushed headlong into battle with a careless mind and an angry heart after Odin’s lies were first exposed.

Thor had been his saviour that day and Loki still felt an odd combination of gratitude and humiliation whenever he recalled the lengths his brother had gone to in order to ensure his safety.

He would need no saviour now, though. He was not the reckless young prince he had once been. Now he had a reason, a purpose to fight for; something larger than himself and far more significant than the truth behind his birth.

Now he had Darcy, and for her, he would do anything.

“Here we go,” Bucky murmured beside him, drawing Loki from his thoughts as the jet began its descent. “Let’s see what’s waiting for us.”

A slow, dark smile crawled onto Loki’s face. “Yes, let’s.”

Whatever awaited them, he was more than ready for it.
Stepping foot onto the arid grounds of New Mexico, it was immediately apparent that something was not quite right.

The air was eerily quiet; no stirring breeze or distant cry of birds to be heard, and with a frown Loki studied the horizon, noting the wide, cloudless sky and unusual lack of any other life forms, be they flora or fauna.

“Feels like stepping into a zombie apocalypse movie,” Sam remarked, coming to a stop next to Loki. He kicked at the dry, parched earth with the toe of his boot before shooting a curious look towards their two training officers. “You guys ever gone up against the undead?”

“Can’t say we have,” Romanoff replied, lifting a hand to shield her eyes from the sun as she turned in a slow, apprising sweep of their surroundings.

“What about that time in Minsk?” Barton swung his quiver onto his back, bow in hand as he made his way down the jet ramp before walking over to join them.

Natasha snorted, looking faintly amused by the memory. “Beta blockers,” she explained in response to the questioning lift of Sam’s eyebrows. “The victims were all inflicted with an extraordinarily high dose, making them appear dead at first glance. So you can imagine the coroner’s surprise when a dozen people started coming back to life in his morgue.”

Sam’s eyes widened. “Creepy.”

“Awesome,” Barton countered, dipping the tip of his bow in Sam’s direction.

“Unimportant,” Loki interjected with an air of impatience. “There is little time to waste if we are to succeed in our mission.”

Under any other circumstances, he would pay no mind to such distracting chatter. Perhaps he might even offer up a tale of his own from his days of reckless adventure with Thor, but at the moment, Loki was too preoccupied to engage in any form of banter.

His sole thought was for Darcy’s well-being, leaving little room in his mind for much else. A sense of worry rested uneasily in the pit of his stomach like a cold, clenched fist, and though Loki knew that his soulmate was thousands of miles away, relatively safe in S.H.I.E.L.D.’s care, he found that his concern for her had not lessened in the slightest. Logic seemed to have an odd way of vanishing when an emotion as strong as love became involved.

“He’s right.” Natasha spoke up, drawing Loki from his thoughts. “There’ll be plenty of time to swap zombie stories once we’ve finished up here. Got to save some entertainment for the ride home,” she added, tone dry as her mouth curved into a half-smile.

“So where do we start?” Rogers asked, sweeping an arm out as he gestured to the bare, unending yards of space.

The unanswered question hung in the air for a moment, only serving to emphasize the strangely quiet stillness around them.
Finally Romanoff shrugged a shoulder; slight smile still in place. “You tell me, recruit.”

“Well,” Steve ran a hand through his hair, brows drawing down contemplatively, “splitting up would be the logical choice. We’d cover more ground, but given what we’re up against, I don’t think that’s the best plan.”

Sam nodded. “I’m with you, man. Safety in numbers.”

“Exactly,” Rogers confirmed, “so we stick together, and move…” he paused then, seemingly uncertain of their next step.

“North east,” Loki supplied. He lifted an arm, indicating to a patch of stormy, slate blue sky visible in the distance over Romanoff’s shoulder. “The skies are remarkably darker in that area. I imagine it would be a wise place to begin our search.”

Rogers lifted one shoulder in a shrug of acceptance. “Works for me. Agent Romanoff?”

Natasha turned, squinting in the direction that Loki had suggested before giving a firm nod of her head. “Okay then, north east it is. Let’s get moving, guys.”

The still air and dry grounds gradually gave way to wet earth and strong breezes the closer they drew to the source of the darkened skies.

“This looks like a good place to grab those samples for Simmons,” Natasha said, impatiently brushing a windswept piece of hair out of her eyes as she crouched down, trailing her fingers through the damp dirt. “The opening of the portal must have triggered some kind of weather pattern. It’s at least ten degrees cooler over here. And a hell of a lot wetter.”

“That’s for sure,” Bucky muttered, flexing his metal hand and watching as drops of condensation rolled down his fingertips.

“Clint, you’ve got the goods?” Romanoff stood, brushing the dirt from her hands as she looked to her partner.

Barton rummaged through one of the many pockets of his cargo pants, eventually producing a clear plastic container courtesy of the S.H.I.E.L.D. lab. “Someone order a urine sample?” He grinned, dangling the little bottle between two fingers and eliciting a mixture of eye rolls and groans from the remainder of the team.

“Can we not conveniently forget him in a wheat field?” Loki suggested while Romanoff plucked the container from Barton’s hand, setting to work as she began to walk west towards a fresh patch of soil that hadn’t been disturbed by their footprints.

“I second that,” Wilson piped up, raising one hand.

“Hey!” Barton exclaimed. “You know I’m kind of your boss, right? Respect your elders and whatever.”

“By all means, do remind me of my place beneath one as mighty as yourself.” Loki fixed the archer with a sarcastic grin. “I positively tremble to imagine the power that comes with wearing such grand of a title as…” he paused, head tilting quizzically, “exactly what is it that you do again?”
Behind him, Rogers made a short choking noise that sounded suspiciously like a laugh, and the noise only served to further widen the smirk that had already taken shape on Loki’s face.

“I said kind of,” Barton emphasized with a roll of his eyes. “Kind of a boss. Did nobody hear me say that?”

“Hey, fellas?” Romanoff’s voice interrupted any further conversation as she called over to them, and while her tone held the same easy, smoky drawl as always, underneath Loki could detect that something was amiss. Her words were shaded with an unusual edge of urgency that instantly drained any last remains of humor from the moment. “I think we’ve found our portal.”

With a mixture of curiosity and foreboding, Loki turned, finding that the dark skies had fractured open into a wide and jagged split unlike anything he had seen before. That wasn’t to say that he had never read of such sights, but he had always thought them to be folklore; ancient tales designed to spook children and impart wisdom upon kings. Gazing at the unearthly sight overhead though, it was now apparent that fiction had found a path to reality.

The tear in the sky was long and relatively thin, revealing nothing more than a glimpse of the haunting depths of blackness that lay beyond, yet Loki still felt a cold, sweeping shudder pass through his bones as he studied that ominous sliver of dead space. It was mesmerizing in a menacing, unforgiving sense; beauty and danger meeting in one brutal but refined combination.

Next to him, Barnes craned his neck, eyes taking in the impossible darkness that stretched overhead. “What the hell is that?”

“Ginnungagap,” Loki muttered lowly, feeling an uneasy sense of dread stir to life in the pit of his stomach.

“Okay, and now in English?” Barton prompted.

“Put simply, you may know it as the void,” Loki explained, tearing his eyes away from the sky to focus on his teammates, “the vacancy which occupies the space between each branch of Yggdrasil.”

“Like a black hole?” Romanoff guessed.

Loki shook his head grimly. “Worse.”

“Great.” Barton ruffled a hand through his cropped hair, blowing out a sigh. “So what kind of living nightmares can we expect to pour out of this void?”

“L…” Loki paused, swallowing with a bit of difficulty as he forced himself to voice the words he did not wish to speak. “I do not know,” he admitted, voice slightly bitter with the admission. “I had thought the void to be uninhabitable.”

“But something did manage to come through the opening. Something big enough to alert Commander Danvers and throw S.H.I.E.L.D.’s satellites offline,” Rogers pointed out.

“So then the question is,” Natasha thought aloud, “what’s powerful enough to survive a trip through the void?”

“Not what,” Loki muttered, frowning as he glanced up at the rift. “Who.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.” Sam frowned, folding his arms over his chest.

“Good. You shouldn’t,” Loki replied bluntly. “If this is in fact the work of whom I believe it to be,
then your trepidation is well placed.”

“And who do you think it is?” Romanoff questioned with a curious raise of her eyebrows.

Loki released a long breath, absently rubbing his jaw as he gave some consideration to the question. “Had I ample time to access Asgard’s libraries, I would be able to compile a more precise list of suspects,” he said, “but in the interest of urgency, at a glance I would most likely call this the work of Thanos. There are very few who possess the strength to journey into the depths of Ginnungagap, but I believe he may be capable of accomplishing such a feat.”

“Alright.” She gave a nod of acknowledgement, not seeming the slightest bit phased by their talk of deadly voids and immensely powerful beings. Had Loki not already possessed a rather healthy dose of respect for her, he certainly would have now. “So what do we need to know about this Thanos guy?”

“He merely controls the chessboard,” Loki said, “moving pawns while he himself remains seated at a comfortable distance. Only when he is prepared to capture the king will he truly step into play.”

“So you’re saying this is just one move on the board.” Steve frowned, brow creasing with concern. “There’s still more to come.”

“I believe so,” Loki affirmed. “By all appearances this is merely a stepping stone in the path towards something greater. I fear he holds plans much larger than Midgard alone.”

For a moment no one spoke and the ominous tone of Loki’s final words rested heavy in the air between them before being swept away by the chilled breeze.

Eventually, Barnes was the first to speak up.

“Well, shit,” he stated eloquently, and with that, Loki found that he could not disagree.

At Romanoff’s suggestion, they patrolled the area for roughly an hour, searching for any sign of what may have come through the long rift in the sky overhead.

“Keep your distance,” Loki warned when Wilson offered to give them an aerial report of their surroundings via the pack of mechanical wings he wore on his back; a prototype he liberated from an old storage base after his days in the military, he’d explained.

At the dark note of warning in Loki’s voice, Sam’s brows knit together with concern. “You think that thing could actually suck me in?”

Loki blew out a frustrated breath, feeling more incompetent in this one day than in all his past years of life combined. “Again, I do not know,” he confessed, “but I trust that you are not particularly eager to find out.”

“Not even a little bit,” Sam confirmed, directing a grimace up towards the dark split above them. “Okay. Stay away from the giant, freaky vacuum in the sky. Got it.” With that, his pack hummed to life; a pair of wide silver wings extending from over top of his shoulder blades before he took off from the ground, launching himself up and into the expanse of darkened grey skies overhead.

It was, Loki thought, both a relief and a headache when after barely any time at all, Wilson’s voice was ringing out over their comms, faintly distorted with static as he announced, “We’ve got
company.”

Romanoff stilled, her hand automatically flying up to where her earpiece rested. “Tell me what you see,” she ordered.

“At least sixteen...eighteen...twenty of them,” Sam counted. “All armed and definitely alien. Heading for your six.”

“Alright, try to take out as many as you can then circle back and meet up with us on the ground,” Romanoff instructed, already reaching for the dual handguns that were tucked into the belt at her side. “Everyone else, arm up and get ready.”

“Comin’ at you,” Wilson warned overhead, and a moment later, Loki found himself in the thick of the action, blood thrumming in his veins as chaos erupted around him.

It was a far cry from the depths of the raging battles he had once fought alongside Thor, but it would certainly do, Loki thought with a small, dark thrill of exhilaration as he coaxed a sphere of magic to life in his palm, letting the green flames lick at his skin.

“The fuck are those?” Barton spun and ducked, smoothly nocking an arrow before releasing it in a perfect arc as he took down the first of the tall, reptilian-like beings.

“Chitauri,” Loki answered, flanking the archer as he shot a burst of flame at the next of their attackers. “They are wanderers; mercenaries. Muscle for hire.”

“And you think Thanos is supplying their paycheck.”

It was a statement, not a question, but Loki nodded nonetheless. “A safe assumption, I believe.”

“So,” Barton paused to shoot off three more arrows in rapid succession, “how do we stop them?”

Loki smiled in a wide and menacing show of teeth. “Rip them apart.”

Barton blinked at him, his mouth dropping part way open as he prepared to respond with something likely along the lines of ‘your inner gleeful murderer is showing’, but before he could speak, their attention was caught by the sudden, sharp gleam of light reflecting off of silver wings as they tumbled from the sky.

“Shit, shit, shit,” Sam cursed over their comms. “We’ve got a problem, guys.”

“Report, Wilson,” Natasha spoke sternly, not so much as faltering as she elbowed another of the Chitauri attackers in the face. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Sam replied after a few tense moments of muffled, static-filled silence, “fine, but I’m grounded. Looks like they sucked all the juice outta my wings. Those guns they have? I don’t think they’re weapons, I think they’re stealing energy.”

“So this isn’t an attack; it’s a supply mission,” Romanoff said, glancing to Loki for his opinion. “Given what you’ve said about Thanos, it fits.”

“That it does,” Loki agreed, spinning to embed a dagger in another of the Chitauri.

“All right then, new plan,” Romanoff addressed the rest of the team. “Make sure you destroy their weapons. Don’t let them hit you.”

“Too late,” Clint piped up a moment later, making a face as he reached up to pull loose the fried
remains of his hearing aid, tossing the mangled piece of tech aside. “Aw. That was the third one this month.”

“Rogers,” Romanoff called, twisting out of the way when his shield blew past her in a blur of metal, catching two more Chitauri before they crumpled to the ground. “Nice shot,” she said approvingly. “I want you over here with Barton. Cover his back, his comms are out.”

“Nat-” Barton began to protest, but she quickly cut him off.

“Cover his back,” she repeated to Steve, though her eyes remained focused on her partner, clearly indicating that there was no room for argument.

“This? This isn’t even in the top hundred worst situations I’ve been stuck in without my aids,” Barton complained half-heartedly, sending another arrow into an approaching Chitauri’s chest.

The alien dropped to the ground between them and Romanoff stepped forward, ensuring that she kept herself oriented towards Barton so he could watch her lips.

“True,” she agreed as she firmly dug the heel of her boot into the fallen Chitauri’s head, “but I don’t feel like stitching you up in eight different places when we get back to base.”

“If this is about turn into a conversation about playing doctor then I’m gonna go ahead and fry my own comms so I won’t have to listen it,” Sam spoke up.

Natasha gave a barely perceptible snort of amusement. “How many Chitauri do you have left over there?”

“Six down, two to go,” Sam replied. “Me ‘n Barnes could use a hand with these last few guys. They’re not going down without a fight.”

“On my way,” Romanoff replied, but when she started forward, her path was blocked by Loki.

“Allow me. It will take time for you to reach the others,” he pointed out, “but I can be there in an instant.”

Romanoff’s lips thinned out as she studied him for a moment, like she wasn’t quite sure whether the offer came from a place of smug pride or a general desire to be helpful, or, perhaps even more likely, some combination of the two.

Finally she relented with a nod. “Okay. Go help them out and I’ll finish up here.”

With a quick flash of a grin, Loki wasted no time in teleporting to join Wilson and Barnes at the far end of the field.

He reappeared in the middle of the fray, using the element of surprise to his advantage by immediately drawing one of his daggers and driving the blade between the ribs of the first Chitauri.

It made angry hissing noise as it fell, only going silent when Barnes delivered a left-handed hook that landed with a disturbingly hard and sickening crunch.

Loki’s surprise must have been evident on his face because Barnes released a hoarse laugh, lifting his arm and spreading his metal fingers wide.

“’S not just for show,” he said, tone light and joking though Loki could see a deeper, darker sentiment lurking in the man’s eyes; a weariness that spoke of a long and haunted past. He was not
unfamiliar with grief so it seemed, and Loki knew firsthand that it was not an easy emotion to box away and disregard.

He opened his mouth to respond (with what, he wasn’t entirely sure), but that line of discussion was soon cut short by Wilson’s abrupt warning of “Barnes, on your left!”

The last of the Chitauri had suddenly advanced from the side, weapon aimed steadily at Barnes’ chest as the muzzle of its large gun glowed red, seconds away from firing.

With no hesitation Loki lurched forward, shoving Barnes roughly out of the way as he heard the gun explode; the impact hitting him like a blow of Mjolnir to the chest, knocking him off his feet as his head pounded and his lungs screamed, struggling to pull in air.

While his vision gradually realigned, above him Loki heard Wilson pull his firearm and embed a half dozen rounds in the Chitauri. Good. He hoped the creature burned in Hel for that. Or better yet, faced the wrath of Thanos for so poorly failing in its mission.

“You okay, man?” Wilson’s face slowly came into focus overhead, mirrored by Barnes’ frowning face looming over him on the right.

Loki breathed out a wheezing gasp. “Fine.”

It was strange, he thought. Despite having the air thoroughly knocked out of him, he was by no means in any sort of physical pain. Perhaps his advanced physiology kept him immune to the Chitauri’s weapons.

“You sure?” Sam asked, concern scrawled across his face. “You’re looking a little...blue.”

Loki swore in his Aesir tongue, struggling to sit upright as a cold, raw sense of dread poured through him, causing his lungs to seize.

“The–” he broke off into a series of choked coughs before finally regaining his breath, chest aching as he pulled in his first true mouthful of air. “The gun,” he tried again, panting slightly from the effort of keeping his voice steady, working to hide the panic that had flared to life in his bloodstream. “Took...”

“Your magic?” Sam finished for him.

Loki nodded. “This is my Jotun...my natural form,” his mouth seemed to stumble over the word, reluctant and ashamed to admit that it was indeed the truth.

“Hey, no worries man,” Sam said, holding up his palms. “As long as you’re not dying, it’s all good.”

“Not. Dying,” Loki confirmed with a last rasping cough before he pushed himself up onto his elbows.

Wilson seemed content with that, giving a parting dip of his head before making his way back to rejoin Romanoff and the others. “Meet us when you’re ready,” he called back over his shoulder.

Loki watched him go until Barnes eventually broke the silence between them.

“Uh, thanks. For that.” He rolled his shoulder; the metal plates of his arm realigning in a series of quiet whirs and clicks. “Not sure what woulda happened if that thing had hit me. Especially with the arm and all.”
Despite the somewhat awkward, halting tone of his voice, Barnes’ expression held a surprising amount of frank sincerity as he leveled Loki with an even gaze, seemingly unaffected by the burning red of the God’s eyes.

In response, Loki blinked up at him incomprehensibly. “You would be wise to be wary of me. I am a monster,” he spoke bluntly, tone laced with bitterness as he glanced down to the dark blue of his hand where it remained planted in the dirt by his side.

Barnes’ face took on a pensive look and he fell silent for a long minute, studying the God with a level of scrutiny that felt as though he were gazing straight through Loki’s skin.

“Monsters are only what we make of them in our own minds,” he finally spoke, slowly extending a hand to help Loki off the ground.

It was not flesh and bone, Loki noted, and he was certain that that was no coincidence.

After a moment of observing the shining metal limb, he accepted Barnes’ outstretched hand, allowing the sure and solid grip to haul him back up onto his feet.

Darcy raced through the main level of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base, jabbing the elevator button with a finger before impatiently riding the eight floors up to their apartment.

According to Coulson, the quinjet had landed almost two full hours ago, but until now Loki had been stuck in a lengthy debriefing with Hill and the other Avengers. Apparently the mission had gone well, but it only served to open a whole new can of worms involving some guy named Thanos (Coulson had actually whispered the name like he’d been talking about Voldemort, which Darcy found equal parts amusing and worrying).

To be honest, she hadn’t paid much attention to Coulson’s lengthy spiel after the point of ‘Loki’s back’, but from what Darcy had gathered, she’d been right about the alien entry point and now a full-scale plan was in the works to close the rift and put a stop to whatever assumingly evil scheme Thanos had planned.

There would be plenty of new work for all of them on that front, she suspected, but for the moment Loki had been dismissed of his rigid training schedule and allowed to enjoy a little well-earned rest and relaxation, at least until his next Avenger mission arose.

Darcy wasn’t sure why he’d left it to Coulson to tell her all of this. Why hadn’t he come looking for her himself as soon as he and the others had landed, meetings and debriefings be damned? It wasn’t like Loki to act that distant and detached, especially considering the fierce look of worry that had been written all over his face when he’d left on the quinjet earlier that morning.

The elevator door dinged as it slid open, cheerfully announcing her arrival on the eighth floor and stirring Darcy from her thoughts.

Before it even had a chance to fully open, she was squeezing through the gap in the door and sprinting down the hall, coming to a stop outside of her and Loki’s apartment.

She gave herself three seconds to bend at the waist and take a few huffing breaths (maybe it was time she scheduled a little gym time of her own - running was hard) before straightening up, giving her hair a quick finger-combing to tame the wild tangles, and then swiping her access card through the little electronic reader on the door.
“Loki?” She called out tentatively, stepping inside and letting the door click shut behind her.

The apartment was still and silent; everything looking just the same as they’d left it that morning, Darcy noted with a twinge of worry. There wasn’t a stray piece of clothing or single dish out of place and despite what Coulson had told her over the phone, she couldn’t find any sign to indicate that Loki had actually come back.

“Lookiii,” she tried again, drawing out each syllable of his name. “If you’re doing your invisible thing so you can jump out and make me pee my pants, I’m gonna warn you right now that I will not hesitate to slug you straight in the nose,” Darcy warned as she peeked around the corner of the living room wall, glancing down into the hallway.

Unsurprisingly the hall was empty, but, she realized a moment later, the bedroom door had been pulled shut.

Bingo.

She made a beeline for their room, stopping outside of it to rap her knuckles on the closed door. Never let it be said that Darcy Lewis didn’t respect a person’s privacy. Even if it was taking an outrageous amount of willpower not to burst through the door like a tiny, human-sized hurricane of impatience and worry.

“Hey,” she raised her voice to be heard through the panel of wood that separated them. “Loki? You okay in there?”

“Don’t come in,” Loki called, voice coming out thin and oddly desperate.

Darcy frowned, feeling her stomach flip with an uneasy sense of growing panic. “You’re kinda freaking me out right now. What’s going on?”

She waited a few beats before Loki’s answer finally came through the door.

“It is not wise for you to be near me,” he told her.

Darcy huffed out a breath, wishing that he wasn’t quite as good at being so annoyingly cryptic and evasive with his words.

“Okay, now I’m more than kinda freaked out,” she admitted. “You have exactly two seconds to tell me what’s wrong before I kick this door down Cops-style.”

“Go, Darcy. Please.”

There was an edge of anxiety to his voice; a level of frightened vulnerability that she’d never heard from him before, and Darcy felt her heart give a heavy thump in her chest as her imagination went wild, running through all the terrifying possibilities of what could have happened to him on that mission. Was he sick? Hurt? What if it was something much worse?

She put a slightly shaking hand on the doorknob, feeling it twist easily in her grasp. He hadn’t locked the door...that had to be a good sign, right?

“Sorry,” she replied, “but I’m not going anywhere. So if you’re doing something weird, this is your five second warning to hide your junk because I’m coming in whether you like it or not.”

Without waiting for a reply, Darcy turned the knob, swinging the door open.
She only managed a single step into the room before her body froze, mouth dropping open as she stopped dead in her tracks.

“Oh my god.”

Chapter End Notes

*cue dramatic music*
Only one chapter to go!
I’ve literally been working on this chapter since January (fight scenes are haaaard), so feedback would be greatly appreciated :)


Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

This is it, guys. Thank you SO much for all your amazing support for this fic. I’m honestly blown away by it. I never thought that (a) I’d be able to write a 30 chapter story, and (b) people would still be sticking with it this far down the line. Just further proof that we’ve got the best fandom ever <3

Loki was standing in the centre of the room in full Jotun form; skin blue and red eyes blazing.

He was gorgeous, Darcy thought, her eyes going wide as she greedily took in every little detail. From the intricate markings that ran in patterns over his skin to the attractive contrast between his dark hair and vivid eyes, every inch of him screamed power in a way that made her skin flush hot and her heart hammer loud in her ears.

When she took a step forward, Loki cringed, immediately turning away from her.

“I need only a few moments longer,” he spoke apologetically, “I should soon hold enough magic to return to my Aesir form.”

“Don’t you dare,” Darcy shot back with a fierceness that surprised her. This was her first real look at her true soulmate; the man beneath the sly humor and clever quips and cocky intelligence. She was finally being given a chance to see the very heart of who Loki was, and there was no way in hell she was going to let that opportunity pass her by.

“Is it okay if I touch you?” She made sure to ask, knowing that if she was going to make any progress with him she’d have to go about it slowly.

Loki swallowed roughly, shaking his head. “I will hurt you.”

He said it with such a heartbreaking amount of certainty, Darcy really wished that she could take his hand just to bring him some small amount of comfort in that moment.

She pressed her palms together so she wouldn’t be tempted to reach out as she studied the pattern of raised ridges that covered his skin. For a while she’d been mulling over an idea, curious about whether Loki’s frosty side would actually harm her or if their soulmate bond wouldn’t allow for that to happen. Now that she actually had an opening, it seemed like the perfect time to finally put her little theory to the test. (Yep, she was actually theorizing. Jane would be so proud of her.)

“See, the thing is, I don’t think you will,” Darcy declared, taking a small step towards him.

Loki automatically backed up, keeping her at a distance.

“I think it’s all in your head,” Darcy continued, adding another step while Loki shrunk away from her again. “If you don’t want to hurt me, you won’t.”
“That is a very dangerous assumption to make,” Loki warned as Darcy cornered him, backing him up against the wall.

“Maybe,” Darcy admitted, “but I want to try something. Trust me?”

“You’re making it rather difficult at the moment,” Loki muttered, red eyes looking anywhere but at her, “but yes, I trust you.”

“Good.” Darcy studied his face, hating how much fear and shame she saw there. “I’m going to touch you,” she explained, “but first I’ll distract you.”

Loki let out a short, broken laugh. “Darcy, nothing could possibly distract me from the thought of hurting you.”

“Really?” Darcy raised an eyebrow, leveling him with a doubtful look. “Not even if I talk about what I want to do to you right now? Because you look fucking hot, Loki.”

Her eyes roamed over his body, moving from top to bottom in a slow, obvious appraisal before she stepped closer, leaving only inches of space between them.

“I want to know what your skin tastes like when it’s blue,” she spoke softly, feeling her pulse pick up speed when Loki’s eyes immediately darkened to a rich crimson color. “I want to see how sensitive all those markings are when I run my tongue over them,” she paused, pushing up onto her tip toes to whisper the final part of her little speech into his ear, “and I want to watch how dark your eyes turn when you’re about to come inside me.”

Loki breathed out a shuddering breath, groaning at the mental image her words provoked. “Darcy,” he said, voice tight with warning.

She grinned up at him broadly. “Look down.”

“I am well aware of my arousal. I do not need to look at it,” he grumbled, expression slightly pained as he looked away.

“No,” Darcy shook her head, trying not to laugh at how cute his sudden, awkward embarrassment was, “look at your hand.”

When Loki glanced down, his eyes widened with disbelief as he saw Darcy’s fingertips resting lightly on the inside of his wrist.

“Are you hurt?” He asked, immediately pulling away as he tried to flatten himself against the wall, putting as much distance between their bodies as possible.

“Nope,” Darcy wiggled her fingers in front of his face, showing off five perfectly normal fingertips. “I’m totally fine.”

Loki made a noise that she couldn’t quite classify; somewhere between a choked laugh and a sob as he sagged against the wall, eyebrows drawn together like he couldn’t quite believe it.

His relief was so raw and palpable, it had tears springing to her eyes as Darcy pulled in a shaking breath, swallowing down the sudden lump of emotion in her throat.

*See, she wanted to yell and wave her arms at him, there’s nothing wrong with you. You’re not as flawed, not as inadequate, as you think you are.*
He would never believe her though. Not yet, anyway. He still had too many thoughts to sort through, too much baggage that he hadn’t yet released, and even though it would be a long journey, Darcy knew that someday they would get there.

“I want to touch your face now,” she said gently, voice wavering a bit, “is that okay?”

Loki gave a stiff, jerky nod. “Slowly, please,” his voice was soft, almost pleading, like he still didn’t completely trust himself around her.

Darcy reached up tentatively, lightly resting her palm on his cheek. When Loki didn’t object, she guided his face down to hers and pressed her lips to his in a soft kiss.

Loki didn’t respond immediately, but after a moment his jaw relaxed and his mouth began to move with hers.

With that little sign of encouragement Darcy grew bolder, tilting her head and parting her lips as their kisses grew progressively longer and deeper.

When they finally broke apart, Loki’s voice was hoarse. “Tell me what you feel. Are you in pain?”

“Not at all,” Darcy answered, “it’s cool and tingly.” She grinned, running the pad of her index finger over one of the more prominent marks on his neck. “I like it.”

Loki groaned, eyes briefly falling shut at her touch. “Darcy Lewis, you will be the death of me.”

“Don’t die just yet,” Darcy grabbed the front of his shirt, pulling him along with her towards the bed, “I’ve still got plans for you.” She gave him a saucy grin, pushing him down onto the mattress.

The sight of him sprawled out on his back with one leg hanging off the edge of the bed made her throat go dry. Figuring that he was in need of a little extra assurance at the moment anyway, Darcy let her brain-to-mouth filter disengage, blurting, “Fuck, you look so good right now.”

Loki’s breath was coming out in short pants as he gazed up at her, eyes a mixture of lust and worry. “I fear this may not be wise.”

“It’s okay, we’ll go slow,” she promised as she crawled onto the mattress, straddling him. “If it hurts me at all, I’ll tell you.” She kissed him again and Loki automatically brought his hands to her hips, holding her in place.

Their kisses were lazy and unhurried, and when Darcy felt Loki begin to relax, she settled her bum in his lap and let her hips move, slowly rocking against him.

Loki pulled his mouth away from hers, pressing his face into her neck and muttering a low string of expletives.

His reaction made Darcy grin and she increased the pressure, rolling her hips forward.

“More?” She asked when she felt his hand began to creep up the back of her shirt, the cool touch of his fingers making her shiver pleasantly.

“More,” he confirmed, voice rough with need. “Your skin feels so exquisitely warm, I can only imagine...” he trailed off, shaking his head as if he wouldn’t allow himself to finish the thought.

“Imagine what?” Darcy sat up just enough to peel off her shirt, eager to see exactly how his cold skin felt when it was pressed against her intimately.
Loki hesitated, swallowing hard before continuing, “I can only imagine what it would feel like to be inside of you while I am in this form.”

When she’d finished stripping off her top, Darcy leaned down again, kissing him hard on the mouth. “Who says you have to imagine it?” She whispered, leaning her forehead against his.

Loki’s eyes went wide with concern. “No,” he insisted, “I would most certainly hurt you. The risk is far too great.”

“Let’s just keep going slow and we’ll see what happens, okay?” Darcy suggested, trailing her fingers over the marks that curved around his neck, dipping and disappearing under the collar of his shirt. “How about you take this off?” She gave a little tug on the fabric, meeting his eyes as she waited for his approval. Patience wasn’t one of her better qualities, but for Loki she would move at a snail’s pace if he asked her to.

When he gave a small, consenting nod, she helped him pull off his shirt before reaching around to unclasp her bra, letting it fall to the floor. As she did, Loki’s forehead creased with worry and in response Darcy laid a hand over his heart, feeling the strong and steady beat beneath her fingertips.

“It’s alright,” she assured, bringing her other palm to rest on his chest as well. “Forget all about the blue. This is just you and me having awesome sexy times like always.”

Loki gave a brief chuckle, some of the tension unwinding from his body as he finally allowed himself to relax against the mattress.

“See?” Darcy murmured, leaning over him and pressing her bare chest against his, “it’s good, right?”

Goosebumps erupted on her skin as Loki slid his hands down her back, drawing her closer. “Quite good,” he agreed, voice low and husky, “but it could be better.”

“Yeah?” Darcy grinned, glad to see that he was feeling more playful than fearful now. “Better how?”

“Better once I remove the remainder of your clothing.” He slipped a hand between their bodies, trailing chilled fingers down the slope of Darcy’s stomach towards the button on her jeans.

“Oh,” she gasped at the contact, arousal hitting her hard like a punch to the gut. “Yep, that does sound better. Much better.”

She lifted her hips, helping him along as Loki tugged down her jeans and panties, pulling them off her ankles and tossing them aside. He reached for the clasp on his own pants then, but soon stopped as a troubled look crossed his face.

“Darcy,” he paused, swallowing thickly. “If I lose control, I will harm you.” He lifted his gaze to meet hers, concern burning in his red eyes. “At best I would freeze your skin beyond repair. At worst...I could kill you.”

“You won’t,” Darcy said surely. “I know you won’t. Don’t think about that, just feel.” She dropped her head and kissed him, pouring as much love and assurance into it as she could manage. When they parted, she moved lower to press more small kisses along his jaw, below his ear, and lower still to the side of his neck where his pulse beat rapidly.

While her lips moved, her hands began their own explorations as they skinned down his abs towards the front of his pants, making quick work of the button before sliding down the zipper and
slipping her hand inside, palming his erection.

Loki’s eyes slammed shut and he let his head fall back against the mattress with a long groan.

“You alright?” Darcy grinned, slowly working the length of him with her hand.

“More than alright.” Loki replied, eyes flicking open as he watched her with a heavy-lidded expression of pleasure.

That look, combined with the deep, gravelly tone of his voice, brought a hot ache between her thighs, and suddenly Darcy couldn’t get him naked soon enough.

“Good,” she admitted breathlessly, beginning to tug down his pants, “because I need you right now.”

When he was fully exposed, she sat back on her heels and took a moment to simply admire him, eyes following the beautiful path of lines scrawled like art across his skin.

“You’re stunning,” she told him honestly.

Loki made a disbelieving sound, shifting beneath her with obvious embarrassment. “Hardly.”

“If you don’t believe me, that’s fine,” Darcy said, raising herself up on her knees; hips shifting to align with his as she leaned in to whisper in his ear, “I’ll just have to prove it to you.”

She reached between their bodies, fingers curling around the thick base of his erection and eliciting a low, needy noise from Loki.

“Tell me you want this,” she breathed, tilting her hips just enough to rub herself back and forth over the head of his length.

Loki let out a hiss of pleasure. “Yes,” it took him two tries to finally get the word out between gritted teeth, “Darcy, please.”

She answered him with a kiss before settling over him, planting her palms on his chest and sinking down slowly, the action pulling an obscene moan from deep in her throat. “Oh God,” she arched her back, panting, “those markings really are everywhere.”

“Darcy.” Loki released a choked groan once he was fully seated inside her, running his hands up her thighs and cupping her ass. “Gods, you feel like fire,” he murmured, gazing at her with what she could only describe as a look of worship, “searing your name into my flesh, my heart, my very soul.”

A wide smile pulled at Darcy’s lips as she bent her head until their noses bumped together. “You’re seriously spouting sex poetry right now?”

“You are worthy of more odes than I could possibly compose,” Loki told her, surging up to catch her lips in another long and thorough kiss.

When they broke apart - Darcy feeling slightly dazed and breathless - she finally lifted her hips, lowering herself back down and –

Oh.

Her eyes fluttered shut, lips parting in pure pleasure. “Oh fuck,” she breathed, “okay, yeah. This is definitely a poetry-worthy moment. Oh my god, Loki.”

Regular sex with him was always amazing, but blue sex? Blue sex was quickly turning out to be her
favourite thing ever.

The friction was incredible, stimulating almost to the point of being too intense and Darcy bit her lip to hold in a groan, repeating the motion again with languid, unhurried movements as she rose and fell over him.

With each undulation, Loki’s hips rose to meet hers and he made a soft, needy sound that was easily one of the best things Darcy had ever heard.

“Tell me what you feel,” she breathed, repeating his earlier words back to him as they moved together.

“I feel...” His voice was raw and he licked his lips before continuing, “I feel you, Darcy. Everywhere. Surrounding me, invading me, overwhelming me in the most extraordinary way. I would have this never end.”

She had to blink a few times to get rid of the slight blur to her vision before bending forward to kiss him again. “Me too,” she spoke against his lips.

In their current position, her hair had fallen around their faces and Loki moved one hand from her hip up to tuck the strands behind her ear, fingers sliding around to the base of her neck as he threaded his fingers into the mass of wavy strands.

His other hand remained firmly planted on the swell of her hip, fingers digging into her skin so hard Darcy would probably wear bruises tomorrow, but she didn’t mind. In fact, she’d welcome it as a visual reminder of the moment. The affection and desire in Loki’s dark red eyes, the way his cool skin slid along hers...those were the little details she didn’t want to forget.

It took all her effort to control her pace, stretching out each slow rise and fall of her hips, but it was worth it to feel him so completely and see that blissful look of pleasure on his face.

When her thighs began to tremble, Loki took note and flipped them over, lowering her down onto the bed in one smooth, effortless movement.

“Sometimes I forget how freakishly graceful you are.” Darcy blinked up as he hovered over her, bodies still joined as his weight rested on his forearms.

“Would you prefer that I allow you to fall onto the floor?” Loki asked, eyebrows raising with amusement. “I should think that would do a fine job of spoiling the mood.”

Darcy grinned, feeling her heart swell at the amount of light teasing in his tone. “Point taken.”

She let out a soft little gasp as he finally began to move, setting a steady and purposeful pace. If she thought that being on top of him was incredible, being under him was even more so. The contrast between his chilled body and her own hot, flushed skin brought Darcy to the brink almost instantly as she locked her thighs around him, silently encouraging him to move faster; go harder.

Loki met her demand, finesse slipping away as the driving thrust of his hips grew more urgent and his mouth found hers in a hungry, desperate kiss.

Darcy’s hands slid across the expanse of his shoulders, mapping out the pattern of raised lines along his back as she arched up, trying to draw their bodies closer. She wanted to explore every inch of him; feel as much of that beautiful, cool skin as she possibly could.

In response, Loki made a low sound of pleasure, coaxing her lips apart and plunging his tongue into
her mouth as he kissed her breathless, and *fuck*, Darcy thought dizzily, even his tongue was icy cold. She was absolutely putting that to use later.

The chill of his body was becoming so intense that she was shivering now, unable to stop as the sheen of sweat on her skin grew cold against Loki’s frigid body. It only added to the overload of stimulation and Darcy whined low in her throat, feeling the rise of her climax approaching.

“You need only ask and I will stop,” Loki’s voice was thick and throaty as he reluctantly tore his mouth away from hers, panting slightly.

“Oh my god, don’t you dare,” Darcy breathed in warning, “I’m so, so close right now.”

“No yet, love,” Loki begged, rolling his hips desperately against hers. “Stay with me.”

“Loki,” his name came out on a keening half-cry as she briefly wondered how the hell he expected her to hang on when he whispered things like that.

She held off her orgasm as best she could until her body was trembling and she felt her control fraying at the edges, a moment away from snapping altogether.

“Now?” She questioned weakly, thighs tightening around him as she tried to hold herself together.

“Gods...yes, Darcy. Now,” he confirmed, mouth landing firmly on hers for one more kiss before Darcy found herself coming hard, letting out a breathless moan as her mouth dropped open and she saw stars behind her eyelids.

Under her palms she felt the muscles in Loki’s back tense, hips stuttering in a series of final, erratic movements and then he was coming with her, pressing his forehead to hers as he choked out her name.

They came down from their highs slowly, sweaty and panting but refusing to pull out of each others arms.

“Wow,” Darcy blew a stray piece of hair out of her eyes, “okay, we definitely need to work blue sex into our regular routine. I don’t even have a word for how good that was.”

Loki’s answering laugh was more of a tired wheeze as he dropped his head to her shoulder, cheek resting on her flushed skin. His breath came out in chilly puffs, ghosting along her collarbone and leaving small ripples of goosebumps in its wake.

“I must admit, that was more pleasant than I expected,” he said.

“Seriously?” Darcy made a face. “Jeez, don’t lay those compliments on too thick or my ego will be huge.”

“What I mean to say is, I was unsure of how my Jotun side would react to our coupling,” Loki explained, a charmingly lopsided smile working its way onto his face. “You, as always, were outstanding, my dear.”

“You’re damn right I was,” Darcy responded, letting out a small, bright laugh when she felt Loki’s teeth nip playfully at the side of her neck.

They lapsed into a comfortable silence then, content to simply lay entwined with each other. Loki’s body gradually warmed up against hers as he slowly made the transition back into his Asgardian form before tightening his arm around her and releasing a soft, content sigh.
The action nearly brought tears to Darcy’s eyes and in return, she held him tighter; one arm around his waist while the other was buried in his hair, fingers sifting through the dark strands.

God, she loved him. It was more than that, even. Love felt like too small of a word, Darcy thought, like it wasn’t remotely close to being on the same level as her feelings for him. She loved Jane. She loved lazy Sunday afternoons. She loved steaming cups of coffee and singing in the shower. What she felt for Loki was so far beyond any of that, and it was during the quiet, simple moments like these, when they were in their own little bubble away from all else, that those feelings were especially apparent to Darcy.

Even back when he’d been nothing more than a half-dead stranger snarking at her from the living room couch she’d been inexplicably drawn to him, and in her eyes, he would always remain just as fascinating and undeniably charming as he was on that day when they’d first met.

That wasn’t to say that he hadn’t grown in the time Darcy had known him. Even now Loki was always striving to be better for her, even as his mind continued to whisper little doubt-filled thoughts that he would never quite be good enough - worthy enough - of her love.

It might take her some time but she would erase every last one of those lingering doubts, Darcy vowed. She would try with all her might to make his life better, knowing that he was undoubtedly going to do the same for her. Because that’s what they were; soulmates, partners, a team. They completed one another, and being with Loki gave her a level of wholeness that Darcy had never felt before.

It was almost like a missing piece of her had finally slotted into place, filling an empty little corner of her heart, and with a small jolt of understanding, Darcy realized that it was likely because there was no holding back between them any longer.

Loki had finally shown her his true self in all his blue-skinned wonder, revealing his biggest so-called flaw and baring every inch of himself to her. She couldn’t even begin to imagine how much fear and doubt and worry he must have felt the moment she’d brushed her fingers against the chilled skin of his wrist, but he’d let her do it. Simply for no other reason than because she’d asked him to trust her.

The significance of that struck her with a sudden, startling clarity that left her almost breathless and in that moment, in her blood and her bones and with every fibre of her being, Darcy knew that she’d finally made her decision.

She was ready.

It was with a slightly giddy sense of urgency that she nudged Loki back to consciousness, quietly asking, “Do you have it? The apple?”

Loki lifted his head, eyes coming into focus on hers as he blinked away any last remains of sated sleepiness. It took a moment for his brain to catch up to her question and when he finally registered exactly what she’d said, his eyes grew large with surprise.

“Darcy,” he paused, swallowing roughly as he stared at her. “Are you certain? Perhaps you would rather wait to make this decision with a clear mind, once you are not under the influence of our recent activities.”

Darcy snorted. “Okay, wow. Did you really just manage to imply that you’re so good in bed, you fried by brain and now I can’t make a rational decision?”
“That was an unintended benefit,” Loki replied with a quick flash of a grin before his face sobered again, eyes searching hers for any sign of uncertainty. “I need you to say that you hold no doubts; that you truly desire this.”

“I’m sure,” Darcy answered without hesitation, steadily holding his gaze as she reached for his hand, squeezing his fingers reassuringly. “I’ve never been more sure of anything. I want this, Loki. I want you.”

“Alright,” Loki sat up, running a hand through his hair and looking slightly bewildered in the most adorable, flustered kind of way. “Alright,” he repeated, “I need merely a moment.” He leaned in, kissing her quickly but thoroughly before moving up the bed to properly settle into a seated position next to her.

His eyebrows pulled down in concentration as he worked to pull the apple from its storage pocket between realms, and a moment later, his hand began to glow with light as Idunn’s apple took shape in his palm.

Actually seeing the apple up close made her heart start pounding wildly, but Darcy wasn’t afraid; she knew that she’d made the right choice. She didn’t want to be apart from Loki ever again, and that little piece of fruit would ensure that she’d never have to.

As he extended his hand their eyes met; Loki’s pupils so large and inky black, Darcy got a little lost inside them for a minute. The expression on his face - hopeful, a bit dumbstruck, and utterly affectionate – made her want to surge forward and push him down onto the mattress all over again. God, she could never get enough of him. At least now they’d have more than enough time to get their fill of each other.

Pushing those thoughts aside for the moment, Darcy sat up straighter, focusing her attention back to the apple that rested in Loki’s palm.

It wasn’t as fancy as she’d expected. Yes, it shimmered with a bit of an otherworldly glow, but for the most part it looked like your average, run of the mill, grocery store-variety apple.

With a deep breath, she reached for the fruit slowly, turning it over in her hands and inspecting the smooth, blemish-free skin as she mapped out exactly where she would take her first bite.

“Are you ready?” Loki asked, voice rough with emotion as he stared at her with large, serious eyes.

Transferring the apple to one palm, Darcy used her other hand to seek out Loki’s, sliding their fingers together and squeezing tightly.

“I think,” she said, lifting her eyebrows coyly, “the better question is: are you?”

At that Loki chuckled, making her stomach flutter with a warm happiness as he pulled her into his arms, settling her in his lap while his lips landed on her temple in a firm, sure kiss.

“I have always been ready for this,” he assured her. “I love you, Darcy.”

“I love you too,” Darcy replied, gazing up at him as unshed tears began to dot her vision. “So fucking much, it drives me insane.”

“Then we shall go mad together, hmm?” Loki offered, brushing her hair aside and nuzzling a path along the length of her neck.

“Hell yes,” Darcy replied emphatically, eliciting an amused chuckle from her soulmate.
So with Loki’s laugh ringing in her ears and his arms holding her tight, she lifted the golden apple to her mouth and took a bite.

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