You've got a friend in me

by boleyn13

Summary

After faking his death in the Dark World Loki is free to do what he wants. Instead of leaving everything behind Loki is driven by his thirst for revenge and won't find peace before he destroyed every single one of the Avengers. This time though he won't use violence, but the weapons of the God of Mischief: trickery, deceit and illusion. Loki decides to befriend the Avengers. However they won't know it's him. Not until he is close enough to strike. Unfortunately Loki didn't consider the possibility that he might get too close.

Notes

Hi, there!
I intend this to be a long story with a slow build-up. The main premise is Loki infiltrating the life of 6 different people, which takes time and patience. In the end it may not work as expected (for Loki and me). I hope you have fun watching Loki coming up with a plan and being his despicable self. I can't emphasise that enough - Loki is not a nice person and he won't instantly find a soft spot for the Avengers or for humanity in his heart. After all he is a driven, tormented and very angry character - this is what makes him such an interesting character. Even more so when he slowly begins to find out things about himself that he didn't know existed.
So long, enjoy the read and let me know what you think about it :)

The Captain

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I am alive, I'm just playing dead
I'm gonna say what should have never been said
The giants of the world are crashing down
The end is near, I hear the trumpets' sound

Northern Lights ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~

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Being dead clearly had its advantages. With nobody hunting him or trying to bring him down Loki should have finally been able to take a deep breath and get some rest. Thor and with him everybody else in Asgard thought that he was dead, so there was nothing to fear, nothing to hide from. Loki travelled between the Nine Realms before he simply stopped and lay down. It was the first time in years that he could close his eyes and drift off to sleep without having to worry about some assassin that might want to slit his throat. So Loki slept and he should have woken up well rested and more or less content.

That wasn’t the case.

Loki had said it himself – satisfaction wasn’t in his nature and now although he was free, free to do whatever he pleased, Loki was far from being satisfied. During his captivity there had been only two things he had been thinking about. Getting out off his cell and taking revenge. The cell belonged to his past now. It had worked out even better than he had planned, all of his enemies thought he was a rotten corpse, thanks to his foolish brother. Now he could do whatever he wanted. Leave this all behind, go to any realm he wanted to visit, search for treasures, learn new abilities, and find a place where he could stay. All that was within his reach, he could almost taste a new life on his tongue. A life he could form any way he wanted to.

But Loki didn’t want it.

His mind never came to rest, not even a single second. The first night in ages that he should be able to close his eyes in peace and still there was only one thought in his head. He wanted blood. He wanted to hurt them, break them, kill them and savour every second of it. All six of them were his. His to torture, his to hunt down. The so called Avengers.

They had beaten him, humiliated him, put him in chains and handed him back to his brother. Just like satisfaction, forgiveness wasn’t in Loki’s nature. Not that they deserved it. Thanks to them and their chains Loki had had a lot of time to ponder. To imagine their sweet cries of agony which he would pull from their lips. It has been way too long since the last time Loki had used a dagger. When he had pretended to actually stab Thor he had been so tempted. His fingers had itched to dissolve his own illusions and to bury his favourite weapon in Thor’s flesh. Maybe that would have been able to satisfy him.

The mere memory made Loki’s whole body tingle and he felt regret. His decision had been the good one, he chose to scheme, to get away, and to free himself from his chains. So he had pulled the wool over Thor’s eyes who hadn’t disappointed. Thor would never stop falling for his illusions. He did even more than that, he spread the word. By now he had probably told the Avengers about his passing. They would feel secure, one potential enemy less to fight. Loki didn’t care. His revenge would only taste sweeter when they didn’t see it coming.
This time Loki would be himself. He would be smart and he would do things his style, not the Other’s. Not some loud, painfully obvious invasion. Loki could be subtle, he was sneaky and he was the God of Mischief. So he would do what he did best. Instead of bursting into the quarters of the Avengers and attack them with brutal force Loki would plan things out. One thing he already knew for sure – he would not make a show out of it. People may think him arrogant and Loki was, but he was absolutely able to learn from his mistakes. He had to admit that he would definitely enjoy taking them all down at once, making the others watch while he killed the first one. Again, just thinking about it filled Loki with joy and excitement, but he forbid himself immediately to pursue that thought any further.

No, he would be better this time. Think ahead. What’s the use in being dead if he didn’t use it to his advantage? So no, there was no way he would face them in all his glory and show them what they were in for. The Avengers wouldn’t know who they were fighting. A malicious grin spread on Loki’s face when a plan was already putting itself together in his mind. They wouldn’t even know that they were fighting at all.

Loki Odinson had ceased to exist long ago. Now Loki Laufeyson was also dead.

It was time that a new villain entered the stage. A villain in the disguise of a friend.

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Loki’s knowledge was embarrassingly limited. Something he definitely wasn’t fond of admitting. When he had arrived on Midgard Loki had been sure that he would quickly come up with a strategy how to bring the Avengers to their downfall, one by one. Unfortunately he realised pretty fast that he barely knew anything about them. A rather ridiculous thought, given the fact that he had actually mind controlled one of them. To look into the mind of a person didn’t help to get to know them as well as one might think. Of course Loki knew about former missions, some of S.H.I.E.L.D’s secret, numbers and names and so on. That was all useful information and he didn’t want to miss it, still it wasn’t enough. Or it wasn’t what he needed.

The mind, even one as feeble as Agent Barton’s, wasn’t just a box you could open and look inside. It was complex, had different layers and it simply didn’t tell you everything about its owner. Nobody, no human, no god, not even Loki knew himself inside out. It was simply impossible to predict someone’s reaction to a certain event. Actions and feelings were born within seconds and could change a person. Some collapsed under pressure while others turned out stronger than ever thought possible.

If Loki wanted to find out more about the Avengers, their weaknesses, their fears, he had to get to know them. A plan Loki was actually looking forward to. A chance to combine his revenge with a lot of other things that filled him with glee and joy. Playing people, luring them into trusting him, only to see their shocked expression when he turned on them.

Right now Loki was still bringing up ideas. He didn’t know yet how exactly he would take the Avengers down. Probably he would create a special destiny for every single one of them. Before that he needed to find out everything about them, what made them happy, angry, what they dreamed of and what kept them awake at night. A task which would take a lot of time, but one of Loki’s greatest virtues was patience. After all, he was dead, there was no need to rush and still there was a lot to do.

The first step was to create a new face. Not just one, but six. A new friend for each of them. They had to be distinct, not the slightest resemblance was possible if Loki didn’t want to put his cover at risk. Sadly he couldn’t just use the appearance of some acquaintance in Asgard, Thor would instantly notice and his masterfully faked death would be revealed as a fraud. Therefore Loki had
no other choice than to create six alter egos and they had to be perfect. Each of them needed to be especially adapted to the chosen Avenger. Thor would be easy, Loki already knew him well enough.

The physical appearance was important, a nice first impression could get him very far. Which already confronted him with the first choice he had to make: a male or female form. Probably he would need both. Six faces, six names, six personalities and he would be forced to alternate between them every day. Loki would have to know them by heart and he couldn’t afford to confuse them or change them after he had gotten in contact with the Avengers. Most importantly – he mustn’t raise any suspicion. The first meeting had to be planned in detail if he wanted to step into their lives like a casual acquaintance.

Without a doubt the woman would be the biggest challenge. The thought of her made Loki cringe. She had played him, used his own words against him. No body had ever succeeded in doing that, because Loki always chose his words carefully. It was one of his greatest skills. Maybe he had been careless, but she had indeed outsmarted him. A mistake he would never make again. She was a killer and a spy. Someone who had to be paranoid by nature. After so many years of battle and secrecy she probably suspected every new person in her life to be a potential thread. In Loki’s case that was even true. No, he definitely wouldn’t start with her.

Looking at his options it was pretty obvious who would be the first to obtain his attention. Someone who was likely to trust a stranger and to believe that there was honour and good will in everyone. A fool, but this would only serve Loki’s purpose.

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After having watched Captain America for over a week Loki was convinced that he knew enough of his daily routine to step into action. The moral’s boring life disgusted Loki, but it was at least easy to analyse. Steve Rogers was a man out of time, he knew that. He was polite to every person he met, did the same things everyday and seemed to try to catch up with all the things he had missed. Yet he was clutching at old things, things he knew, things that most mortals didn’t even bother with anymore. It would be all too easy to befriend the Captain.

It almost made Loki sick to observe him every day how he treated other people. Although Rogers himself was a mere mortal, he was still superior to pretty much everybody else on this planet. He didn’t act that way though. He was silent, bowed his head, followed orders, negotiated and stepped back although he could crush the other person’s skull with his bare hands. The Captain was weak and literally begged Loki to be manipulated.

So Loki chose his appearance. Rogers was a soldier, he valued friendship and comradeship. Loki hadn’t once seen him in the company of a woman, aside the Widow. Given that it seemed obvious to choose a male form. Every new feature of his body was chosen with care, but Loki couldn’t resist letting his eyes as they were. Blonde curls decorated his head, his face was softer, his cheekbones less sharp, his lips fuller and his body a little more stout.

Loki was content with the result. He watched himself in the mirror and the God of Mischief was nowhere to be seen. Just a blonde man with green eyes in Midgardian clothes. After choosing a name for his new persona Loki went straight to the place where he would meet Steve Rogers again for the first time in two years. Loki wasn’t even nervous, he had full confidence in his plan. The only one who could compromise it was himself. It would definitely be a hard task to not simply rip Rogers’ heart out the second he saw him. He would have to hold on to this picture and treasure it. Sooner or later he would be the one responsible for Rogers to stop breathing. Till then he would be his friend and dig up all the dark secrets.
Since Rogers was a creature of habit Loki knew exactly where to go. Like every damn morning Rogers would take a run in a park nearby his flat. The Captain was clearly a creature of habit and clearly didn’t think that his enemies might use that to their advantage, like Loki. Doing every day the same thing was his first mistake and made it painfully obvious that Rogers, apart from his superhuman strength, was still an ordinary mortal and a fool like all of them. His imprudent behaviour made Loki’s skin crawl, but he wouldn’t complain, it made things easier.

The closer he got to his target the more Loki started to feel some kind of excitement. Here he was again, scheming, hiding himself out in the open. He was the God of Mischief and it was going to be fun.

Loki had chosen this bench with care. Rogers ran past it every time and Loki would be in his field of vision before Loki could even see him. It was perfect, like a play that Loki had written and put on stage. Smiling to himself Loki sat down, pulled up his legs up and opened the book he had brought along with him. Though it was only his cover Loki had chosen a book which had actually sparked his interest. A work about the different religions of humanity. Since the mortals had chosen other gods to worship Loki wanted to know more about said gods. From what he had already heard, it seemed pretty confusing. The first chapter intended to explain the concept of religion and to Loki’s surprise it pleased him. He was already on page 35, he read much faster than most people, when he heard those steps approaching. As punctual as usual, but Loki didn’t look up. He didn’t have to, he had watched Rogers numerous times and his ears told him all he had to know. The mortal simply had to see him, but didn’t mind him. Why should he anyway? For all he knew, for all he could see, there was only a blonde man sitting on the bench, reading a book. Nothing special.

If he only knew who he was under this cover… Loki shook his head, again this wasn’t the time to let his thoughts wander. Roger passed him three other times and Loki read about five hundred pages. All he had to do was make sure Rogers wouldn’t notice that the young man on the page had almost finished the entire book during this short amount of time. One hour and a half later Rogers was done with his training and Loki stayed another few minutes on the bench to keep up appearances. He used the time to finish the book which still left him a little confused. There was definitely need to read up on this subject.

Since Loki knew how to use his time successfully he did exactly that the next day and the day after that. Loki sat at the same bench every time and Rogers jogged past him. This simple routine continued for almost two weeks, although Loki didn’t show up every single day. Into the third week Loki felt it was time to advance to the next step. So he left early and after a few steps he accidentally dropped his sunglasses. Since a mortal would notice them missing he returned to the park one hour later, only to find them gone. Loki wasn’t able to keep the smirk of his face. There was no way anybody else but Rogers could have found them, Loki had placed them in the perfect spot. The Captain wouldn’t stumble over them, but he would have to be blind to not see them. Now Loki could lie back and wait, Rogers’ good manners would do the rest.

Loki came early the next day and searched for his sunglasses. It felt only natural to do so and he could never know if someone was watching. Maybe Rogers was constantly under surveillance and Loki couldn’t risk giving anybody the impression that he was actually trying to get the captain’s attention. Thus Loki played his role absolutely perfectly and pretended to search the item he had lost before giving up. He sighed, ran a hand through his blonde hair and then shrugged it off. Instead he sat back down the all too familiar bench and opened his newest book. By now Loki was fairly sure that he had a good grasp of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Now he was getting into Asian religions and spirituality, a concept that was more to his liking than monotheism. This was probably something he shouldn’t discuss with Rogers. From all he had heard the captain was a fierce believer, what a fool.
“Excuse me, are these by any chance yours?”

Showtime. This would be the first time Rogers would genuinely look at him, so Loki had to be completely in character. None of the hatred and anger he was feeling was allowed to be visible on his face. From now on he had to be a mere mortal, a dull creature just like everybody else on this planet. His green eyes were indifferent or maybe even friendly. For the time he was talking with Rogers he had to be someone else and lock Loki away, so he wouldn’t use his powers and burn a hole into Rogers’ chest. The sound of his voice definitely made want him to.

Loki raised his head, feigned surprise and started to smile when he saw Captain America right in front of him, holding a pair of dark sunglasses. “Oh thank you. I must have lost them here somewhere yesterday. I came back looking, but couldn’t find them.”

Rogers handed them to him, a politely and honest smile on his face. Looking pleased to be able to help someone out. The Avengers must be truly desperate to make such a weak man their leader. Loki’s insides were already tearing up, his hands dying to lash out and to wrap themselves around Rogers’ throat. No, he had to wait, his revenge would only taste sweeter if he waited.

“Yeah, you probably must have dropped them, I almost stepped on them. I saw you wearing a pair of sunglasses, so I figured they must be yours.” Rogers shrugged and didn’t seem to be in hurry to continue his morning run. Good. “I saw you quite a few times around. You’re enjoying a good read?”

Loki kept on smiling, knowing it wouldn’t look forced although it was. “Yes, indeed. My first class doesn’t start before noon, so I enjoy coming out here and read. I’m stuck inside for the rest of the day.”

“I see, it’s a beautiful place so I can understand that.” Rogers smiled

First impression, it was done. Loki could easily tell that Rogers liked him. The Captain’s face showed every emotion, right now he obviously saw no reason to try to hide them. Loki was no threat. Just another person who liked to spend their time reading in a park.

“So, I have to finish my run if I don’t want to be late. Don’t lose your sunglasses again and… see you around.” Another kind smile and Rogers was on his way. Loki’s green eyes looked after him and a feeling of content spread inside of him. Everything went according to plan and five others were waiting for him.
It turned out to be painfully obvious that it had been over a century since Loki had played the part of a woman for a longer period of time than just a few minutes. Loki knew very well that he didn’t resemble Thor or those other Asgardian brutes. He was graceful, he knew how to walk without being heard, his movements were fluid and airy. Nevertheless Loki possessed the natural elegance of a man and though it was impeccable, it simply couldn’t be mistaken for female. He had to practice.

To make matters worse humanity had come up with an atrocious invention called high heels. As far as Loki knew they were an indispensable item for a mortal woman, so there was another thing that he had to learn – walk in high heels.

A task like that could even wear out Loki’s endless patience. At least he had time. After his usual morning read in the park Loki got home and walked the corridor up and down. As a woman, in high heels. He was getting better, but it definitely wasn’t fun. There was no way he would leave this house as a woman before he was perfectly able to pull off this role. Including dancing waltz in high heels. Perhaps there would never be a need to do that, but Loki was a perfectionist. He spent hours in front of the mirror, walking, standing, sitting, holding a glass, looking at his watch, brushing his long hair back. Every single gesture had to be attributed to a woman, not a man. Apart from that he also had to become comfortable again in this skin, he was probably going to spend a lot of time as a woman.

The person Tony Stark trusted the most was a woman. She also seemed to be his only real friend and the Man of Iron constantly seemed to get into childish fights with the other Avengers. Loki didn’t know why, but maybe Stark preferred women as his friends. There was no shame in that, Loki would just have to find out more to be sure.

To find an opportunity to meet up with Stark was rather easy, all Loki had to do was to watch the news or read the news paper.

Stark would be present at an event, some kind of presentation of his new technology. Loki sneaked in and it was all too easy. He wore an elegant black dress, his long blonde hair was falling loosely over his shoulders and Loki knew that he looked gorgeous. Maybe even a bit too much, but he wasn’t sure yet if he wanted to stick with this form. Right now it was more about finding out if a female form was a good choice to get closer to Tony Stark.

It worked. It worked actually way too well. Loki’s eyes had followed Stark the whole night and he finally decided to casually sit down next to him at the bar. His first chance to get him alone, this man was constantly surrounded by people. Loki had worked out a nice plan to engage in a conversation with Stark. As it turned out – completely in vain.

“Shame on me, how come I hadn’t noticed you until now?” It was Stark who approached him. “I know this party is a bore. Can I buy you a drink?”
This was odd. Loki hadn’t even tried yet and all he wanted to do was try out this disguise. So he would use this opportunity, although he didn’t feel quite at ease. Not a good sign. “A bore? You seem to amuse yourself quite well.” He offered Stark a smile while imagining throwing him through another window. The look on his face would be priceless.

“It’s getting better by the second. A dirty martini for the lady. So tell me, why haven’t I seen you around? A lady this beautiful hardly slips under my radar.”

By the Nines… Stark was interested in him. The puny example of a mortal was trying to hit on him. It was beyond embarrassing. Loki had fooled around a lot to bend people to his will, had used sex to gain favors and secrets and he was absolutely dedicated to his plan, he would do anything to obtain his goal. Still the thought of Stark’s or any other mortal’s hands on him repulsed Loki. Most important, Loki was convinced that Stark’s sexual interest in his female form wasn’t helping him the least bit. Stark was for looking for someone to have fun with, probably just for one night and then goodbye forever. It would be all too easy to find his way into Stark’s bed, but no information would be waiting there for him. Stark wouldn’t tell him anything, rather fuck him, show off some of his inventions, but there was no way he would let Loki really get to him. That was unacceptable.

This female form would get him nowhere and Loki felt a sudden fit of rage, feeling as if he had failed. Stark moved closer to him and Loki snarled, tempted to pick up one the bar stools and crush Stark’s skull with it. Instead he just turned around and left. Not without making sure that the fire alarm went off and with it the sprinklers. The Man of Iron was in desperate need for a cold shower.

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After the debacle with Stark Loki felt the need for some entertainment. The only logical conclusion was to go after Agent Barton. It was easier than expected, these Midgardian soldiers all stuck to their schedules like glue. Loki started to wonder more and more how even a brainless army of Chitauri had failed to take over this planet.

Barton obviously shared Rogers’ liking for exercising in public places. While the captain worked out to stay in shape (or more likely to get even stronger) Barton did it to unwind. Loki guessed that he was trying to get away from his work, leave some of the pressure behind him. The concept of a gym wasn’t unfamiliar to Loki, but Midgardian habits still seemed a little odd.

Like he had done before Loki chose different forms to check out the surroundings and Barton’s routine. The differences between him and Rogers were all too obvious and Loki had to think of all the things he had seen in Barton’s mind. The agent was furious, he had so much pent-up anger in him, risking to lash out at any time if someone crossed him the wrong way. He would need somebody with patience, but who wouldn’t be afraid to speak up.

A week passed till Loki had decided on a form for Barton’s new friend. He didn’t choose any special features, nothing out of the ordinary. Someone who could blend into the crowd. So Loki settled on dirty blonde hair, light blue eyes and a fit body, but not too muscular. Barton was a killer and a spy and after some events in his life, involving Loki, he had developed a strong leaning towards paranoia. Loki wasn’t stupid. He started to visit the gym regularly in his disguise, mostly at times when Barton wasn’t even present. It was an incredibly boring task, but it had to be done, he couldn’t afford to raise suspicion. Moreover he still had to figure out a way how to engage in a conversation with Barton. He wasn’t the chatty type and not as naïve as the captain. Loki became more and more aware of the fact that it was very hard to make a detailed plan look like coincidence.

Then again, life itself was unpredictable. It was Barton himself who created the perfect opportunity. He served it on a silver plate. Loki knew that Barton had anger in him. Like some
dark energy he constantly was trying to suppress, but sometimes it got all too much. Today was one of those days. The archer got into a fight, if someone had asked Loki, he would have told them that Barton had started it. Loki saw it coming from a mile away, but he didn’t bother to prevent it. Lying in wait was definitely working in his favour.

The other guy involved in the fight had a hot temper and more or less bumped into Barton. By accident or on purpose, it was hard to tell and it didn’t matter anyway since there had to be more to it. Nobody got in such a heated argument, just because another person jostled them. Everybody around them got uncomfortable, but still nobody dared to raise their voice or to tell them to cut it down. Feeble humans. They weren’t even able to take care of themselves, how could you even expect them to take care of others? Loki was watching for entertainment. He desperately wanted to show his amusement with a wide smile, but instead he had to settle for discontent. The need to keep up his disguise forced him to act as if he was feeling uncomfortable. Though he didn’t.

A member of the staff finally walked up to them and politely asked them to settle their quarrel more privately. So this was Midgard’s way to deal with such inappropriate behaviour in a public place? Loki would have their tongues cut out by now. At least they seemed to realise their misdeeds and went both into different directions. Barton was still fuming, he definitely needed to let off some steam. Loki knew what to do like he always did. The archer was coming right his way and Loki met his gaze.

There. This was the moment. Deep inside Loki knew that it wasn’t possible that Barton might recognize him. He wore a different skin and there were probably only three other sorcerers in the Nine Realms who were equally gifted in shape shifting as Loki. Nevertheless Loki felt slight unease as their eyes locked. Besides Thor, Barton had come closer to him than any other Avenger. Loki had seen into his soul which was something a man would always remember. It wouldn’t surprise Loki if his presence would startle the archer a bit. No reason to worry though, he wouldn’t be able to put his finger on it.

Loki pushed these thoughts away and focused on glancing disapprovingly at Barton before he turned back to his training. He slightly wondered if it had been enough, he would be damned if he had failed to use this opportunity. Again his worries turned out to be unfounded, because Barton chose the treadmill right next to him. Rogers had made it easy for him, Stark not so much, Barton was a piece of cake.

“You don’t mind, do you?”

Nothing but a snarl. The archer was still looking for a fight, almost desperately and it tasted so sweetly. Loki wanted to give him a fight. Only this time he wouldn’t command Barton, but wrap his hands around his neck. Again, not the right place nor the time for wishful thinking. “I don’t mind as long as you’re not looking for a fight. There are bars you can go if you want to do that.”

His voice sounded nothing like his own, but still determined and strong, like someone who wouldn’t put up with the crap of a stranger. At first it seemed like Barton wasn’t going to answer him, just started running on the treadmill. Loki was patient, yet he didn’t need to be. “I don’t walk around looking for a fight.”

A blatant lie, Loki considered the possibility that Barton himself didn’t know he was lying. “Good, just wanted to be sure. My day was bad enough, I don’t need some guy who can’t control himself to fuck it up even more just because he feels like taking his anger out.”

Loki noticed how Barton flinched without even looking at him. Barton was mostly acting on instinct, but he still felt ashamed when being called out for it. He didn’t want to be that kind of guy and Loki was going to use it against him.
A rather awkward silence settled in between the two of them and Loki could almost hear the wheels turning in Barton’s head. He was an honourable man, Loki knew as much and he liked to be considered as one too. So it was only a question of time till Barton would speak up again.

“I’m sorry.” A quiet mutter under his breath, Loki barely made it out. “I also had a bad day and some fucker decided to make it even worse. I got frustrated. Sorry if I was that guy for you.”

Now it was up to Loki to establish the character traits of his personality. Tough, stubborn, resistant, but still a good-hearted guy. So he looked up, forced the most natural smile on his face. “It’s alright. I know where you’re coming from. I just hate to be disturbed during my workout.”

Barton nodded and went back to being silent. Loki continued to smile, mostly to himself. He already had a foot in the door, his work for today was done. They continued their workout without paying attention to the other again until Barton stopped and got off the treadmill. Before he left he nodded to Loki. “Sorry again and… see you around.”

Loki smiled, nothing more and watched Barton go. The seed was planted, all Loki had to do was to come back and watch it grow. He followed his newly developed schedule, going five times a week to the gym although he thought it was boring and plain. His observation of Rogers was way more satisfying, on the bench he was able to read books that interested him and gain knowledge on different Midgardian subjects. All he could do in the gym was pretending to work out although he wasn’t even breaking a sweat. Loki was bored out off his mind. At least until he discovered a rather useful invention called Stark-Pod. A little electronic device that allowed him to listen to music while working out. Music and audible versions of books, something that Loki enjoyed. That way he was able to entertain himself till Barton spoke up to him again.

About a week after their first encounter they happened to be in the gym at the same time. Sometimes Loki liked to rely on actual coincidence to make things appear more realistic, he tried to get closer to a spy. Once again Loki was on the treadmill when he sensed Barton walking up to him. It gave him a thrill that his enemy had no idea who he was. That Loki could just turn around and rip him apart if he wanted to. Loki did indeed want to, he wanted nothing more than break his bones.

“Hey there, you don’t mind if I join you? I swear, I am not going to fuck up your day, but this is the only free treadmill left.”

Barton didn’t smile, but his tone was friendly, being polite to a stranger. His guard was partially down. Kill him. Slit his throat. Paint the floor with his blood. Make him regret to have ever aimed an arrow at you. Make him suffer. Loki needed to let out a deep breath to calm himself and his overwhelming desire to appease his blood thirst. “As I said before, I don’t mind if you’re not seeking for trouble.”

“I am not. I can actually be a nice guy if you’re not pissing me off.” Barton gave him a cocky grin and Loki felt like he was getting sick. He desperately needed to get used to be around people who he despised even more than the average Asgardian. Right now he had to plaster a smile on his face. Loki was a god, not just some god, but the God of Mischief, he was a trickster, a master of illusions and deceive. Nothing should be easier than playing a role. Normally it wasn’t that tiring, but the hatred burning in his guts made it hard to concentrate. Even more so when his magic told him to let go, use all the pent-up savagery and… No, another time.

“Thanks for letting me know, I don’t intend to do that.”

“Cool. I guess we’ll be getting along just fine then.”
Oh, if you only knew, Agent Barton. If you only knew. There would be no better opportunity to introduce himself, so Loki went for it and held out his hand. “I’m Henry Laing.”

Barton grabbed his hand in a firm grip and shook it. A Midgardian custom which would probably never stop to seem weird to Loki. “Clint Barton.”

It was done. They engaged in a shallow conversation, it mostly revolved around the gym, but for now that was perfectly enough. Loki had taken a step towards his triumph and Barton towards his doom. During their trivial exchange of words Loki was already working on a plan. It was forming in his head all by itself.

When Loki had looked into Barton’s mind he had seen darkness there. Heart and the will to do good, but also darkness. It was an inevitable consequence for someone who had so much blood on his hands, but was still clinging to some moral code. Yet there was no way to ever get rid of the darkness again. Loki would use it for himself. He would get his hands on it, make it grow even bigger until Barton would not be able to contain it any longer. It would eat him up alive, he would lose himself in it and leave no choice to the other Avengers than to take him out.

This would be Loki’s revenge and he definitely wouldn’t use a sceptre to bend Barton to his will. He would use his best weapon, his words. Loki would coax Barton into believing that there wasn’t only darkness in him, but that he himself was the darkness.

It took all his willpower to keep the sly, obscure smile off his face. Suddenly Loki was feeling utterly happy. Something he wasn’t really used to, but he definitely liked it. The first taste of revenge was rather sweet.
Tony Stark had been a disaster, Loki could admit that. Besides that he had all the more reason to be content. Rogers smiled at him every day when he ran past him and he chatted regularly with Barton about coffee and different methods of physical exercises. Stupid conversations that weren’t the least bit stimulating, but Loki was willing to do a lot of degrading stuff to get his revenge.

It was getting dark when Loki sat down to plan his next step. He didn’t use the nice desk in his living room, but sat on the rail of his balcony. Of course he had made himself invisible before, because otherwise he would only attract the attention of the mortals. Moreover it gave him a nice feeling of being secure. Sure, he shielded himself from Heimdall 24 hours a day, after all everyone thought him dead and Loki wanted to keep it that way. When he wasn’t wearing one of his disguises, he preferred not be seen at all.

The cold air helped him think and he enjoyed looking at the stars. It reminded him of a place that had once been familiar to him. By now he had snuck his way into the lives of two Avengers. His role was still marginal, but Loki intended to change that soon. Right now he should focus his attention on the four remaining Avengers. Regarding the woman Loki was still convinced that he had to save her up for last. The mortal called Stark had frustrated him way too deeply to immediately try again. The only options left between which he could choose were the green beast and his brother. Both possibilities made Loki cringe. Loki didn’t feel the slightest desire to see Thor again. He didn’t doubt his abilities to deceive him, but there was still the need to put a lot of care and preparation into his disguise for Thor. After all that man had known him for centuries and Loki would be in disguise for quite some time. Therefore it was only even more important that Loki wouldn’t slip. It were the little things that could give him away. Like the way he brushed his hair back or how he leaned against a wall.

No, he still had to practice. Which left him with the green beast. Or Doctor Banner as they called him. Loki had to start observing him. Figure out how to get close to him.

Two days later Loki had to face an unpleasant truth, it wasn’t getting any easier for him. The beast worked for S.H.I.E.L.D, the organisation who had once tried to imprison him and to take possession of the Tesseract. Although he had insisted on some form of independence, he was constantly watched by agents, probably only waiting for a reason to take him out. The dark force that slumbered inside of him could crush them all, they feared him and Loki already felt his own darkness surging up. Gathering up ideas how he was going to use that once again. S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t scare him, thanks to Barton he had insights into their structure and operational procedures. Still they were perfectly able to annoy him. Most probably they would check every new person entering the beast’s life, so Loki could work around that or use it to his advantage.

Banner (Loki had to stop to refer to him as the beast, so he wouldn’t do that face to face) was an
altruist. A concept which filled Loki with dread and he snored when he thought about it. At least he could understand the doctor’s dedication to his work. He was a man who preferred a sharp intellect to strong muscles and who was never satisfied. Banner lived a life dedicated to gain knowledge which would serve him and the rest of this worthless species. Beneath all that there was of course the desire to find a cure for himself, to restrain the beast inside of him. Something that Loki couldn’t quite comprehend yet. Without the monster Banner was just an ordinary, puny, little human. More intelligent than most of them, but still nothing worth Loki’s attention. Why would you get rid of the one thing that made you stand out? On the other hand it was something the mortal had no control over, being controlled and helpless were things that Loki despised. Banner just wanted to be left alone and be freed of the risk to potentially hurt innocent people. Another proof of his weak character.

The weakling was so scared of putting someone else in danger that he avoided other people most of the time. It made it pretty hard for Loki to seek him out in the first place. From what Loki could tell, without invading the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters, he spent most of his time working in his laboratory. This fact turned out to be more than just a minor inconvenience since it narrowed down Loki’s possibilities to get closer to him.

When Loki couldn’t come up with a good and plausible idea to meet Banner, he considered the possibility to replace a person in his life. An assistant perhaps. An idea which he quickly dismissed. To play a person already known to others for a long period of time was almost impossible. Sooner or later people will notice differences and mistrust was something Loki couldn’t afford. Moreover he had to get rid of the real person and deal with family and friends. That simply wasn’t possible if he had to play five other roles at the same time. No, he had to come up with his own personality and still had no clue how to get into Banner’s inner circle which was irritatingly small. Tony Stark was part of it. Loki watched them meet up for lunch in a nice restaurant. He sat at a table a few feet away from them, where he wasn’t able to hear them, but he saw their every move. The whole scene left a bitter taste in his mouth and he fought with the urge to sneak into the kitchen to dribble venom on their dishes. Or to do something else, anything. Kill the waiter, throw his body at their feet and laugh at them in his Asgardian amour. It was all too obvious that they felt secure. Why shouldn’t they? Loki of Asgard was dead. The Man of Iron and the green beast could sit here, relaxed, making jokes, having fun. What they didn’t know was that Loki’s eyes were fixed on them. In this very moment they may be brown, but that didn’t change the fact that beneath this colour there was a poisonous green.

“Is there something else I can get you, Sir?”

Loki looked up and faced one of the waitresses smiling at him. How dared she to distract him? He already had finished his dish what could he require more from her? Midgardian costumes still hadn’t stopped to bewilder him. “Thank you, I would fancy another glass of the wine I already had.”

She nodded and came back a full glass one minute later. “Incredible to see them this close, don’t you think?”

“Pardon?”

She smiled knowingly at him and Loki would have liked to cut her hand off for being so indiscreet. Teach her some manners. “The Avengers. You were watching them. The two of them come here every Sunday and most of the staff still can’t get used to it. It is weird to actually meet a superhero and to find out that they are really nice people.”

“I am sure they are.”
Fortunately the waitress remembered that she had other things to do and left Loki alone. Against all odds she had given him an idea. All further encouragement he needed came some minutes later when a small group of people interrupted Stark’s and Banner’s meal. They were fans, like the mortals called them. Admirers of the Avengers who wanted their signatures or pictures. Finally something Loki could work with. The mere image was atrocious, but Loki was ready to do pretty much anything.

A woman. He would do it as a woman, because it seemed more plausible to him. A gut feeling, but Loki liked to rely on his instincts. Now that he had the first notion of a plan, he needed to do research. A lot of research.

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“So you too exchanged your books for one of those things?”

It came unexpected. His relationship and meetings with the Captain till now had consisted of smiles and glances and occasional ‘Hello’s’. Nothing more, two people who acknowledged the other’s existence. Loki had had already ideas how to get them to actually talk about things, but he didn’t expect the Captain to take the next step. Now Loki looked up and Rogers was standing right next to him, smiling. He was talking about the StarkPad in Loki’s hands. Interesting. This had drawn his attention? There was nothing planned for today but sitting on this bench, reading up on Banner’s research and now the mighty Captain America had decided to stop his workout to talk to him.

It took Loki two seconds to slip into his character and he returned Rogers’ smile. “No, I have to read some articles for a paper I have to write and I couldn’t print all of them… so the pad serves its purpose. Normally I prefer books though… it seems weird to read on a screen.”

The smile on Roger’s face caused Loki to pat himself mentally on the back. He had given the perfect answer. A man out of his time. Of course the Captain wouldn’t have a preference for screens, computers and every piece of technology that hadn’t existed when he had felt still at home.

“Yeah, I can understand that. People always tell me with a Pad I would be able to read in the dark, but I prefer to turn on the lights.”

Are you afraid of what could be lurking in the shadows, Captain? Because you should be.

Loki secretly looked the mortal up and down and got the impression that the Captain was already finished with his run. Which meant that he hadn’t decided to simply go home, but instead to talk to Loki. Nothing better could have happened, there was no way Loki would appear insincere if it was Rogers who approached him. “Maybe we’re just old-fashioned. I like the feeling of a book in my hands, I like to turn the pages. I only learn from handwritten notes. It’s my quirk.”

It was getting better and better since Loki wasn’t even making this up. The best lies were the ones which had truth in them.

“Seems like we have something in common. I’m sorry, I haven’t even introduced myself yet. I’m Steve Rogers.” His handshake was everything Loki had expected. Firm and cordial. Rogers was trying to make a friend, he was about to do all the work for Loki. Pathetic little mortal with his need to be nice and be loved by everyone.

“I know.” Loki tried to make his smile a little bit shy, but mostly jovial. “William Sharpe. Nice to meet you.”
“Do you mind? I don’t want to keep you from your studies, but I’m still waiting for a colleague to pick me up, so…” The Captain sat down next to him and Loki got the feeling that this would be his easiest task. Rogers’ ridiculous morals and eagerness for harmony were more than obvious and if Loki only played a little bit into that, Rogers would spill all his secrets, willingly.

He gave Rogers some space, crossed his legs and turned his StarkPad slightly away. Banner’s name would definitely bring up questions. Since Rogers had already stated interest in his lecture Loki would have to cast an illusion over it. “Don’t worry. I’m just going over some of this stuff again, but I’m not studying for a test. If you want some company to spend the time, I can do that.”

Rogers laughed and Loki once again couldn’t believe that this man was actually a soldier. After all he had been through, after all he had seen, Rogers should be paranoid or at least highly precautious. No, he was putting trust in people, granting everybody the benefit of the doubt. Loki couldn’t wait until this behaviour would backfire and he would take the Avenger down. With a cold smile on his face.

“Right… We see each other almost everyday, so it would be kind of weird not to say ‘Hello’ sometime. I have to admit that I started to wonder what you’re reading.”

Without hesitation Loki handed the mortal his StarkPad, the illusion already in place. “You can take a look if you want to.”

Of course he did want to. After smiling gratefully at Loki Rogers glanced at the screen and a second later his eyebrows went up. “Religion In Medieval Europe? You’re reading up on religion? Quite unusual choice.”

“Not if your academic field are religious studies. I think it’s fascinating. From both a spiritual and historian point of view. If most people just put a little effort into understanding religion rather than judging it by what they think they know about it… a lot of conflicts could be avoided.”

Every single word hit bull’s eye. Genuine interest was clearly visible on Rogers’ face, he probably enjoyed this kind of conversation which he definitely wasn’t used to. Something not related to muscle, weapons or brute force. “It does sound interesting. Something that should definitely get more attention. Do you…”

“Cap!” They got interrupted by whatever colleague the Captain was waiting for. Loki could smell S.H.I.E.L.D on him from a mile away. He wouldn’t even get out of the car, just sticking his head out of the window. Another thing that Loki didn’t like, rudeness. The Captain shared his opinion on that, Loki could tell that by his deep sigh. “Guess I gotta go then. It was nice talking to you, William.”

“Same here.”

Loki smiled to himself while watching the Captain walk away. There were no words to describe how perfectly this had gone down.

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After having lived longer than a century Loki had clearly defined tastes. Especially concerning his own appearance. Loki preferred himself as a redhead. At least when he was roaming around in the body of a woman. Now he had decided against this for no other reason than avoiding any resemblance to the Black Widow. Sadly Loki couldn’t deny the fact that it annoyed him. He was staring at his reflection for now longer than twenty minutes, trying to get used to his new face. Something didn’t fit. He was a dirty blonde with piercing blue eyes and marvellous white teeth.
Mildly attractive, not a stunning beauty. In Asgard Loki had made the experience that the prettiest women weren’t likely to be taken seriously. They got a lot of attention and almost always what they wanted, but Loki needed to make an impression which wouldn’t be related to his looks. Why wasn’t he content yet?

Under his illusions Loki usually felt completely like himself. They became a second skin, but still something he wore, underneath he was always Loki. Nevertheless he only felt at ease when his illusions were perfect. Something was off.

Sighing Loki let the illusion slip and his own reflection looked back at him. It was rather comforting to see a familiar face. Loki’s lips curled up into a smile. What a stupid, childish mistake. Luckily there was nobody here to call him out on it, because for the first time in centuries Loki would have been embarrassed. Even as a master of illusions who enjoyed creating and perfecting them, Loki still preferred his own face, his own figure. Pale skin, green eyes… For weeks now Loki had been using different appearances, so it was only natural that he missed himself. Even here in the safety of his apartment Loki sometimes hid under a different skin. Just a little safety precaution in addition to the spell he had set up to shield himself from Heimdall. There wasn’t any sensible reason why he was doing it, because if the spell slipped not even the best disguise could hide him permanently from Heimdall’s sight. In the end there was no point in it, other than giving him a false sense of security.

Loki had read legends and stories about shapeshifters who had gone mad after staying too long in a different skin than their own. They tend to forget who they really are when seeing always somebody else’s face in the mirror. Even if they can’t remember themselves anymore, a part of them keeps itching. Something inside, a part of their soul which will never stop insisting. Never stop telling them that they aren’t who they think they are which makes them go insane.

All the more reason for Loki to be careful. Soon he was going to alter between six persons and his revenge was way too important to lose his mind before succeeding. The only logical consequence was that Loki had to change back into himself every now and then. Time to free himself of his ridiculous fear that Heimdall would spot him instantly if he let his guard down for just a second. He thought him dead, he wasn’t even looking for him.

Nothing spoke against lying down a little bit, put his mind at ease, just savouring the feeling of his own skin. Loki scowled at the mere thought. There was no time for this. He would rest when he had made a bed out of their skulls and bones. Two years he had spent waiting, planning, scheming, hoping. Even praying, although it had made him sick to his stomach. Every second he wasn’t working on bringing them down was a second wasted. The drive to make them suffer wouldn’t let him slow down and Loki didn’t want to. Yes, he had chosen a difficult and long path, one that took time, but it was his path, his way to do things. The way Loki wanted to do it. His encounters with the Avengers evoked his disgust, but the payoff would be worth it.

So Loki turned his attention back to the mirror and set up the illusion. Everything was the same, only one feature underwent a little change. Poison green eyes looked back at him and Loki had to try really hard to get the smile off his face. Number 3 was waiting for him, he couldn’t afford to show a familiar smile.

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Stark got stuck in traffic, a coincidence that Loki had a lot to do with, but he would never know that. It wasn’t even about Stark, Loki just thought it would be easier for him if the unpleasant mortal wasn’t present.

Banner was already at their usual table, talking into his phone. Most probably Stark was informing
him that he was coming late. Loki watched the scene carefully, sipping on his coffee. He had
discovered this drink during his first week on Midgard. Every single person on this planet seemed
to be addicted to it despite it being completely disgusting. Loki had to put a lot of sugar and milk
into it, so it would be bearable. It still wasn’t a pleasant taste, but Loki had quickly learned that it
was another one of Midgard’s weird costumes to always drink coffee.

A slight tingle of agitation came over him when he decided it was time. He had done his research
on radiation, physics and chemistry, that wouldn’t cause any problems. What Loki really dreaded
were the common Midgardian costumes, just like coffee. There was so much that he didn’t know
yet and he had barely any interest in learning about it if it didn’t serve his purpose. So he could
only hope Banner wouldn’t bring any of them up.

Anyway, it was time to act before the Man of Iron would arrive.

Loki got up, cursing the mortals for torturing their women with high heels, and walked over to
Banner’s table. All the practising had paid off, he was moving elegantly and graceful, like a
woman. Not too much though, he still had to appear casual.

Banner had his glasses on, studied the menu for whatever reason, since he ate here every Sunday.
Not that Loki cared.

“Excuse me… Doctor Banner?”

The beast… Banner looked up, startled like he wasn’t used to being approached like that. “Yes?”

Loki smiled and it tore up him inside. There it was, right in front of him, that worthless creature
that had stopped his plans, that had humiliated him. Taking him down with brute force, not with
cunning or intellect. Him, the trickster, a genius, a god, a prince. A king.

Kill him! There’s the knife, slit his throat, poison his food, end his puny, worthless life!

Instead he smiled. “I am sorry to disturb you, but I couldn’t miss the opportunity to tell you how I
much I admire your latest article on nuclear fission. Your perspective on the subject is remarkable.
It was inspiring, although I would have enjoyed it even more if you had gone into more detail in
your description of the critical mass… you only treated it on the surface. Beside that it was an
intriguing read.”

If Banner had looked startled when Loki had approached him, now he looked absolutely shocked.
Only for a second, but Loki didn’t miss it. He wasn’t used to compliments, he realised. People
rarely approached him because they knew who… what he was. When they talked to him all they
probably wanted to talk about the beast. Now here he was, a young woman who wanted to talk
about his research and scientific achievements. Banner took off his glassed and seemed to regain
his composure. “I… Thank you, that is very kind.”

“You seem surprised.”

“No, it’s just… usually when somebody compliments me on my work, I am not sure if they
actually read it. You didn’t even wait a second to criticise it, I appreciate that.” He looked Loki up
and down like a decent man would, to figure out who was in front of him, nothing else. “I’m sorry
I didn’t get your name.”

Loki thought he would never stop smiling. “There I go again, trying to not be rude and then I’m not
even introducing myself. Elizabeth Stone.”

“Pleasure to meet you. You are a student? I’ve never heard such interest in physics from a person
who isn’t a scholar.”

“I didn’t have the opportunity to pursue such a career, but now I’m trying to make up for that by reading everything I can get my hands on.” Loki started his inner countdown, his timing had to be perfect. “So, I won’t keep you any longer, I just wanted to thank you. I hope you have a nice day.”

When Loki turned around he saw Stark entering the restaurant out of the corner of his eye. Without giving him a second glance Loki returned to his table and took a sip of his coffee. His work was done, hopefully Stark would do the rest. Loki used his magic to be able to observe them without looking at them. They were clearly talking about him, Stark even seemed overly excited, while Banner made a rather embarrassed impression. Perfect.

Loki signalled the waiter and reached for his purse. Only ten seconds later there was a person standing next to him, but it wasn’t the waiter. Stark beamed at him. “Hello there, don’t worry I am not here for you. Though I am, but not really. Anyway you seem nice and into physics what already makes you the ideal chick for Bruce. My friend is kind of shy and sometimes needs a little push, but not too hard, because he has some anger issues. What am I talking about, you already know that. So why don’t you give him a call? He would love to hear from you again, but would never say it out loud himself. Also, my treat. You, guy with the check, off with you. Whatever this young lady had is on me.”

Stark didn’t even take a breath, just put a handwritten note on Loki’s table, smiled and walked directly back to Banner who seemed to die from embarrassment. Loki smiled, his green eyes flashing.
Barton asked Loki if he wanted to take a real run, outside of the gym, not on a treadmill. Loki agreed and during the third time they met up Barton started to open up. By now Loki considered him more of a soldier than the Captain. Barton was paranoid, angry, had secrets and was determined to keep them. He didn’t just talk to anybody and when he did, he wasn’t giving away information, but rather trying to gain it.

“When you said you were working out to let off some steam, what were you talking about? Your boss is giving you shit? Your girlfriend?”

Until now Loki hadn’t given away any details about Henry, since Barton hadn’t asked. Now that he asked questions, he would most probably also be willing to answer some himself. “Both… at least somehow.”

Henry wasn’t very talkative, because Barton found guys who talked too much obnoxious, especially Tony Stark. Moreover he would definitely respect Loki more if he didn’t just spill the beans right away. Why not provoking some curiosity?

“So you can’t decide who’s the bigger pain in the ass? Come on, fill me in. Yesterday you ran so fast I thought you were trying to get away from something.” Barton’s voice was as monotone as always and Loki knew for a fact there was no concern for Henry’s problems. Not yet. Barton was interested, but he didn’t care. So Loki would give him a dilemma he would easily understand. “The girlfriend isn’t a girlfriend. It’s complicated. All our friends made a bet when we’re actually going to end up together, but… it’s complicated.”

The words almost died on Loki’s tongue, because he felt so stupid while saying them. Barton didn’t seem to notice, maybe he thought his hesitation only proved that it was a delicate subject. “She’s your boss?”

“Good god, no. We would kill each other after three minutes. We were colleagues, not working together anymore, but we still see each other almost everyday. I would explain it, if I knew myself what’s going on. It’s utterly frustrating. Being torn between wanting to be with somebody and… killing them? A bit harsh, I know…” Loki shrugged, staring straight forward. After so many centuries he still hadn’t stopped to amaze himself. Was there even a single role which he couldn’t play perfectly?

Next to him Barton obviously preferred to ponder than to answer. Most likely he wondered why the story seemed a little bit similar. “I don’t quite get what you mean…”

Such a bad liar. He should be ashamed, since he was supposed to be a spy.

“A pity, because then you would be able to explain it to me. Perhaps I’m just getting turned on by people who always give me shit.” The Midgardian way of talking was beneath him, Loki didn’t like it. Mostly.
At least it paid off since Barton started to laugh. “But it still pisses you off so much that you need to exhaust yourself. Sounds very healthy.”

“Don’t care. I’ve been told quite a few times that I was mad… maybe they were right.”

“Nah.” Barton determinedly shook his head as if the idea of Loki being mad was pure nonsense. “Believe me, I met a lot of freaks, guys who are batshit crazy, you really don’t have to worry. You are perfectly sane.”

Inwardly Loki laughed so loudly to even wake Odin from his Odin’s sleep. “My family would disagree.”

“You’re not close?”

“I don’t do what I’m asked of, pissed them off pretty good.”

“But you don’t care?”

“Got better things to do.”

Barton’s response was a smile and Loki could see in eyes that he started to like him… even more? “I bet. It’s always yourself you have to watch out for the most. Everybody has already to put up with a lot of people you can’t stand, so why not avoid trouble when you actually can avoid it.”

Loki was on to something, he could clearly hear it in Barton’s voice. “That’s the case with you? Having to put up with people you can’t stand?”

“Who doesn’t have to do that? Nah, I have a habit of getting rid of people that I can’t stand. I work for a lot of people who are complete dickheads, but as long as they let me do my job in peace, I can deal with that. Then again, somebody says a thing so fucking stupid that I want to punch them.”

Stark. Loki was sure that he was talking about Stark. Not an entirely new information, but a very useful one nevertheless.

“I can’t punch them, so I punch a sandbag. Damn, if anybody listens to us they must think you’re coming straight from our anger management class.”

Careful now, trickster, he is a spy, an assassin, don’t forget that. “Why should anybody listen to us?”

His question seemed to hit a nerve and Barton quickly shook his head. The light smile vanished and his expression turned stern. He had shown a bit of his paranoia or maybe it was just a consequence of years of experience as somebody who seeks information and has to be aware all the time that somebody might sneak up behind him and try to slit his throat. Like Loki longed to do so badly.

It didn’t matter, Barton just needed a reminder that his running partner was not thinking about being observed or listened to. “Right, don’t mind that. I’m talking too much anyway.”

Loki smiled without a word and they continued their run in silence. At the end of the day not only Banner’s but also Barton’s phone number was in his possession. It was about time to get a phone.

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The Widow had to be the last one. She was the real challenge. So before her Loki had to infiltrate
Stark’s and Thor’s lives. For a while Loki had considered ignoring Thor, because he already knew the stupid oaf inside out, more than he cared to and if there was one thing Loki wanted to avoid then it was to spend time with Thor.

Reckless, stupid fool who talked about love all day, then had threatened to kill him and when Loki actually had died for him, what had he done? He had cried. For about two seconds? Then he had dropped Loki’s cold and dead body, forgot about him as soon as his corpse had touched the ground. Of course Thor had been too busy to entertain the mortal woman to even send somebody to collect Loki’s body. Loki had cast an illusion over one the dead dark elves, to make sure there would actually be a corpse as soon as he was gone. Nobody had come to get it. Not even Thor thought him worthy of an honourable funeral. He would pay, like all the others. Even more so. Loki would dedicate his whole life if necessary to the task of finding out which way to die would cause Thor the most pain.

Loki sat up straight when the enlightenment suddenly came over him. How could he be so stupid? Why hadn’t he thought of that earlier? Thor had never been even vaguely interested in Midgard. Not until his banishment. Now he claimed that he favoured the mortals and that it was his duty to protect them, but Loki knew exactly where this interest had suddenly come from.

The mortal woman.

Killing her wouldn’t be enough and not very creative. She would die, there was no way around that and Loki didn’t mind. Despite his comment after her slap he didn’t think highly of her. From what he heard she was said to be a smart woman, an intellectual even. Hard to believe that a person who liked to use their brains enjoyed Thor’s company. For now Loki would only watch her since he wasn’t sure yet if she was worth the trouble to create a new persona. What could she ever wish to know about Thor that Loki didn’t know already? Pointless. She was important to Thor, so her death was inevitable. Loki would snap her neck or make sure she found herself in a situation even Thor couldn’t save her from. The details could wait, Stark had just moved up to the top of Loki’s list. Only this time he had done his homework and wouldn’t be so stupid to approach him as a woman. Another thing that was hard to believe – how could a man in Stark’s position only be driven by women and alcohol? By now Loki had learned one or two things about Midgardian society and as far as he knew alcoholism and fornication weren’t respectable attributes, even less so for people who belonged to the upper class. Midgard and Asgard couldn’t be more different.

Even though Loki would never miss Asgard, a place he refused to call home, he would still prefer it to this underdeveloped realm with their foolish morals and their incapacity to recognize greatness when it was right in front of them. They were all so fragile, weak and not able to take care of themselves. Some of them were even so faint that they couldn’t handle their own emotional distress. Loki still couldn’t wrap his head around the fact that the mortals paid someone to listen to their absolutely unimportant problems. They had made a profession out of it. Information which Loki would gladly erase from his memory, but fate had something else in store for him. Two days after his last run with Barton Loki sat in the waiting room of a so called psychologist.

The whole concept made him cringe. If you weren’t a strong person who couldn’t take care of themselves, how should talking with a complete stranger make you feel any different? To share one’s deepest thoughts and desires with someone you didn’t know was madness. It proved once again that this planet was begging to be ruled.

Loki took a deep breath and tried to shake of his disgust. It was time to put on his mask, Stark could get here any second and Loki had to be as ready as ever. Which meant not to strangle Stark as soon as he set foot into this room. By the Nines, he wanted to. Appearances, he had to keep up appearances. His patience was already running low and Stark showed no sign of being punctual. Loki grabbed one of the magazines on the little table in the middle of the room and began reading
it. Naturally it only fuelled his anger and his wish to crush this planet under his fist became even more intense.

The things that were discussed in this magazine were appalling, without meaning and a waste of space and words. Maybe Loki had been wrong. Midgard wasn’t supposed to be ruled. He should tear it down, bury all the stupidity and atrocious ideas underneath the rubble of fallen buildings. This was the only way one should cope with this realm.

“Hey, nice to see that I’m not the only basket case here.”

Finally. Loki looked up and saw Stark in front of him, a huge grin on his face. Impressive. The mortal wasn’t even capable of being two seconds in a room with another person without saying something. This tongue which loved talking so much would definitely be cut out. Seemingly bored Loki lowered his gaze back to the magazine. An action like that wouldn’t decrease Stark’s need for putting himself in the spotlight.

Just like expected Stark sat down opposite of him and couldn’t keep his mouth shut for two seconds. “It’s my first time at the shrink, I know hard to believe, but I could use some help how to get out of here again without being sent straight to the loony bin.”

Loki sighed audibly. Keeping this new persona close to his real personality wasn’t hard. He was actually frustrated with this rude and unnerving behaviour. Stark was a little child and he proved this assumption as a fact by not being able to stand being ignored.

“Okay, so… not being allowed to talk is part of your therapy? Sounds pretty dull, but if it works for you, I’m not going to object. Or yes, yes, I am objecting, because talking to myself just makes me seem like somebody who should actually see a shrink.”

This time Loki even uttered a groan before he raised his head and searched Tony’s gaze. He had to keep himself in check, so Stark would only see his annoyance and not the resentment Loki was feeling. “What is it? Me not looking at you? Me reading the magazine? Me not answering one of your questions and being obviously displeased by your presence? What makes you so eager to talk to me?”

Stark must be used to people lecturing him about how much they loathed him and he didn’t seem impressed, rather amused. “Okay, you got me, I just want to be able to tell my friends a story that starts with ‘There was this guy that I met while waiting for my shrink.”

“I would prefer it if you could just make a story up instead of annoying me.” Loki felt the strong urge to immediately murder them every time. With every one of them. Right now it was more intense than ever before.

“Well, maybe we had a bad start. An appropriate introduction is in order. Hey, I’m Tony Stark. You probably have some piece of technology with my name written on it at home.” He smiled and it was only partly arrogant and Loki asked himself what Stark really wanted. What was the reason for this conversation? Did it cause him pain to keep his mouth shut? Or was he indeed such a desperate person that he wanted to make a friend… but had no idea how to do so.

“I am very aware of who you are.” Again, not necessary to fake the disdain in his voice.

“So that’s where all the hostile energy comes from. I don’t mind, I get that a lot. Be fair, I told you my name. Time to tell me yours. I’ll even shut up.”

That was all too tempting, but Loki wanted Stark to continue talking. Then again, if he told him his
name or not, Stark wouldn’t keep his tongue in check. Loki restrained himself to a single word. “Thomas.”

It had to suffice as an introduction and Stark’s vow of silence was astonishingly quickly broken. “Nice to meet you, Tom. What brings you here? Hopefully something interesting like kleptomania and not just some family drama.”

“You won’t stop before I engage in a conversation with you, right?” Loki narrowed his eyes at him, but Stark’s smile only got bigger. “Hey, I’m new to this whole thing and want to make it less awkward. We’re all on the same page here or are you just hanging around here, waiting to pick up your mentally unstable girlfriend? Maybe I should try to befriend her then.”

“Let me guess, you’re here because you hope the doctor can cure you from desperately seeking attention.”

“No, I’m pretty fine with being a diva. I just don’t like the silence.” Stark grinned, but Loki didn’t miss the glint in his eyes and made a mental note on that. Loki had done his research, he knew exactly that Stark wasn’t here voluntarily and most probably he tried to distract himself by annoying the only other person around. A character trait which Loki had actually found quite entertaining. When the Avengers were the ones who got a taste of it and not him. Right now it was about time to awake Stark’s interest and to create something that they have in common. Loki turned back to his magazine and muttered under his breath “I knew I shouldn’t have agreed to come here…”

Stark would think that Loki had said that to himself, but no. It was meant for Stark’s ears only. “So who made you come here?”

Inwardly Loki started to smile. One phrase. All it had taken was one phrase and Stark was already on the hook. Couldn’t let him know that, so Loki mumbled “None of your business” and made sure he sounded uncomfortable.

Like the obedient little puppet that he was Stark walked straight into his trap. “Oh, it was your girlfriend! Forced you to come here and discuss your insecurities. That’s just cruel.”

“I am not being forced!” Loki snapped, perhaps a little too harsh, but it would fit his character. “I was asked to do something that I didn’t want to do and I agreed to do it, because I was sick of being asked.”

There, he had him. Stark’s eyes showed understanding and sympathy. It got even better, Loki could see that the other man now really wanted to have a conversation, not just hearing the sound of his own voice. Superficial problems that Loki didn’t care about, but it got the job done.

“I know where you’re coming from. It’s just nagging, nagging, nagging. Tony, do this. Tony, do that. Tony, that is not healthy. Tony, you need to talk to a professional. Tony, I can’t put up with that anymore. Tony, here. Tony, there. There’s no escaping. It’s everywhere.”

Their very first conversation and it was already way more personal than everything he had discussed with Barton or Rogers. Against all his expectations Loki was starting to have fun. Finally his acting skills were put to some use and he could at least understand a bit of Stark’s frustration. Although it was rather ridiculous that one of Earth’s heros got forced by his female servant to go to a psychologist. Again Loki turned from the magazine to Stark, this time his face showed less hostility. “That sounded awfully familiar…”

“Yeah, would there be another reason for two obviously sane men like us would be here? I’m just
not able to turn down a woman. Why did she send you here? You pissed her off?” Stark tilted his head and seemed to relax in his seat. Probably he thought they were hitting it off, having found something in common. Nothing brings people easier together than shared animosity towards a third party.

“No. I didn’t. She is of the opinion that this relationship isn’t going to work out unless we work on it, put some effort into it. Talk with someone who can help, who is unbiased.” Loki was quoting lines from magazines and books he had read, stupid arguments from stupid people, but at least useful.

Stark groaned and shook his head. “Nobody should be forced to attend group therapy. It won’t work out anyway if you don’t want to do it.”

“So you now are the expert on my relationship?”

“No, I am an expert on fucked up relationships and you are having one of them. Or why are you sitting here alone? She’s letting you do group theory all by yourself?”

“One on one. It’s my turn. I’ve been thinking about getting away all day. I dread this, I dread the whole concept of this. Talking to a stranger about things that are none of their business and things I don’t want to talk about.” Even more honesty got involved in this conversation, way more than Loki had expected.

“Told you, fucked up relationship. Apart from that you’re perfectly right. How’s talking to a stranger going to help. It won’t help your relationship and it won’t help me sleep. Complete waste of time.”

An open book, Stark was really just saying all of his secrets out loud. Rather surprising. “If it’s such a complete waste of your time, why don’t you just get out of here?” Loki made sure that Stark knew that he was being mocked. A man who couldn’t keep a straight face longer than a minute was for sure a friend of sarcasm.

“I dunno. Why don’t you get out of here? I’m used to waste my time, I’m making a living out of it.”

For a short moment Loki actually hesitated. His instincts told him clearly what to do. Get up and leave. It would be rude, pretentious and Stark would love it. On the other hand leaving bore the risk that this encounter would be the only meeting between Stark and Thomas. Loki was unsure what to do. Stark was putting him up to a challenge. Finally it was getting interesting and Loki might actually start to enjoy himself even before he could take him down. If somebody wasn’t afraid to take risks, it was Loki. “You’re right… I’m outta here. This is so not working out.”

Tossing the magazine aside Loki got up from his chair and walked straight out off the room. He couldn’t slow down or look over his shoulder. Loki wasn’t going to break character, not even one single time. Luckily he didn’t have to, because Stark was indeed an obedient little puppet. “Hey, Tommy, wait up! I’m right there with you! We won’t be bossed around by women any longer!”
Hi everybody, here we are again, watching Loki discover a lot of new things about Midgard :)

I was born of the womb of a poisonous spell
Beaten and broken and chased from the lair
But I rise up above it, high up above it and see...

*Night of the hunter ~ 30 seconds to Mars ~*

Midgard was making Loki weary. The few weeks he has been here now were already wearing him out, almost draining him. This place was just so shallow, no magic to be found, only sheer ignorance. Strange customs and Loki’s disgust for the human race was only outshined by their self-loathing. They were stupid, weak and fickle and so incredibly lucky that they hadn’t been enslaved yet. Not necessarily by Loki, any realm with the least bit of intelligence would do. The humans didn’t realise that and they definitely weren’t worth the trouble Thor had gone through to protect them. Most countries thought themselves better than others. Those with white skin looked down on those with black skin. Some even thought that the language one spoke had an impact on their worth. Loki wanted to skin all of them alive and crush their bones to dust.

The arrogance was almost too much to bear. A race so underdeveloped, naïve, with zero knowledge of magic or of all the secrets the universe had to offer should constantly fear for their life. They didn’t, they weren’t even smart enough for that. Instead of sticking together to become stronger and to be actually able to fight for their place in this universe… they tore each other to pieces.

Racism wasn’t a new concept to Loki. After all he had grown up with stories about the Frost Giants which were supposed to scare him and tell him what an atrocious species they represented. It was normal to despise other races or to be convinced to be better than them, because there were differences. Differences between Asgardians and Frost Giants. Dark elves and humans. Countless species existed in this universe, some of them were even unknown to Loki. Not a single one of them would degrade itself like mankind did. Skin colour, nationality, language, hair colour, Loki couldn’t tell the difference. They were all the same, but didn’t seem to realise that.

It took Loki a lot of reading and watching TV to finally understand the whole idea. It still seemed absolutely bizarre and he wanted to unleash hell. Every moment on Midgard was constant suffering, since he was confronted with stupidity. The second he had finished off the Avengers Loki would walk away from this planet and never come back.

For now he had to get a grip and adapt as best as he could without losing his mind. Although he didn’t like to accept this simple fact, Loki had other needs that weren’t covered by his thirst for revenge. Right now he was overwhelmed by a need for distraction. Distraction from the ignorance and an environment stripped from all wonder and amazement. Some intellectual stimulation.
At least Loki was used to search for exactly that in the most deserted places. Even in Asgard Loki had been surrounded by idiots, but he had almost found sources of knowledge. Mostly in books. Asgard had the immense advantage that it knew about the other existing realms, about magic and its elders had actually shown interest in something else than themselves. Loki didn’t have much hope to find something that could really capture his attention in Midgardian libraries. There were a lot of them, a piece of information which lit up Loki’s mood a little bit. Before actually going there he did some research on the surprisingly useful tool called Internet. Humanity simply wouldn’t stop to astonish him. Lists about great literature were quickly found and Loki at to smile at the fact that the most admired and valued works had all been written over three hundred years ago. Did that mean that humanity itself thought that its intellectual peak had already passed? It could not get any worse.

So Loki did indeed take his break from plotting and spending time with the Avengers and spend three entire days and nights in the Public Library of New York. His expectations hadn’t been big, but what he found surpassed them by far. Seemingly three hundred years ago there had been a period of time during which humanity had tried using their brains. The results were interesting works about laws, the sense of life, the definition of luck, freedom, egalitarianism and so on. Loki even discovered books that brought him joy while reading. It didn’t change his opinion on Midgard, but maybe there was still some light in the darkness. Or had been. Three hundred years ago.

Loki had always had a soft spot for the written word. He liked poetry and prose, if it was of good quality. Literature was an asset and Loki treasured it. The library disposed over thousands of novels from different periods of time and in various languages. It had been hundreds of years since the last time Loki had learned another language, but the great variety Midgardian dialects intrigued him. How could it even be possible that two members of the same species weren’t able to interact with each other, because their linguistics didn’t match. Despicable. And yet fascinating.

The books fulfilled their purpose, even more so, they put Loki’s mind at ease. Since he didn’t want to spend all his time in the library, Loki purchased a lot of the new discovered books. Just because he couldn’t resist he also stole some of them. Not many though, he didn’t want to raise any suspicion. After his three days hiatus his apartment was stacked with books, every room was filled with the sweet smell of paper and ink and Loki came dangerously close to feel at home in this pathetic Midgardian place.

On the fourth day Loki was sure that he had mastered the language system which the mortals called ‘Spanish’. It was pretty simple, but had its charms. More importantly an enormous percentage of humanity spoke it, so it could come in handy. It was also the day Loki got restless again. His thirst for revenge turned out to be stronger than his thirst for knowledge and distraction. Nor did his rage allow him to waste any more time. Even Loki’s patience wasn’t endless. So this morning he grabbed two of his books and left the house to meet up with Captain America. He always went their by foot or used public transport to blend into the crowd. His first impression of the underground had been that it was a vehicle designed for peasants who couldn’t afford a car. Yet it turned out that seemingly wealthy business men, wearing suit and tie, also used this way of transport. Loki had no idea why. It was dreadful. Tiny, it smelled foul, way too crowded and at every station waited a lunatic or a drunk who obviously enjoyed molesting people. One could think that they actually wanted to make him hate Midgard even more. After slaughtering the Avengers he would turn around and never come back.

And if he did so anyhow… then only to wipe all of life from this miserable planet.

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“Hey, Will! I haven’t seen you in a while!”

So the Captain had noticed his absence and called three days a while. There was no further proof necessary, the great Captain America was a sentimental idiot and Loki’s plan was working better than he had expected. Time to smile, time to be nice, time to bury all that anger deeply inside and to pretend to be a happy mortal who had never been wronged and who worried about paying his bills or finding a nice parking spot close to his working place.

“How did you spend your time?”

Loki smiled and wanted to ram a knife between Rogers’ rips. Will smiled honestly and playfully at a friend.

Rogers smiled back at him, his eyes darting to the book in Loki’s hand. “I was worried that you wouldn’t show up again. I’m going to change my usual running route, so I already thought that I wouldn’t get to see you again.”

That would have been a tragedy, wouldn’t it? Loki felt the anger already rising. All that work for almost nothing? Just because he had wanted to get away for a few days. Then again, nothing bad had happened yet. As far as he knew the Captain Loki was sure that he wouldn’t change his habits without a reason.

“You want to change your route? How come? Has the scenery started to bore you?”

The Captain seemed amused and shook his head. Would he ever stop smiling? Loki wondered what would happen if he put a blade in the Captain’s mouth and made him chew on it.

“No, it’s just… since a week or so I get stopped every time by a small crowd of… girls. A friend found out that someone put my route online and now it seems that some kind of club has made a habit out of waiting for me to… I don’t know. It’s rather embarrassing.”

Loki wouldn’t have to be as good in reading people as he actually was to realise that Rogers was serious. The uptight and correct soldier couldn’t and didn’t want to deal with the fact of being a celebrity. The fact that there were willing girls to throw himself at him at very corner threw him off. A strong leader, not afraid of talking responsibility of walking straight into the fire. Yet totally unsure of himself, not familiar with the time he lived in and the way people behaved. Loki could relate to that, there were also a lot of things he still had to learn about Midgard. The difference was, he would never doubt himself because of his lack of knowledge about the culture that wasn’t his own. If the Captain had indeed self-doubts, Loki could be able to work with that.

He could tell that the Captain already had a soft spot for him. Probably because he considered him an innocent American, part of the people he had sworn to protect. That wasn’t enough, but Loki already knew how to create a bond between them. “I wouldn’t call it embarrassing. At least not for you, rather for them. They’re invading your privacy.”

Rogers’ cheeks were still flushed, but he tried to cover it with a shrug. “Anyway, I’m going to change my route and I wanted to ask you if… you wanted to stay in contact.”

It was awkward and showed all too dramatically that the Captain wasn’t versed in social banter. Loki felt the urge to call him out on it, to laugh at him, but that had to wait. Right now he couldn’t afford to let the Captain notice that his uneasiness was obvious. No, Loki had to make him feel good about himself. “That’s really nice of you, but I don’t really see… we didn’t talk that much. I wasn’t aware I… left an impression.”

“You know… I don’t meet a lot of people. My old friends are dead and my new ones… How can I
put this… I don’t meet normal people that aren’t soldiers and when I do they tend to ask me all sorts of questions about the Avengers or about Captain America… You don’t and I realised how much I missed that. I guess I just want to make a friend.”

He smiled honestly, almost vulnerable and Loki could smell the loneliness on him. What a sweet surprise. The Captain wasn’t just a man out off time. No, he was a lonely man who longed for company and someone to talk to. Yes, Loki could be all that. It would be even easier to lure him into trusting him, the possibilities were endless. Perhaps he could even turn him against the other Avengers. Against the organisation.

“Well, don’t think that I don’t have any questions, I certainly do, but… I don’t know you and I wouldn’t like it myself if some stranger walked up to me asked me questions about my life and work. So… yes, why not? I give you my phone number and you give me a call if you want to talk about… normal things? Like fangirls pissing you off? I can’t really relate to that, but that doesn’t mean I can’t have an opinion on it.”

That remark gained him a chuckle from the Captain. “It’s weird and for sure not the topic I’d like to talk about… So I won’t keep you from reading any longer. It was nice to see you again.”

When the Captain left Loki took a look at the new phone in his hand. It only contained four numbers. The beast, the Hawk, the Iron Man and now also the Captain. Until now Loki’s plan was paying off, almost better than he expected. Another proof how foolish these mere mortals were.

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Loki chose the most average disguise he could think of, hid himself in a crowd of hundreds of people and it still took only three minutes till the widow noticed that she was being followed. Her composure changed, only slightly. Somebody with eyes not as sharp as Loki’s would have probably missed it. A killer like her was always on guard, always ready to engage in a fight or to be attacked. She sensed danger when it was close.

This time Loki hadn’t meant to cause her any harm. All he wanted to do was following her around, observing her, trying to analyze what he hadn’t already seen. He had failed. Miserably. Of course she couldn’t know what was really going on or who was following her, but she had realised that something was off. By the Nines, she was clever. Not once did she turn her head or look around. Oh, she was good. Most probably already trying to find out who her shadow was and how to take him out.

Right now Loki was torn between admiring her and getting overly frustrated. His plan was working out so nicely, he wasn’t used to failure. Today he hadn’t even intended to put her life in danger, all he had had in mind was to figure out her routine or some of her habits. This hadn’t worked out and Loki had to admit to himself that he had no idea how to infiltrate her life.

She wasn’t like Barton, she didn’t have an obvious schedule. No point in going to the same gym, because she didn’t visit one. At least none that Loki knew of. The widow was a spy through and through, a shadow on the wall, impossible to grasp. Always attentive, always watching out for somebody who might come to get her. Loki wondered if she slept with her eyes open. Or if she ever slept at all. At this very moment she was awake and aware of being watched, so Loki called it a day. He turned around, disappeared into the crowd once more and cursed the damned woman under his breath. How could her instincts be so sharpened that she was capable of sensing his presence? The God of Mischief. At loss. Because he didn’t have a clue how to get close to this person. Maybe Loki had to still give it some time. He couldn’t force his creativity to come to him. Focussing on an easier target would be a better idea. Time to find out if Thor was still mourning the loss of a family member. Loki doubted it.
The contrast couldn’t be anymore obvious. The widow had felt his presence although Loki had been hundreds of feet away. Loki was sitting two chairs away from a man who claimed to be his brother and Thor didn’t notice a damn thing. Not that Loki was surprised. He made a mental note, tried to memorize this moment, every detail of it. Right before crushing Thor’s bones Loki would remind him of this. That Thor hadn’t recognized his so called brother. After insisting over and over on the ridiculous idea that they were brothers, family, that there was actual sentiment. Fool.

Loki sighed, crossed his legs and lowered his book. Nobody paid attention to him anyway, no need to pretend. London was a nice place, Loki enjoyed being here, but he would definitely enjoy it even more if he didn’t have to follow Thor around. Or if Thor spent his time doing something interesting. No, of course not. Thor was acting as if he was still on Asgard. He spent his time having fun, doing stupid sports, hanging out in bars or trying to entertain his mortal woman. Until now Thor had had so much more time on Midgard than Loki and he had used none of it. The day Thor would take a book into his hands, Ragnarök couldn’t be too far away. Loki knew all too well that Midgard hadn’t a lot of offer, but one could at least make a little effort to understand it better. Surprisingly it had even turned out a little bit of fun to learn some of the Midgardian languages. Their different religions were confusing yet fascinating. Loki still had trouble to figure out the different types of governments, but he had already covered himself in books to work that out.

Thor? Loki would be surprised if he knew that London was in a different country than New York. If you swore to protect a realm, shouldn’t you know some things about it? Never mind, Loki wasn’t here to roll his eyes at Thor’s lack of knowledge, but to play spy. It would be easy since Thor opened up to almost everyone. He had surrounded himself by a small group of mortals which he called his friends now. It was weird since they had nothing in common with the Warriors Three. Thor had probably made their acquaintance over his woman.

After one day in London Loki knew their names and occupations. They weren’t important. Jane Foster was the one that mattered. Loki had already got a glimpse at her during the fight against the Dark Elves. At the very least she seemed interesting and passionate enough to hit a God. Although Loki doubted that she would have dared to raise her hand if Thor hadn’t been right next to her.

Thor, stupid oaf, seemed to adore her and Loki couldn’t help but wonder why. Her appearance was fair, her nature was kind and her mind sharp. Those were attractive attributes, but Thor had a very specific taste. He like his women beautiful and always ready to engage in a physical fight. A thirst for knowledge had never appealed to Thor. To be honest Loki didn’t see a lot of common ground and he couldn’t imagine a future for them. Beside the fact that her beauty would quickly fade away and her death was only the blink of an eye away. She was a mortal after all and Thor tended to forget that.

Anyway Thor was in love with this mortal woman who was Loki to question that?

He would use that to his advantage. The possibilities to hurt Thor were endless, but Loki was no longer interested in destroying or enslaving the world Thor had sworn to protect. No, he would leave it behind and never go back. Loki would take Thor’s precious mortal away from him. A decision was in order. Killing her would be quite simple but so effective. With his own hands and let Thor watch. The mere thought left a sweet taste in Loki’s mouth. Or he could make another Avenger kill her, maybe Barton, then Thor would turn against them in his rage and the result would be a bloody mess. A tingle of anticipation. Or he could infiltrate their lives, whisper words into her ear, fill her heart with doubts and dread so she would break up with Thor, leaving him behind desperate and confused.
Loki didn’t have to decide instantly, there was still time.

The next day Loki wore a new body, but the one who resembled himself the most, he just couldn’t resist. Green eyes, black hair and a lean body. He wasn't going to keep it, this time he only wanted to test the waters. Loki decided to be straight forward, so he just walked up to Thor and his entourage. How he would have loved to ram a dagger into the back of his neck and watch him choke on his own blood. Another time. “Hey, I don’t want to interrupt your party, but I just realised I’m in the same bar as one of Earth’s saviours. So I feel obligated to buy him a drink. And his friends of course.”

Thor turned in his seat, looked at Loki and there was no recognition in his eyes. Instead he smiled brightly at him. “Thank you for the generous offer, my friend! Sit down and feast with us.”

Just like Loki had expected. Thor was blind and though Loki had relied on the fact that he wouldn’t recognize him, his blood was still boiling with rage.
Hello everybody, Loki has a tight schedule today - 4 Avengers and one is especially getting on his nerves :-)

The shadow on your wall
A whisper in your ear
The footsteps in the hall

Thief of hearts ~ ~ Bon Jovi ~ ~

The moment passed when Loki always had to be the one chasing after the Avengers. No, they were already coming to him now. Loki was busy reading up on the history of Argentina when his cell phone started to buzz. A text from Agent Barton.

Sh*t day. Wanna have a couple of beers?

What a pleasant surprise. So the Hawk was in a bad mood and had actually thought of Loki to pass some time with him. There was no better sign to prove that Barton thought of Loki as decent company. Bonding over sports. It sounded a lot like a stereotype, but Loki was fond of anything if it brought him closer to his goal.

Sure, you know a good bar?

Barton knew quite a lot of them, but for this special occasion he chose a pub. A dark, almost shady place where people didn’t dare to look each other in the eye. Loki loved it. His company was once again brooding, Barton’s composure told Loki from the very first second that something had happened. Maybe just a dispute between colleagues or with his superior, but Barton was filled with rage. Something that he hadn’t dared yet to let out. Because it would get him into trouble. Loki had to make sure that he kept all these emotions bottled up inside. This way it would unleash a disaster and Barton would pretty much destroy himself. Some potential that Loki had to explore further.

“Just that I know what I’m in for… Am I supposed to ask what happened or should we just drink?”

Barton snort and Loki felt it again. The desire to strip off his disguise, turn into a beast and bury his claws into pink flesh. Just because he couldn’t forget the smug look on Barton’s face when Thor had brought Loki back to Asgard. No, Barton had never known real misery. Whatever he would tell Loki were just going to be the unimportant problems of a mortal.

“I already mentioned in my text that it was a sh*t day. Sh*t day means beer. Simple.”

So no talking, Loki couldn’t say that he minded. This behaviour wasn’t healthy. If anyone Loki must know. He wasn’t a friend of talking about his troubles either, but there were other ways to relieve the tension. Like manipulating the people who were the cause of his misery and destroying
their lives before killing them. Somehow Loki had the feeling that Barton didn’t have to chance to
deal with his problems this way. Although the darkness in his eyes hinted that he had probably
already thought of it. Loki only needed to lure it you of him.

For now he was content to sip on his beer and wait. Barton seemed to be content of his mere
presence, there was no need to talk for the sake of talking. Loki took a sip of his beer and tried not
to screw up his face. A foul taste lingered on his tongue. He preferred wine, but from what he had
learned Midgardian men didn’t use wine to drown their sorrows. When this meeting was over Loki
would go straight to Europe and get some bottles of white and red.

“How are things with your girl? The woman you work with who likes to piss you off. Any
change?”

Loki had to admit he was almost surprised to hear Barton speak up. Trying to distract from himself
and learn more about Loki. Why not? After all Loki was trying to be a friend. “No change. We
make our lives a living hell and… I despise her and I like her. Sometimes I don’t understand that
myself. Sooner or later something is going to happen. I don’t know what and I doubt that it will be
something good. I don’t know what to do about it, so I just tend to ignore it.”

“Sounds a bit like coward move.” Barton watched him with dark eyes, studying him, looking for a
challenge. Poor little mortal, still no idea who he was talking to. Loki was more amused than
offended. After all Barton was talking about himself.

“I will figure something out, but I haven’t done that yet. What have you done to solve your
troubles? Something less cowardly?”

For a little moment Loki didn’t know what to expect. Perhaps he had gone too far and Barton
would walk out on him. “I created new ones.”

“You didn’t solve your troubles, but created new ones? I guess you’re not in the right place to
criticize me.” Loki put on a grin, making sure that it didn’t resemble his own. Barton still narrowed
his eyes, but Loki thought that wasn’t really meant for him. “I made it to royally piss off my boss.
If you knew my boss you would gladly tell me that I’m crazy to even think about going against his
will, but… I didn’t share his opinion on a certain matter.”

That was a goldmine. A possible discord between Fury and Agent Barton. Music to Loki’s ears.
Still he had to continue being careful. “You pissed off your boss by disagreeing with him.”

“I pissed him off by not doing what he wanted me to do on a… project. We had different opinions,
so I did it my way. Guess I’m not in his good graces anymore.” He voiced the words with
nonchalance, but it didn’t fool Loki. Judging by his tone and the vague information he was most
probably talking about some mission. Loki was still at the very beginning of his scheme, but the
idea of the Avengers destroying themselves pleased him more by the second. First he had to know
more and then he would have to choose his words carefully.

One’s influence on a person was always bigger when trust was involved. Humans tended to only
trust people they liked. Fools.

“Were you right?”

“Huh?” Barton seemed confused and lifted one eyebrow. Loki shot him a grin. “Were you right?
The disagreement with your boss. Was your way the better one?”

“Yes, it was. I got the project nicely done. The results were good, no reason to complain. He was
pissed off, because it wasn’t done his way.”

All the better. Loki leaned back in his seat and shrugged. “So fuck him. You did your job, maybe even better than he expected and that pissed him off. I wouldn’t be able to suck up to somebody when I know that I know better than them. Which is pretty much always the case.”

Barton seemed to be surprised, but then he decided that Loki’s opinion pleased him. “You’re right, but it still gets me into trouble. Now I have to deal with a pissed off boss and he’s for sure going to let me do lots of bullshit that’s completely unnecessary. Or he’s going to let me sit around and I really can’t stand that.”

Loki knew that this was his doing. After having his mind manipulated Barton couldn’t just nod and take orders like he maybe used to. He had never been the type to take orders and simply nod like the Captain would. The Hawk wanted to do things his way, now more than ever and he wasn’t afraid of crossing somebody or of getting into a conflict with his superiors. He was paranoid, always looking over his shoulder, not wanting to be ever used as a puppet again. This time it took Loki some real effort to not start smiling.

“What are you actually doing? I just told you to not be bothered by your boss, but I have no idea what kind of job you have?” A mortal would have sooner or later asked this question. Barton would only get suspicious. “I’m working for the government, you wouldn’t be interested in the details.”

Surprisingly odd answer. By no means Barton seemed to be surprised that Henry didn’t know he was an Avenger. Of course the spotlight was mainly focussed on the Captain who was also considered a traditional beauty by Midgardian standards. The Man of Iron had already been a celebrity before being an Avenger and then again they were all overshadowed by an alien god and a big, green monster. Other people with lower self-esteem would have probably been offended by the lack of attention they were getting, but him and the widow were still spies, killers. A place in the spotlight was the last thing they needed.

“What do you do? Beside hating and wanting to bang your co-worker?” Barton said that so casually that even someone who didn’t know any context at all would know that there was more to it.

Loki smiled and he knew this time it had more of him than of Henry. “I’m in economics.”

“You don’t look like somebody who is calculating tabloids.”

“Oh, I’m more at home in the hostile take-over department.”

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The Russian Revolution seemed fascinating, but it still did make absolutely no sense to Loki. It only told him that he really had to start 1000 years earlier if he wanted to read up on Russian history. Quite surprising that there was so much history on Midgard and since Loki knew absolutely nothing about it, it turned out he had to read up on simply everything. He had quickly found out that the French Revolution was considered one of the most important events of Midgardian’s history, but its process remained a mystery to Loki. He barely had any knowledge of France or the 18th century. Without this information the so called Revolution just didn’t add up. The result was that Loki got himself a bigger apartment, filled with hundreds of books. The internet barely contained any answers anyway.

This was what Loki was doing when his cell phone rang. It took him actually half a minute to find it between the different piles of books. He expected a call from the Captain, but it turned out to be
the Man of Iron. Clearing his throat Loki slipped into Thomas’ skin before he answered the phone with a hiss. “What?!”

“Whoa, that’s some way to say hello, Tommy. Had a bad night? Good thing Tony calls to cheer you up.” Stark sounded as happy and as obnoxious as ever. At least Loki didn’t have to pretend to like him… yet.

“Stark, I know since you never had to work for your money you don’t understand that some people really value their time off, so don’t make me lose some of it if you don’t have anything important or slightly interesting to say.”

“Well somebody needs some ice-cream and liquor to cheer them up. You got bit some radioactive bug or something?”

“I’m hanging up.”

“Fine! Give me ten seconds before you jump through the phone and bite my head off. You’re pissed. Good thing for you that I know what to do about that. My girlfriend decided once again to give me hell, because I’m such a terrible, inconsiderate person who might have bailed out on a thing I promised to do and…”

“I see where she is coming from…”

“Sooo… I thought I’d talk with somebody who’s got some sympathy for me. What do you say, wanna hang out and complain about our girlfriends and how they don’t cut us some slack.”

“Seriously? Don’t you have somebody else to call? Somebody who enjoys your company? Or likes to listen to your self-pity?”

Stark must be really used to people feeling annoyed by him, because he started to laugh, completely unbothered. “Nah, my friends tend to agree with my girlfriend and the two of us had such a nice bonding moment over being pissed off at our girlfriends. So why not?”

Loki made a pause, let Stark wait for a bit to build up the moment. He should feel bad about it after all. “I don’t have a girlfriend anymore.”

Stark’s mouth was definitely faster than his brain. This was the only way to explain the very eloquent “Huh?”

Somehow he reminded Loki of Thor.

“I don’t have a girlfriend anymore. She didn’t like the fact that I quit couple counselling. So you have to find someone else to discuss your relationship problems.”

“Look, I’m sor-“

Loki hung up, feeling very content with himself. Stark was arrogant, narcissist, had a temper and acted without thinking. Still he had a conscience and didn’t want to be the reason for another person’s misery. This made up drama would give him some feed for thought. Loki wasn’t quite sure how he would react to it, but he still had a plan B anyway. Time to wait and let things unfold on their own.

Since he had already started having phone conversations with members of the Avengers today he could continue doing it. He had decided to wait until the publication of Banner’s next essay before calling him. After all they needed something to talk about. It had come out in a science journal just
the day before. Loki had already read it thrice and was legitimately impressed. This man was even more intelligent than he had given him credit for. Which made the fact that he turned into a stupid green monster even more embarrassing. Anyway, Loki had written down notes, compared it to Banner’s previous work and also to some articles of other scientists. It was such a different perspective on the universe, almost unique. Even clever. A slight tingle went through Loki’s body when he realised that he actually wanted to talk about it. Someone like him, a prince of Asgard, a god, a person with a supreme understanding of how the nine realms worked was feeling anticipation to talk about Midgard’s… accomplishments. Loki should be ashamed.

Sighing he put the book down that he still held in his hands. His revenge demanded sacrifices from him, but it would be all worth it. Loki hated the mortals and thought them foolish, but Elizabeth Stone didn’t. She was a mortal herself. A few minutes later, after having gone over his notes once again and putting on his new disguise Loki felt ready and called the number of a certain Midgardian scientist.

“Hello?” Banner sounded already bored, Loki was probably interrupting his work.

“Doctor Banner?” He made sure that his voice was soft and smooth, without making the impression that he was a woman with an ulterior motive.

“Yes. Who is this?”

Loki smiled maliciously and leaned back in his seat, propping his feet up on a pile of books. “This is Elizabeth Stone. I hope I’m not out of line here. Mr. Stark gave me your phone number and I wasn’t sure if I could use it, but I read your latest paper and hoped there would be an opportunity to talk with you about it. Of course only if you have time and are interested in having a conversation about it.”

There was a moment of silence and Loki didn’t even hear breathing on the other line. Loki hoped that he was just speechless and hadn’t forgotten about him. Highly improbable though.

“Tony gave… Yes, sure. If you want… I could… I’ll talk about it on a conference in Europe next week. I’m still preparing for that and I could show you the notes if you are interested. Or if you want to criticize me again.”

He definitely remembered and Loki was almost thrown off by how easy this was. Should Banner really immediately agree to this? He didn’t know him, he could be a spy or someone else with bad intentions. Which was actually a matter of fact. Intelligent, but still a naïve fool. Or just blinded because a pretty woman wanted to talk to him? The most convincing option was still that Banner was delighted that somebody showed interest in the topic he had dedicated his life to. Not just the green beast.

“That would be a pleasure. I’m out of town for the next month. Would you be alright with discussing it on the phone? I guess that would also cause you less inconvenience. You absolutely don’t have to do this if you don’t have the time or better things to do, I know what I ask is rather unusual and kind of rude…”

“No, don’t worry about that. I’d love to debate my work and you seemed very passionate about it. Just tell me when you have time and I will give you a call.”

Loki went over his made up schedule and they quickly came to an agreement. “So, uhm… did you like it? The paper, I mean. Or have I again skipped over important parts?”

What a pleasant turn of events. It was Banner who didn’t let the call end immediately. A good sign. He should be rewarded with sweet laughter. No matter what disguise Loki used, he made sure
that they all had a beautiful, smooth voice. Easy to listen to. “Actually I was quite surprised to see…”

“Bruce! Alert! Alert! Code red! Code red! I need your help!”

If somebody didn’t have a smooth and beautiful voice then it was Stark. Quite the opposite, he sounded annoying and whiny. The worst thing was that he couldn’t speak at a normal volume, instead all he did was shouting. So loud that Loki could hear him clearly, although Stark had probably just entered the room and wasn’t even talking into the speaker. What happened? An attack? Someone else who was after them?

Obviously Banner seemed taken aback, switched into alert mode. He also forgot that he was having a conversation with Elizabeth, Loki. “What’s wrong?!”

“I think I screwed up some guy’s relationship and I need your help to fix it!”

The sigh Banner uttered was probably the deepest Loki had ever heard and it was in great contrast to the smile on Loki’s face. An unfamiliar feeling started to spread inside of him. Satisfaction.

“Tony, are you mad? Coming in here screaming, because you couldn’t keep it in your pants. God damn it, how can you do this to Pepper?”

How trivial and boring. To even get worked up over such a thing like the relationship to a woman.

“Listen to me! I didn’t destroy my relationship but the one of some guy I met. I might have talked him into quitting his couples counselling and now his girlfriend left him. You’re smart and a nice person, I’m not. So tell me what to do!”

“Good lord, I’m… I’m on the phone… Elizabeth, listen, I’m sorry, but a mad person just stumbled into my lab and I need to take care of that.”

A sense of humour, Banner really didn’t cease to surprise Loki. If he didn’t have this other, much darker side Loki would be able to have a conversation with him without wanting to ram a knife into his chest. There was no way Loki would ever forget what the Hulk had done to him. No time for that now, Loki was a mortal woman and he had to pretend to not know what was going on. “Is everything alright?”

“Elizabeth? Oh, the cute chick who’s into physics? Nice! Bruce, you’re turning into a real player!”

“Tony, do me a favour and keep your mouth shut. Yes, just a colleague who wants to discuss an… urgent matter. I will call you back to discuss the paper. Sorry for the interruption.” He indeed sounded apologetic and Loki couldn’t be more content with the way things were working out. Stark had walked straight into his trap and wasn’t even aware of it, Banner was heading down the same path. “Don’t worry, you were very kind. I’m looking forward to the discussion. Have a pleasant day, Doctor Banner.”

“Thanks, it was nice talking to you.”

Loki hung up and looked at the phone in his hand. This has been a very successful day and he intended to continue to ride on this wave. He was full of confidence, it seemed to be his lucky day. There would be no better time to try to finally get in contact with the Widow. To wait any longer would be a waste of time and Loki was especially looking forward to bring her down. She had dared to use his sharpest weapon against him, his tongue. Loki loved languages and words, he could bend them to his will and to use them to manipulate people into anything. That woman had had the audacity to take this gift away from him, by making him believe she was fragile. God of
Mischief and Lies, beaten at his own game. It was beyond humiliating. A challenging foe was something Loki was fond of, but she had gone too far. Therefore Loki couldn’t wait to let her suffer. Maybe he should write a list of ideas how to torture her since he had already thought of a dozen. Sometimes creativity turned out to be a curse.

Now it was time to go after her since the feeble men were already tangling in his web.

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Although Loki despised her deeply, he couldn’t help but being impressed. The way she moved was graceful and completely soundless if she wanted to. She was strong, trained, but had still maintained an appearance that could fool her enemies into thinking she was a helpless woman.

It was already dark when the Widow returned to her apartment in Manhattan. Loki watched her very step. They were so light that she must have been a dancer. Something that probably Agent Barton didn’t know about her. This setting was rather amusing. A beautiful woman, alone, returned to her home in complete darkness. Around the corner was lurking a dark figure, watching her, preying on her.

She was aware of that.

Not that she wasn’t good at hiding it, she almost did it perfectly. After having her misread once Loki had all his attention fixed on her, not missing the blink of an eye. She knew that somebody was there and was getting ready to fight off an attack.

Only a few steps left then she would be right in front of the door. With a casual gesture she brushed back her hair. A move to fool him, feigning indifference. Her eyes darted around, coming close to the spot where Loki was hiding. Oh, she was good and it enraged Loki. He had sneaked up on dwarfs, elves, Jotuns, Asgardians… Beings with much better senses than mortals could ever dream of and this pathetic human woman still could tell that he was present.

It started in the pit of his stomach and spread out, as far as in Loki’s fingertips. They were tingling, his magic pulsed inside of him, building up, screaming, yearning for bloodshed. His throat went dry with a sudden thirst that could only be stilled by her blood. The desire to cut her in half became the dominant thought in Loki’s mind and he didn’t know if he would be able to fight down. Or if he even wanted to.

She was in front of the door and Loki jumped at her.

An actual gasp slipped from her lips before her eyes settled on Loki and the surprise vanished from her eyes as fast as it had appeared. Instead she raised an eyebrow as if she couldn’t believe he was the one who had been watching her. “Don’t you belong to someone?”

Loki just watched her before he rubbed up her legs and almost heard her chuckle. “I don’t have any cat food and I don’t like being sneaked up on.”

So she was the kind of person who talked to animals. This could come in handy. Loki miau ed at her and rubbed his head against her calf. A hinted smile lay on her lips before she straightened up and disappeared into the house. Loki stayed in front of the building for several hours, pacing up and down, acting like a real cat would before he vanished into the night. Acting as a cat hadn’t been his first choice, but Loki would do what had to be done and tonight he was way closer to take her down than yesterday.
Hi everybody, thank you for nice comments. Today Loki has a "date" with Captain America. What can possibly go wrong?

Baseball was shockingly boring. Loki didn’t understand the rules and he didn’t care about learning them either. If Rogers asked him about it, he would be honest and say that he didn’t like it. Basketball seemed slightly more interesting, but Loki didn’t like the fact that it was a sport especially created for tall and big guys. Too Asgardian for his taste. Football was beyond him, just like Ice hockey. The supporters claimed that those were sports that required team spirit and companionship, but in reality they were just looking for an excuse to beat each other up. The first popular sport that Loki truly liked turned out to be an European phenomenon called soccer… or football. Loki wasn’t sure about that, the names seemed to be different in every country. It was strategic and the seemingly stronger team didn’t always win. Unfortunately it wasn’t American, so why would Captain America even be interested in it?

Loki knew he was thinking in a box, but he was still pretending to be a young male mortal. He should have at least some knowledge of sports. At least they weren’t all about wielding swords. The Captain had said he wanted to talk about normal stuff? What did that even mean? Clearly it wasn’t anything related to war, spying, superheros, aliens or secret organisations. But what was considered normal? Literature? Sports? Art? Television? The internet? Less likely since the Captain probably still had trouble adapting to this unknown time. He didn’t have Loki’s ability to suck in new information like a sponge. Loki was taking a big risk here. What if the Captain wanted to use him as a guide? Someone who could explain the wonders of this time to him? Loki had gained a lot of knowledge by now, but the biggest parts of human culture were still a mystery to him. He had to be careful to not ruin his cover.

They met at a diner, so predictable. Rogers already sat there at a table, smiling brightly when he saw Loki walking up to him. “Hey, Am I late?”

“No, don’t worry, I’m always early. It’s nice to see you.” There was genuine joy in the Captain’s eyes. Why? They didn’t know each other. Was the Captain indeed so naïve that he was willing to trust everybody? Or even worst – did he think that everybody deserved to be trusted? How could this man be considered a leader? The leader of Earth’s mightiest heros. Utterly embarrassing. Faking a smile Loki sat down opposite from the Captain. “Thanks for calling. You were lucky though, my class got cancelled, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to be here.” Loki looked around and
his true self would have wrinkled his nose. This place was plain, simple like the Captain himself. Nobody here showed the least bit of charisma or class. A prince like Loki would never set a foot into this place among peasants and other low life. What was the Captain doing here? His status was way above the average mortal. Maybe he was intending to demonstrate his closeness to the people? Loki didn’t understand his motivation and this was really upsetting him. “You come here often?”

Rogers, of course, didn’t have a clue and happily started talking. “Yes, it reminds me of a place from back in the 40ies… and they have a great apple pie.”

Nostalgic fool. Loki reached for the menu and hid his face behind it. By the Nines he had forgotten to get familiar with the food. His physiology allowed him to endure months without feeling hunger. When Loki’s attention was concentrated on a single goal he forgot to eat anyway. A stupid mistake, not worthy a man like him. Still it wasn’t that bad since the menu explained every dish and listed its ingredients. Perhaps for the tourists since Loki doubted that the peasants were even able to read. He had heard people talking about Burgers, so he would go for that. It would be the first Midgardian food for him. Life simply wouldn’t get boring.

“I’ve never been here before, you can recommend me something?”

“Pretty much anything on the menu… you aren’t a vegetarian, are you? Then you’ll probably go home hungry.” Instantly the joy was gone and Rogers seemed indeed worried. Embarrassed even. Loki didn’t know what a vegetarian was. He had never heard that word before. It was probably better not to ask and just to pretend. “No, I’m not.”

Rogers seemed relieved and Loki definitely had to look up this word. They both ordered a burger and Rogers tensed up. An interesting view. “Is something wrong?”

The Captain looked like he had just stumbled into an unpleasant situation. “No, it’s just… I invited you because I wanted to have a normal conversation about normal things and now I realise that I don’t know how to do that. I guess I haven’t had one in years… a normal conversation.”

Loki’s mind went in three different directions at once. He had to use this to his advantage somehow. This thirst for the simple things, for… being average. There could only be one reason for such a degrading wish. Rogers felt like he wasn’t fitting in. Maybe even like an outsider. The great Captain America. Who would have thought? Loki would make him feel like fitting in. But only with Loki. Perhaps this was a way to alienate him from the other Avengers.

Time to play nice and understanding. Luckily Loki had centuries of experience doing that. “Why? We’re having a conversation right now and I have no reason to not label it normal. Just say what you want to talk about. Literature? Sports? Art? Television? Politics? Paying taxes? I think these topics would all be considered normal.” At least Loki hoped so.

Again he seemed to have reassured Rogers and it gave him mixed feelings. It worked well with his plans, but the little, dull knife on the table would look so pretty… stuck in Rogers’ forehead.

“I fear I’m not up to date with any of these proposals.”

“Nobody is and why would you have to be?”

Rogers opened his mouth, but not a single sound left his lips. Surprise was written on his face. Was Loki moving too fast? “I… I can’t remember anybody ever saying something like that to me.”

Did he make a mistake? Did he throw him off? No, the Captain was unable to hide his emotions and he just seemed taken aback, not offended. “Saying what?”
“That it doesn’t matter to… Everybody always tells me about things that I missed and that I have to catch up on. I even have a list…”

Right there, it was time to do what he was famous for and what he was most proud of. “Did you write the list or did others tell you what to put on it?”

“How would I know what to put on it?” The Captain looked honestly confused and Loki didn’t know if he should pity him or smack some sense into his head. The similarities to Thor couldn’t be overlooked.

“Who but you would know what to put on it? How could anyone but you know what you want to know or what’s of importance? Let me guess, they put a lot of movies and songs on your list. Is that what you really want to understand?” What kind of a species were they anyway? Not able to explain their own culture to one of their own. Loki did nothing else but studying it day and night and still couldn’t quite grasp it. How should the Captain ever be able to get it? Being human wasn’t an advantage when it came down to understand human culture.

The Captain blinked, taken aback and Loki realised that nobody had ever really taken the time to talk to him. At least about the difficulties he must face. Why should they? He was a machine. The blood running through his veins didn’t change that in the least bit. They designed him to fight for them and that was what he was supposed to do. Why should they care if he was a happy or a confused soldier if he was still getting his job done? A very Asgardian way to look at things and Loki couldn’t care less. It was good to know though. They had acted carelessly and Loki would use that. He was a good listener, all he had to do was to keep himself from rolling his eyes every now and then. And from stabbing him.

After a short sigh Rogers shrugged, still at a loss of words. “I don’t know… That’s all people talk about when I ask them about… what changed and what I missed.”

“Forget about what you missed. The internet can provide you any song, any movie. Millions of people haven’t seen the movies on your list and they haven’t been… asleep for seventy years. You won’t find the answer if you don’t ask a question.” Maybe Loki had to draw a picture so this mortal would finally understand him.

“I want to understand this time… society, politics, arts…”

“Then you have to read some history books. A lot of books. And talk to people. History tells us how things evolved, how they became what they are and the people can tell you how things are now. Or how they think things are.”

He wouldn’t stop confusing the Captain today. His frown couldn’t get any deeper. “How they think things are?”

Loki shrugged. It bored him to point out the most obvious things. “Nobody understands the time they are living in. They are just living in it, they don’t know anything else, so they think they understand it. The truth is they have nothing to compare it to. You have, that’s the only difference. Most people wouldn’t feel any different than you now if you send them to another country. They would have no idea what’s going on, no idea how to act, how to interact and so on. I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

Once again the Captain looked like he couldn’t decide how he should feel about what Loki was telling him. It left him probably more confused than any other encounter with the modern world. After a few seconds Loki could see his triumph on Rogers’ face. A smile. “That’s… It makes sense… somehow. You mind if I start the talking part with you. Right now?”
“Go ahead.”

Like that Loki engaged in a real conversation with the great Captain America. He slipped from boredom right into amazement. Not that Rogers told him something exciting or vaguely interesting. It was the mere fact that they were talking about private stuff and Rogers wasn’t holding back. Barton always tried to stay vague and keep their conversations superficial. Nothing of that to be found here.

So the Captain was a fan of antiques, liked the smell of wood and some music called jazz. Loki would have to look that up. Until now he had only listened to classical music. It was no surprise that Rogers didn’t feel comfortable using a lot of modern technology and would like to have the possibility to travel more. Not just to save the world, but to see a little bit of it. Captain America was feeling the urge to visit other countries, nice. He was also an artist, liked to draw. Now this was something Loki actually found pleasing. “I’ve never been to an art gallery.”

Instantly Rogers’ eyes lit up. “You haven’t? That’s a shame. There are a lot of them in D.C. but until now I also haven’t had the time to…”

A beeping sound interrupted the Captain and his face fell. At the same time he got extremely serious and tense. “I’m… sorry, I gotta go. Something is happening.”

How delightfully interesting. Loki of course didn’t show his excitement, but feigned worry. “Sure, go ahead… and take care.”

Rogers nodded hastily while he got up. He looked like he was going to apologize a second time, but then he just pulled a phone out of his pocket and stormed out of the diner. Of course everybody’s eyes followed him and worried murmurs started to spread. Loki instead thanked the Norns for this turn of events.

He left enough money on the table to pay their bill before he got up and slowly left. Strange enough he was tempted to whistle a tune, his mood was just so good. The Captain considered him a friend, he was sure of that, he had gained a lot of information and already had a slight idea how his revenge on Rogers would look like. Outside the diner Loki disappeared into a dark alley and turned into a bird. This way he could spy on the Avengers without being noticed. It wasn’t even necessary to search for them. A major building of the city was on fire. Not another alien army who wanted to take over this little planet, but seemingly enough to alert the Avengers.

Loki took his time, sailed lazily through the air. Barely flapping his wings. When he was close enough he landed on the building next to the one on fire and watched the scene. It couldn’t be saved, that much was obvious. The flames almost seemed to devour the building, all that could be done was trying to save the people who were still trapped inside. A lot of them were looking out the windows, waving their arms in panic, crying out for help. Loki wondered how many of them would jump, because some of them always jumped. The Avengers were no where to be seen, probably they were already inside the building. Trying to save what could be saved. It was an average disaster, things that happened sometimes and couldn’t be prevented. Rather boring. Some would die, some would walk away from it and be traumatized for the rest of their lives. Boring.

A red flash appeared across the sky and Loki would have smiled if he had been in his normal form. The Ironman also showed up for the party, quite dramatically. He was an effective add-on though. Immediately he started to gather people from the windows and brought them to safety. In the meantime the fire fighters tried to get the fire under control. The whole thing took about two hours, then the building had burned down to the ground. Loki couldn’t hide his disappointment. Only four Avengers had shown up, Loki’s so called brother was probably still busy doing nothing in London. The absence of the Beast was easily to understand. What should he be doing here anyway? He was
strong and good at tearing things down, but not at saving someone when there wasn’t an enemy to kill. The Captain, Ironman and the two assassins had taken care of that. Time for Loki to take advantage of the situation. He took off, flew down towards the Avengers and landed on a street light. They had gathered only a few feet away, but Loki’s hearing was good enough. Tired, but relaxed. So they probably saved most of the people. Bought useless lives some more time, Loki couldn’t care less. All he was here for was listening.

Their faces were covered with ashes, their clothes torn and burned. Expect the Ironman who had just taken off the helmet of his armor. Like always he wore that obnoxious grin on his lips and Loki was curious to see if he was the only one who felt like that.

“Well, I give us all a huge thumbs-up for that. Good work, everybody. Isn’t it nice when it’s not some maniac who developed some super-weapon but some good old fire?”

Loki sided with Stark, but the Captain looked horrified. “Tony, people got hurt!”

“Yeah and we’ got them out of there. We’re heroes, even did all of that without the green guy or our favourite Nordic god. Anyone else wants to have a cigar?”

“No thanks, Tony. It’ll take me a week anyway to get the scent of burning wood out off my hair. I don’t need to smell like cheap cigars…” Agent Barton pulled a face and the Widow stayed silent, content to wipe the ashes off her face.

Now it was somehow Stark’s turn to look offended. “Hey, I don’t smoke cheap cigars. Whatever, nothing new that you guys don’t know how to relax. Or how to call. Did you all lose my phone number? Nah, don’t even tell me, we can do all the catch-up now. Cap, what have you been doing? Watched a good movie? Ever considered getting a haircut that’s not completely… last century?”

The Captain obviously tried really hard not to roll his eyes. “And you really wondered why nobody of us is calling you?”

“Well, you could also send me some smoke signs if that’s more your style.”

“So not funny, Stark.”

“Fine, if you don’t want to tell me anything, I’ll cut the bullshit. Anybody of you got an idea how to make it up to someone if you screwed up their relationship by giving them some horrible advice?”

Loki made a mental note to laugh hysterically as soon as he was back in his body. Puppets. So easy to play. He had been so stupid to come here with an army, he just should have run for president.

The Captain’s eyes got really big, while the Widow only sighed and Agent Barton… did what Loki had intended to do. He laughed. “Who the utter fuck is so stupid to go to you for advice for their love life. Stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Oh, shut your mouth. Nobody’s talking to you anyway. I need a female opinion on this. What do you say, Tasha? What do I do? Buy him a car?”

She looked calmly at him, nothing on her face gave away how she felt about this question. “Fix the relationship.” She said dryly.

“Great. Anything else? Sew up the ozone hole? Explain Twitter to Thor? Help Cap getting laid? Another task that’s just impossible to accomplish?”
“Hey!”

“Oh come on, Steve, we all know it’s true. I’m willing to help you since I got Bruce already covered.”

Shut your mouth, you stupid mortal!

Of course Stark was too dim-witted to understand what he had just said. Or in front of whom he had said it. The Widow and the Hawk were sharing a look. “What do you mean? You didn’t drag Bruce into anything stupid, didn’t you?”

Stark rolled his eyes at them. “Why does nobody understand me? I got him to talk to a girl. That’s progress. Maybe you’ll get there one day too, Cap.”

“I’m out of here. See you guys.”

“What? Did I say something?” Stark looked at the two other mortals and the Widow once again didn’t show any emotion. Agent Barton just shrugged. “You shouldn’t complain. He’s probably just leaving so he won’t kick you in the crotch.”

“Yeah, I get that reaction a lot.”

Loki didn’t see the point in staying any longer, so he spread his wings and flew away. Their interaction was like he had expected. Nothing new, but he was definitely content that Stark was still upset over his last conversation with Thomas. The Captain wasn’t completely at ease with the other Avengers and Thor was still an unreliable oaf. He knew exactly what to do about that. Time to go to London.

But first he lay down in front of the Widow’s door and played cat for a while.
Hey everybody :)  
First of all thank you for nice comments and kudos - as already mentioned Loki is going to London today... but first he makes another interesting discovery about Midgardian culture. He doesn't like it very much

This was without a doubt the most barbaric thing Loki had seen in centuries. Here its main purpose was to entertain children. Grotesque. All Loki could see were happy faces, no shock or outrage. Nothing. No matter how hard Loki was going to try, he would never understand some aspects of Midgaridan culture.

Zoos were beyond him. Mortals locked wild beasts into cages, so people could… look at them? They didn’t want to keep them form killing their sheep or wanted to eat them the next day. No, they were just keeping them locked up, so they could… look at them. It wasn’t getting any easier to even think about this. Loki knew enough by now that there were other ways. Photographs, movies, whatever. Why would they lock them up?

Loki had come here to learn more about Midgardian wildlife. Animals existed here that Loki was completely unfamiliar with. He had never seen anything that even slightly resembled a penguin, so this turned out to be one of the most exciting days he had spent on Midgard until now. The zoo had his advantages. Loki could have travelled all continents to observe the animals, but this spared time. It wasn’t their natural environment, but Loki didn’t want to become an expert, it was enough to know that such a thing as a koala existed. And that kids were hammering with their hands against the glass that separated them from the peaceful animal that just wanted to sleep. Disgusting little creatures. Their parents didn’t care either, so Loki couldn’t help himself. When they visited the gift shop Loki saw a good opportunity to have some fun. They would have a hard time explaining the three books about sea life in their backpack.

Apart from that Loki didn’t feel at ease. At all. These animals were caged, forced to stay still when they wanted to run, some may have been born here, but their instincts were still calling out for something else. Loki remembered his own cell all too well. This was wrong.

He didn’t have the ability to talk to animals, not really. Yet Loki had spent a lot of time in the body of an animal. Such experiences changed your way to look at things. During one of these pointless voyages he had been on, because of Thor, Loki had been forced to spend several days as a wolf to not get killed. Almost too long. The animalistic instincts had started to win over and he had felt less and less like a man. An experience like this leaves a mark. Form this day on, when Loki had changed back into himself, something had stuck with him. A part of him was gone and he was left with the memory of being something else. Shape shifting didn’t change anything about him. Underneath feathers, fur or scales Loki was still Loki. He felt like himself, the same desires, the same feelings and thoughts. Even as a woman he always felt like the man he was. This had slowly started to fade away and was replaced by unknown instincts. Now they weren’t controlling him anymore, most days he wasn’t even aware of them. Yet sometimes, when he was calm and nothing was on his mind to keep him focused, he heard the wolf inside him howl.

Right now. Loki stared at the wolf in the cage and it stared right back at him. Into him. It saw
something familiar, knowing that Loki wasn’t human. Nor a person. Loki felt a connection and a rather unknown feeling. Sympathy. This beautiful creature wasn’t supposed to be locked up. It should roam around in the woods, be free to go wherever it wanted.

Loki turned around and walked straight out off this facility. As soon as the gates closed behind him he snipped his fingers and every lock of every single cage sprang open.

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Stark might have been right, maybe the Captain didn’t know how to write text messages. Instead he called William to apologize once more that he had left him alone at the diner. He felt even worse when he realised that Loki had paid for both of them and promised to invite him the next time. Loki accepted and he knew he had the Captain wrapped around his finger. Almost too easy.

After this call Loki spend the day listening to different styles of music and found out that he had a liking for jazz. He was almost disappointed when Stark called him. Took him way longer than expected and Loki didn’t like it when things didn’t go as planed. Lazily he turned into Thomas and answered the call. “Are you continuing like this until you finally have the restraining order you’re obviously hoping for?”

Loki had learned about the existence of such a thing thanks to the newspaper. He was so close to give up on ever being able to understand Midgardian behaviour.

“Wow, I normally hear that phrase after my third call, you really don’t want to take things slow.” Stark laughed softly, but it didn’t sound as relaxed as usually.

“I’m hanging up now.”

“No, wait! Okay, I know I fucked up… that happens rather often and I’m sorry I dragged you into this. Look, I asked some people what to do in a situation like this. Stupid idea, I should rather be asking you. So, can I do something to make you feel better? Or make you hate my guts a little less?”

Loki wanted to click his tongue or to hum a song. There he was and all because of a guilty conscience. Another proof how weak this species really was. “Wow, you’re even an egocentric idiot when you’re trying to be nice.”

“What? What did I do wrong now?”

“It wasn’t you who talked me into not doing the couple counselling. I’m very well capable of making my own decisions. Without your influence or help. You know… like a person who has their own mind.” This was way too much fun. Maybe Loki was going too far.

“Cool. That means I haven’t fucked up… once in my life. Great, can we be friends now?” Stark sounded absurdly happy and Loki was sure that this wasn’t typical Midgardian behaviour. “Are you out off your mind?”

Stark even had the nerve to laugh. “Depends on who you ask. I don’t want to piss you off, I thought you were a cool guy and since I’m pretty awesome myself I try to surround myself with cool people and…”

He continued to babble, but Loki wasn’t listening anymore. Another lonely Avenger? That didn’t add up. Banner – of course, how couldn’t he be lonely? He was a dangerous beast, despicable. The Captain should long have been dead. He simply didn’t belong in this time and couldn’t find his way. Moreover everyone he had cared for was dead. Loneliness was the logical consequence. But the Man of Iron? Yes, his personality was repugnant, but so was Thor’s and he was always the
most popular person in the room. Stark was also incredibly wealthy, he should be fighting off all
the people trying to be his friends. That’s it. A man who was very rich and even more famous.
Most certainly Stark was surrounded by people trying to get into his good graces. Sucking up to
him, but in reality not giving a damn about him. Stark was probably sick of that and all the more
impressed with the fact that Thomas told him over and over to fuck off. Someone who wasn’t even
pretending to be impressed by him. That meant Loki had to continue being at least a little bit
rejecting while also giving in.

“Just stop talking. Okay, I’ll try to be nice. Tell me something that convinces me it’s possible to
have a real conversation with you. You’ve got thirty seconds then I’m going to hang up and get
that restraining order.”

“Wow, pressure, pressure. I’m working badly under pressure, but let’s give it a shot. Uhm… real,
normal conversation. There, I got it! You heard about that freak incident at the zoo? All the
animals suddenly being on the loose?”

Of course Loki had. He always liked keeping an eye on his work. “Yes, I did.”

He was even responsible for it and immensely proud. Stark should better watch his tongue.

“Wasn’t that completely awesome? Normally I’m not a PETA or Greenpeace person, but whoever
let them out has a damn good sense of humour. There wasn’t any political or environmental
message attached, so it probably was a huge prank. Hilarious. And irresponsible, but since nobody
got hurt I’m allowed to say it was damn cool.”

No more proof needed. Stark was a reckless madman, but Loki could work with that. Plus it rather
amused Loki that his little joke had pleased Stark. New possibilities were opening up. “Most
people were shocked to see wild animals roaming around…”

“They’re animals. That’s what they should be doing. Perhaps they shouldn’t have locked them up
in first place… just so little brats could look at them. Oh, look, mommy, the lion is so cute. When
there’re suddenly no bars and it’s looking for something to eat, the lion isn’t so cute anymore. Hey,
nobody got hurt, so I’m allowed to think it was funny. Now that I said that out loud I might see
why Pepper wouldn’t let me talk about this during an interview.”

Loki was torn between rolling his eyes and grinning. “I feel rather awkward to agree with you on
something.”

“There you go! It only would have been funnier if some of the animals had actually gotten away. I
would have loved to meet a kangaroo in Central Park.”

It was probably a wise idea to keep his mouth shut, because there was no way Thomas could know
that the zoo was still missing a wolf. They hadn’t released a statement yet and they would never
find the wolf anyway. Loki had made sure of that, the beautiful animal was under his protection.
What animal had Stark been talking about? A kangaroo. Endemic to Australia, large, powerful
hind legs, large feet adapted for leaping, a long muscular tail for balance, and a small head…

“Why? Would you want to box against it wearing your suit?”

As expected Stark somehow thought that this remark was funny and started laughing. “This is a
pretty awesome idea. Though I’m worried the kangaroo would just beat me up. That would be bad
marketing… About this real conversation thing – how am I doing? Be nice, I’m already worked up
about the fact that I won’t get a chance to box a kangaroo. Thanks for the image by the way.”

“You’re doing… alright. I’m giving you some leeway, because it was me who brought up the
kangaroo." Stupidest conversation he had ever had. Even Thor was able to discuss something with a little more meaning. Loki had to remind himself of how wonderfully satisfying it would be to kill Stark. It would all be worth it.

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Thor’s lady was clumsy. There were few things that Loki hated more. During the three hours he had been following her she had dropped two different items and she seemed constantly lost in thought. Loki felt the urge to pull each of his own fingernails with a pincer, because that would less painful than watching her. This was indeed making him weary.

Hurting her would hurt Thor. Making him finally realise how it felt to lose someone dear. Since he hadn’t even cared enough to send somebody to search for Loki’s corpse.

Right now Jane Foster was waiting for an underground vehicle called the Tube, similar to the one in New York. She was reading a book, almost dropping it of course when her phone started ringing. Pathetic woman. This was really wearing Loki out. For three seconds he just closed his eyes and let go. Imagining something that would make him feel better. Shedding his disguise right here and now, walking up to her in his armour and throwing her down onto the rails. The tube would do the rest. Loki would make sure that Heimdall would see him, so Thor would know what had happened. Yes, this was what Loki wanted. What he needed.

Another time. Another fucking time.

Loki followed her to a restaurant. Were these mortals doing anything else but eating and spending their times in restaurants? Jane Foster met up with a female friend and Dr. Selvig. Thor wasn’t present so they were probably discussing something work related. Loki was bored to death. The Avengers were a lot more fun to watch, because they were damaged, had a cross to bear and they were extraordinary. These people were worthless mortals and there was nothing to spark Loki’s interest. He was already tired of watching, so he had to speed things up.

A fire would be a good idea. Loki could burn this stupid place down, that would make him feel better and he could gain unlimited trust before he had even started this new relationship. Most importantly he wouldn’t have to watch them eat any longer. Maybe he was really lucky and somebody in here would die.

He would need smoke, a lot of it and Jane Foster needed to be separated from the group. That shouldn’t be too much of a problem. Loki created a clone of himself, disguised him and sent him out to check out the surroundings. The restaurant was crowded, the waiters were in a hurry and nobody paid too much attention to what was happening around them. Time for some entertainment.

Loki has always been fond of fire and he had mastered it a long time ago. All he had to do was to pay attention that the flames wouldn’t turn out to be green. He would create two fire sources, making sure that everybody would instantly panic.

Thinking about it a second time Loki began to hesitate. Was this really a good idea? Or a knee-jerk reaction? Yes, he was annoyed and normally he took way more time to work out a plan. He always knew what to do before he entered a building. Right now he was improvising. Just because he was sick of sitting here and watching the mortals around him. He would rather sit as a cat in front of the Widows door than staying here a minute longer. No, Loki was patient and he wouldn’t…

The waiter walked past him and bumped more or less into Loki’s chair. Okay, that was it. The fire would burn this place down till there was nothing left but ashes. Luckily Jane Foster excused
herself 10 minutes later and went to the restroom. Time to act quickly. Loki let a clone take his place at the table and got up to follow Thor’s chosen one. Why did mortals even bother with locks if they were so painfully simple? Casually Loki locked her in and then set the restaurant on fire. Afterwards they would wonder how it spread so quickly. Or how it could create so much smoke in such a short amount of time. Because Loki wanted it that way. He wanted them blind and in panic. Searching for the exit, stumbling over their own feet, screaming and definitely not able to look for other people in this chaos. Everybody should take care of themselves, Loki would do the rest.

A woman was the first one to scream and then everybody realised the danger they were in. Chairs were pushed aside and were falling over, people ran blindly towards the nearest exits, calling out for help. Loki couldn’t keep the smile of his face as he watched the scene. Amused by the fact that Jane’s friends called her name, but were too disorientated in the smoke filled room to even try to look for her. The screaming and shouting drowned out the loud banging noise that came from inside the restroom.

Of course she could already tell what was happening and was scared to death. If nobody found her, Jane was going to die. Being the girlfriend of a god who had sworn to protect earth and its inhabitants, but she wouldn’t be saved from an ordinary fire. The irony made Loki laugh. He let her wait a little bit longer than necessary.

“Somebody in there?”

“Yes! Help me, please! I’m trapped! I can’t open the door!”

Of course she couldn’t, Loki had locked it himself. “Calm down, I’ll get you out off there.” It was quite hard to fake fear and a hint of panic when he felt so utterly relaxed. Loki liked fire, he liked the warmth that radiated from it, even though it closed up on him right now. Time to act or this whole thing wouldn’t be believable. So Loki hammered a few times against the door to make it sound like effort before he simply opened the door.

Jane Foster stared at him, coughing, gasping for air, eyes filled with terror. She wore the face of someone who was sure they were going to die. Now Loki was finally getting the meaning of the term damsel in distress. Another taste of irony since he was a woman himself right now. Thor’s chosen one seemed frozen to the spot, so Loki grabbed ruggedly her arm and pulled her along. “Come on!”

Life seemed to rush back into the mortal and she followed Loki. If she hadn’t been filled with fear for her life right now she would have maybe noticed that Loki knew exactly where to go and had no trouble whatsoever to find his way in a room which was completely filled with smoke. Loki reminded himself to cough once or twice, to keep up appearances. So this was how Loki saved the life of Jane Foster.

In front of the restaurant the ambulances were just pulling up, fire-fighters were running around to do their job. The time of their arrival was still impressive since Loki had used magic to speed up the fire. A paramedic rushed up to them, pulled them aside to treat their wounds. Loki didn’t have any, but they still wanted to make sure that there was no smoke in his lungs. These mortals and their weak bodies. One touch and they perished. Loki played the game. Acting scared and relieved, looking around, took a deep breath when the doctor told him so and let him check out if there was soot in his throat or nostrils. Of course everything was fine, but he was nevertheless told to sit down and to rest for a few moments. Again he did as he was told and took advantage of the situation to admire his own work. Chaos all around him, confused people who still didn’t understand what had just happened. Nobody was weeping or crying hysterically. Perhaps not a bad sign. There would be less of a fuss about the fire if nobody had died.
“I’m sorry, you’re…”

Looking up Loki saw Jane Foster in front of him, wrapped in a blanket a paramedic had most likely given to her. She was pale, still shaking, but her eyes were bright and full of gratitude. Don’t celebrate too soon, mortal. I’m still going to kill you. “You… I want to tell you how thankful I am. You saved my life in there and… Thank you. Thank you so much.”

She looked teary eyed, partly because of the smoke, but she was also deeply moved. The first time Loki had saved her life, in the Dark World, she hadn’t even batted an eyelid. Loki had almost died himself, not worth mentioning. Some girl opened a stupid door and the mortal almost started crying.

“I heard someone screaming… I’m just glad that you’re okay. Seems like everyone got out.” Again Loki was surprised how honest he sounded, while the words were causing him physical pain. Lying was nothing new and not a hard task, but this was something Loki didn’t want to lie about. All he wanted to do was ripping her heart out and handing it to Thor. Soon.

“Yes…” Jane let out a deep breath. “I got out thanks to you. I’m Jane Foster.” She held out her hand Loki shook it. “Lori Lorenzen.” Again, he hadn’t been able to resist. Loki enjoyed hiding in plain sight way too much.

Jane’s nerves finally seemed to calm down and she smiled at Loki. “Scandinavian?”

“Danish.”

There was no chance for Jane to say something else, because her friends had finally spotted her in the crowd. “Jane!”

The female friend jumped at her, mumbled about being so worried while Selvig was way more calm, but the relief was also written all over his face. Jane introduced Loki as her saviour and insisted on inviting him to dinner. “Of course that’s not enough, but I have to do something to show my gratitude.”

Oh, she was doing more than enough. Inviting him into Thor’s home was more than he had hoped for.
Hello everybody,

Today something unusual happens - somebody actually questions Loki’s motives. Who could that be?

Now am I blessed?
Or am I cursed?
Cause the way we are
Ain’t the way we were

When we were beautiful ~ Bon Jovi ~

Loki applied his lipstick with a casual gesture and pursed his lips. Impeccable. He especially enjoyed this new form, because it was quite similar to his own. He was meeting Thor, so how should he resist? The outfit wasn’t perfect yet, so Loki clicked his fingers and the dress turned into dark jeans and a one sleeved black shirt. Way better, it showed off his tattooed arm. A so called dream catcher with long feathers, surrounded by flowers. It was beautiful, a work of art. Loki wore an undercut and green highlights. His green eyes sparkled with amusement. All his other personalities were rather simple and boring, so something more eccentric was a nice change.

He was wearing all black, his eyes were green and Loki would still bet his life on the fact that Thor wouldn’t recognize him. Not that he cared. Whistling the tune of a famous Midgardian song called Sympathy For The Devil Loki left his new London apartment. It wasn’t far from Jane Foster’s flat so Loki arrived there only twenty minutes later. He had even brought a bottle of wine with him. Hopefully he would be resist the temptation to smash it on Thor’s head.

Jane Foster opened the door, her face lightening up when she saw Loki. “Lori! So nice to have you here. Come in!”

Obviously she was eager to please Lori, so happy to see her. Loki was inside. Just like that. Invited into Thor’s apartment. So easy. Jane was as nervous and as clumsy as always, almost tripping over her own feet while leading him into the living room. By now Loki’s body was tingling with anticipation. He could feel Thor’s presence, it was floating in the air, filling the rooms. Proving once more what an uneducated brute he was. He was present, so why would he let the lady walk to the door?

“Lori, this is my boyfriend Thor. Thor, this is the woman I told you about. Lori, she saved my life today.”

There it was. Loki had become a master of fighting down his urges. He had been half an hour on
the phone with Stark without teleporting straight to him and cutting his tongue out. Now he was clinging desperately to this self-control. A tingle in his fingertips was almost too much to bear. Thor wore a V-cut T-shirt and Loki could perfectly visualise where he would ram his dagger into Thor’s skin. Right above his collarbone. Thor would cough up blood before he even knew what was going on. But it would be quick and not the least bit satisfying.

“Lady Lori. I must thank you deeply for your bravery. You saved the person I hold most dear. I will be forever in your debt. If you ever find yourself in need for help, let me know, I will serve you as best as I can.”

Oh, Loki definitely wouldn’t forget this offer. Now he was quite busy with fighting down his disgust when Thor reached out and pressed a light kiss on the back of his hand. How exposed he was at this very moment. Loki could so easily… No.

“I… did what anybody would have done. At least I hope so.”

Thor smiled at him, looked directly into his face and again – no recognition. A little magic and Thor didn’t recognize the man he called his brother. Just like Loki had expected. Jane asked Thor to get their drinks from the kitchen and Loki began his little game. His eyes followed Thor, his expression darkened a little bit and of course Jane noticed. “Everything alright?”

Loki smiled and nodded. “Sure… I’m just… That’s not something I would have expected. I mean he looks totally different wearing… normal clothes, but that’s… Thor. The God. The guy with the hammer. Thor. Your… boyfriend?”

Jane was easy to read and she beamed with pride. “Yes, I met him two years ago a rather long story… Maybe we can talk about that during dinner. Oh my God, I hope you’re not a vegetarian!”

Why were mortals making such a fuss about vegetarianism? After his dinner with the Captain Loki had looked it up. Not eating any meat was odd and now that he knew about the concept Loki had even less ambition to become a vegetarian. “No, I’m not.”

Thor came back a moment later with their glasses and they sat all down. He wanted to hear everything about the fire, although Jane insisted on having him already told everything. Nevertheless they did it again and Thor complimented Lori’s courage once more. Stupid oaf couldn’t see what was right in front of him. His company though made Jane’s much easier to stand. “So Lori… what are you doing when you’re not saving my life?”

Trying to destroy it.

“I’m working for an art gallery. I was supposed to meet an artist at the restaurant to negotiate about having his works in our latest exposition. So thanks to the fire this deal is probably not going to work out. I’m sorry, but my job must seem like the dullest thing on Earth. A god is sitting at this table… or… are you a god?” Loki looked at Thor and didn’t even try to conceal the distrust on his face. Lori was an honest woman and straightforward. She would ask obvious questions. Questions Jane Foster had never bothered to ask. There would soon be a time to regret that.

“I am not a god. The physiology of Asgardians is similar to… what you would call divine. We’re physically stronger, resistant to a great amount of pain and our life expectancy is… considerably longer.”

Give or take 5000 years. Another reason why Thor’s liaison with a mortal was so foolish. He would have outlived her in the blink of an eye. Loki would put his finger in that wound later. “Asgardian… Asgard? That’s where you’re from? Another… dimension? Planet?”
Not that Thor would be able to explain that anyway. “Something like that…”

“And you’re here now? On Earth? Permanently?”

“Yes, I am.”

“How does this work? Do you have some intergalactic tourist visa?” He said it with a smile and a happy tune in his voice, not wanting to offend anybody. Not yet. Thor answered by looking at him with big clueless eyes. By the Nines, he has been longer on Midgard than Loki, he called himself protector of this realm, he had mortal friends and still hadn’t heard some of the most basic Midgardian terms. And Loki was upset about knowing too little about the influence Rasputin had had on the Russian tsar.

Jane obviously felt the need to change the topic and told them it was time to eat. Loki didn’t mind, he put on his best behaviour and after a few minutes Jane and him were engaged in a pleasant conversation. Thor was content to listen to them and to smile. Unbelievable, he still had no idea of all the things mortals talked about. Good thing Loki would talk about Thor’s favourite topic. He asked questions about Asgard, mostly its form of government.

So his father was the king and was always right.

Huh.

No parliament?

No.

Separation of powers?

Nope.

A council of Elders?

Nay.

Anyone else who was a say in anything beside the king? Popular petitions? Popular votes? Ostracism?

Loki already knew the answers to all these questions. Questions mortals had never bothered to ask. It’s not like you have to know where somebody comes from to understand the kind of person they are. Or what made them how they are. How would Stark say? – People didn’t know shit about Thor.

Jane Foster needed to realise that and Loki would gladly help by pointing out that Midgardians would call Asgard’s government a dictatorship. No, he didn’t say it out loud. That wasn’t necessary. For now it was enough to frown. There would be other possibilities to let the mortal know what she was in for.

For the rest of the evening Loki was a nice, normal person, talking about things that didn’t interest him and dreamed about six different ways to kill Thor with the tasteless vase that stood in the middle of the table.

How could he sit here and smile when his beloved brother was dead? This time Loki didn’t need to ask if he had mourned. It was all too obvious. He was going to pay for it.
Loki was licking his fur. He was bored. Once again. The Widow had not been home the last three days, so he assumed that she was on some kind of mission for S.H.I.E.L.D. In the meantime one of her neighbours had tried to feed Loki, but he only hissed and tried to scratch her. The cat food she had offered had smelled awful anyway. When had been the last time that Loki needed entertainment so badly? Some mischief, setting Central Park on fire, letting it snow during summer, sending the Captain a porn magazine… anything.

Still an hour or two to pass then he would go home and maybe cause a few car accidents to unwind. For now all he did was getting up and pacing around. He was a cat, so why not taking advantage of that to distract himself. He jumped on a windowsill of the first floor and gazed into the apartment. Two young kids were playing on the floor, laughing hysterically. Did their parents know that a professional killer was living in one of the flats above them? Loki doubted it. The little girl raised her hand and spotted him. She almost squealed with excitement and got up to her feet. No way Loki would let her open the window, he had been cuddled while being a cat a few times too many. Lazily he jumped to another windowsill, but he saw nothing but boring, ordinary Midgardian life.

It was a relief to sense another presence coming closer. Who would have that he was now actually looking forward to see the woman who had made him look like a fool? She was the lesser evil.

Loki jumped down and kept roaming around the entrance until he saw her walking up to him. If she was just coming back from a mission to kill or to bring down a nation, it didn’t show. Her appearance was as flawless as ever. Barton had also been gone for some days, Loki would have to bring that up during a conversation. Right now his focus was on the widow and on her light steps. Why did she never come home in a vehicle? Thankfully Loki was a cat, so he didn’t have to be subtle. Of course this time she didn’t flinch nor make a sound when he sat down right in front of her, blocking her path. The widow’s face was a blank mask. Loki could do that too, so he stared right back and mewed.

“You do like it around here, don’t you?” Such a monotone sound, but she was bending down, reaching out to scratch his head.

“Be careful with that cat!”

Good thing Loki was in perfect control of his reflexes, otherwise he would have turned his head. A cat didn’t care if a stupid mortal told another mortal not to touch it. The woman who had tried to feed him was also spying on her neighbours. She must have been lingering around behind her window or it would be too much of an coincidence. “It’s feisty and aggressive. It attacked me for no reason.”

The widow looked down at him again and this time she did indeed smile. Against the advice of her neighbour she petted his head and Loki purred like a good cat. It seemed to please her, as if she was eager to prove her neighbour wrong.

Then the moment was already over, she left him sitting there and entered the building. Again Loki couldn’t leave instantly, he was a cat. A wise choice as it turned out a few minutes later. The door reopened and the widow came back out. In her hand she held a little bowl and Loki’s senses caught up with a delicious smell.

Without a word she placed it in front of him and left again, barely looking at him. Still reserved, even in the presence of a cat. Loki was content nonetheless and ate up the tuna before licking the bowl clean. The widow would be rather devastated about the missed opportunity to poison him.
Loki needed to learn how to drive. He already knew how a car worked, what most people on this planet to his surprise didn’t. Yet it would seem weird if he showed up everywhere by foot. He had already used his magic to get him the wealth to buy several apartments. A car wouldn’t be a problem. Then again Loki’s ‘To do List’ got longer and longer. There were too many things to learn. Well, learning how to drive wouldn’t take that long, maybe it would even be amusing. Loki still desperately needed entertainment.

He found it in the most unusual place.

How could the beast be the one he actually enjoyed talking to? At first physics had seemed so simple and trivial, but now Loki was starting to be intrigued by it. A different take on things that was surprisingly clever. Parts of it were even brilliant, others utterly stupid. Most importantly – it was effort. Banner tried to understand something that was so much bigger and more important than him. He knew that he would never grasp all of it, but his fascination and passion would never let him stop. He would always want to know more about it. A thirst of knowledge that Loki could comprehend, he felt it himself. In the end it wouldn’t matter, he would destroy him like the others. Until then he could enjoy having a conversation with someone who actually had a brain.

The beast seemed to appreciate it too and nevertheless he was the first one to be suspicious. It wasn’t that bad though, he voiced his thoughts immediately. Something he wouldn’t have done if he thought Elizabeth to be a danger. He was clearly uncomfortable and didn’t try to hide it. First he took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Elizabeth, I have to ask you something and I want to apologize beforehand, because there is no way I won’t offend you.”

If this conversation hadn’t already held Loki’s interest, now it definitely did. Banner was a nice, almost shy person. Him saying something like that was promising and Loki was dying for excitement. Elizabeth was also a nice girl and cosy, definitely not shy. She cocked her head and frowned at the camera. Skype was a useful invention, Loki had to admit that. “You’re promising that you’re going to offend me? I’m not sure if I want to be offended, but I want to hear the question. Shoot.”

Again Banner seemed to have a conversation with himself. A struggle what to say? Was he searching for the right words? “Are you… by any chance… a S.H.I.E.L.D agent?”

Huh. What was Loki supposed to think of that? Banner couldn’t be further from the truth and still he was on the right path. He suspected Elizabeth to play a role, pretending to be someone else. Once again Loki had to acknowledge the intelligence of this man. There was another awkward feeling that Loki couldn’t quite put his finger on. No, it wasn’t respect, that would be ridiculous. “I am a what? Dr. Banner, I’m sorry, but I don’t think I understand…”

“I know this must sound weird… I am most probably wrong and this is just my paranoia talking… I’m wondering how a regular person can know so much about advanced physics. You are brilliant, you know what you are talking about and still sometimes you express yourself quite… oddly. As if you were unfamiliar with the terminology you’re using. There, no way you aren’t offended yet. I can’t… figure you out and there already were some people who were… They were chosen to keep an eye on me and were quite creative on how they would do that. New assistants in my lab, people following me around the whole day… Someone to have a conversation with would be quite a nice change. I’m feeling stupid while saying this. You have no idea what I’m talking about, right? Because you’re just a nice person. They still exist.”
There wasn’t much more that Banner could offer. He was baring his soul in front of Loki without being asked and without knowing it. This was something he badly wanted to believe. Good people doing good things without an ulterior motive. Sentimental fool. So similar to the Captain who was also ready to believe in the good in people and give everybody a second chance. Banner wasn’t so sure, but desperately wanted to believe in it. A scenario right from Loki’s dreams. All he needed was one phrase. One well chosen sentence and the beast would trust him. Eager to talk to him about things that Barton wouldn’t mention even after weeks.

Loki was a woman and she could be tough, but she was still sensitive. So he took a deep breath and folded his hand on the tabletop in front of the laptop, showing his discomfort. Yet there was concern visible on his face. “I’m sorry that you made these experiences, but you’re right. I am offended.”

A little pause, Banner should have the opportunity to feel guilty and embarrassed.

“I have a legitimate interest in your work and I don’t think that’s something I have to apologize for. I was worrying you would find it inappropriate that I called you to talk about your work although we don’t know each other. I would have never thought that you’d think I was… a secret agent? I dunno. I am not. I am a person who gets rarely excited about something. I get excited about your work, it’s interesting and inspiring. You’re trying to understand something that’s far more important than… us, the people… This amazes me and I would have loved to do something similar with my life. I didn’t have the chance to and because of that I’m even more excited about what you’re doing. So yes, you offended me.”

Spot on, a perfect performance. He had even put a little bit of regret in his voice. The guilt Banner was feeling was all too obvious. This was good. “I’m sorry, I really didn’t intend… I don’t like to be a distrusting person, but a lot of people have given me reasons to distrust them lately. You weren’t one of them, but I still… I’m sorry.”

An Avenger was apologizing to him. Loki felt a strange rush of excitement. A moment he needed to treasure. Too bad that there wasn’t time to savour it immediately. Instead Loki put on a smile, playing the part of a woman who tried to reassure somebody, although all he really wanted to do was to unleash the savagery inside of him. “It’s okay, I guess. Listen, I don’t know the stuff you have to deal with and I probably don’t want to know, because… I’m pretty sure you get enough of that everyday with every person you talk to. I also gotta admit that it must feel weird… somebody who isn’t a scientist coming up to you and wanting to talk about things that are extremely complicated and definitely not the stuff that gets taught in school. So how about I tell you a few things about myself and perhaps then this… is going to make a lot more sense to you.”

“I’d like that…” Banner smiled at him and Loki did what he did best. He lied. “I’m an only child, my family runs a business, five generations. I didn’t really have a chance, I had to take over the company and get into economics. It isn’t that bad, I like what I’m doing, but I would have loved to get into physics. At university I sometimes snuck into classes and got the literature, read up on things. I know a lot more than the average physics student, but I’m still far from being an expert. Maybe that’s why you think I have a weird way of expressing myself… I also studied aboard, so that’s there too… All what’s important is that your work reminded me again of the passion I feel for this field.”

“That’s…

“Bruce, newsflash! I found video footage that’s in immediate need to be put on YouTube. It shows Cap how he is actually trying to… Oh, hello. I didn’t want to interrupt something. Am I interrupting something? Some weird, juicy Skype conversation?” Stark had burst into the room and
walked right into the screen. Loki was annoyed and pleased at the same time to see him. It opened up new possibilities.

Banner sighed loudly, not even trying to hold back. “Elizabeth, this is Tony Stark, you’ve already met him and I apologize right now for everything he has already said and what he will say.”

Loki smiled politely. “Nice to see you, Mr. Stark.”

“Oh, the pleasure is all mine! Nah, scratch that, not mine, rather yours, Brucie. Ruining Cap’s reputation can wait a few more hours. You have better things to do I’m off, see ya.” He left the same way he had come in, with a bang. The second the door fell shut behind him Banner started to apologize again for Tony’s rudeness. “Don’t worry I have seen Mr. Stark on television, he doesn’t seem to act any different in real life. This is the second time he interrupted one of our conversations. Are you working for him?”

A few minutes before Banner had suspected him to be a spy, but now he wasn’t worried about that kind of question. “No, not really. He provided me with one of his labs. So I can’t complain about him interrupting my work every five minutes. Sometimes he’s even helping out. I’m surprised every time that he can be very useful.”

Loki was absolutely sure of that. Stark was going to be very useful.
Loki’s discovery of the week was the internet meme. He didn’t understand their purpose, so he assumed that they were made for entertainment. For him that didn’t work out, because he didn’t understand any of the pop culture references. Yet this wouldn’t stay a problem for much longer since Loki had found somebody whose whole communication system consisted of these references. Stark was talking about movies, bands and other cultural phenomena all the time. Loki didn’t understand half of it, but that didn’t seem to upset the Man of Iron. Almost as if he was used to it.

It was one of Loki’s theories that Stark was a lonely man, because nobody, not even fellow mortals could comprehend the things that came out of his mouth. Anyway, Tony Stark was very lonely, there was no other explanation why he would be insisting so persistently on spending time with Thomas.

From all his personas Loki liked Thomas the most. He was most similar to himself, still a different person, but he didn’t pretend to be happy all the time. Or nice. Or to be particularly interested in the things Stark had to say. Strangely enough Stark seemed to love that. Somebody to argue with, Stark’s idea of entertainment.

“Are you serious? This is your idea of fun? How old are you? Five?”

Stark pretended to be devastated, but he could keep the grin only a few seconds off his face. “Come on, spoilsport, you have to loosen up a little. It’s a hell lot of fun. You can even shoot me in the face. Come on, I know you want to.”

Yes, this was indeed tempting. Loki would use something deadly instead of a ball filled with paint, but causing Stark pain was still something he couldn’t say no to. If Stark’s suggestion wasn’t the stupidest thing he had ever heard. It was so utterly dumb that even Thor could have come up with it. Pretending to shoot each other? With little balls filled with paint? This whole thing made about as much sense as internet memes. “You’re a designer, a mechanic. It’s your job to design new technology and you want to play paintball, not video games?”

Stark laughed happily and shrugged. “That’s work. We’re having fun now. Here.” Just like that Stark pressed the paintball gun into Loki’s hands. Was he really going to do this? Suddenly his revenge was actually getting humiliating. Then again, Loki was determined and it would all be worth it. “This is stupid and you don’t stand a chance against me anyway.”
Now Stark’s eyebrows met his hairline. “What? You know I’m Iron Man, right? So how do you think that you’re going to beat me?”

“You’re not wearing a suit and I have a pretty good aim. Moreover I don’t hesitate to hurt you.” Loki grinned, in this case he actually liked saying the truth and Stark didn’t mind at all. “Fine, same here. I’m going to destroy you. So don’t start crying when I paint you all over.”

Perhaps the game would still be fun, because Loki could teach Stark some manners. The game was indeed stupid, since it reminded him of primitive Midgardian weaponry. All Loki had to do was to rely on his reflexes, his sharp eyes and the speed at which he could move. He was careful though, Stark shouldn’t notice anything not human about him. It went down well. Of course Loki defeated Stark easily. The sight was quite nice and fitting, Stark painted green from head to toe. Irony tasted so sweet and the startled look on Stark’s face did the rest. “Good lord, you’ve never done that before?”

“No, but I told you that I have a good aim, but I still think it’s stupid. Can we leave now before I regret agreeing to meet you even more…”

Another person would be fed up with him by now, but Stark was only amused. Was this some kind of masochistic behaviour? Surrounding himself with people who couldn’t stand him? Or was Stark so easily bored that he searched for a challenge? “Fine, you cheated anyway and I need to drown my sorrows about losing. I know a great bar. Interested?”

Loki wasn’t a big fan of Midgardian alcohol, but he thought this might be a good idea. Stark already talked a lot when he was sober, under the influence of alcohol he might tell Loki interesting stuff. “I’m okay with that, but a nice place.”

“Best place in whole New York, you’ll love it.” There was no doubt that Stark had a smart answer to every question. Or least he thought that his remarks were smart and funny. No, they weren’t, but they hadn’t started to bore Loki. Yet.

They used one of Stark’s expensive sport cars to get to said bar. Loki watched him carefully and fantasised about grabbing the steering wheel, causing the car to crash into a wall or another vehicle. Loki would walk out unharmed and Stark would be dead. How very unsatisfying. Loki needed it to hurt, not only physically. Nevertheless it was tempting to summon a sharp object and to ram it into Stark’s neck. His blood would paint the inside of the car and Loki would feel so much better. No, he probably wouldn’t begin with Stark though. He was the entertaining one.

“Either you don’t know anything about cars or you’re just really hard to impress. Which one is it?”

50 seconds of silence. Must be a new record for Stark. Had he been a lonely child? Nobody else to talk to but himself? There had to be a reason for this strange speech pattern? “I don’t care about cars and I care even less about them when they are expensive. And I’m incredibly hard to impress. I would say it’s almost impossible to impress me. I don’t understand why you are so eager to achieve that.”

Stark looked at him for a few seconds and his entire face one big grin. “Oh, I just like to show off, but it’s even more fun when a person isn’t fainting every five seconds because of my awesomeness.”

“You being so full of yourself is really getting old and tiresome.” Loki sighed and rubbed his forehead while Stark only laughed. “Come on, I like your attitude, it’s a lot of fun, but you don’t have to pretend all the time.”
Loki didn’t flinch, his heart rate didn’t increase and yet he was alarmed. Or rather interested. Of course Stark didn’t know anything, if he did he wouldn’t give it away and he wouldn’t be able to play it so cool. Still, Loki was intrigued. “What are you talking about?”

“You think I’m fun to hang out with. Otherwise you wouldn’t be here. I’m sure you didn’t expect to like me, but now you kinda do, because I’m awesome. I’m a cocky bastard, but so are you and that’s why you don’t think I’m so bad. I don’t think you’re so bad either, I need more sarcastic, self-pretentious people in my life.”

Loki had to laugh. Loki, not Thomas. Stark was funny and he despised the overly correct and moral people maybe as much as Loki. If he continued like this, Loki would think about killing him last. “You’re not as awesome as you think and maybe I’m only spending time with you, because I am incredibly easily bored.”

“Well, we’re going to take care of this.” Stark began to hum some tune unknown to Loki. Arrogance, Loki had already known about that. This was the reason Stark and the Captain got along so badly. A source of potential conflict. Then again, they had succeeded in forming a team before. Loki couldn’t rely on that alone. Nonetheless he would whisper a few certain words in their ears, the Captain liked William and he valued his opinion.

It was time to concentrate on the here and now when Stark slowed down and Loki realized they hadn’t just driven to some bar in Manhattan. “This is the Stark Tower.”

“Yeah, best place in New York, I told you so.”

This was far beyond Loki’s expectations. After being in contact with Barton for weeks the Avenger had barely revealed anything about himself. Stark invited him into his home. Reckless, careless... Loki knew he was brave and he thought him smart. This was just crazy and stupid. No way he would complain, he would gain entrance in Stark’s personal chambers. Time to be attentive and to suck in every little piece of information. “I sure hope so. Otherwise this will be a complete waste of time.”

Stark seemed to swallow a chuckle and shook his head. When they got out of the car Loki felt something that reminded him of nervousness. A feeling that had been absent for a very long time. Memories came over him, moments he longed to forget and yet he was clinging on to them to fuel his rage. The image of the Hulk, beating him until he hadn’t been able to move anymore. Him lying on the floor all of the Avengers above him, the Hawk aiming his arrow at him, the Widow holding his scepter. No, Loki would never forget that. He would make them regret having ever crossed his way.

“Hey, are you alright?”

Loki looked up, real confusion visible on Thomas’ face and Stark raised an eyebrow at him. Only now Loki realized that he had been clenching his fists and Stark felt the tension. “Yes, I’m fine. Just had to think of something and... nevermind.”

This was embarrassing and unworthy. Loki had let his emotions get to him and even Stark who was as sensitive as a brick had realized it. It was necessary that he regained his focus, he was here to play nice, to earn somebody’s trust and to find his weak spot. His determination would allow him to slip again.

At least Stark didn’t bother to ask any further. The elevator ride happened in silence and Loki was glad, time for him to calm down and think. This was important, all his attention was needed right here.
The elevator doors opened and Stark walked right into the penthouse as happily as ever and started talking to nobody. “Jarvis, lights. Daddy is home.”

Instantly some of the ceiling lights went on all by themselves. Well, this was the home of an inventor and a master of technology, of course he would have his home controlled by a computer. Loki followed Stark who went directly to the bar Loki had already seen before. So Stark was finally handing him the drink he owned him anyway. It tasted good, better than most things Loki had had before. Loki took immediately advantage of the situation and scanned his surroundings. Somehow he was surprised how little had changed. All had been repaired, but was still the same. Now Loki would even admit that it was rather nice, he particularly liked the view. If New York was burning it would be even better, but that had ceased to be Loki’s main interest long ago.

“So, you’re impressed yet or do I have to show off with my new television?”

Instead of waiting for an answer Stark just grabbed a remote control and pressed some buttons. There wasn’t a TV and Loki felt indeed a little surprise. Stark didn’t need a television, when a hologram appeared in the middle of the room. Just like that. It showed a football game, another one of these sports that Loki started to hate.

Stark looked at him expectantly, clearly waiting for some sign of amazement, but Loki found it too funny to frustrate him. Also he wasn’t impressed. “It’s nice. Based on who you are I expected something like this. I don’t like what’s on though.”

Again Stark didn’t make the impression of being disappointed instead smiled and sipped on his drink. “Jarvis, you heard the man. Put one something he likes.”

“This would be an easier request to fulfill, sir if I knew about our guest’s preferences.”

Now Loki did flinch and turned around on his heels. Nobody was behind him. Loki would have sensed another person, there were only him and Stark. So who had just asked this question? What was going on? Loki didn’t like this, he didn’t like that at all. A feeling that wasn’t shared, Stark was laughing, not trying to hide his amusement. “You scared him, Jarvis. That wasn’t nice, where are your manners?”

The voice without a body started talking again and Loki closed his free hand to a fist. Ready to summon a dagger at any second to defend himself.

“My apologies, sir. May I introduce myself? My name is Jarvis, I am an artificial intelligence created by Mr. Stark. I will gladly change the channel if the football game is not to your liking. Do you have any preferences what you want to see?”

The voice came from the ceiling, the walls, the floor. It was everywhere. An invisible force that could make out Loki, but he was unable to locate it. It was terrifying, dangerous, unknown and utterly fascinating. Finally. Loki’s heart started to beat faster and he almost started to feel a little bit light-headed. This was it. This was what this whole thing should be about. A rush of excitement, a challenge, a thrill. Knowledge, creativity, creation. Midgard had finally sparked his interest and way more than that. For the first time in ages Loki was curious about something, he barely could contain himself. He wanted to rip the place apart, break the walls and find the source of the voice. Then he would take it apart, every little piece of it until he was able to understand it. Loki wanted to learn. Before that he had to be polite, after all he had been asked a question.

“I… would prefer football. The real one. Where the players actually use their feet.”

Stark somehow thought that comment utterly hilarious and burst out laughing. “Could you be any
more British?”

The voice without a body ignored that. “At this very moment I could propose four different games in four different European football leagues. England, France, Italy and Spain. Would you like to know the teams?”

Loki’s eyes darted suspiciously around. “England is fine, doesn’t matter which team…”

A second later the hologram changed and showed a match between Liverpool and Hull. At least the commentator called them like that.

Now Stark was quirking an eyebrow at him, but Loki was so thrilled he didn’t even care. “This is absolutely… It’s. No, wait a second.” Loki felt stupid when he lifted his eyes to the ceiling, but he didn’t know where he should look. “Computer?”

“I would be glad if you could refer to me as Jarvis, sir.”

A name, it even had a name and Loki was caught in a confusing state between fear and admiration. “Are you… do you…” He was babbling, Loki wasn’t able to find the words he wanted to use. So much about his silver tongue. “Are you self-aware?”

Again this question sounded stupid and Loki hated it. The answer excited him.

“Yes, I would say so.”

Turning around Loki faced Stark and voiced things he had never thought possible. “This is absolutely brilliant. One of the most fascinating things I have ever witnessed. You created… You created a machine that… thinks and answers me when I talk to him… it? Without codes or… I am genuinely impressed.”

The grin on Stark’s face widened. “You hear that Jarvis? You managed to warm up the coldhearted European bastard.”

“I highly doubt that this is the name of your guest, sir and I very much appreciate your compliments. I’m sorry I can’t address you properly, but Mr. Stark hasn’t found an opportunity yet to tell me your name.”

“You see, he’s so self-aware, he tends to be self-righteous. Anyway let’s get the formalities out off the way so you can go back to tell me how awesome my inventions are. Jarvis, this is Tommy. Tommy, this is Jarvis.”


“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Pine.”

There were thousands of questions Loki wanted to ask. Directly at Jarvis or about him… it? “Why are people raving about your suit? This is something you should really be famous for… Okay, I admit it. You impressed me, your creation did. Tell me about it. Show off, now you have an actual reason to do so.”

It was the biggest flattery Loki could offer and Stark dwelled in it. So why not? The fact that Loki could enjoy himself even before ripping his heart out was a good thing. Unexpected indeed.

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The captivating encounter with Stark and his computer had given Loki ideas. He wasn’t the only person who was having too little fun. Steve Rogers was a boring person and he lived for the duty he had chosen for himself. Dull. So driven by his will to do good that he even didn’t give himself any free time. That wasn’t healthy. Loki didn’t care about that, but William did. Another reason why Loki liked Thomas most.

“You’re going to like it, I promise. I’m rather astonished that you haven’t been here before. You’re an artist.”

“I’m not.” Rogers replied quickly and Loki thought to see a slight flush on his cheeks. How pathetic. How was it possible that it was now Loki’s task to convince the Captain of his own talents?

“You’re drawing. You’re painting. You create something beautiful that serves no other purpose than to make people wonder, think, sad or happy. That’s art. So don’t say anything different. I can’t believe you’re living here and haven’t been to the National Gallery yet. Do you ever take a day off to do something that is fun?” Loki sounded reproachful, but like always the Captain smiled at him. “The bad guys don’t take days off, so why should I?”

Now came the part that Loki really loved about being the Captain’s friend. He could smack him.

“Ouch! Why did you do that?!”

“You deserved that for being stupid. Even Captain America needs a day off. I thought that’s the reason for the Avengers. A whole bunch of… super heroes, so everybody can go on vacation once in a while. This isn’t even vacation. This is an afternoon in an art gallery. You said you needed normal tings. There you go.” Loki nodded to himself and the Captain still looked like he was in doubt about that. How odd that a person who fought for freedom and self-determination suffered from a lack of his very own free will.

Loki didn’t want to discuss this matter any further, so he just pulled the Captain along. At least he had been smart enough to put on a cap. Today Loki definitely wasn’t in the mood to take care of fangirls or more sophisticated admirers of the great Captain America. Loki would have to kill one of them and that would probably ruin the day. Well, the Captain’s day, Loki would definitely feel better.

The National Gallery possessed a great collection of art, but Loki was still more impressed by the museums he had visited in Europe. Sadly William couldn’t just invite Rogers to Paris, London or Vienna, so the National Gallery would do. They went straight for the paintings and Rogers seemed to indeed loosen up. It was still somehow awkward to see that there was passion inside of the so strict and tedious Captain. He was fascinated and touched by the lines and brush strokes that formed a painting. They talked to him, told him a story and he could find some better meaning in them. Not the one the painter intended, but that wasn’t important. Rogers liked something that Loki could actually understand. Something that required a little bit more than brute force.

They had checked out the halls with paintings of the 17th century when Loki decided it was about time to talk business. Rogers trusted him it was time to find out just how far Loki could push it.

“Is everything alright? You look stressed lately. Remember the world isn’t going to end just because Captain America does something he actually likes and isn’t lying in wait for dangerous criminals.” Loki said it with a smile, almost teasingly.

Next to him Rogers let out a deep sigh and for the first time Loki started to wonder. Was he really so selfless? Or maybe there was still a little bit of arrogance to found in this righteous man. Did he
think himself the only one capable of protecting this planet?
“You’re right… I know you’re right, but every time I’m off guard something bad seems to happen. So I prefer to be ready all the time.”

Inwardly Loki smiled and thanked Rogers for making it so easy. William stopped dead in his tracks and Rogers seemed startled by the serious look on his face. “Will?”

“I’m pretty sure that isn’t the way it’s supposed to be. Yes, you dedicated your life to this task, but that’s not a burden you have to carry alone. I saw what happened two years ago. You’re not the only one who has this dedication and it would be definitely wrong to only rely on you. That’s not fair, everybody has a life of their own. Even Captain America. I’m not saying you should lie down and do nothing when shit hits the fan, but when it doesn’t look like the world is going to end any moment… you can relax a little bit.” To emphasize his point Loki reached out and squeezed Rogers arm. That’s what friends did… wasn’t it?

A small smile appeared on the Captain’s lips, but it didn’t last. “It’s nice that you’re trying to look out for me. You’re not the first one to tell me that.”

Interesting. “So why aren’t you listening? You think the world is going end, because you’re not watching it for two hours? There’re other Avengers who can take of this world for the next hour.”

Rogers hesitated and Loki saw opportunities opening up. It was a risk, but Rogers liked him for being honest. So Loki would go all in. “What is it? Don’t you trust them enough to do it on their own?”

Or don’t you trust them at all? This would be marvelous.

“Of course I trust them, what kind of team would we be if we didn’t trust each other?” That was supposed to be a rhetorical question, but Rogers didn’t quite manage to pull it off. Loki wanted to squeal with joy. Even the great Captain Rogers had trust issues towards the other Avengers, the man who granted everybody the benefit of the doubt. Now Loki only had to find out who he distrusted the most and why. Probably Stark, they didn’t like it each other.

“Sorry, I was out of line. All I’m saying is that you don’t have to do everything alone. That’s what teamwork is all about. Most important if you ever want to come to grips with this new time, you can’t be working 24/7. I also don’t feel at ease with the thought that you should fight for the world, but in the end you’re fighting for nothing but the fight. Come on, let’s check out the other hall.”

The Captain seemed more than content with this decision, but he still felt the need to point something out. “You’re… You don’t have to worry. I have a purpose in life, that’s more than most people can say.”

So why is there still longing in your eyes?

“But that isn’t enough. No, I’m not talking about a girlfriend, don’t worry. Just that you should do something else than fighting. Enjoy yourself. It’s absolutely unbelievable that you haven’t been here before. Come on, there’s a new exhibition that’s only going to be here for a couple of weeks. Works of Russian artists. Wanna check that out?” Loki smiled William’s sweetest smile and Rogers returned it.

The next hall was indeed filled with the art work of Russian or Soviet artists of the 20th century. Loki held back this time, he mostly followed the Captain around and listened to him talking about the paintings that he liked. He didn’t really have a preference of a specific style, the Captain always took decisions based on a feeling in his guts. His explanation why liked a picture was pretty much
always the same – It made him feel good. Loki smiled patiently, listened and commented honestly. The most important thing was that Rogers loosened up more and more, the way he talked to him and the overexcitement to share his opinion with William and to hear what he had to say.

“Oh, I know this one! I saw it in an anthology. It’s called the Chinese Girl.” Rogers pulled him along to another painting, staring at it in awe and Loki turned around to look at it. A rather simple portrait of a woman. Nothing special about it, but one little detail. Her skin was blue.

Something clicked. Loki had seen paintings that had left him indifferent and others that had pleased him. This made him want to run, more than that, tear at his hair and scratch his own eyes out, so he would finally be able to look away. Why would anybody paint something so atrocious? If you had the tools to create beauty why would you choose ugliness?

Loki blinked and after barely a second the painting stared back at him. It was the face of another person whose eyes were piercing through him. Stripping William’s skin brutally off him, leaving him with what was underneath it. Not even that was enough. Loki could feel its force reaching out for him, like hands with long, greedy, calloused fingers that didn’t belong to a being known to Loki. It clawed at him, trying to rip his white skin into shards, piece by piece off him. All Loki could do was clinging desperately onto it like a madman, fighting to protect a part of him. The part they were trying to take away.

Himself.

He could feel how the hands turned into claws, burying themselves mercilessly into his flesh, wanting to bring to light what lay underneath while Loki helplessly tried to hold on.

No, they wouldn’t tear him apart, he wouldn’t let them take his skin away. This was him and nobody had the right to pretend he wasn’t. Loki wouldn’t let them, he wouldn’t…

“Will? Are you okay?”

A hand was put on his shoulder and the room stopped spinning. Loki blinked and the claws were gone. Rogers’ worried face was in front of him and for once Loki felt no itching in his fingers, no need to wrap them around his throat. Instead he felt relief, but it wasn’t enough to fight down the panic inside of him. Or this overwhelming urge to free himself of this skin that made him pant and felt way too tight, squeezing the life out of him.

“I have to… Sorry…”

This time he didn’t bother what Rogers might think, Loki had to do this or he would lose his mind right here in this gallery. So he rushed almost blindly towards the restroom, his palms burning so hotly that the doorknob felt like ice against his skin. In front of the mirror Loki dropped William’s skin and he finally stared into his own green eyes. Now he could breathe.

There he was.

This was Loki’s reflection. His own eyes, hair, mouth and the colour of his skin. Nobody could take it away, because this was him. Slowly his breathing evened out and a feeling of ease and calmness settled in. What kind of fool had he been? Losing his calm because of a tasteless painting that only mortals could find worth looking at? He was definitely spending too much time in their presence.

Loki heard how the door was being opened and slipped back into William’s skin.
The Captain entered, worry clearly visible in his eyes. “Hey, you’re sure you’re alright? You looked kind of pale.”

After taking a deep breath Loki smiled. “Yeah, I got dizzy. Sorry I scared you.”

“You’re sure that’s all? You do look scared.”

How dared he? A mere mortal who reproached a god of such a feeble sentiment like fear? Loki would teach him about fear. “I’m fine.”

“Should we leave? Get something to eat or some fresh air?”

Right, Loki would indeed prefer to get out of here. “That might be a good idea.”

Before they left the Captain shot him an intense glance, Loki could almost feel his compassion. “You know… you can talk to me. I’m a good listener and I’m your friend. If you ever feel… like you needed one.”

It was one of these rare occasions where Loki decided to stay silent. Instead he smiled and nodded.

He felt sick to his stomach and the feeling wouldn’t subside even hours after they had left the gallery.

The next day the newspaper reported about a fire in the National Gallery. Oddly enough only a single painting had been destroyed and Loki finally felt better.

Chapter End Notes

Here's a link to the painting that made Loki have his little freak-out
Hi everybody,

I've had a little scare, because my laptop isn't working anymore and for half an hour it looked like as if the story was completely gone. Luckily that's not the case, so there's no rewriting and you don't have to wait longer than usual for an update :)

Loki is still upset about his little panic attack and Captain America simply won't do him the favour to let him forget about it...

_______________________________________________________________

Tell me would you kill to save your life?  
Tell me would you kill to prove you're right?  

Hurricane ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~

_______________________________________________________________

Barton was already waiting for him, sitting at a table by the window, his nose buried in the menu. Loki took his time to take in his appearance. Relaxed, he decided. Good, somebody as paranoid as Barton was getting comfortable around him. Time to step up his game. “Hey, sorry for being late…”

“Don’t worry, I came early.”

Loki sat down opposite of him and looked at him rather intensely until Barton raised an eyebrow at him. “Something wrong?”

“No, you just never told me that you’re an Avenger.”

Judging by the look on his face Barton had probably waited for this topic to come up. “You never asked.”

“Well, don’t worry, I already feel stupid enough. I saw you on TV, you know the big fire… It’s kind of a dick move to only pay attention to the guys in the fancy costumes. Even though half of them look utterly ridiculous. Oh damn, I just insulted your friends. Your friends with superpowers. Scratch all that, I don’t want to wake up dead tomorrow.”

His comment seemed to amuse Barton. “Ridiculous. That’s the perfect word. I told Thor a hundred times that he can’t wear a cape. It looks beyond stupid. Not to mention Cap’s stupid mask. Why is he even wearing that? Everybody with an internet connection probably knows his social security number.”

“So you’re not pissed off because I didn’t know who you are?”
Barton couldn’t answer the question immediately, because the waitress showed up and wanted to take their orders. Loki wanted those fried potatoes which had turned out to be strangely delicious the first time he tried them.

“No, I’m not standing in first row and I like it like that. I’m glad you didn’t know when we met. I like hanging around a person who isn’t biased.” Barton shrugged and took a sip from his beer. Loki did the same and cursed William’s preference for beer. How he would love to have some wine right now.

Loki cocked his head and tried to look thoughtfully. “You know now I feel weird about the things you said about your boss. Then again every job can suck even saving the world. But how the hell can you have a boss if you’re an Avenger?”

Barton’s face told him that he asked himself the very same question. Good. Loki’s plans towards Barton were getting more and more concrete. He was having troubles with the organization, mostly with Fury. Loki would make him question their importance even more until Barton chose to rebel. The other Avengers would be forced to make a choice. With him or against him. Everything would fall apart. Considering that the Captain had also trust issues and Thor never knew what was going on… it was perfect.

“Well, if there’s a team somebody has to be the leader. Somebody has to pay for shit and as soon as some public building gets destroyed you have to put up with the government. It’s overly complicated and unnecessary. You wouldn’t be interested in it.” At least this was what Barton expected from him, he had no urge at all to talk about the Avengers. Not in detail.

Until now Henry hadn’t been overly interested so Loki wouldn’t start now. “Oh by the way thanks for saving world.”

Barton couldn’t help but grin. “Don’t mention it. Enough of me. How are you doing?”

Time to get the drama on. “The usual. I’m working too much and get frustrated by the people I’m working with. I thought about taking some time off, but the second I’m not there everything is falling apart. It definitely sucks to be the best at what you’re doing. I’m irreplaceable.”

“A lot of people wouldn’t consider that a bad thing. Doing a good job I mean. Being irreplaceable is a good thing. At least for you, not for the guys who are working with you. Because your ass can never be the one on the line.”

Loki shrugged. “It’s annoying as hell when you’re only surrounded by idiots. Apart from… nevermind. You don’t want to hear that.”

“No, I wanna hear. Spit it out. It’s about that girl, isn’t it?”

“Don’t make it sound like that kind of thing. Hell, even I don’t know what kind of thing this is. I’m pretty good at reading people, it’s part of what I do. Normally it takes me only moments to figure a person out. With her… it’s like a blind spot. I have no idea what she’s thinking and when I think I got a glimpse of her true self… she changes. Maybe that’s what’s so interesting about her. If I could figure her out, maybe I wouldn’t look twice at her. I dunno.”

How come Loki wasn’t going too far? Why didn’t Barton realize that Loki was holding up a mirror right in front of his face? Loki was talking about him and the Widow, had been all along and he was slowly giving up on being subtle. Of course Barton recognized his own situation in Loki’s words, but he wouldn’t admit it or there wasn’t enough trust yet. Henry was opening up, at least a little bit, time for Barton to do the same.
“Anyway, I feel stuck and that pisses me off. I like it when things are clear. You got any advice? If you don’t, you have to buy me a beer.” Loki finished with a smirk and now it was Barton’s turn. A decent challenge was nice and good, but if he wasn’t soon giving Loki something to work with, it would be getting even harder to fight the urge to slice his throat and drink his blood instead of beer or wine.

For a short while Barton didn’t say anything at all, but his emotionless expression couldn’t conceal his interest. His fingers were tapping a slow rhythm on the table. When he finally spoke up he sounded stern and monotone. “What is it that you want? From her. What do you want from her? Figuring her out or… something else?”

This was the moment Loki finally came to understand why they were calling Barton Hawkeye. It had nothing to do with his abilities with a bow and an arrow. Maybe he could see indeed better than the average human, Loki didn’t care. Right now even the god of mischief himself felt as if the person opposite of him had the ability to look right through him. Not really of course, Loki knew that his real skin and his intentions were perfectly concealed. A shield that Barton would never be able to break. Yet Loki felt a tingle and indeed goose bumps on Henry’s skin. The Hawk’s eyes were beautiful, sharp, attentive and not capable to hide his pain or the scars he had suffered. Not visible on his body, but on his mind.

No way this was a conscious decision, but Barton was finally letting Loki in. A tiny glimpse that there was real person behind this man who tried to keep every conversation superficial to not let any emotions show. So he could continue to deny having them.

They had reached a turning point. It was absolutely essential to return the favor, to open up to Barton or the opportunity would pass and Henry would never get this close to the real man again. So Loki acted, tried to imagine how uncertainty and vulnerability would feel and put that expression on Henry’s face. To a little extent, everything else would throw Barton off. The little touches were important to fool him into believing he had an actual person in front of him. An actual person with problems who tried to be trusting.

Licking his lips Loki lowered his eyes to create the impression he felt self-conscious. What a weak character trait. “I have no idea. That’s what getting to me. I told you I like things simple and clear. I make a decision, I stick to it. I know what I want. When I meet somebody I make up my mind pretty fast if I like them or not. Okay, I like her… most of the time. She’s great, strong, determined. Only woman in a business full of men and she stands her ground, pretty impressive. We were always getting along quite well, it was easy to work with each other. Still… she’s aloof. I never know what she’s thinking or what she might do next. I loathe that, seriously I can’t express in words how much I hate that. Even worse so, because I don’t know… We were working together, it’s a harsh business where you throw others under the bus. Economics. You might be the one who puts up with crazy warlords or aliens, working at Wall Street is still the more barbaric job. She’s good at it. I watched her overcoming a lot of competition, assignments we both worked on. Fucking impressive, diabolical. Though everyday I go to work I wonder if she would even bat an eyelid before doing the same to me. It makes me want to watch my back and I’m still fascinated with it. So, I don’t know what I want.”

This was the best Loki could do, it was already way too much. He was far from being subtle, but Barton had all emotions so desperately locked up, that Loki needed to use a hammer.

Again Barton remained expressionless, tapping his fingers against the table. Loki was curious how long he had been training himself to be this calm and collected. How would Agent Barton react if he knew that this act didn’t make him any less predictable? Before all this was over Loki would tell him.
“Perhaps that’s all. Maybe you don’t want to know anything else. You don’t want to figure her out. A mystery is only interesting as long as it remains unsolved. You can’t figure her out and that frustrates you, but it’s also the one thing that intrigues you. The second you understand her… you’d probably lose interest.”

Is that what you’re trying to tell you? That it’s all just a game? That you could put an end to it if you only could solve the puzzle? Denial was a powerful weapon if you knew how to use it.

“Possible, but somehow I doubt it. There is more to it. Geez… Enough. I don’t want to talk about it anymore and you must be sick of my whining too.”

“No, I… I guess… like I said, maybe there is nothing you can do about it… Maybe she’ll let you know what it’s all about.”

“That’s not the way I roll… I’m not sitting around, doing nothing. I’m not a waiter, when there’s something that has to be done, I get it done.”

They locked eyes and for a split second Loki wanted him to recognize him. Come on, little hawk, see me. Look at what’s underneath. You don’t dare to look inside yourself because you know what you might find there. So look inside of me and let my darkness suck you in. Let me back in. You already can’t tell the difference between loving somebody and wanting to end their life. So let me in and I will show you how to unleash it. Let the darkness engulf you. It’s such a good friend. The only one you’ll need.

Barton turned his head, seemingly drifting far away while he mumbled “Yeah, me too…”

Loki smiled. He had a foot in the door, the trick was to not kick it open. It would be opened slowly but completely.

***

Considering his latest discoveries Loki thought about sleeping with a mortal. Preferably as a woman, maybe he should have given Stark a chance and not a cold shower. No, the thought was still appalling. It wasn’t like another human attracted Loki in any kind of way, but not being an Avenger was definitely no disadvantage. From what he had learned till now there was no universal Midgardian way to court a person.

Why was this planet so determined to insist on variety? There were countries, traditions and cultures which allowed everybody to do as they pleased. Engaging with anyone disregarding social status, age, religion or gender. At least that’s what they were pretending. Loki quickly found out that all these things did indeed matter, but legally they weren’t an obstacle. In some places.

Other cultures had rules to it, similar to Asgard. Social status was a barrier, a peasant couldn’t marry a person of wealth. Marriage was considered a business affair, it was supposed to bring in money and to secure the family’s position. Because of that the bride and groom often didn’t choose each other, the parents took care of that.

There were places and people who considered marriage overrated and unnecessary. What a barbaric and stupid way of thinking. Loki had looked up different laws, marriage definitely had its advantages.

Loki thanked the Nines that he had already studied Midgard’s most important religions, otherwise he would have been utterly confused about the thousands of different ways to actually get married. Some forms seemed odd, others appeared elegant. Well, each ceremony was unique and Loki
quickly found out that knowing about these different forms wasn’t necessary to be considered an average Midgardian.

So much about marriage, but it wasn’t a necessity to engage in an intimate relationship. After having looked up the word ‘one night stand’ in a dictionary a lot of things Loki had seen on television suddenly started to add up. Midgard tolerated having sex with a complete stranger without any obligations to see this person ever again. Or to exchange names. In some countries. In others this was an act against the law.

Rubbing his temples Loki fought a headache. Why couldn’t these stupid fools agree on anything!? He had thought the United Nations were some kind of universal government – couldn’t they come up with some guidelines?

Anyway from what Loki had gathered he was pretty sure that he could walk in any kind of bar in New York City looking for a … one night stand. The reason why such a bizarre thought even crossed his mind was simple. Loki had seen a TV spot. It had shown a couple while making love. Nothing too specific, seemingly there were also laws about that kind of stuff. The man in the spot turned out to be a monster with long fangs and bit the woman while sleeping with her. Then bright letters illuminated the dark screen, warning people about something called Aids and they should protect themselves. The whole thing had left Loki incredibly confused.

A warning against what? He doubted that these fanged monsters existed and that they were called Aids. So what was it about?

To cut a long story short this TV spot had introduced Loki to sexually transmitted diseases. He hadn’t been able to stop laughing for half an hour. Infections that were spread by having sex and which could turn out deadly. Was there anything that wasn't able to kill these tiny mortals? Even one of their most basic needs was threatening to kill them. Pathetic.

There were ways people could use to protect themselves from these diseases and it all seemed so odd and utterly weird that Loki was actually curious. How did that work? Did you walk up to a person and asked them if they were a carrier of a disease? Would that be considered rude? Did people actually worry about these things or were they a modern tale? The internet wasn’t trustworthy when it came to these things. Pretty much everybody was a liar.

If Loki slept with a mortal all of his questions would be answered. The only downside… he would have to sleep with a mortal. No way, it would be too much of a sacrifice for so little to gain. Loki preferred other kinds of human interaction, so he traveled to Japan to work on his Japanese. The most fascinating language he had yet encountered although the country with his bright colours was making him dizzy. While Loki was studying the daily news and still struggled with the different layers of said language his phone started to ring. The Captain was indeed full of affection for Loki… William.

“Hey Steve. How are you?”

The Captain sounded nice and concerned, no change there. “Hello Will. I’m not interrupting something?”

Always the same, it annoyed Loki terribly. “No, I’m having coffee, reading the news. How are you doing?”

“That’s what I was going to ask you. I’m still worried about what happened at the National Gallery. You really… Is everything okay?”
Loki gritted his teeth, anger quickly rising inside of him. Surprisingly his rage was not directed at the Captain, but at himself. He had slipped. William had gone to the gallery with Captain America, William had discussed the paintings with the Captain and Loki had had a… panic attack. The Captain’s friend, a person he had designed with so much care, had vanished and Loki had taken his place. Trembling, scared and confused. All because of a painting. How could Loki’s plan ever succeed if he couldn’t keep up his charade long enough? Pitiful.

Now he couldn’t even leave this dreadful experience behind him, because the Captain wanted to dwell on it. Like a fool Loki had hoped that Rogers would let it rest and they could ignore that it had ever happened.

Loki wasn’t able to suppress a sigh. “I’m fine, Steve. I had a headache, was feeling dizzy and I didn’t eat anything all day. That’s all. Don’t worry about it.”

Of course the Captain didn’t let up, his only purpose in life was to frustrate Loki. “Are you sure? I’m just… Look, I don’t want to bug you. All I want to say is… I’m your friend. If you want to talk about… something, you can call me anytime. I know I’m probably exaggerating, but… I just want you to know that I’m here.”

All of a sudden Loki’s rage declined as fast as it had taken a hold of him. Of course, how could he have missed that? He had spent way too much time focusing on the fact that Rogers was a stranger to this time and place, just like Loki. But that wasn’t everything, not even the main influence which had shaped his character. The Captain was a hero, somebody who took care of people and he also wanted to take care of William. Was this what he was looking for? Somebody to take care of? To be needed? Emotionally, not just a shield in front of the planet. Maybe Loki had to give him that, show a little bit of vulnerability. Rogers was likely to do the same. This way William and the Captain would form a bond, deeper and more meaningful than whatever Rogers hoped to have with the other Avengers.

Yes, Loki would make himself the most important person in Rogers’ life and then he would pull him away from the others.

Slowly he couldn’t effort to rush it, they didn’t know each other well enough for William to instantly open up. Rogers wouldn’t distrust him, but a later reveal would leave a bigger impact. Also Loki had to make up a story to actually reveal.

“It’s very nice of you to worry about me, but I’m fine. Really. Look, I’m very busy at the moment. How about we meet up for coffee? Monday? Does that work for you?”

There was a smile in the Captain’s voice. “I’ll be out of town during the next couple of days. I’ll be back Tuesday evening. Dinner instead of coffee?”

Captain America left for some kind of mission? How nice of him to mention it so that Loki would be able to come along. “Alright. I just discovered a nice Korean place and…”

“It’s quite a trip, so when I get back I don’t really want to go out. We could meet at my place. If that’s alright with you?”

His first impulse was to scream with joy. At second thought this could be a test. Was the Captain suspecting something? Keep your friends close and your enemies closer? Did he invite Loki into his home to have an eye on him or did he indeed trust him this much? Loki was going to find out by accepting this invitation. “Sure, should I bring anything?”

Rogers declined and emphasized instead on how much he was looking forward to their meeting.
Not as much as Loki though.
Hello everybody! Over 200 Kudos, thank you all so much! :D

Today we learn about Loki’s first movie night on Midgard... with an unexpected / uninvited guest :)  

______________________________________________________

Y lo que más me asombra es que no sé de ti
más que apareces y te conviertes en ley
Pero tu nombre lo olvidé y es lo que hay
Yo no me atrevo a preguntarte otra vez

Camino de rosas ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~

(And what astonishes me most is that I don't know anything else about you
Than that you appear and you become the law
But I forgot your name and it's my bad
And I don't dare to ask you another time)

______________________________________________________


“Stark, I got it the first time. You know a lot of adverbs.”

“That really wasn’t the point that I was trying to get across.” Stark smirked and put the controller aside. Loki was grateful, finally, no more video games. “Seriously though, even Steve is slowly getting into video games. Not liking them is weird.”

Loki shrugged casually. “So I’m weird, I don’t care. I also think you’re weird. Creating a machine that helps you undressing. Weird.”

In response Stark only snort. “I should have never shown you that. It’s for the suit, damn it! You have any idea how much time it would take to take off every single piece by hand? A fucking eternity. Even Steve could find a girlfriend during that amount of time.”

“It’s also weird to hear Ironman talk like that about an American idol.”

“Tommy, you’re from Westminster. So don’t give me that crap. You don’t give a fuck about an American idol.” Stark shot him a surprisingly stern look and Loki shrugged a second time. “You’re right. I don’t give a damn. And don’t call me Tommy.”

Clearly amused Stark burst out laughing. “You’re such a coldhearted son of a bitch. Have I ever
told you that you’re amazing?”

Loki didn’t reply, but he grinned. It was true, things between Thomas and Stark were… They were buddies. At least that was what Stark called them. By now Loki was pretty sure that Stark was a madman or absolutely reckless. He didn’t seem to be bothered by anything. The first time in the Stark Tower he had given Loki a tour. Showed him around as if they had known each other for years. His lab was pretty much the only part of the tower he hadn’t revealed to Loki. So he wasn’t completely mad.

Now Loki had to admit that he actually liked spending time here. Stark’s tower was fascinating, the machinery, all the awkward tools lying around and most of all Jarvis. He was without a doubt the most fascinating thing Loki had yet encountered on Midgard. Since Stark was his creator there was also more to him than Loki had originally thought. Still he remained the Avenger who evoked Loki’s urge to murder the strongest. This was also the fault of the huge panorama windows. It had been such a good feeling to toss Stark outside.

“I don’t think so, most of the time you’re busy talking about how awesome you are. I’m just an innocent bystander.”

“Guess I gotta apologize because most people around me tend to forget how awesome I am.” Such self confidence almost deserved adoration. In any case it was entertaining. “So since we’ve already established that you suck at video games, you wanna watch a movie?”

It wasn’t like Loki had anything better to do, the whole day had been reserved for Stark. If the mortal wanted to waste his time by watching a stupid movie Loki wouldn’t object. “Fine, but a decent one. I don’t trust your crappy taste.”

“My taste in movies is flawless. You’re just a nitpicking pain in the ass.”

“What? This movie about the Scottish revolution was historically incorrect.”

“It was fucking Braveheart! You don’t care about historical facts! You just marvel at how cool it is when he gives that war speech and you laugh your ass off at the scene when they’re mooning the other army.”

“About that I already told you that no Scot wore a kilt before the 16th century…”

“Who the fuck cares! It was awesome! You’re just pissed because they kill a bunch of English guys!”

“I’m not. I just think that if you’re making a movie about a historical event, you should get the facts straight… and cast appropriate actors. I highly doubt that the actor who portrayed Wallace is Scottish.”

“Wow, you can suck the fun out of anything, right? You watch that movie to remember a time when Mel Gibson was still cool… God, it has been so long.” Stark stretched out his legs on the couch, almost taking up all the space. Nice, a legit reason to hit him. Loki kicked him lightly and sighed happily when Stark yelped. “Hey! It’s still my couch.”

“I’m your guest, so you have to make me feel comfortable and if I have to watch a dull movie I want at least be comfortable.”

There was a twinkle in Stark’s eyes. Somebody else might have thought that they had offended him, but Loki could clearly see that Stark enjoyed their banter. It was fun and Loki was glad that he didn’t have to keep his mouth shut all of the time. “Fine, Jarvis, put on Fight Club. Let find him
something to criticize.”

“Sir, if I might object?”

Loki raised both eyebrows. It wasn’t new that Jarvis sometimes debated with his creator, but why should he object to such a simple order? Unlike him Stark didn’t bat an eyelid. “What’s up? You got a better idea?”

“No, but I wanted to point out that it was you who chose the last three movies. Maybe it is about time to let Mr. Pine decide what you are going to watch? He is indeed your guest.”

Not even for a second Loki tried to hide his smirk while Stark’s jaw dropped to the floor. “Jarvis, please tell me that was my first hallucination of the day or are you really siding with the coldhearted Brit?”

“Mr Pine is, as he pointed out himself, your guest. You should take his preferences into consideration.”

“Fine!” Not even an attempt to hide his frustration. “Come on, Prince William, thrill me.”

This was quite a task. Of course Loki had already seen some movies, but generally he avoided them and used the television to watch the news or documentaries. Then again he had heard of generally acclaimed films, so why not choosing one of them. “Jarvis, I would like to watch Star Wars.”

His choice startled Tony. “Nice and I was worried you’d come up with some arthouse shit…”

Loki rolled his eyes and leaned back, getting comfortable. The first time they had watched a movie here Loki had been tense all the way through, waiting for Stark to use the distraction to jump at him. Never happened, Stark didn’t know anything, all he wanted to do was to relax on the couch with a friend. He would never dream of Thomas being a potential danger. They were about 10 minutes into the movie when Jarvis spoke up and Loki tried his best not the flinch, but he was still having a hard time to cope with a voice without a body. Or soul.

“Sir, I’m sorry to interrupt you, but Miss Potts just entered the elevator and is coming right up to the penthouse.”

Another piece of information that Stark didn’t seem to be pleased with. “What? Now? Doesn’t work out, tell her I’m in a meeting with British associates.”

“Sir, I’m sorry, but Miss Potts already declared that she wouldn’t accept any kind of excuse. She does seem rather upset.”

Instantly Loki’s interest was sparked. He remembered the name of Stark’s female servant all too well and from all the information he had gathered he could tell that she was also Stark’s lover. The one who had sent him to the psychologist and now Stark didn’t seem to be eager to see her. This was promising.

About ten seconds later the doors of the elevator opened, but Stark didn’t even bother to get up from the couch. Immediately Loki found out why.

“Tony Stark! You were supposed to be in a meeting two hours ago! You didn’t respond my calls and now I find you here watching Star Wars.”

Loki looked her up and down, taking in her appearance, instantly analyzing what he saw. She was beautiful, determined, driven, ambitious, a woman who was used to stand her own ground and who
probably had herself under control 95% of the time. Now her pretty face was disfigured by anger and Loki could tell from her composure that she has been through this very same situation a couple of times. Most probably she was the only person on this planet even more frustrated by Tony Stark than him.

“Pepper, no need to shout at me. You know me I probably did you a favor by not showing up. What do you need me for anyway? You’re CEO.”

“Right, but you are Tony Stark and the company is called Stark Industries. Some investors actually want to talk to Mr. Stark and you leave me standing there and… Oh, sorry, I didn’t realize somebody else was here.” Now that she had noticed Loki she instantly pulled herself together, obviously embarrassed by her own behavior. Or at least she wasn’t used to people witnessing how she lost her patience. Loki wondered how she’d react if she knew that at this very moment he was trying to figure out if she was going to walk away from this of if she was going to die like the rest of them. Depended on Stark’s relationship with her. Anyway a lady had joined their little round and Loki still remembered his manners unlike Stark. So he got up and walked smiling towards… Miss Potts and held out his hand. He was finally getting used to this strange custom that required hand shaking. “No need to apologize, I should have announced my presence immediately. Stark, why don’t you introduce us?”

Again Stark didn’t look like he cared, but he did what he was told to do. “Pepper Potts, my CEO and the only reason I’m still alive and not in prison. Pepper, this is Tommy, my new Star Wars buddy.”

Pepper, if that was her real name, scowled at Stark and Loki sighed. “It’s Thomas. Thomas Pine. Nice to meet you, Miss Potts. I just want to mention that I’m not… his Star Wars buddy.”

It was easy to read her face, she liked him, a good first impression. “Likewise, Mr. Pine. I’m sorry, but Tony was supposed to be in a meeting and sadly he forgot. Once again.”

“I didn’t forget. I didn’t care.”

Now that was rude, even more so in front of a third party. Loki was thankful, naturally. It allowed him insight in their dynamics. Right now that was a bad sign and Pepper narrowed her eyes. “I guess it would be more appropriate if we discussed this matter later. It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Pine.”

Loki was almost impressed how quickly she could switch between a scowl and a smile. She was gone as quickly as she had shown up and Loki sat back down next to Stark. Suddenly the room was filled with tension that he had never been there before. Caused by the woman. So now it was about time to get serious, enough of playing paint ball and watching movies. “She’s your girlfriend, right? The one who sent you to the psychologist.”

Stark didn’t look at him but concentrated on the movie. “Yes. At least most of the time.”

“Well, you claimed she’s the reason why you are still alive. You’re not treating accordingly.”

An almost inaudible grumble escaped Stark’s lips. “Let’s just not talk about this. We’re watching Star Wars. Nothing’s better than Star Wars.”

“Fine, just wanted to let you know, if you wondered if you were acting like a jerk – you totally were.”

Before Stark could say anything Jarvis also voiced his thoughts. “I have to agree with Mr. Pine, sir.”
“Oh fuck you both. The Brits are teaming up on me…” Pouting and so obviously frustrated Stark turned away. Loki wasn’t worried, he wouldn’t be able to stay silent for long. He was way too interested. After just a few moments of silence Stark cleared his throat. “Why did your girlfriend want to go to couple’s counseling? What was the problem?”

Finally. Loki had spent an entire day to think about his possible answer to this question. Now it was perfect. Stark would see himself in it and most importantly, it wasn’t a lie. Sometimes the truth was even more useful than a well thought out lie.

“She always saw another person in me, someone that I could be, at least she said so. She wanted that person, a person I couldn’t be and that I don’t want to be. I’m fine with the person I am.”

It was perfect. Like a soft melody that lulled somebody into closing their eyes and giving themselves away to enjoy its impeccable beauty. There were cracks in Stark’s mask, but it wasn’t falling apart yet. “What didn’t she like about you?”

“She said I’m cold and distant, sometimes that I don’t care. I do care, but only about things that are worth it. I hated her idea of a relationship, total dependence, not being able to live without each other. Bullshit. I could live without anybody, I lived nicely before I met her and I wasn’t miserable. Now that she’s there, she expects me to hate my life when she isn’t there. I don’t. A relationship shouldn’t make things good, but better. Not bad, but worse. She somehow thought that it’d be love if I hated my life without her. I didn’t, so I obviously didn’t love her. I think it’s repulsive to not be able to live without another person. Why would I want to be with someone who is willing to base their whole existence on me? I wasn’t willing to do that, so I am cold and distant. If I can’t enjoy life on my own, how could I enjoy it with another person? So, I’m not too sad that we’re not together anymore.” Loki searched Stark’s eyes, but he avoided him. Suddenly he looked lost in thought and Loki could tell that he was uncomfortable. That was necessary, right? Real friends did that sometimes, saying things that weren’t all that pleasant.

Stark sipped silently on his drink and let the words sink in. Good boy. So much more responsive than Barton. Perfectly willing to listen and to let Loki into his head. It was so much better to manipulate someone by telling them the truth.

“Well, you’re kinda cold and distant.”

“I thought I was amazing.”

A light smile flickered over Stark’s face. “You’re amazing… and a coldhearted bastard. Who is completely right. You can’t say that out loud though. Nobody’s life is complete without his second half. That’s what TV and love novels told us. Pepper’s great, really, but I don’t like myself too much right now.”

“I thought you were awesome.”

“I am. I know I am, but I don’t feel like being awesome. Can we just watch the movie and wait for Darth Vader to show up? That would be awesome. Like me.”

Why not? Loki was content enough. Stark had opened up and still thought he was awesome. What could he want more?

Star Wars, as it turned out, was mindless entertainment, but Loki could enjoy the creativity. This Darth Vader person also seemed quite likable.

“Sir, I’m sorry to interrupt you a second time…”
“Then don’t do it.”

“I fear this is inevitable since Captain Rogers is on his way up to the penthouse.”

A sudden rush of excitement went straight through Loki’s body and within a second the anticipation was almost unbearable. Captain America and the Ironman in one room with Loki. He could watch their dynamics and he would see if the Captain recognized a little bit of William in Thomas. Of course not, but it would still be interesting. It would also be nice to know why the Captain was here in New York although he had told William he wouldn’t be in the United States until Tuesday.

“God damn it, is everybody knocking at my door today? Tell him I’m not here.”

“Just like Miss Potts the Captain seems very determined to talk to you.”

“Yeah, who isn’t. Tell him I’ve got company. Oh, tell him, it’s a girl that will scare him off.”

“Captain Rogers already met Miss Potts in the lobby and she informed him that you’re at home and not in a compromising position.”

The amount of self-control that would keep Loki from laughing didn’t exist, so he did just that and Stark shot him a dark glance. “Okay, whatever. Maybe he’ll watch Star Wars with us.”

“I’m starting to feel rather special, because you’re pissed off at all your visitors but me.”

“Because you’re the only one I invited.”

They shared a grin and a few seconds later the doors of the elevator opened. “Tony?”

Again Stark didn’t move a single limp. “Over here, on the couch. Relaxing. In my own house you know. Not working. How was North Korea? Did you take the whole base out or did you make friends and that’s why you’re already back?”

North Korea? Right, Loki had read about it.

The Captain had just set a single foot in the apartment and he was probably already regretting coming here. He and Miss Potts shared the same scowl, that was for sure. “This is classified information, Tony. I’m really sorry I’m interrupting your spare time.”


Again, Thomas was honest, a coldhearted bastard, but he had manners. For the second time he got up and greeted the Captain. “Stark isn’t going to introduce me, so I’ll do it myself. Thomas Pine, nice to meet you.”

So much new information, plain visible on Rogers’ face and Loki sucked it all in. The look was stern, but friendly. Still it couldn’t be compared to the way he looked at William. Loki knew that he cared, he knew they were friends, but this made it even more obvious. “Steve Rogers. Nice to meet you too. You’re a friend of Tony?”

“Something like that.”

“He’s my Star Wars buddy. You gotta watch out, Cap. He’s from the island, so he doesn’t have to be nice to you.”

Rogers sighed and Loki sat back down, he had done his deed, now he could lean back and watch
Obviously his presence didn’t please the Captain, he shifted from one foot to the other before speaking up. “Tony, I would like to talk to you about…”

“Fury sent you because he wants something. Not interested, thank you very much.” Yawning Stark crossed his arms behind his head and propped his feet up on the couch table. Loki didn’t miss that Rogers wrinkled his nose. “We should talk about that. In private.” His eyes darted to Loki. “Would you mind…?”

His tone was polite enough, but it was clear that he didn’t expect at all the slightest refusal. After all he was Captain America, people were eager to please him and did what he asked of them. What did Stark just say? He was from the island, he didn’t care much about Captain America. Thomas was European and Loki had found out during his first stay in France that they didn’t like the Americans much.

“That if you are implying that you want me to leave so you can discuss more of this classified information that Stark already spilled, then I have to tell you – No, I definitely won’t leave.”

Rogers’ eyebrows almost hit his hairline and Stark turned his head in interest. There was a small sparkle in his eyes. “Excuse me?”

Loki shrugged, he would gladly explain it to the Captain. It filled him with satisfaction to finally, oh finally, be able to frustrate Rogers. Being nice to him all the time was such a difficult task. Moreover he would make Stark like Thomas even more. Only a fool would miss the evident tension between the Ironman and the Captain and Loki knew what he had to do. William and Thomas would tear them apart. “I told you that I’m not going to leave this room. First of all, it’s Tony’s apartment, so only he can ask me to leave. Second, I’m his guest. I was invited to spend time with him, so I showed up. We sat down and started to watch a movie. Now you walked in just a second ago, uninvited, without calling and want to throw me out, because you want to discuss something with Tony he doesn’t seem to be interested in. So no, I won’t leave the room, I’m watching a movie. If you want to talk about some… Avenger’s stuff, fine, I don’t care, but it’s you guys who have to leave the room and talk somewhere else. If Tony agrees.”

That should suffice.

Seemingly Rogers could do nothing but gape at him while Stark’s face lit up like a light bulb. “You know what, Tommy? I love you, we’re going right into man-crush territory here. You wanna come to a board meeting some time? There are a lot of other people that you could tell to piss off for me.”

“Shut up, Stark. I’m trying to understand what Han Solo is saying.”

Now it was Stark’s turn to sigh, but he sounded disgustingly content while doing so. He raised his glass of bourbon like he would before saying a toast. Then he mouthed the words ‘You rock’ and Loki smiled lightly.

“Tony, please, this is important.” Good, so Rogers had instantly given up on getting Loki out off the room.

“Important for whom? Fury? S.H.I.E.L.D? Sounds like a lot of work and no fun for me. It can’t be really important, otherwise I’d already be in a suit.”

“You have a responsibility. Act like it!”
Lovely, Loki could listen to this all day. “Either the both of you shut up now or you get outta here, so I can watch the movie.”

If Loki had a calendar, he would encircle the date. The Avengers did what he wanted. Of course there was still some bickering and it took Stark ages to get up, but then they actually left Loki alone. Yes, Loki thought about following them and listening to their secret conversation. Then again he didn’t care about their missions or whatever Fury wanted from Stark. It would make Stark mad, he would frustrate the Captain and this was all that mattered. Loki didn’t need the reason, just the emotion. For now he was content watching this piece of Midgardian… art.

After a few minutes Stark came back and the Captain had gone. “You know… surprisingly he doesn’t like you very much.”

“A shame. I do think he is rather amusing.”
Hey everybody, thank you so much for all the comments :)

Today Loki gets into conflict with... non-Avengers. He has quite a special way to deal with it.

To all hispanophone people who might read this (especially from Latin America) - I am not a native (though I can babble a bit and read a lot of Spanish stuff) and if you find mistakes in the few Spanish lines in this chapter feel free to point them out and I will correct them.

How stupid could a species be? Loki had come to terms with the fact that mortals divided themselves into different races. Incredibly stupid since they were all humans, but this was a lot easier to accept than to comprehend. To organize their world better they had also decided to create countries. The United States for example. France. Great Britain. Australia. Japan. Afghanistan. Turkmenistan. And so on. Maybe that made even a little bit of sense, because they felt connected this way. Countries also developed their own culture, traditions and habits. For Loki it was quite an advantage, this way he could find locations pretty quickly and knew where to use which language.

It was also a general Midgardian knowledge to about… one third of the existing countries. Why bother to create them if most people didn’t even know how many of them existed? This was a little discovery that made Loki want to tear his own hair out. Nobody, not a single person on this planet had an idea about how many countries there actually were. They didn’t agree on anything. Palestine?

It had taken five books, three academic papers and a night in the Library of Congress to understand what was going on. Some said it existed, others said it didn’t. How was it possible to not agree on something like existence? They weren’t talking about a fantasy creature or a legend, but about a country. Could get things any more real and concrete? Countries had borders, laws, populations, minorities, governments, constitutions and about a thousand things more that made them countries. So how could you debate if it existed if you had a check list?

The whole thing with Tibet was just embarrassing. Practically you could just walk into a country and say ‘Hey there, you don’t exist anymore. You’re part of us now’ and that was fine. North Korea was of the opinion that South Korea didn’t exist. Not acknowledging its existence didn’t stop them from fighting all the time though. Israel wasn’t recognized by 32 members of the United Nations, but they rest of them said it’s perfectly fine.

Pakistan claimed that Armenia didn’t exist. Nobody else did, just them. Why? Loki had no idea and he doubted that the Pakistani knew either.

By now Loki was indeed tempted to smash his head against a wall. Not a single time during his whole life which had lasted now for over a thousand years he had been so utterly frustrated. All this senseless bickering and fighting for nothing.

Rubbing his temples Loki let out a loud sigh. When was this ever going to stop? New atrocious
details to learn every day. He was getting weary again, could be about time for a hiatus. Well, right
now Loki was actually doing what most people here would consider holidays. Sitting at a bar built
right on a beach, sipping on a sweet cocktail and watching young and beautiful people dance to
sensual and joyful music. It was nice, people who didn’t think themselves so important, enjoying
their time after work, not caring about anything else in the world. A valuable lesson – just doing
what made them feel good. Loki would do just that. He summoned a book about Chinese
mythology and got lost in that with the pleasant feeling of the evening sun on his skin. Yes, this
was nice.

After a few minutes of reading Loki felt eyes on him. He wasn’t being observed, there was nothing
secret or subtle about it, no finesse, Loki didn’t even need to raise his head to know that the person
wasn’t trying. They had no idea what they were doing. Sighing Loki turned the page and finished
the chapter before he did indeed look up.

A young woman at a table not too far away. She smiled sweetly, met his gaze without being shy or
instantly turning away like a person would who felt like being caught. That wasn’t the case, the
expression on her face which was all too easy to read made the rest pretty clear. Well, Loki
definitely hadn’t expected to be so soon reminded of his research on Midgardian rules of courting.
Obviously Latin America was one of the parts of this world which didn’t mind if women were an
active part of the process. Not really important or useful though, so Loki turned back to the book
since he didn’t have to bother about his observer. Not paying attention to her should send the
message.

The book was amazing though. Loki devoured the chapter about the Chinese Dragon. At least
some mortals remembered creatures of magic that once had visited Earth. The way the dragons
were described was very similar to their real appearance and the Chinese legends treated them with
respect, speaking of them in awe. Rightly so, they were splendid creatures of immense beauty.
While he was continuing his read, Loki was very aware that the girl hadn’t stopped watching him.
He hadn’t encouraged her in any way, but that didn’t stop her from getting up and walking over to
his table. What had Loki done to deserve this? He was a prince, she shouldn’t even dare to
approach him.

“Debe ser un libro muy interesante.”

Talking to the Avengers was already a tiring task and Loki had a really hard time not to stand up
and break her wrist for even talking to him. Then again Loki hadn’t had yet the possibility to
practice his Spanish. So he would play a little bit with her. “Prefiero la compañía de los libros a la de las personas.” That should do it.
Loki barely looked up, but it was enough to see that she was still smiling. Confusing mortals.
Without being asked to or asking for permission she sat down opposite of him. “A mí me gustan
los eruditos. ¿Qué lees?”

Now Loki was thinking about baring his teeth. Would killing her really be the fastest way to get rid
of her? Maybe he had to be more obvious. “No quieres hablar conmigo.”

She didn’t get the message, just tilted her head and her smile got even brighter. “Qué sí…”

Sighing Loki shook his head and put the book away. The disguise he wore wasn’t very different
from his own skin. Most importantly he didn’t cover his eyes, they were as green as always. Time
to put them to good use. “Mirame a los ojos… dime que ves.”

Loki looked directly at her and this time he didn’t hold back. Agent Barton might have seen a tiny
little glimpse, only a taste that could give him an idea. This young woman would see it all, he
opened up, letting the darkness unfold in front of her. It wouldn’t suck her in though, it would only
scar her and guarantee that even in years to come she would wake up in cold sweat because of it.

Her soft features changed visibly, the smile faded and Loki watched pleased how everything fell
apart. Nothing but a whisper escaped her lips. “Rabia… odio… oscuridad… tristeza…”

The shock wave of energy erupted spontaneously and shattered the cocktail glasses and beer
bottles on the tables around them, even the ones on the bar. The sound of breaking glass mingled
with the shocked gasps and quiet whimpers of pain when somebody got cut. Across the table the
woman flinched, hastily looked around before her gaze was fixed on Loki again. Now the smile
was definitely gone, forgotten. Loki relished the fear on her face as his magic slipped back into
him.

Without another word he got up and walked away, leaving behind confused and slightly scared
people who had no idea what had just happened to them. Fools. Only the woman knew that he had
something to do with it, but she wouldn’t be able to grasp it either.

Amused by their ignorance Loki walked down the beach, savouring the feeling of the sand
underneath his toes. At least one thing about Midgard that he was able to understand – beaches
were a nice location for a holiday. He liked the warm weather, the sun on his skin and the smell
and taste of salt in the air. If there were no other people Loki would actually like to stay here for
some time. Sadly those mortals were like vermin, they were everywhere and way too hard to get
rid of.

How ironic that Loki could not even finish this thought without another human interrupting him.
An Avenger was calling him. Doctor Banner. First time for him to call Loki. Interesting. This time
Loki didn’t even bother to look around if there was someone who might see him changing into
Elizabeth. At least one good thing about mortals, they never paid attention. “Hello?”

“Elizabeth, this is Bruce Banner.”

Soft, joyful, happy. Good. It was supposed to be like that.

“Bruce, how nice to hear from you. How are you doing?”

“Fine, thank you. Listen, I just came back from the conference I told you about. If you’re
interested I could send you some of the papers that were presented. Only the interesting ones of
course. Well, if you’re… interested.”

Babbling, wasn’t he sweet? Not that it would do him any good, Loki inwardly rolled his eyes, but
was still pleased with the direction where this conversation was heading to. “That would be
amazing. Thank you so much for thinking of me.”

“It’s no big deal. There’s strange noise in the background. What are you doing?”

Messing with some mortals, enjoying the little pleasures in life. “Nothing extraordinary. Just had a
discussion with some South American business partners. Boring. How was the conference, was it
worth your time?”

“Indeed. A lot of fascinating research from my colleagues. You get to see that in the papers. So…
you’re still on your business trip? For sure that’s just as interesting.”

Small talk, not what Loki was waiting for. This needed to get more personal, but Banner wasn’t the
possible with a person as sensible and smart as Banner. Someone so desperate for something
“Not really. Negotiations, new contracts and everybody tries to screw the other over. It’s quite frustrating at times. Maybe that’s why I like physics, there are rules to it, it’s honest, clear. Sometimes complex and confusing, but still logical. So are numbers and mathematics, but as soon as you have to work with people everything goes right out off the window. I do think studying your field is rather calming.”

This should do the trick. Loki had used a bad word and Banner would have to react to it. “I guess so… How come you never ask me about it?”

A smile lit up Loki’s face. This was the question he had waited for, he had worked hard for it. This was also the moment to bring it on, now Loki had to be at his best. Sometimes he still found it hard to believe that the physically strongest of them, a wild beast, could also be the most vulnerable. His weak spots weren’t even protected, they were revealed, for everyone to see and to exploit them. Oh, Loki would give him what he wanted. Even more than that, he would make him realise that the others weren’t giving him that. Loki had felt the rage of the Hulk, now somebody else should have that pleasure. What a tough decision between Thor and Stark.

“What do you mean?”

The reaction was exactly like Loki had imagined it, Banner sighed loudly. Not frustrated, but rather sad. Oh, this would just taste like Loki’s favourite dish.

“Elizabeth, you’re a smart, educated woman. I know you’re probably too well-mannered to be straight forward about it, but… why don’t you ask me about it? Everyone does that… even at the conference.”

A reason to thank those stupid mortals who always concentrated on the obvious yet unimportant things. Even the so called intellectuals. A lethal mistake, but Loki would put it to good use. “Okay, you brought it up. I don’t care too much about it. It’s not the most interesting thing about you. You already described the physical process and data in your work, that’s fascinating and all I need to know. The rest… it’s not the most interesting thing about you.”

Give him time to let it sink in. It was a big one after all. Maybe too big to believe it immediately. “You’d be the first one to say that.”

Of course Loki was and he was relying on it. The Avengers, although being described the greatest team ever put together, didn’t know a damn thing about each other. Or least they didn’t put enough effort in trying to understand the other. “Yes, I know about the Avengers and what happened in New York and before, because… everybody who ever read the news knows about it. I still wouldn’t care about what Tony Stark’s suit does, but how he developed it. I wouldn’t want to use it, but pick it apart to see how it works. I’m grateful for you guys saving the world, but I don’t care what you do besides your academic work. That’s private… more or less. Your academic work is how you’re saving the world, at university, in a lab, not with brute force. I don’t pretend that it isn’t necessary, but in the long run it’s not going to be our salvation. So yes, what you talked about at the conference is for sure more likely to improve the world. We’re too busy thinking about other forces that might destroy us. Yes, fighting off an alien invasion definitely saved the world, people still tend to forget that other things pose a threat too. Just because you survived a car accident that doesn’t mean that nothing bad is ever going to happen again. You still have to eat things that are good for you, exercise and so on. Muscles and physical strength are important tools, but they’re not the future. I believe that you’re research is. That’s why I think it’s the most interesting thing about you.”
Yes, that had been good. Perhaps even a little bit too much. No, Banner was desperate and Loki was serving him everything he wanted, right on a silver plate. He wanted it way too much to not go for it. The silence was probably a good sign. Banner was too stunned to respond and Loki would gladly give him all the time he needed. After all he was the only person who understood him and could take care of his needs.

To the silent sound of Banner’s breathing Loki drew patterns into the sand and watched how the sea washed them away a second later. Not a single trace left. Loki would do the same with the Avengers. There would be nothing left of them. Not a single reminder of their existence. He would erase all of that.

“That’s… Well, that’s… I really hope that you are right about that. I would love it to be this way.” So much genuine hope in his voice and the last bits of his barrier were coming down. All of that and they weren’t even face to face.

“Of course I’m right. So now tell me how the conference went down, because that’s something I’m really interested in…”

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“I’m so happy you had time to come here with me. Documentaries aren’t actually Darcy’s thing.”

Darcy, right, that obnoxious dark haired woman with the intellect of an empty cup. It was still an interesting fact that Jane Foster mentioned her and not Thor. A film that forced him to use his brain, no way Thor would agree to that. “Who’s Darcy? A friend?”

The mortal woman nodded while telling the cashier what movie they wanted to see. “Right, she’s my assistant, but also a friend. I would have never been able to talk her into seeing something like this.”

How so? It was a documentary about Midgard’s solar system, Loki would be bored out of his mind since they wouldn’t be able to tell him anything new. “Pity, I’m sure it’s going to be interesting. Although you’ll probably have to explain a lot of things to me.”

Jane Foster only smiled, purchased their tickets and they went on to buy some… popped corn? Salted popped corn. Loki decided to spare himself the headache and didn’t think further about that. Right now Loki desperately missed Stark. No, he didn’t miss Stark, but Jarvis. Wit, entertainment, cockiness, something that would stop him from being so desperately bored by Jane Foster. Well, that only told Loki that her and Thor were meant to be.

By the Nines, she simply wouldn’t stop babbling. Sure, Loki liked a witty and smart woman, but why couldn’t she shut her mouth?

“So how is work going for you?”

“I’ve never been to Denmark. What is it like?”

“Your tattoos are really artful. When did you get them?”

“Is your family living in Denmark?”

Yes, Loki shouldn’t complain. She was showing interest in Lori, tried to connect with her, winning her over as a friend. Then again, she annoyed him so much. Therefore Loki was incredibly thankful when they sat down in front of the big screen and the lights went out. Listening to a movie telling him things he already knew wouldn’t be quite as tiring as Jane Foster’s voice.
87 minutes later it was over and Jane Foster suggested they would have a drink in a nice cocktail bar. Sure, alcohol would make this situation easier to bear and Loki still had work to do. They had already been shoe shopping and by the end Loki had wanted to cut open her stomach and turn her insides out. During all that he had resisted the urge to even mention Thor. It was necessary that he wouldn’t seem compromised. If Jane Foster got the impression that Loki wanted to talk badly about Thor, he would most likely only bring them closer together. Jane Foster may be annoying, but she wasn’t stupid, once again it was time to be subtle. A little bit, but first Jane Foster had to throw him a bone.

She didn’t, but some guy in the bar who walked up to them as soon as they had sat down. “Hey gorgeous, can I buy you a drink?”

Loki almost felt sorry for giving the Latino girl nightmares, in retrospective she didn’t really do anything to upset him. The mere presence of this guy made Loki’s skin crawl and his impolite behaviour had him itching to lash out. It had felt so good to scare the mortals at the beach. To show them how weak and helpless they were. How he would love to do the same with this guy. Cutting his tongue out would be a pleasure. It would make a nice mess and the look on Jane Foster’s face would be priceless. Then again, it would cause unnecessary attention.

“Of course, you can buy me a drink. Just leave the money here on the table on I’ll do the rest.”

Jane Foster covered her smile with her hand, while the annoying and disgusting human being glared at Loki. Oh please, moral, look for a fight. Let me break your bones.

“Come on, sweetheart, don’t play hard to get. We could both have our fun.”

Loki rolled his eyes and tried to keep his magic controlled since it was already rising up. “The answer is no. I don’t want to and I’m not going to suck your dick. So why don’t you offer that drink somebody else who might actually go for it?”

The mortal blinked, Jane Foster’s eyes widened and Loki’s darkness was begging him to do some damage. Such a nice neck and so easy to break.

“Stupid cunt!”

And he was gone. Probably saved his own life. Loki leaned back in his chair and smiled at Jane Foster. “Sorry, should have got rid of him sooner.”

Hastily Jane Foster shook her head, still taken aback by the situation. “I’d say you got rid of him rather… quickly. I’d never have the guts to talk to guy like that.”

“It’s the only language they understand.”

Now she was even blushing a little bit. “Maybe… I’m glad when I have Thor around. A guy of his size scares weird people off.”

Well, at least Thor had one single virtue. Now that Jane Foster had finally mentioned him Loki wouldn’t let this go. “Yeah, I guess so. He has an impressive physique, but maybe the fact that he can summon thunder is also a little bit intimidating.”

To be honest Loki didn’t understand why Jane Foster thought this to be funny. Yet she laughed softly. “I see, but he would never use that against an innocent person. Not even in self-defence. They wouldn’t have to worry about that.”

Two phrases into the conversation and Loki was already biting his tongue. This planet considered
this woman an intellectual! She was in a relationship with a guy from an other dimension and she actually thought that she had the slightest idea what he might and might not do. Nobody knew a damn thing about Thor and they didn’t even bother to ask. As if ignorance wasn’t bad enough. Good thing Loki was here to ask the questions. He was becoming such an altruist. Must be Banner’s influence on him.

“What is he doing tonight anyway? I can hardly imagine what he’s doing when he is not saving the world.”

A smile lit up Jane Foster’s face. Foolish woman, as if there was no nicer topic to talk about than a man. “He’s at home with Darcy. She tries to teach him how to use the Wii. He struggles with a lot of our technology.”

Thank you, Jane Foster, this is all I need. “This is really amazing. I don’t know if I were able to do that. I would be asking him questions day and night. He would be so annoyed by me.”

“Oh no, he is very open to that. He loves sharing Asgard’s knowledge.”

Quite odd, because he didn’t possess any of it. “It must be hard though… being with someone who is so entirely different… It’s so difficult to get to know another person. You have to get to know somebody who’s… there are no words for it. He’s not from this planet. Talking about cultural differences.”

Finally Loki saw the little spark in her eyes. Faint, but it was there and it was all he needed. She wasn’t a very strong character, it would be easy to manipulate her as soon as the first seed of doubt was planted.

“There… aren’t as many differences as one would think.”

Loki inside of Lori laughed in delight. One minute and he already had her. Not that he had expected any difficulties. It was her own fault that she had never thought about the potential consequences of being with someone who wasn’t human. “He told you a lot about where he’s from? Asgard?”

She nodded overly excited. “Yes… Or… no, but I’ve been there.”

Loki marvelled at his own trap. “You have been to Asgard. You have left this planet and went to Asgard?” Feigning amazement was a tiring task, even more so when saw how excited Jane Foster got. “Yes, Thor took me there. It definitely helped me to understand his culture better.”

By the Nines, did she ever think about these things before she said them? Loki wanted to cut her eyes out, but Lori stared at her, unable to cover her disbelief. “Incredible… How long of you been there?”

Jane Foster’s face fell and she obviously realised that she had made a fool out of herself. “A few… hours.”

It was only natural for Lori to be confused now and she showed it. “A few hours?”

“I know it doesn’t sound like much, but if you’re really there and can see… What?”

Loki sighed and shrugged. “Listen… I don’t want to offend you, but… I spend three weeks in Kabul, I had work to do there. Three weeks and I still don’t know anything about Afghan culture or the Afghan people. Traditions, rituals, their judicial system, Afghan identity, beliefs or Muslim religion. After three weeks I still don’t know anything about them and… Well, they are all human,
like me.”

There, done. Jane Foster opened her mouth, but no words escaped her lips. Loki could see all too clearly the wheels turning in her head. She was beginning to understand and it scared her.

They didn’t know anything about Thor. So he had had a mad brother who had tried to take over the world. Did they even bother to ask if this was an unusual thing… or did they take over worlds all the time if Thor didn’t happen to be in love with a person there?

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After Jane Foster had left, trying not to show how confused she was, Loki walked down the street, happily humming a tune. Something odd happened a second later. He was so distracted by his success that he was actually surprised when he was grabbed and yanked back into a dark alley. Of course that moment didn’t last and Loki sighed in frustration against the hand that covered his mouth. A hoarse voice hissed familiar words into his ear. “You sure you don’t wanna suck my dick, you stupid cunt?”

This disgusting creature was touching him. He actually dared to…

A scream of agony cut through the darkness of the night when Loki effortlessly pulled the hand away from his mouth. “I studied the Midgardian forms of courtship. This is highly inappropriate. You don’t touch a woman without her consent. Guess I have to make sure your tiny brain remembers that.”

Loki squeezed and he heard the sweet sound of breaking bones beneath his fingers, mingling with moans of pain.

~ ~ ~

“Debe ser un libro muy interesante.” - That has to be an interesting book.

“Prefiero la compañía de los libros a la de las personas.” - I prefer the company of books to the company of people.

“A mí me gustan los eruditos. Qué lees?” - I like scholars. What are you reading?

“No quieres hablar conmigo.” - You don't want to talk to me.

“Que sí…” - Yes, I do.

“Mirame a los ojos… dime que ves.” - Look me in the eyes... tell me what you see.

“Rabia… odio… obscuridad… tristeza…” - Anger... hatred... darkness... sadness...
Hey everybody :) 

Today Loki finds out if Captain America can cook...

Your defenses were on high  
Your walls built deep inside  
Yeah, I'm a selfish bastard  
But at least I'm not alone

Was it a dream? ~ 30 seconds to Mars ~

Tommy, the Empire strikes back! Get your ass over here, I can’t fight Darth Vader alone!

“Something important?” Rogers smiled curiously at Loki who quickly put his mobile away.

“Nah, just a friend who wants to watch a movie. I’ll call him back later.”

Now Rogers seemed even more pleased and went back to cutting the onions. This arrangement, this whole setting made Loki feel uneasy. Midgardian kitchens were death traps. So much weaponry that was just waiting to be used. Sharps knives and other pointy objects, Loki could think of 100 ways to kill Rogers here. The can opener was the most tempting. There would have to be other ways to live out his creativity. Sadly the little incident in London had reminded Loki just how much he enjoyed causing pain. He had felt calm, at ease, able to breathe.

He would have to feed on that for some time.

“You’ll finally give me something to do? I’m feeling weird just sitting here and sipping my drink while you’re doing all the work.” Actually no, Captain America being his personal slave was something Loki could get used to. Unfortunately that wasn’t William’s style.

“No, you’re my guest. You’re not supposed to cook the dinner.” Again Rogers only smiled at him and grabbed a pepper that he was now slicing up. Loki wanted to have that knife. “Come on, at least let me slice that pepper. I’m not good at sitting around.”

Rogers let out a sigh, but his face still told Loki that he was amused by his persistence. “Fine, you get the peppers. I’ll take care of the chicken.”

For a fleeting moment Loki’s heart beat faster. Captain America handed him the knife and their fingers brushed. All he had to do was ram it into Rogers’ stomach. Maybe it would break, because his muscles were harder than steel. Another reason why Loki preferred his own daggers. An
enchanted blade would even bring down the great Captain America. This one in his hands would probably be useless.

So Loki took Rogers’ place and sliced the peppers, time to make conversation. “So… Everything worked out fine during your… project? I know, it’s probably some stuff you can’t talk about and I don’t want to know about it, but I had a weird feeling when you said you’d been gone for a while.”

Loki would be devastated if something happened to Rogers and Loki wasn’t the one responsible for it. Not that Rogers would ever guess that, he thought that Loki was worried about his well-being. “

“I got home earlier than I thought, it wasn’t as… time-consuming as I thought it would be. The things I had to sort out when I came back were less pleasant.”

The friction between Stark and Rogers was a blessing, but Rogers had to go into more detail. Shouldn’t be too hard. “Work related? I told you that you have to take it easy.”

“That’s not it… some people just make it harder than it has to be.” Rogers shook his head, while cutting the chicken into small pieces. Loki realised that he had already heard him complaining, but never about another person. Too nice to do that.

“Tell me about it. Every time I have to do a group project I end up doing everything on my own, because everyone else is a lazy bastard. I would love to let them feel the consequences, not doing their part, but then I’d be screwed too. Not fair.”

Loki remembered all too well how he had done Thor’s chores and had made sure that he wouldn’t embarrass himself in front of their tutors. Since the day he was born Loki has had incredible skills, but not even he did possess powers great enough hide Thor’s stupidity. So it had always been him who had to clean up after Thor. Loki had soon learned that it was better to do things on his own if he wanted to get them done. Once again proof that he should have never worked with the Chitauri army. Loki had learned his lesson.

“Not fair and also kind of sad. You can also accomplish greater things by working together.” Rogers’ idealism was tiring, but Loki forced himself to smile. “You think so?”

“Yeah, I’m part of a team and I see the things we already did and what we still might do… I do believe in that.” The serious tone in his voice gave everything away and Loki let only a single breath pass before he said his line. Loki already knew that Rogers wanted to trust his colleagues, but it wasn’t quite enough. “It must be amazing to be able to rely on somebody else like that. You have to trust them with your life… I wouldn’t have trusted my last girlfriend with my life… which says a lot about that relationship. Or any other relationship. I don’t know if I have anyone in my life right now I would give this kind of trust…” Loki hesitated, the words dying on his tongue and his hand with the knife stopped mid-motion.

An uncomfortable silence settled in and Loki stared at the pepper on the wooden board in front of him. This was it, right? The thing Rogers wanted to hear. Slowly Loki raised his head and indeed Rogers was looking at him. Intensely and the smile was gone, instead sorrow was shining in his eyes. There it was, the emotional connection he was looking for.

“It’s not… It’s not easy to do that. To trust someone. Sometimes you have to do it, otherwise you’d be lost, but it can be… an alliance of convenience. Real trust… has to be earned and grows slowly. It’s a privilege if you find a person you can trust and if it’s you who chooses this person. Because a lot of times you don’t get that choice.” Rogers’ voice dropped to a whisper by the end and Loki could barely hear him. He wouldn’t make him repeat it though, it had been enough. The Captain
knew very well what he had said and that was all that really mattered.

William smiled awkwardly and let out a deep breath. “Well… that conversation suddenly turned serious…”

Relief was written on Rogers’ face, obviously content to let go of that topic. “Time to tell you about the last movie I saw. It was horrible. A friend told me to watch it, because it’s a must-see, but… totally awful.”

“I told you not to listen to other people. So why are you listening to them and not to me?” Loki smiled, but his thoughts concerning the knife came back. I can teach you to listen to me, Captain America. It might hurt, but then you’ll understand that it’s only to your best.

Rogers returned his smile, seemingly a little bit embarrassed and shrugged. “Maybe I’ll just do that from now on. Come on, I need the peppers. You wanted to help, now hurry up.”

To Loki’s surprise Rogers turned out to be a decent cook. The dish had a very odd name – Jambalaya which didn’t sound very American to him. Rogers mentioned something about it being a dish from Louisiana, but Loki was still pretty sure it had been invented by immigrants. Well, then again, this whole country consisted of immigrants, since most of the original population had been killed ages ago. What would the Captain say about that? What was a real American anyway?

Loki would have to think about that another time since their meal seemed to evoke some memories. “I’ve tried it in New Orleans once. I can’t quite get it done like the one they served me, but I still think it’s good.”

It indeed was, definitely better than what Jane Foster had cooked for Lori. “What were you doing there? Stupid question. The usual… whatever that might be.” It wouldn’t hurt to remind Rogers that he longed to do other things than protecting the earth. Longing was such a powerful emotion and all the Captain needed was a little push. A perspective that there could be other things in life.

He was already feeling uneasy, because Loki had pointed out that he was always doing the same no matter where he went. Some kind of mission, fighting some bad guy and then going back home. Where he didn’t feel at home. “Yeah, the usual. I liked the city I would have liked to check it out more. There was no time. The usual.”

So willing, so open.

“So take your time. I’ve never been to New Orleans. We could go on a field trip. I’ll learn a few words of creole and then we go to a jazz club.” This really demanded every little bit of Loki’s acting talent. During these two hours he had to stop himself three times from grabbing a knife slitting Rogers’ throat with it. Painting the floor with his blood. Loki doubted that he would be able hold back an entire weekend.

His proposal still obtained the reaction he had hoped for. For a second Loki could glimpse a shimmer of want in the Captain’s eyes. Pretending to be Steve Rogers, just for a day. Not Captain America. He almost got him.

“That sounds nice but I can’t really afford to take a day off.”

This old story again. Loki almost felt sorry for him. A person physically so strong, driven by a need to protect other people, who weren’t worth it. To stand up for them, but not for himself. Such a weak character. Stark, an insane person with a drinking problem, was ten times stronger than Rogers. At least he would stand up for himself, because he knew nobody else would. Maybe
Rogers was still too naïve.

Loki put on a grin and shrugged. “Steve, as a citizen of this country which you want to protect, I promise that not everything will go down in flames if you have fun for a weekend. What’s the alternative? You sit around and wait for a call that’s maybe not going to come?”

How adorable, Rogers was blushing. Loki rammed his short fingernails into his own flesh to not rip the other’s face off. “Yeah…”

“How I think that we would hear about another alien invasion, even in a jazz club. I’m not too worried with the other Avengers around. According to the newspapers Tony Stark is patrolling every day above New York City.”

Mentioning Stark’s name turned out to be quite effective. Although Rogers tried to hide it, Loki could see very well how his whole composure changed. Stark was a sore spot and Rogers’ expression turned to stone. Most likely it had something to do with their last fight and Stark’s behaviour that Rogers simply couldn’t understand. “He’s more showing off than patrolling.”

Contentment spread inside of Loki, relaxed his muscles and still left that sweet tickle of excitement. The so nice and faultless Captain America had said something negative about another person. About a fellow Avenger. Perfect. “Well, he likes talking about himself in his interviews but everybody already knows that he got that suit. No need to show off and remind us of it.”

“He feels like he has to. All the time. It quickly gets exhausting.” Rogers uttered a sigh and the next moment he obviously bit his tongue, realising what he had said. But don’t worry Captain, we’re all friends here. Your secrets are safe with me. I’m all about making you feel good about yourself.

Right now Rogers didn’t even want to meet his eyes and the smile on Loki’s face was the complete opposite of what he was feeling. Oh yes, inwardly he was smiling, but like the madman he was. Mischievous, dark and spiteful. William’s smile was forgiving and slightly amused even. “You don’t like him very much, do you?”

“No!” Rogers’ head shot up, looking as if somebody had caught him doing something that was absolutely not expected from Captain America. Like having real, human emotions that weren’t all the time happy and positive. How could anyone feel positive emotions while thinking about Tony Stark? “No. Of course, I like him, he’s a friend and… we’re a team. I like him.”

Throw him a bone, William.

“You know, he’s kinda your working colleague. Most people don’t like their working colleagues. Or they aren’t friends. You don’t have to be friends to work together. You definitely don’t have to feel bad about that. Hey, I only know Stark from interviews and I don’t like him much either. Can I say that? About someone who has saved the world?” It worked well enough, Rogers relaxed visibly and began to smile again. “Yes… I guess so. It’s not like I don’t like him though. We just… have different opinions most of the time. But that’s good, this way we can learn from each other.”

Keep on telling yourself that, I know better.

Captain America didn’t like the Man of Iron. The Man of Iron didn’t like Captain America. Loki had already known that, but not how easily it would be to manipulate this feeling to break their little group apart. Now they might not like each other, but Loki was going to make them hate each other. He knew about hatred and what a strong emotion it was. It could tear down cities and Loki would just let them do that. Captain America would go after a legit threat and Stark didn’t bother to
use extreme measures if he was sure of being right. Or if he was defending himself. Stark would
definitely listen to Thomas and as they all knew – this guy was a coldhearted son of a bitch who
didn’t like Captain America much.

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“You come and go as you please, don’t you?”

Loki mewed in response and the Widow’s face hinted at a smile. During the last two weeks he had
realised that he didn’t have to show up a lot of times to leave an impression. The Widow seemed to
like the fact that he came and went as he pleased. The last time he had even been sitting in front of
her window and mewed until she would bring him something to eat. Somehow the situation had a
comedic touch, letting the Widow feed him and play his servant. Cats really seemed to be treated
like gods in this world.

With a casual gesture the Widow opened the window a bit further and sat down next to it. Looking
directly at Loki she tilted her head. “I bet you have a lot of places like this. You go there, get some
tuna and then go to the next house.”

Not quite, but she got the idea. Loki wasn’t even in his human form, not talking to her and yet she
figured him better out than everybody else. That didn’t matter though, as long as she still saw a cat
in him. So Loki only looked at her and mewed. The Widow hinted another smile and got back up,
leaving the decision to him if he wanted to enter the apartment or not.

Slowly Loki was getting the impression that the Avengers were eager to invite him into their
homes. Loki wasn’t the kind of guy to decline an invitation. After an elegant jump he landed on the
floor. Soft carpet, nice. This place smelled good. Clean, but artificial. She wasn’t here often, no
plants. Was this a place she might call home or just some rooms with a bed to sleep in?

A couch, two big bookshelves, a TV… pretty much a normal living room. Loki jumped on the
couch to get a better look at the books on the shelves. A lot of Russian literature, books about
meditation, material arts, books about foreign languages and different cultural philosophies. Could
be all work… a little bit had to be personal interest. She was smart, but that was nothing new. Most
of the books were written in Russian. Nostalgia? Loki would have to remember that. The books
were all perfectly lined up, there was no way to tell if she reached for one regularly.

No pictures or photographs on the walls. Just a poster of a painting of some artist Loki didn’t
recognize. The state of this room was impeccable. Probably there wasn’t a single grain of dust to
be found.

Loki didn’t hear her steps, but smelled the tuna. A look into her refrigerator would be quite
interesting. She didn’t seem to bother that he sat on her couch, but still put the can of tuna on the
floor. Well, Loki wouldn’t say no to that. Jumping back down Loki acted like a good little cat and
ate up all of the tuna. Again, it was delicious. When he had finished Loki purred gratefully and
rubbed his head against the Widow’s leg. He had already figured out that she didn’t like public
display of affection when it came down to humans, but she didn’t mind if a cat showed her its
appreciation. Perhaps she was an animal lover, who knew? All that mattered to Loki was that she
liked this cat.

And she did. She rubbed his head for quite a while and Loki pretended that he enjoyed it and didn’t
want to scratch her eyes out. It would be a hard task to find out how to hurt her. With Thor it was
obvious, Barton was a clear case too, the Captain and Stark could easily destroy each other and
Banner… Banner was difficult too, but Loki already had a few ideas. The Widow though…
physical pain wouldn’t be enough, Loki was sure she had quite a resistance to it. Loki preferred
psychological torture anyway. Therefore he needed more information and she made it quite hard for him to gain it.

“So, time for you to go. I’m sure you still have a lot of other places to visit to get your free food.” She smiled and Loki didn’t mind that she wanted to throw him out. He had been accepted in her rooms, so he would be allowed to come here a second time. What he didn’t like was the fact that she just grabbed him and carried him back to the window. Oh, Loki would remember that. He hated being manhandled. Why not making Barton cut her hands off?

Finally she put him down on the window sill and scratched his head another time before closing the window behind him. Time to call it a day, Loki was quite content with his accomplishments. Maybe he should answer Stark’s calls, they were slowly getting annoying. He hadn’t spoken Barton in quite a while too. Being popular was kind of tiring.
Chapter Notes

Hello everybody, I hope you're having a nice weekend :) 

I know in the comics Loki said that he would never change into a fly, because a fly is nothing like himself, but I took some liberties here. You're a shapeshifter, Loki, use it! :)

_________________________________________________
So unimpressed but so in awe
Such a saint but such a whore
So self aware, so full of shit
So indecisive, so adamant

Come undone ~~ Robbie Williams ~~

__________________________________________________

What are you doing?

Sighing Loki lowered the book. A splendid book. Probably the best piece of Midgardian literature he has read yet. Of course it was a few hundred years old. Anyway Loki was enjoying himself, so Stark had do write him a text message and ruin it. Unfortunately Loki had ignored him for two days, so now it would be appropriate to reply.

Reading the Divine Comedy. You’re disturbing me

The reply came within seconds.

Dante? Stop being such a classy, fancy motherfucker and get over here. We’ll play Resident Evil to get you back to normal

Loki frowned, he had never heard of that game. He would have to google it.

Did you have to google that or do you actually know who Dante is?

While Stark was typing a reply, Loki searched for Resident Evil. A video game about killing zombies. Not the worst thing Stark had ever suggested. Still Loki had lost himself in a breathtaking piece of literature. He had no time to kill zombies.

I can be a classy motherfucker myself if I want to. It just suits you better than me. Come over and be a classy motherfucker while killing zombies

Confusion came over Loki. Yes, most of Stark’s actions didn’t make any sense, but this was still weird. The other Avengers invited him calmly or politely. Banner called and asked if he had time to
talk. Barton sent him text messages consisting of a few words, something like – Run, tomorrow, 9
am? Jane Foster also called him and none of them kept asking when he said that had no time. Why
was Stark so persistent? He had no manners, obviously, but Loki wasn’t content with this
explanation. Did he just like Thomas more than the other ones like their friends? No, William and
the Captain were the closest. They talked everyday and Rogers asked a lot of questions, wanted to
know everything about the life of his friend. Stark didn’t ask anything, he didn’t know anything
about Thomas. Stark liked his wit, but he didn’t care.

*I prefer Dante to killing zombies*

If Loki got a chance to kill Stark Dante would have to wait.

*You know I can get Jarvis to get you a PDF file of every damn book in the world*

Loki still preferred printed books, but Stark would probably keep this game up for the rest of the
evening. Spending time with him also meant spending time with Jarvis and Jarvis was interesting.
It was also about time to fuel the antipathy between the beloved American idol and the bad boy of
the Avengers.

*You’d better not be playing that awful acdc music when I get there*

Half an hour later, Loki despised the Midgardian vehicles for being so terribly slow, he entered the
elevator of the Stark Tower. “Good evening, Mr. Pine.”

A smile spread on Loki’s lips and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. “Hello
Jarvis.”

“Mr. Stark wants me to ask you what music you would like to hear. I refuse to use his actual
wording.”

Even a soulless machine like Jarvis could sound disapproving when talking about Stark. It was
enough to amuse Loki and he cocked his head, still tempted to look at the ceiling when talking to
Jarvis. Stark had already explained that this was stupid since Jarvis wasn’t located in the ceiling, he
was everywhere. A somewhat scary and even more fascinating thought. “Do I want to know what
he actually said?”

“I doubt it, sir. Any musical preferences?”

Loki pondered for a moment, should he choose something that he actually liked or something to
piss Stark off. “Beethoven, the moonshine sonata would be nice.”

“Very well, sir.”

An instant later the sweet and melancholic sounds of his beautiful piece of art filled the elevator.
That was a nice start for now. The second the elevator’s doors opened Stark’s whiny voice ruined
it. “Oh come on! Beethoven! You got to be kidding me!”

“It’s beautiful and doesn’t make my ears bleed like the stuff you listen to.” Loki smiled and Stark
rolled his eyes. “Seriously, that gives me the urge to lie down and cry. Jarvis, I guess we’ll be fine
without any music.”

Jarvis did as he was told and the music subsided. A pity, Loki was really starting to enjoy it. “Here
I am. Where are my books?”

Stark walked over from the bar, already two glasses of bourbon in his hands, a grin on his lips.
“Don’t I get a hello first?”

“Hello Stark. Where are my books?”

Laughing light heartedly Stark handed him a glass. “Fine, give me your e-mail adress, I’ll have Jarvis send you… you’re into Italian guys… Il Principe. Everybody loves Machiavelli. Is that enough to kill some zombies with me?”

Loki had indeed already heard about said Machiavelli and he was intrigued. His friendship to Stark turned out to be very useful. “Yes, I think that’ll do. You gotta show me how it works first. Since you’ve already found out how bad I’m at playing video games.”

“You’re not bad, you were embarrassing yourself. Don’t worry, I’m a great teacher.”

So they sat down and Loki made his second experiences with video games, he still didn’t like them too much, but the concept of killing zombies was kind of fun. Also a nice way to release tension. After a few rounds playing against each other, which Stark had all won, they played together against the computer. Even doing something so trivial like playing a game seemed bizarre. They were doing it together, supporting each other. Even in this stupid game Loki had to fight the urge to kill Stark in friendly fire.

“Shit, that fucker’s on to me! Get him off me! Blow his fucking head off, Tommy.”

For the first and only time Loki followed Stark’s orders and blew his head off. The one of Stark’s avatar in the game, not the zombie’s.

“Holy shit! You did that on purpose! You just killed me!”

Not yet, Stark, not yet. My first try failed, but I will be the cause of your downfall and death. I promise you it won’t be as quick and painless as getting your head shot off.

Grinning Loki shrugged. “You call me Tommy, you get punished.”

“It’s your fucking name.”

“No, it’s not. It’s Thomas.”

Stark put his controller away, instead reaching for his bourbon and shot Loki a condescending smile. “If parents decide to name their kid Thomas, they know very well that he’s going to be called Tom his whole life. Or Tommy. I don’t complain about being called Tony.”

Fine, if he wanted to play that game, Loki could do that. “I don’t call you Tony.”

“You could, I don’t mind. I’ll continue to call you Tommy.” After taking a sip from his drink Tony looked at Loki expectantly, waiting for a reply, enjoying their little banter.

“Don’t be surprised if I make you regret it. Another round, I’m starting to get good at this.” Loki held up his controller, put on a cocky smile and he knew that Stark wouldn’t turn down a challenge.

Of course he didn’t, just wiggled his eyebrows and mumbled “You don’t stand a chance.”

It was another round against each other and this time Loki won, like it was supposed to be and to his surprise Stark didn’t turn out to be a lousy loser. “Wow, quite nice to see somebody who can actually figure out a piece of technology that he has never used before.”
This was indeed awkward. Why these little comments and side blows against the Captain? Thomas had only met him once and they… well, they hadn’t gotten along. So Stark was just looking for someone to talk badly about Rogers with?

“I still think that it’s stupid.”

“You think everything’s stupid.”

“How would you know?” Loki searched Stark’s eyes and there was nothing. Nothing but a shield. Stark had it all locked up, buried deep down inside of him, even deeper than Barton. Until now Loki hadn’t had an opportunity to see that. Interesting. After all, Stark kept their relationship superficial. Showing him around in the tower couldn’t count, it was nothing personal, nothing emotional. Nevertheless even a blind man would be able to see Stark’s issues. He treated his girlfriend, who wanted him to see a psychologist, like a complete jerk and he didn’t show too much interest in the other Avengers at the moment. Then the loneliness… All locked away and Stark wasn’t ready nor willing to show any of it to Loki. Not quite so reckless as Loki had thought. Or just unable to express his feelings. Or he wasn’t interested in doing so, just like Loki.

Stark did his best to avoid Loki’s gaze, instead he focused on the drink in his hand. “Well, I guess you don’t think Dante’s stupid. You also don’t think that Beethoven’s stupid… that tells me that you’re into old men…”

“I’m into anything that’s intellectual stimulating.” Loki shrugged casually and Stark snort. “You mean anything that’s not fun. Reading about the different levels of hell and listening to depressing music. That’s not my idea of fun. You killed me, so I’m done with the zombies. Jarvis, put on Toy Story, we gotta find something to make that guy smile. Something normal.”

Fine, another movie night, Loki could live with that. The key was to spend time with Stark, since Loki was absolutely sure he would only tell him to fuck off if Loki would ask him something personal. So they watched an animated movie about… living toys… who were hiding when the kid who owned them entered his room? What a sappy and stupid premise. Loki had once known a mage who had been able to bring inanimate objects to life to torture his victims. A creative, but scary thought and Loki didn’t understand why this might be an idea for a kids movie. Only one of the toys would have to… lose its mind and stab the child in his sleep. The result was obvious, the movie didn’t make Loki smile, he thought it was childish and weird.

“Are you fucking serious? Who doesn’t like Buzz Lightyear? He’s awesome!”

“Of course you think he’s awesome. He flies, wears a weird suit and thinks he’s the greatest person… thing on earth. He’s you.” Making no attempt to hide his yawn Loki leaned back, crossed his legs and waited for Stark’s reply.

It had been a clear insult and Stark’s reaction was strange, yet not surprising. A big smirk on his face. “Wow, whenever you are in a bad mood, call me. I really want to see that. It’s really hard to imagine you as anything else than a bright ray of sunshine.”

“I know, everybody loves my bubbly personality.”

“Cold-hearted bastard.” Stark shot him a grin, then cleared his throat. “Jarvis, the sequel, please.”

Slightly confused Loki looked at his watch. “It’s already past ten… you want to watch another one?”

“Sure? What’s else there to do? You wanna sleep? Read Italian renaissance stuff?” Stark laughed
softly as if his words were supposed to be joke. Loki didn’t really get it, but he already knew that nobody really understood Stark. Thomas would figure him out, it would probably take some time, but he’d do it.

“I have all the time in the world… I’m rather surprised that you can just sit here. Don’t you have a company to run? The world to save? Pose for photos doing charity work like the Captain America?” Why not testing the waters? Bonding over their mutual hatred for the Captain was something he could do.

Just mentioning his name made Stark snore. “Steve’s got to do all the posing, because blond and blue-eyed reminds them of Disney princes. I’m too old and too dark to pose on photographs. Playboys aren’t interesting anymore, now they all want the boring guys who can put you to sleep, bore you to death and suck the fun out off everything.”

Well, even Loki could admit that Stark was more entertaining than the Captain. Not a hard task though, Rogers was as much fun as a wet sock. “Are you only mad at the Captain? The guy with the hammer is also blond and blue-eyed.” And despicable and stupid.

Sadly a smile started to light up Stark’s face. “Yeah, Thor’s fun. I made him watch Godzilla with me and pretended we were watching the news. He was instantly off to Japan to help the people there fight it. I had to fly after him to explain that it wasn’t real. Fury was furious, but I had a good laugh.”

Never had it been more tempting to roll his eyes and groan at Thor’s stupidity. Even if he didn’t know anything about Japanese culture and their creation of the fictitious monster Godzilla to cope with the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki… it was a damned movie! Loki wouldn’t have expected anything else. Thor was here as a representative of Asgard, they really had to think of them as brutes. “Even if Godzilla was real, I’d be angry if Thor fought him. Godzilla is awesome.”

Stark acknowledged that with a slight chuckle and then conversation seemed finished. “Okay. Jarvis, still waiting for Toy Story 2. Then we’ll do Toy Story 3 and if he hasn’t smiled until then we’ll watch the Exorcist.”

“You just wanna sit here all night.” Loki laughed, but this time Stark remained silent. Not even bothering to look at Loki, his eyes were fixed on the hologram, his lips forming a tight line. Bull’s eye. Stark did indeed want to sit here all night. But why?

There was no time for Loki to ponder about it, the answer entered the penthouse, stepping out off the elevator, wearing high heels. “Tony, you’re still… Oh, sorry. Mr. Pine, nice to see you again.”

Pepper Potts had her body language fully under control and still it took Loki a bare second to read her. No, she wasn’t pleased to see him, but she wouldn’t have been pleased to see anybody. Anybody but Stark. She wanted to talk or at least to spend time with him alone. Again, Loki didn’t have to turn his head to look at Stark. The second his girlfriend had showed up the tension in the room had become so thick Loki could cut it with a knife. It was probably in his interest to let this scene play out. “Good evening, Miss Potts.”

She politely returned his smile, but her eyes already darted to Tony who was still ignoring her presence. Loki felt a slight tingle of excitement rising inside of him. He smelled a confrontation and he was looking forward to it. This wasn’t going to be some lover’s banter. With a bit of luck Pepper Potts would serve him Stark’s emotional distress on a silver plate. All Loki had to do was listening.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t aware Tony had visitor. It’s already late…”
“It’s not. We’re only into the second movie and we’ve got two more left to go. The night is very young.”

It was almost funny, Stark didn’t give a damn and Pepper Potts felt terribly uncomfortable. Loki could feel her rage though it was being outweighed by her frustration. She clearly didn’t want to start yelling at him in front of Loki. The yelling was important, Loki needed to understand what was going on here. Why was Stark so dismissive? Barely looking at her although she clearly cared about him. Humans and their feeble emotions.

“Actually it’s getting late and I have work to do tomorrow.”

That was enough to make Stark look at him. Almost as if he felt betrayed. “You can’t leave during Toy Story 2.”

“I’m sure we’ll find the time to watch it another time. Or something else that isn’t meant for kids.”

“You’re my guest, not Pepper’s, I want you to stay, so you stay.”

Nonetheless Loki turned to Miss Potts who pleaded him with her eyes. No, Loki wouldn’t leave for anything in the world, but Thomas had indeed to get out of here.

Time was working against him, he barely had minutes to come up with a plan and it had to be brilliant. No mistakes were allowed, Jarvis was watching and Loki had to be at his very best. This was the real thing, if Loki wasn’t able to pull it off, he would be unmasked and his little game would be over. More than that, the Avengers would be chasing him down once again, Thor would want to drag him back into his cell and Loki would find himself in the role of the prey, not the one of the hunter. Loki liked being a hunter and he would never sit in a cage again. What he was about to do could jeopardize his whole task and put his life in danger.

Then again, what was life without a little risk?

“Nah, like I said I got work to do, my schedule isn’t as loose as yours. You talked about killing zombies, not spending the whole night watching kids movies. Next time I’ll decide what we get to watch. I’ll call you when I finished Machiavelli.” Loki smirked at Stark who still looked genuinely pissed off, but after a moment of silence he returned his grin. “Fine, see ya.”

Slowly Loki stood up, already bundling his magic. Pepper Potts smiled gratefully at him, the expression in her eyes was soft and sad at the same time. So intriguing, promising, Loki wanted more of it. “Good night, Miss Potts.”

“Good night, Mr. Pine.”

Stark didn’t look at him nor Miss Potts while Loki stepped into the elevator. The doors were closing and it all had to happen within seconds. Closing his eyes to better be able to focus Loki created a second skin, letting it linger a second, feeling it on his very own. A fleeting moment later his own skin slipped away. Loki’s body seemed to be filled with fire, his arms, legs and torso were glowing before they melted away. Loki rarely chose such small forms, but this time there was no other way to remain unnoticed.

The elevator doors were almost closed and Loki just made it to fly back into the apartment without getting squashed. That definitely would have been the most unworthy death one could imagine. Loki, god of mischief, squashed in the form of a fly by two automatic doors. At least everything had worked out, the clone would leave the tower and disappear into the night while Loki was sitting on the wall and listened. He had no doubts about it paying off.
“I’m glad you made a new friend. He seems nice… cheeky, but it’s nice to see you spending time with someone.” An unsure smile appeared on Pepper Pott’s face while she approached Stark who still hadn’t moved a bit. Loki wouldn’t have been surprised if he hadn’t answered at all. Nevertheless he did, sounding completely different than before. Monotone, uninterested. “So why would you send him away?”

“I didn’t…”

Stark didn’t even let her finish, instead he snort and the shadow on his face seemed to become even darker. “You could have just told him to fuck off, wouldn’t have been any different.”

It was strangely satisfying to hear him talking about Thomas and seeing him angry about the fact that his new friend had left because of his girlfriend. Until now Loki hadn’t decided what to do with Pepper Potts. At the moment Stark seemed anything but pleased by her presence. Was that reason enough to let her go? Was she important at all? Would Stark even care?

One thing Loki could be sure of – Pepper Potts did care. Like a weak female being that couldn’t exist without her male counterpart. Suddenly Loki remembered why he despised relationships. Dependence, searching in another person what you couldn’t find in yourself. “Tony, it’s late… and I think that we should talk.”

Such a pity that a fly couldn’t roll its eyes.

“That’s what we’re doing right now, talking. I’d rather be watching Toy Story 2 with Tommy… who you told to fuck off.” His tone couldn’t get any more reproachful. Reckless madman, now Loki could add insensitive jerk to the list. Judging by his character there couldn’t be many persons to even give a damn about him, not even his fame and his money could make up for such shortcomings. Stark should think twice about driving this devoted woman away.

“Tony, please… can’t you see that I’m worried sick? I would love it if you had somebody you can talk to. If you were really talking to him. You just use him as a reason to stay up all night, so you don’t have to go to sleep.”

Nothing new, that much was obvious. The question was why. Stark was treating his friends without respect, until now Loki had only seen him interact in a nice way with… Thomas. Someone he barely knew.

Loki hated to admit it, but he had no idea what Pepper had just said to make Stark snap. From one second to the other the indifferent tone was gone and Stark was yelling. “Yeah, and he lets me do that! He’s not working for me, he’s not a fucking member of S.H.I.E.L.D, he doesn’t give a shit about Ironman! He doesn’t want me to talk, doesn’t want me to sleep. He doesn’t want to send me to damned shrink!”

Delicious. So much anger under the surface. How had he been able to miss it? Stark was barely trying to hide it. When he had been with Thomas, he hadn’t been angry. The reason why he had been looking for a new friend was unveiled, he was sick of other people telling him what to do. Understandable and so easy to take advantage of. Anger needed a target and Loki would gladly help Stark to find a better one than this poor woman. Stars and stripes were so much easier to spot in the dark.

Against Loki’s expectations Pepper Potts wouldn’t give in yet, maybe she could endure more than her pathetic behaviour had made him believe. Loki decided he liked her better than Jane Foster. Then again, he pretty much hated Jane Foster and her inability to question anything. She was the definition of a minor, not asking question, smiling and nodding all the way through.
“Why are you so angry with me? I love you and I don’t want to see you torturing yourself. You don’t sleep, you don’t talk, all you’re pretty much doing is drinking and working. Please, I won’t push you to do anything, just don’t push me away. Let me be there for you.”

It was a plea. Was she actually pleading for his permission to save him? From himself? Loki needed more information. Why couldn’t they just spell it out?

At least Stark seemed to calm down, sighing deeply and turning back to the hologram. “Fine, be there for me and let me watch Toy Story 2. Jarvis, I’m sure Miss Potts had a strenuous day and wants to take a bath.”

Trying to get rid of her, she wouldn’t like that. The worry and slight traces of despair faded away and were replaced by anger, her pretty face hardened. “How would you know?”

A single phrase, but the way she pronounced it made Loki almost respect her. That simply had to catch Stark’s attention and it did. “What?” His frown showed that he had no clue what she meant.

“How could you know anything about my day? You don’t ask me questions anymore. So how would you know how my day was? How would you know who I spend my time with or what I do?” Anger turning into sadness and Loki was back to being bored. Relationship banter. Dull.

In the meantime Stark got up from the couch, but he had more interest in approaching the bar than approaching her. “I’m sick of being asked questions… I guess I also don’t want to ask them.”

Pepper Potts took a shaky breath while Stark poured himself another glass of bourbon. “Jarvis, when was the last time Tony slept?”

“36 hours ago, Miss Potts.”

Stark raised his glass to the ceiling. “Thank you, traitor.”

After a short moment of hesitation and biting her lip she obviously wanted to give it another try, hoping that she might still be able to somehow reach him. She walked over to him, putting her hand on his arm. “Come to bed with me, Tony. We can just lie there and… I won’t force you to sleep, but just lie down, I’ll be there, we can let Jarvis play music if you want to, but you… can’t stay awake forever.”

But that was the point in all the Toy Story movies, wasn’t it?

“I can try…” Stark stared intently at the glass in his hand before he downed the glass in one go.

Back to desperation. “Tony, please…”

The glass made a silent sound when Stark put it back on the bar and then his actions even surprised Loki. Not that Loki had pictured him as a gentle or soft lover, but that kiss didn’t even look pleasant. Desperate and desperation wasn’t lovely to look at, at least when it came down to kisses. His hands were cradling her face, probably because she would back away and he kissed her as if he was drowning.

Not because of love or at least lust. No, Stark was trying to forget. He could be drinking, he could be watching a movie, it was all the same. The kiss didn’t matter and most important, she didn’t matter. It could be anyone or anything. Just something to distract him.

Pepper Potts knew that too. That’s why she pushed him away, not very gently. “Tony, stop! God, you need help and I don’t know how to do it. I love you, but not like you’re now… I’m going to
There was still a glimpse of hope in her eyes that Stark would hold her back, but he preferred to look at the bottles of his bar, to choose the next one to drink from. So she left and Stark remained silent.

Loki considered leaving too when the Man of Iron spoke up again. “Jarvis, call Thomas please.”

Stark was calling him? Why?

“I’m sorry, Sir. Mr. Pine seems to have turned off his mobile phone.”

Being a fly had a definitive disadvantage, Loki couldn’t grin when he saw how disappointed Stark was. “Damn… okay, so we’ll send him a message… Just realised I haven’t asked you yet, what do you do? You have to work tomorrow, what kind of work? Just asking.”

 Destiny obviously had a liking for irony. The Man of Iron was lost. From what Loki had heard there were hands reaching out for him, offering him help, but he told him to leave him alone and decided he wanted Loki to save him.

Yes, Loki could do that.
Hello everybody,

New York is being attacked... and Loki is maybe having too much fun, while the Avengers find themselves in a difficult situation. The god of mischief wouldn't really help them, would he?

Loki woke up the next morning and something was different. He rarely slept anyway and now the City around him smelled different. Something was off, not like it used to be. Something was floating in the air, announcing its presence, calling out to something deep inside of Loki.

Magic.

Not very strong, definitely not of Asgardian nature, but this city had suddenly become interesting. Hostile, of course, but not towards Loki. Even if, it didn’t pose a threat. Loki’s own magic was responding to it and could easily tell that it could never match him. Didn’t matter, it was magic. Magic in this boring wasteland.

Leisurely Loki stretched before he got up from the couch where he had fallen asleep last night. He stepped over the piles of books that covered the whole floor and finally leaned against the open balcony door. It was early, the first rays of sunshine felt warm and pleasant on his skin. The city was already awake, but until now nobody had noticed the new presence. It was lying in wait. No way that magic would finally appear in this town and then wouldn’t do anything. Impossible.

Taking a deep breath Loki cocked his head and let his eyes travel across the skyline. If he tried he would find the source within minutes. There was no reason to look for it though, sooner or later the new power would reveal itself. This was most probably about the Avengers. An attack and Loki would welcome it gladly. A possibility to watch their interactions and maybe Loki would even do some sabotage if he felt like it.

Until then he would take the day off… Loki felt like going on a trip to Asia, but he wouldn’t risk missing a single second when the new presence made itself known. So, Georgia and Armenia had to wait, Loki would instead have a picnic in Central Park and read Machiavelli. The version Stark had sent him was in English, boring. Loki had already stolen an Italian version from a store. A language system he hadn’t mastered yet, but the similarities to Spanish and Latin were so obvious that it would take him probably half a day.

Three minutes later Loki was off to play a little Midgardian, wearing a backpack full of books and used the terrible peasant’s vehicle to get to the big park. He would never get used to that smell, he was still having a hard time not to start retching. Luckily it was a lovely day and Loki spread out a blanket on the grass before he lay down and buried his nose in one of Midgard’s greatest work of literature. At least they called it that. It took him a while getting into it, because he was busy trying not to chuckle and marvel at his own cockiness. Lying here directly under the blue sky, all he still needed to do was to actually wave at Heimdall. Not that he would ever be able to see him. Loki had always been a master at sneaking around and shielding him from watching eyes.
Maybe someday he would get into trouble for being too careless, but not today. Today he would only take a seat in the audience and watch. Who knows, perhaps it would even be fun. The other magical presence didn’t do anything yet, so Loki could relax.

The book was indeed fascinating and bore interesting ideas, Loki got lost in it easily, enjoying the sun on his skin, the smell of the grass and…

Damn Stark and his timing.

Loki pulled out his cell phone and glanced at the new message. *There, 12 hours later and you still haven’t told me what you do. My guess – plastic surgeon. You’d love to tell people that they’re ugly*

Right plastic surgery, Loki still couldn’t decide if he found it more barbaric than the zoo idea. Midgard was doomed. Anyway, he’d let Stark wait long enough, he was downright begging Thomas to be his friend, it was not necessary to be hard on him. But it was more fun. Lazily Loki tipped his reply and then put the cell away, turning his attention back to the book.

*I’m an interpreter. You better didn’t piss off Ms Potts completely*

There was no reason to fully engage into a conversation. Loki was into his third book when his magic started to flutter. Finally. The new energy source came closer, getting ready to strike and Loki’s magic desperately wanted him to take part in it. Or at least to seek it out. It was close, but not heading his way. Loki Laufeyson was dead, he had nothing to do with this attack. No matter who was the attacker. Being dead wouldn’t Loki stop from finding out.

The city and the people around him were still at peace, not noticing that the danger was coming closer, approaching with the speed of light. Not quite, but Loki was indeed surprised by its speed. Then it suddenly stopped. Must have reached its destination.

Nothing to be heard, nothing to be seen. Almost disappointing. Loki had expected explosions or at least some fire. It wasn’t his style, but it could be entertaining to see somebody else doing it. Moreover he wanted to see the Avengers in a little bit of trouble. Probably he still had to wait.

Sighing Loki went back to reading and waited. They wouldn’t let him down, would they? The foreign power seemed to have fallen asleep again. Did he really have to go looking for it to make sure that it would attack the Avengers and tear some parts of the city down? All this tranquillity dulled Loki’s senses.

It happened abruptly the second time. Loki could feel the magic surging and at the same time he heard the rumbling. Cutting right into the peaceful silence and Loki’s heart almost leaped out off his chest.

With a lazy gesture he teleported the books back into his apartment and turned into a nightingale. One thing wasn’t half bad about the mortals. They were so absorbed by themselves that you could shapeshift in a public place and hardly anyone noticed. Even if, soon they would be busy because of completely different things. Sailing through the air Loki tried to concentrate on the magic, but it wasn’t necessary.

They were flying. Flying machines that circled around a skyscraper, attacking it. Instantly Loki approached the scene. Even from a distance he could tell that their attacks consisted of a cooperation of magic and… machinery. Barbaric and advanced at once. Fascinating. Not what Loki had expected. This had to be the work of a Midgardian and it was still something more. The robots had a humanoid form, bulk, the appearance was physically impressive, made out of metal and they
seemed to be coloured… green. Loki doubted that this was homage to him, but he liked the colour anyway. They attacked the building, shooting energy blasts that were the product of modern technology and then again Loki felt a little bit of magic in it. To make the attacks more effective. Whoever had created them had the powers of a mage. Not to Loki’s extent, not at all, but it was magic and Loki was thrilled to see it. Things could only get better if the Avengers would finally show up to save the day.

What kind of building was that anyway? The attack was entirely focused on it, definitely not a simple apartment block. Probably some offices of the government or it belonged to a bank or another wealthy institution. Loki didn’t have a clue what the person who controlled the robots intended, but it couldn’t be mere destruction and chaos. The attack was focused on a single building.

A flash of red appeared across the sky and the first robot crashed and burned in flames. Feeling amused and more excited than he had felt since faking his death Loki landed on a building next to the one under the attack. He was still in the danger zone, but Loki preferred a good view to safety. So the Man of Iron was the first to show up, not really surprising, his own stupid tower was just down the corner. From Loki’s point of view he fitted in quite nicely, looking like all the other robots. Expect for the colour. The dynamics changed and half of the robots were now going after Stark, firing at him and he actually had a hard time to dodge all the energy blasts they were shooting at him. Maybe he should have waited for back-up. Too bad some of the Avengers weren’t living in this city. Well, Stark would probably still be able to stand his ground until they got here, Loki would actually be sad if someone got the chance to kill him before he did.

For now he wasn’t worried, but took advantage of the fact that he could watch Stark and his behaviour and tactics in battle. Nothing new, yet it was a change to be completely secure while watching. Stark seemed even faster than the last time he had seen him, besides being lonely and insomniac he had also been working on his suits. Unfortunately for him the robots weren’t easily destroyed, his own power blasts weren’t sufficient to stop them, but he was keeping up with them nicely. It was entertaining. Stark was having a hard time to neutralize them without smashing them into another building and causing more damage than them.

Loki was having a blast.

Watching Stark getting a little bit frustrating and worked up was amazing and Loki would have loved to laugh when two of the robots smashed a window with him. Looked like the robots were getting the upper hand. Time for some back-up, since Loki didn’t want to get involved, he preferred not getting his hands dirty.

The loud and mostly annoying sound of an engine told Loki that he didn’t have to worry. Finally the Avengers arrived in their ridiculous… plane. At least they were putting on a show. Captain America jumped out off the plane and landed on the rooftop. Without a parachute of course. Had this guy really called Stark a show-off? This little stunt right now should be the definition of showing off. To Loki the Captain seemed rather useless anyway. He couldn’t fly unlike the robots, so he could only take them out if they got close to him. How convenient that they seemed to be stupid enough to do that. Rogers decapitated two of them with his shield before they realised it would be better to fire at him from a distance. During the next seconds everything happened so fast that even Loki had trouble to keep up with it. The Captain wasn’t the only one who jumped out off the plane and even as a bird Loki flinched a little bit when he saw the Hulk.

A roaring, mindless beast that smashed the robots with his bare hands and who seemed to relish every single moment. Loki was disgusted by it. Sure, he had nothing against violence, but it was only a tool to use to obtain something you wanted. It could never be the thing you wanted. Unless
you were a stupid barbarian who didn’t know any better. Hard to believe that this beast was a part of the gentle Doctor Banner. At least he was effective, Loki could tell from experience.

Another robot was hit by an arrow, so Agent Barton was also close by. Loki didn’t really care that much. It was far more interesting that now only one Avenger was late for the party, since Loki was convinced that the Widow was the one flying the plane. Mjolnir should have permitted Thor to cover the distance between New York and London by now. He still wasn’t here yet, confirming once again that Thor’s idiocy couldn’t be matched. In the form of a bird Loki’s magical senses were dulled, but he would still be able to tell if Thor was approaching. Right now he was still too far away.

The others were still holding up pretty well. Joining their forces to destroy the robots, wielding this atrocious shield, shooting energy blasts that weren’t the product of magic but of technology and the brute force of the Hulk. No, the robots weren’t a match for the Avengers. Unfortunately they were so many of them and for every single one that perished, another one seemed to show up. The Captain was dealing with six at once, the Hulk had a dozen and there was no end in sight.

There was this tingle of anticipation and a familiar feeling that would have made Loki’s skin crawl if his body wasn’t covered with feathers. A second later the growl of thunder drowned out the sounds of fighting and several robots at once were hit by lighting. The Prince of Asgard finally made his appearance. In this case last was definitely least.

They were distracted, fighting and Thor’s senses had never been very sharp. The darkness was surging. All of Loki’s instincts were telling him to do the same. No, they were ordering, screaming at him, trying to take control of his body. Loki’s body, not the one he was in now. He could do it. Summon a dagger and bury it in Thor’s neck. How much he wanted to.

No, it wouldn’t be enough. Loki needed blood, but he also needed pain and most of all recognition. Thor should know who was doing this to him. Who was going to rip his beating heart out off his chest. First he had to deal with Jane Foster though… and Agent Barton. He didn’t know yet what to do about the Widow and Stark was just starting to give him interesting ideas. Loki couldn’t give up all control to his rage. Patience.

For now he had to watch, analyze their weaknesses and their dynamics. On the battlefield they were working just fine as a team. Some of their moves were quite impressive. Captain America used his shield to throw the robots back at the Man of Iron who gladly fired at them. Way too much harmony.

The fight continued like this for about 10 minutes, then the robots suddenly started to flee. Whoever was controlling them was calling them off. Interesting. What was this all about? The Avengers also seemed to wonder, Loki had to get closer, he didn’t want to miss this conversation. Spreading his wings Loki sailed towards them. The Captain seemed to be catching his breath, the Man of Iron and the jet were hovering above him. The beast was still busy slamming two robots against a wall of the building. Again and again.

“Stark, what the hell was that?”

Confusion and anger. A dangerous mix, even for Captain America.

“Why are you asking me? I don’t have a clue where these guys came from.”

“Yeah, but they looked like the kind of stuff you’d be building.” Given the Captain’s character that probably wasn’t supposed to be an accusation, but given Stark’s character…
“What are you implying? That I made them?!”

“Friend Stark, I think what the Captain…”

“You know what! I’m not the one who built them, if I had built them, your shield wouldn’t be able to cut their damned heads off! I was wiping the floor with them before you even showed up! I’ll continue to do just that till you figure out how to fly.”

That said Stark took off, chasing after the robots. Bless the good man. Captain America shouted after him, to wait, to discuss their next move, but of course Stark didn’t give a crap about him.

“I will go after the Man of Iron to help him seek out the metallic things that have been attacking us. You take care of the Hulk.”

And Thor was gone too. The Captain seemed anything but happy, but he had no other choice than to accept his fate. Well, since they had spilt up Loki had to choose one side and this may be the easiest decision he had ever made. All he needed was a quiet place to turn back into his real form and then to teleport himself to the source of the energy.

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Small stones clicked under Loki’s boots as he took in his surroundings. Grey walls, an empty hall, the smell of old paint. Loki had teleported himself into an abandoned warehouse. It seemed like an obvious choice for a hiding spot, but Loki wrinkled his nose anyway. He preferred adequate surroundings, elegant and comfortable. Not that this was of any importance. The scent of magic lingered in the air, stronger than in any other part of the city. Loki closed his eyes and concentrated on it.

It came from a few levels below him. The temptation to go down there and to look for it was almost unbearable, but it would be better to wait for the Avengers. A magic user was close, Loki could feel him and it wasn’t impossible that the unknown presence could feel him too. No way he would take the risk of revealing himself.

Loki had just made one step when a loud bang resounded above him. Wonderful, entertainment was knocking at the door. Wrapping himself in an invisibility spell Loki walked towards the stairs at the end of the room. Before he could even reach it parts of a robot were falling down, coming to a halt on the last steps. Raising an eyebrow Loki looked down on them, slightly amused by the sparks that were sputtering in all directions. Most of it was still machinery, as soon as it was thoroughly damaged the magic also extinguished. Another proof that its creator wasn’t a real mage.

After having decided against picking it up Loki walked up the stairs and lazily dodged a ripped off robot arm that almost grazed his cheek. Such a barbaric way of fighting, his brother couldn’t be far. The view in front of him was quite a spectacle. Thor and the Man of Iron fighting these robots in such a small and tight space. Concrete was already trickling from the ceiling. Loki wondered how much damage it could take if robots were constantly being smashed against the walls. Seconds later three of the robots caused a Thor-shaped hole in the wall and Loki’s grin was so big it almost hurt his lips.

“What’s up, pointbreak? You need a hand?”
Fascinating, Stark even had the time to make his stupid remarks while trying to take out two robots. The joke was on Thor’s expense so Loki didn’t mind. The next few minutes Loki was standing in a corner and tried not to be hit by flying objects. Mostly robot parts and sometimes the Man or Iron. Apart from that it was pretty much the same picture as before – Avengers fighting a flood of robots.

“As always a little late for the party, don’t you think?”

This question wasn’t directed at Thor, either Stark was losing his mind or he was using some radio set to talk to the other Avengers. About time they showed up, Loki was slowly getting tired of this routine. Seconds later the fight was brought to a new level when the Widow, the Hawk and Captain America stormed in. They must have left the Hulk behind. Why? For such a task he would be perfect. Nonetheless the Avengers now gained the upper hand without their greatest weapon. Quite a weird coincidence that with the appearance of the three mortals no more new robots were showing up. Loki made a mental note on that while marvelling at how the Widow took out a machine with a combination of physical skills and her guns. Her fighting style bore elegance grace, a feast for Loki’s eyes after having been forced to watch brutes like Stark and his so called brother.

Now everything was falling apart, the floor was covered by destroyed parts of machinery. More and more glowing robot eyes turned black and the sounds of fists hitting metal slowly subsided, being replaced by heavy breathing. The Widow’s temple was bleeding, Agent Barton had a dislocated shoulder and some parts of Stark’s armour had probably joined those of the robots on the floor. No real damage done though. Good.

Time for them to realise that their fight had destroyed a far too big part of the building. The concrete didn’t trickle from the ceiling anymore, it came down in big chunks. Loki had to fight down a chuckle. Their physical strength couldn’t be matched, but Loki’s way of fighting caused less damage and was way more effective.

About five robots were left, equally matched, how nice. “This whole building is coming down! We have to get outta here!”

Who else would be the reasonable one if not Rogers?

“Agreed! Let’s just…”

“You guys go ahead. Jarvis detected a strong energy source a few levels below us. I gotta have this checked out.”

There he was again, reckless madman Tony Stark at your service. Yes, Loki would kill him last. Maybe he could even find a way how to keep Jarvis after he had destroyed Stark. As if revenge could taste even sweeter.

“Stark, are you mad?! These walls won’t support the building much longer.”

Loki had to agree, they had totally wrecked the place.

“I’ll meet you outside, just gotta check that out first. Take care of that for me.” Stark tossed one of the last remaining robots towards the other Avengers before he took off and flew down the stairs.

“Damn it, Tony!”

Good Tony, nice Tony.

The ground started to shake beneath their feet and the Hawk lost balance, falling down, landing on
his hurt shoulder. His scream of agony filled the room and Loki closed his eyes to savour the pleasure he found in Barton’s pain. There would be more of it. Only better because Loki would be the one who caused it. For now it had to suffice. After all Loki couldn’t let Stark wander around… unsupervised.

Loki took another few seconds to watch how the Widow and Rogers helped Barton up and scrambled towards the stairs. They had to get him to safety, they wouldn’t go after Stark. Not even Thor, he helped the others to get out. Luckily Loki was here. He teleported himself to the lower floors, unimpressed by all the bricks and concrete that were coming down.

It was a fake. A trap, a coward’s move but smart. A grin appeared on Loki’s lips. The energy source was nothing more than an enchanted object. A vessel to contain energy, to draw attention to it, but there was nothing to be done with it. A big X mark on a map, nothing more. Somebody had wanted them to come here. To fight the robots and be buried under a collapsing building? Or it could be one great distraction? Well then, Loki had fallen for it too. Definitely not a distraction. Rather a trap, judging by the ten robots which were lying in wait here. Bigger than the ones they had fought before. Well, that would be Stark’s problem now.

The blink of an eye later the Man of Iron came flying through the door and got greeted by several energy blasts.

“Son of a bitch!”

The invisible man desperately wanted to laugh, but he couldn’t give his cover away. Also Loki had once again to be careful to not get hit by parts of the ceiling coming down or parts of the robots. The Man of Iron was doing well on his own, having some unfair help bestowed on him from said collapsing building. Some of the robots got hit and destroyed. There wasn’t much time left for Stark to get out of here. Or nothing at all.

Stark was fighting off two robots and Loki could see that he was getting tired. His movements slower, not as focused as before. Not that it mattered when half of the ceiling crashed down and the Man of Iron and most of the remaining robots were buried underneath it.

Loki waved his hand in front of his face, but the movement did only little to prevent the white dust to get into his nostrils. A disgusting sensation. Full of expectation Loki cocked his head and looked at the rubble in front of him. Parts of the amour were sticking out, the red colour seemed to be gone, covered by dirt and dust. No, he wasn’t moving, probably knocked out.

The last robot was still standing tall though. Raising his arm he was aiming for Stark’s head. Loki uttered a sigh and shook off the invisibility. The dagger he summoned fitted perfectly in his palm and gave Loki the reassuring feeling of familiarity. As always the dagger found its aim. Buried perfectly between the lifeless eyes of this machine. The machine stumbled and that was enough time for Loki to completely destroy it in a wave of concentrated magic. With glee he watched it falling apart and purposely stepped on it when he slowly walked up to the helpless Man of Iron on the floor. Whose life he had just saved. This realisation gave Loki goose bumps and he felt his fingers twitching. His magic mingled with his anger, trying to overcome Loki’s will and give Stark the same treatment as the robot. But Loki wasn’t some barbaric fool, controlled by sentiment and a slave to his emotions. It wouldn’t happen like this.

Paying no attention to the still crumbling building Loki crouched down next to Stark and pulled him out from under the rubble. Just to be sure Loki had slipped a glamour over his face, but after ripping the mask off Loki found Stark indeed dead to the world. A trickle of blood ran from the corner of his mouth down to his chin, but he was still very much alive. Thanks to Loki.
Slowly Loki leaned down, bringing his lips up close to Stark’s ear. “Don’t worry, Man of Iron, today is not the day you die. Not like this. I’ll be the one who takes your life and I want you to be fully awake when I do it. So you feel the pain… I promise it won’t be quick and when I’m through with you, you’ll be longing for the release of death. Be happy… today you walk away from it.”

Minutes later Captain America and Thor dug the Man of Iron out of the remains of the caved in building. They mumbled something about it being a miracle that Stark was still alive and that the debris hadn’t completely crushed him.

Loki smirked to himself. He would never grant him such an easy death and he would grant nobody else to kill the Avengers. They were his.
Hello there,

The fight is over and Loki is a good friend, so he asks one of the Avengers how he's doing and takes a good look at another :)

A good friend would call the Avengers after seeing them fighting robots. The newspapers and television programmes weren’t talking about anything else. Seems like the world had just stopped. Or there was nothing else to talk about. So the Avengers had fought off an attack and two of them had got hurt in the process. Who would be the first one to call?

Thomas wasn’t a very sentimental person and the press didn’t even know yet if Stark was seriously hurt. He would rather send a text message saying ‘Still alive?’

Loki couldn’t help but grin at this thought. Why not? Due to his madness Stark would probably even like that. Grabbing his phone Loki typed said message.

Good, next step. William would be worried, just like Elizabeth. Henry would probably wait a little bit. Elizabeth was a woman and the mortals considered them overly emotional. So why not starting with her? Picking up the phone again Loki called Banner and made himself comfortable on the couch, this could take a while.

“Lizzy, hey.”

Tired, weary, but happy.

“Bruce, hello. Are you fine? I saw you on the news and…” Stuttering. Loki felt stupid and extremely content with himself at the same time. The way he sounded, he would definitely believe himself. Such a little, worried, female mortal. Weak and helpless.

After hearing his discomfort Banner had of course to do his best to comfort him. “Yeah, I’m good. Made it on the news, huh?”

Not you, no. Just the beast, you’re never in the spotlight. “Yeah, it’s all over the place. Every newspaper writes something different. I was a bit confused… and just wanted to ask if everything is alright. Or if it’s a safe time to return to New York City.”

Banner laughed softly, but even that couldn’t hide how tired he was. “Everything’s alright, yeah. Just a few bruises… about the latter… we still don’t know what this whole thing was about or who did it and… Honestly I have no idea if something like that is going to happen again… Then again, an alien invasion happened and people are still living here. I think it’s going to be fine. A lot of people are working on it.”

Were they? Loki would have to check that out. Stark would tell him for sure. “Okay…” Letting out a deep breath Loki waited a moment. “And you’re sure, you’re alright?”

“Sure. The Hulk is pretty hard to take out. He can take an awful lot.”
Perfect. Was it supposed to be so easy?

“I’m not talking about the Hulk. I’m talking about you.” Loki looked at his nails and thought about getting a manicure. He had seen nice nail polish on Midgard. Why not taking advantage of being a woman?

Banner sighed audibly. “I’m fine. It’s weird, because it’s been a while since the Hulk has come out. I prefer it if that doesn’t happen at all, but… Smashing robots isn’t exactly how I like to pass my time.”

Loki could agree on that, every person with the ability to think would. “I thought so. Is it really necessary that you do that?”

“What?”

“Risking your life. Doing something you don’t want to do.” Black nail polish would look nice. Loki would even wear this as a man. He really should get some nail polish.

“I want to help.”

Oh yeah, right, the altruist was coming out again. Time to talk him out of that. “How? I thought you’d rather find a way to deactivate the killer robots than to… rip them apart.” Banner didn’t like being the Hulk and that was all what was important. The man was an interlectual, Loki would treat him as such.

Now he hesitated and Loki knew he had won. “I guess so… but sometimes we’re bound to use… brute force, because there are no other ways left.”

“Fair enough. You’re fine, I shouldn’t worry and you shouldn’t have to do this.” Loki made sure that his voice died out at the end, Banner should feel like somebody cared about him. And didn’t give a shit about the Hulk.

After a few seconds of awkward silence Banner cleared his throat. “Right… maybe someday all that research is paying off and all that won’t be necessary anymore.”

“I’d be really happy for you.”

“Yes… I’m sorry, Lizzy, I gotta go. Everybody here is going crazy, because of what happened.”

Of course, a new criminal in town. Magic user, very scary. The nail polish got Loki far more excited. “I see. Take care. I’ll be back in New York in a couple of days. Maybe we’ll have the chance to meet up.”

Banner didn’t say much else, stuttered a good bye and hung up. Leaning back Loki grabbed the Rubik’s cube he had found in the warehouse. Somebody had enchanted it with a pretty basic spell. All it did was glowing with energy, somebody had filled it with said energy to attract attention. The attention of the Avengers. By now Loki had sucked everything out of it, even the last bit. It was nothing, just light. A piece of information that the Avengers and their organization didn’t have and Loki wouldn’t give it to them. They should tap around in the dark.

The phone in his other hand blinked and Loki frowned. A message from Stark. So he was still alive. Better for him, Loki would be really furious if this mortal had the audacity to die after Loki had saved his life. Then again you couldn’t trust Midgardian medicine. Well, one thing was for sure, Stark wrote his messages the same way he talked.
Alive and rocking. I would invite you over to gloat over my misery, but… No, I do! So I can throw the others out. Get your ass over here!

How could the Avengers keep a single secret if Stark walked around telling everyone about everything? Loki wasn’t complaining, but it was astonishing. Barton barely opened his mouth, the Widow would never talk to him in human form, Banner tried keep things private, Rogers was open, but only about himself and Stark… couldn’t keep his mouth shut.

Were they all over at his tower? The team, perhaps even Fury. Discussion strategies… licking their wounds… trying to make Stark feel bad about his stunt that had almost cost him his life? It was out of the question that Loki was going to miss that.

I can’t say no to gloating. It’ll probably take me half an hour

Three seconds later Loki stood in the middle of Stark’s living room. His energy levels were down, only another extremely powerful mage would be able to sense his presence. No risk there. Loki was definitely done with playing a fly on the wall and invisibility had proved to be such an useful tool, he went with that.

Stark hadn’t been lying – he did indeed have company and Loki was instantly tested to actually keep his energy levels down. Captain America was standing there, arms crossed in front of his chest, a scowl on his face. The pose of a leader whose mission had turned out to be a failure. Right next to him was Fury, mirroring his position. The contrast between them and Banner, who sat in a chair and looked like he was scared of being talked to, couldn’t be more obvious. There was also the mindless brute who didn’t contribute anything to this scene but his impressive presence. His fingers were only loosely wrapped around Mjolnir. One glance at him and Loki was furious. What an act of arrogance. A weapon like this, a magical object of such value that Thor couldn’t grasp anyway had to be protected all the time. Or at least you should value it with your full attention. So much about Thor. The last person in the room was Stark, lying on the couch, a bandage wrapped around his head. A little souvenir from his near-death experience. Strange to see him in such a vulnerable position next to the other men. Well, until he opened his mouth. “So, I got a friend coming over in 30 minutes, everybody get outta here.”

Loki smirked in amusement, while Fury tilted his head and glared at Loki, not able to believe what he had just heard. “Stark, this is not the right time for jokes.”

“Who said I’m joking? My tower, I didn’t invite you, so get out.”

Fury growled and the Captain’s eyebrows twitched. It was beautiful and Stark’s relaxed, nonchalant tone made it perfect. It was decided, Stark was going to die last.

Now Loki even had to try to not laugh out loudly, because Thor decided that he had to be the one to stop this potential fight from happening. Did he even have an idea what was going on? “I understand your distress, but we indeed should come up with a plan how to react to the presence of magic on Midgard.”

Oh, shut your mouth, you stupid oaf! You don’t even have the slightest idea what magic is! You are not able to sense it! I’m standing right next to you and you don’t feel me! You’d only notice if I drove a knife into your throat.

“Cool, you do that, but why do you have to do it in my fucking living room. I have a concussion, does nobody care?” Stark obviously didn’t, the way gesticulated and didn’t make Loki think of a hurt man, rather of a child, craving for attention.
“You have a concussion, because you didn’t listen and acted on your own.” Serious excitement was starting to take over Loki’s body. Just to see the way the Captain narrowed his eyes made saving Stark’s life so worth it. Their aversion against each other was dragged straight into the spotlight and both of them didn’t care. They were too focused on disliking each other. How far would Loki be able to go? The aura that surrounded them told him enough to give him conviction that he was able to break their group apart. Perhaps he could even sell Stark as a threat. Wouldn’t it be the ultimate triumph to have America’s symbol, their great hero kill the Man of Iron. Loki’s magic hummed contently at this thought. Unfortunately that wouldn’t work out with his decision to kill Stark last. He could take out the Captain? Somehow didn’t feel as satisfying. It was necessary to give it more thought.

The Captain’s disapproval didn’t suffice to impress Stark in the least bit. Quite differently, he also seemed proud. Probably an act to piss Rogers off. “Yeah and I took out most of them. My fucking suit is completely broken. I deserve a break.”

Loki would have loved to watch their banter continue, but Fury made a step forward, trying to maintain his position as the leader. Disgusting creature, Loki had almost forgotten, he would have him killed. Barton should do it. “Thor, did this kind of magic look in any way familiar to you?”

Stupid question from a stupid man.

“I fear not. Although I must admit I’m not the most skilled person when it comes down to detecting magic.”

Loki looked at his open palm, imagining a dagger in it. They were asking Thor about it. The one thing he would never understand, no matter how hard he tried or who would tutor him. Something beautiful, powerful, so much bigger and more important than Thor could ever be. A part of Loki’s being, the essence of his soul and these mortals who didn’t know anything about wonder, amazement or beauty were asking Thor about it. A dagger wouldn’t be enough. Clawing his face off with nothing but his fingernails might work.

Rogers still glared at Stark, so Banner obviously decided to join in on the conversation. “You must have encountered it sometime during your quests for Asgard.”

Thor slowly nodded and finally his grip on Mjolnir tightened. “Indeed, but I didn’t have to bother since we’ve had a gifted master of magic among us.”

Now that hadn’t been difficult. All it had taken Loki to get noticed was to die. His powers had always been taken for granted. Thor and the rest of Asgard had known of what he was capable and even more so they had wondered what he also might be able to do, but wouldn’t show them. During those stupid quests he had been an useful add-on to Thor’s team. Nobody had ever said that out loud though. Loki had done his duty, using trickery and illusions, something that wasn’t considered heroic or up to Asgardian standards. If you didn’t solve a problem with your bare fists you didn’t do it the right way. Thor had never mentioned anything like that before. Loki’s powers being useful were entirely new information.

“Let me guess, your psychotic little brother had a fucking diploma in fucked up magic and he’s too dead to tell us something about it. Well, too bad. Guess there’s nothing else we can do than going home and giving the guy with the concussion a break.” Stark continued to complain, but only to deaf ears. Fury still hoped to get Thor to remember something about magic, a hopeless case.

“How is this even possible? Machinery combined with magic. Doesn’t seem like a fitting combination to me…” The Captain mused and Stark groaned loudly. “Come on, Cap. I bet the first time you saw a mobile phone that can send photos you probably called it magic too.”
“Your concussion obviously isn’t severe enough for you to stop talking.”

“Hey, Fury is he allowed to talk to me like that? I’m a hero, we only managed to destroy all of them, because I found their hideout. I saved the day.”

“You did? All I saw was a building coming down while you were still inside and I had to dig you out. You endangered your life and…”

“Oh, spare me the lecture, Cap! They took off and maybe they were about to go after civilians. If you want to twiddle your thumbs while something like that is happening – fine by me. I won’t do anything like that.”

“Because you’re a dang-“

Banner audibly cleared his throat. “Both of you, calm down. Nobody got seriously hurt and that’s what’s most important. Stop fighting, we still have to figure out what happened and who’s responsible for all that. Tony really needs to rest and we should let him do that.”

Amazing, Loki couldn’t get enough of this whole banter, it was incredibly entertaining. Even more so, because Fury wasn’t too keen on Banner’s suggestion. Instead he wanted to gain more information and to tell Stark that he couldn’t do whatever the fuck he wanted. Half an hour passed amazingly quickly and Loki almost regretted the fact that he had to leave just to show up again. It was time to, he didn’t miss that Stark looked frequently at his watch, obviously waiting for Thomas so he could get rid of the others.

Loki teleported out off the apartment and had to walk up to the tower, which seemed so ridiculous, but he had to make sure Jarvis wouldn’t get a glimpse of him showing up out of nowhere.

Walking by foot was so plebeian.

Three minutes later Thomas was standing in the elevator and listened to the soft tunes of guitar music. Didn’t sound like anything Stark would enjoy listen to. “Jarvis?”

“It’s a Portuguese fado. Mr. Stark thought it might please you. Again, not his exact wording.”

Loki was sure of that. This was odd and against his expectations, but Stark had been right. It did sound nice. Soft tunes, pleasing. He would have to remember the name and check it out later. The elevator arrived at the top, the doors opened and five pairs of eyes instantly fixed him. Only one was pleased to see him. “Good evening… I didn’t know this was going to be party.”

“It isn’t. I told you I was going to have visitor. There he is, see him? Tall, skinny guy in the elevator. He’s got an invitation, you don’t. Get out.” Stark smirked at him, while Fury preferred the look of a guy who was about to murder someone any second. “Who’s this guy? What is he doing here? Stark, what have I told you about bringing civilians to an Avengers’ meeting?”

“This isn’t a fucking meeting! This is you guys invading my fucking privacy and refusing to leave! He’s a friend and he showed up here after being invited, like people with some manners do.”

The word manners woke Rogers up. “Mr. Pine. Nice to see you again.”

His smile was forced and it clearly wasn’t nice to see him again. And it shouldn’t be. Stark liked
Thomas Pine, it was even better if Rogers didn’t. Loki hated them both, but his opinion was secondary. “Captain Rogers. I saw you on television. I hope you’re doing fine.”

Rogers opened his mouth, but Stark was faster. “Hey, I’m lying around like the wounded hero that I am.”

“You seem fine.” Loki shrugged and now Stark was cut off short by Fury who would be devastated if Loki told him that he wasn’t half as threatening as he wanted to be. “We’re not continuing this discussion in the presence of a civilian!”

“Thank god! How many times do I have to say ‘Get out!’ until it finally sinks in?”

“Look, I’m clearly interrupting something here, so I’ll…”

“No, you won’t! They’ll get out!”

Disaster was approaching fast, any second Fury and Stark would be at each other’s throats and maybe it was too soon, but Loki wanted it. He needed them to… Wait, no. There was something else, something he had missed. Discrete, fleeting, but important. What? Who didn’t… Banner hadn’t said anything yet. Sure, he was the quiet, shy one. Still educated and polite. Why hadn’t he greeted him? Despite not having said a word Banner’s attention was totally on him. His soft eyes followed him too intently, he wasn’t just taking in the appearance of a stranger. No, there was nothing of Elizabeth to be found in Thomas. Banner’s gaze shooed from Loki to Stark and back to Loki. Distrust? Or had Stark mentioned Thomas some time? Banner and him were friends, why not? It was possible and Loki was a fool to not have thought of that sooner. If he could use Rogers’ and Stark’s disregard for each other, he could do the very same with Stark’s and Banner’s companionship. Perhaps it would be to his advantage if Banner liked Thomas.

He was already interested, that much was obvious. Sadly Loki couldn’t figure out the way Banner looked at him. An uneasy feeling settled in the back of Loki’s neck.

“Tony, why don’t you introduce me to your friend?” This was the Banner he knew, a gentle tone in his voice, sounding polite but at the verge of being shy.

“This isn’t a coffee party!” Fury grunted, the Captain bit his lip and Thor had no clue what was going on. The usual.

Stark made a lax gesture, not bothering to get up from the couch. “Tommy, this is Bruce. You better don’t piss him off, he’s got some anger management issues. Bruce, this is Tommy. You better don’t piss him off, he’s British.”

Loki demonstratively sighed and approached Banner to shake his hand. “Thomas Pine. I’m still trying to get him to stop using this terrible nickname.”

The uneasy feeling was only distracting Loki long enough. When Banner stood up Loki was confronted with his fear. Their hands touched and Loki’s heart was pounding in his chest. So fast it might burst out off his ribcage. He could play it down, nobody would ever see a single trace of it on his face, but it didn’t change the fact that Loki felt fear. He remembered pain and Thomas’ skin had a certain vulnerability to it. In front of a computer screen or on the phone everything was entirely different. Banner shook his head and a breath later Loki was back in time, feeling his skin break as it connected harshly with the concrete. The humiliation tasted bitter on his tongue and Banner’s smile only made him want to rip him apart. “Yeah, he does that. Pleasure to meet you.”

He let go of Loki’s hand and his heart rate went down again.
“Does this mean that our meeting is over?” Thor looked utterly confused, Loki wanted to laugh, a big vein on Fury’s forehead was ready to burst and Stark let out a cry of joy. “Yes, Point Break, you got it. Get out. Have a nice evening. Somewhere else. Not here.”

Fury gave up, probably only to avoid murdering Stark right here and now. “We’ll still have words about this. Don’t do anything stupid and get better. Cap, we have other places to be.”

So they left and Stark grinned as if he had just won a war. Loki tried not to smirk at how uncomfortable Thor looked in an elevator. Everybody pretty much ignored him. Him, the person who was responsible for the existence of their little meeting. The person who would destroy them. A millisecond after the doors closed Stark sat up and sighed happily. “Thank you for saving my life. I wouldn’t have been able to stand them a second longer.”

Loki cocked his head and looked Stark up and down before lingering on the bandage around his head. “So… you’re alright?”

Stark raised both eyebrows before he touched his head and shrugged. “Just a scratch.”

“I heard a whole building crashed down on you.”

“Like I said – a scratch.”

Pursing his lips Loki decided to not say anything and he simply nodded. Stark used the opportunity and continued to be his obnoxious self. “I didn’t think you’d come over.”

Where did he want to go with that? Loki shrugged casually and faked a yawn. “I was curious. Nothing more.”

“Holy shit, you were worried about me.” Stark shot him a shit-eating gin and Loki felt the strong urge to destroy this illusion. Telling Stark that he was only alive due to Loki’s mercy. Well, not exactly, rather calculation. “I was curious if you were still alive. Maybe it’s not entirely unpleasant that you’re still breathing, but that’s as far as I will go.”

“Fair enough.” Another smirk before Stark coughed and it sounded suspiciously like ‘You were totally worried’.

“Are you actually nice to other people than me? Every time someone shows up here you tell them to fuck off. Should I feel flattered?” Loki wasn’t complaining, not at all, it made things easier for him and it was delightful to see that Stark was pushing everyone away. He only wondered why. What kind of demons were hunting him? The way he treated his girlfriend didn’t give Loki too much hope that Stark would eagerly tell Thomas. Improbable. Very much so.

Finally standing up from the couch Stark turned his back to him to walk to the bar. Or did he just avoid looking at Loki? People with a concussion weren’t supposed to drink alcohol, but Stark was mad, so Loki shouldn’t read too much into it. “As I said before, you’re the person I invited. Cap can show up anytime if he calls before he does or if I ask him to come here. Strangely enough nobody ever asks, they just show up and then I am the jerk, because I don’t want to talk to them. Just use a god damned phone.”

Well, Loki could understand that, but that wasn’t enough to be so full of anger… directed at anyone but Loki. Or was he jumping the gun on this? He had seen Stark acting this way around his girlfriend and fellow Avengers – his supposed friends. Why shouldn’t it be possible that Stark was acting normal around other people who weren’t linked to his life as an Avenger. That wouldn’t in Loki’s favour.
Without having asked if Loki even wanted one, Stark handed him a glass of whiskey. His bad mood had completely vanished, judging by the mischievous smile on his face. Okay, Loki allowed himself to be intrigued. “What? You want to say something, just say it.”

“You wanna see something cool?”

The glint in his eyes told Loki enough – Stark was talking about a secret, something forbidden even. A tingle of excitement rushed through Loki’s body although he tried to stay calm. He didn’t want to be disappointed. “Am I going to like it?”

“You like Jarvis, so yeah. Come and follow me, Tommy, you’re going to be thrilled.”

Another time Stark turned his back to him and something was off, something was different. Something so important that Loki was frozen to a spot. His hand didn’t twitch, his magic remained silent, calm, almost relaxed, but still lying in wait. Loki was curious and he actually wanted to see what Stark was about to show him. Not because of his revenge, but… He just wanted to.

Taking a deep breath Loki followed Stark out of the main room. He didn’t lead him into the lab, but a small room with a lot of technical equipment. “So?”

Without making a comment, which was slightly unsettling, Stark opened a metallic cupboard and stepped aside to let Loki take a look. Interesting. Right there in front of him was the ripped off arm of a robot. “Pretty damn amazing, isn’t it?”

“Is this a part of the… things you battled? Are you allowed to have this?” Loki was being serious, eyeing the robotic arm with interest. Of course Stark would keep one, he had a sharp mind and was a scientist – he would want to analyze these things.

“Definitely not. Fury let S.H.I.E.L.D pick up the tiniest bits they could find, but I was still able to get my hands on this one. During the last time he thought that I wasn’t acting very responsible, so I shouldn’t be the one analyzing this. Well, fuck him. Here I’ve got all I need. In a few days… give or take… I’ll have figured out who was behind this attack.”

Loki licked his lips and for the very first time he had to hide a positive emotion. His anger was silenced by joy and thrill. Either Stark possessed the courage or the insanity to go behind Fury’s back and Loki loved it. “I see… What is this? I’m good at linguistics, but I don’t know a thing about technology.”

Instead of being annoyed by having to explain everything Stark beamed with happiness. “Quite simple, it’s a robot. Whoever put it together knew what they were doing. Nothing extraordinary though, I could do it better, of course. The odd thing about it… somehow somebody managed to weave magic into the construction. I have no idea how. Don’t look at me like that! The second the mantle was destroyed the magic also vanished. Maybe I can still find some traces of it, then I’d be able to analyze it… Unfortunately I have nothing to compare it to.”

The expression on Stark’s face was new to Loki. He hadn’t seen him like that before. Stark had found a purpose for himself. Something that fascinated him, something he enjoyed doing, not just a dull movie or a glass of alcohol to pass the time and to avoid closing his eyes. Loki felt sick for doing it, but he couldn’t help to compare himself to this mortal. They were smarter than the people surrounding them, so it was hard to find intellectual stimulation, when they did though, it made them tremble with excitement.

“How come? Can’t you use Thor’s magic? He is magical, isn’t he?” The words themselves almost refused to roll of his tongue. They felt so wrong.
“Thor doesn’t know shit about magic. Nobody on this planet does, but I’m going to find out more about it. What do you say? Awesome, isn’t it?” His eyes darted from the last piece of the robot to Loki, searching approval.

“Why do you want to impress me desperately?”

“Because you’re hard to impress. I don’t like people who’re making it too easy.”

Brilliant. Stark had found a project, Loki didn’t know what his issues were, but if working on the robot would keep Stark from getting the sleep he desperately needed – Loki was all in for it. Moreover he was doing it behind S.H.I.E.L.D’s back. If destiny turned out to be grateful Loki might have even a chance to see Stark murdered by Captain America in the end. Seemed almost impossible now, but there was a glimmer of hope. “No, I’m not impressed. If you show me what you can do with it I might be.”
Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Over 300 Kudos thank you all so much for that :)

Loki likes the Rolling Stones? Who would have thought that?

Almost a second after Loki had jumped on the sill the window was being opened. “What are you doing here? It’s a little late to be looking for food.”

Loki wasn’t looking for food, he was here because she hadn’t been at the meeting at the Stark Tower. Barton had needed medical attention, that was pretty clear, but why had she been missing? She was at home, casually dressed and Loki wondered if she ever slept. After all she had instantly seen him. And had let him in.

A strange scent lingered in the air. Loki didn't know where to put it and immediately searched for changes. Hardly anything to be found, every book was at its place, nothing was on the table. The Widow herself was way more interesting. Until now Loki had only seen her in her battle outfit, her current look was completely different. She wore sweatpants and a pullover that was about two sizes too large. That probably meant that she didn’t intent to leave this apartment for the rest of the night. Well, it was already after midnight and her hair was still perfect, just like her face, she hadn’t laid her head on a pillow yet. Did she even want to go to sleep? If so – why letting the cat in?

Loki stopped wandering around, just sat down in front of her feet, looking up at her and mewed silently. She returned his gaze, just looking at him. It told Loki that she did have an even softer spot for animals than he had expected. Who would actually look at a cat, like looking at person? Concentrating on its eyes and trying to figure out what was going on in the head of an animal. Once again Loki was impressed by her mind. Not many persons on this plain planet realised yet that they had a personality. This cat even more than any other.

When the Widow finally broke the eye contact Loki gave up on a little dream. He would never be able to read her like he read the others. This woman was an anomaly. She was like him. This perception caused an equal amount of adoration and hatred inside of Loki. It would be easy to just leave her out of the game. He could have Barton killing her and it would be done. Every fiber of Loki’s body screamed no. That wouldn’t be enough. Death was too quick and after the humiliation he had suffered because of her, Loki needed her to undergo the same pain. Loki would never be able to find his peace if she didn’t suffer. He had to find something. Everybody had some buttons that waited for being pushed, Loki needed to look closer.

Her steps were still light and graceful, no matter what she wore. This time she didn’t bring him tuna, but some kind of sausage. It wasn’t half bad. While Loki was eating the Widow sat down on a comfy chair and reached for a book from the shelf. She wasn’t even looking at it, but her gestures told Loki that she knew exactly where to find what she wanted. This new setting was entirely surprising and almost felt unreal. For the first time Loki saw her in a casual moment. Her guard was never down, she wasn’t able to lower it completely. Then again, reading a book was not how Loki pictured her.
Exhaustion was starting to show. The type of training she had had to undergo was irrelevant, she couldn’t train away being mortal. Pathetic, but Loki would put it to good use. She was very calm, collected, focused, extremely smart and she was very much aware of that. Every single piece in this apartment was at its place. Why not making her lose her mind? Or even worse – making her believe that she was losing her mind. He could start with placing a book somewhere where it wasn’t supposed to be. A few weeks later he would let some notes disappear and then they would show up in an unexpected place. Perhaps he could even manipulate her communication with the organisation. Change dates, making her believe that she started forgetting things… How sweet would it be to see her falling apart? A person so fierce and smart wouldn’t be able to stand to lose confidence in her abilities. Yes, the Widow would be terrified of losing her wit or…

No. Loki would have shaken his head about himself if he had been in his real form. His idea was good, but impossible to realise. The Widow was a killer and a spy, she would never fall for it. Whenever something went missing, an average person would first think that they lost it somewhere, but she wouldn’t. Paranoia were part of the job and the second Loki would let something disappear, she would understand that her apartment had been infiltrated. All Loki could do was dreaming about it, but it would never work out.

Loki would have to go with Barton. Manipulate him until he would choke the life out of her with his bare hands. She thought him a friend, so it would hurt and Loki could relish every second of it.

Turning his attention back to the here and now Loki focused on the Widow. Her eyes moved slowly from line to line, seemingly captivated by the content of the book. Besides that her face was a mask. If Loki couldn’t learn anything by observing her, he would have to get closer. How convenient that he could do that in this form.

When Loki jumped straight into her lap she didn’t even flinch. It wasn't like Loki would have expected anything else. She glanced at him, but Loki ignored it. Instead he stretched out on her legs, before he made himself comfortable and laid his head down on her thigh. It needed a bit of concentration, but Loki could hear her heart beating. Calm, almost relaxed. Her body didn’t feel stressed or weary. The fight against the robots didn’t seem to have taken its toll. Nor had Barton’s injury. Fingers were caressing Loki’s head and he started to hum. An absurd scene, but strangely entertaining. They stayed like that for almost two hours until the Widow closed the book and continued to scratch him behind his ears. The movements became slower till they finally stopped. She had fallen asleep with Loki on her lap. Before her death Loki had to let her know that. Having a deadly and dangerous killer asleep was the perfect opportunity to snoop around. If a person didn’t offer any information about themselves, maybe their surroundings would. Loki was about to get up when a shadow crept over him. For a second he thought that the air around him dropped a few degrees. No, it was her. This dark aura dispersed from her, filling the room and Loki immersed right into it.

Nightmares. Loki knew that bitter smell well enough. She was reeking of it.

Loki’s heart leaped in excitement. Finally a window, maybe even a door. What would Loki give to able to open her mind and look inside. To actually see the images that were hunting her. Her face contorted, there were deep lines around her eyes, her lips looked strangely tensed. Beautiful. The whole thing didn’t last very long. Suddenly she jolted awake and looked totally confused for a second. Like she had no idea where she was. For a second, then she rubbed a hand over her eyes and let out a sigh. So definitely not the first time. Interesting.

Carefully she picked Loki up and put him on the floor, while he was fighting hard to not bite her. The next hour Loki watched her sitting on the floor, meditating. Indeed the best method to get rid
of nightmares. So she was troubled after all and knew how to deal with it.

Dreams were such a whimsical thing. Loki would have to thank the Widow for giving him such a splendid idea. Even the strongest hero would sooner or later break down if only horror awaited them when they closed their eyes. Not finding any sleep was torture enough, but it was nothing compared to the fear of sleep itself. All it needed was the right nightmare. Loki was a master of illusions, but he wasn’t able to weave dreams. The process of mastering this ability took over a century, so there was no time for that. What did he need a dream for anyway? An illusion created by Loki could top any nightmare.

Good thing he knew exactly who could lose some sleep.

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“Good lord, what did you do?”

Loki actually had had to practice that. He was quite amazed that he got through that without laughing. Barton’s arm was in a plaster cast and the look on his face was pure disdain. Not directed at Henry, but it was still telling. “Didn’t you see that on television?”

“No, I saw robots attacking a building. That’s it. Are you alright?” Again, Loki played a worried friend, although he only felt regret that he wasn’t the one who broke his arm.

Barton huffed and his eyes dropped to his recovering arm, looking even angrier than usual. Now anybody could tell by his behaviour that this man was filled with rage. Now he had even more reason to be furious.

“I had someone’s back, but they didn’t have mine. Happens. Sucks.”

After a simple nod Loki decided that Henry wouldn’t ask for further explanation. Barton would come up with it by himself sooner or later. “Can you even run with your arm in the cast?”

“Sure thing. My legs are perfectly fine.”

So they started their little run, Loki remained quiet, he knew better than to pressure Barton. It was finally Barton who spoke up. “So, how are you doing?”

“Fine. It didn’t happen so much since the last time we’ve seen each other. I didn’t fight robots, I just went to work and was bored. That’s pretty much everything.” Loki shrugged and Barton nodded. These conversations were so tiring, because Loki had to fight for every word that left Barton’s mouth. The contrast between him and Stark couldn’t be more obvious. It was probably again up to Loki. “Do you get hurt like that a lot? Or in general?”

The problems with the Widow were obvious, some disdain towards Stark, but Loki had to turn him against everyone. So much beautiful and fierce anger under his skin that wanted to be formed. It was important to direct it at somebody, it wouldn’t help if Barton just lashed out at a random person on the streets. Sure, they would have to take him out, but Loki wanted him against the Avengers.

“In this job… it’s not unusual. Even more so when you’re not in an amour of metal or an unbreakable alien.”

Well, then again, Loki didn’t have to do anything, it was all already in Barton’s head. “Sounds kinda unfair, but it must be reassuring to have somebody like that looking out for you…”
Barton snorted and Loki smirked inwardly. “I gotta look out for myself. Everybody has to do that, it’s good to be a team, but you can never really put your life in someone else’s hands. At least not if you’re also involved in the battle. Maybe I haven’t been doing that. Enough. Looking out for myself. I’m going to pay more attention to that.”

“I see what you mean, but… You can’t do anything on your own. Hell, I try to do as much as I can on my own, because my business is all about screwing other people over, but sometimes a task is just too big for a single person.”

“So you’re saying I should rely more on other people? To get my shoulder broken again?”

“No, of course not. You always have to look over your shoulder, no matter who you work with. You should cooperate, but in your own interest. You’re vulnerable in comparison to them, so you also gotta somehow benefit from their strength. Let them work for you without them knowing it… God, stop listening to me. I shouldn’t even be talking about this. I’m everything but a team player. As I said – my job description is screwing people over. Yours is being part of a team that saves the world. So I’ll shut the fuck up.”

A hoarse laugh escaped Barton’s throat. “Nah, that made perfect sense.”

How delightful. “You’re really pissed off because of your shoulder, aren’t you?”

“I’m pissed off, because it could have been avoided.”

“Does that make it the fault of one of your friends?”

“Well, yes, if you’re running after an idiot to stop him from getting himself killed. I should really demand a raise…”

“Damn, I’m not envying you. Like at all. I would be so bad at this. I’d constantly try to kill the others the second something goes wrong. I’m not a teamplayer. Comes with the job and the kind of douchebags you meet. You don’t trust anybody.” Once again Loki shrugged, seemingly not making a big deal out of it. Why should he? Barton was doing that very well on his own.

For now he was all lost in thought, their running pace slowing down a little and Loki sang a song in his head. He was loving this. Like a script that wrote itself. Barton reminded him of a well-trained dog, Loki said a single word as a command and Barton reacted, did a little trick. “Maybe that’s not the worst idea.” An almost silent mutter and Loki would drink to that later on. “What do you mean?”

After letting out a sigh Barton bit his lip and shrugged another time. “Tursting people. It makes you vulnerable and in the end there’ll always be some backstabbing. It’s inevitable. If you don’t trust anybody in the first place, you won’t look stupid in the end.”

“Okay… I can see where you’re coming from. It doesn’t sound very healthy…”

“It is, it keeps one alive.”

What was there left to say? Loki was absolutely content.

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So little time and so much to do, but Loki was honestly amusing himself. Right now he was quite sure that his mood hasn’t been this good for an entire century. His current task was so much fun and as weird as it may sound, he was sparkling with creativity. By now his floor wasn’t only
covered in books, but also in drafts and loose papers. Loki sat between two piles of books, his third sketchbook in his hands and drew. At the same time he was alternating between humming a tune and singing some Midgardian songs that he had discovered. Some of them were so strangely fitting.

“Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm a man of wealth and taste. I've been around for a long, long year. Stole many a man's soul to waste…”

The new draft looked the most promising, Loki was pretty content. He didn’t really want to wallow in vanity, but it was beautiful. Captain America could learn a thing or two from him. Loki had to laugh at this thought. There were a lot of things that he could teach the man out of time. Starting with contempt.

Still, it had to be better. Loki wanted it to be perfect, it should ruin Thor’s sleep for the rest of his life. More drafts were needed. “Pleased to meet you. Hope you guess my name…”

Someone decided that they had to interrupt Loki and with a sigh he reached for his phone. How very fitting, it was Captain America. Did he read Loki’s mind from afar? Unlikely. Licking his lips Loki slid into William’s skin and answered the call. “Steve, hey. How are you?”

Angry, he was angry. Loki could clearly hear it in his voice. The anger of course wasn’t directed at William and Rogers even tried to not let it show. Indeed funny. “Hello Will. I’m good, thank you. Listen, about Thursday, I’m sorry, but I won’t be able to make it.”

That was rather unsettling, Loki had been looking forward to a game of chess with the Captain. The perfect opportunity to remind him of how irresponsible Stark had acted. Change of plan, he had to do that now. “Oh… right, you’re probably still in New York.”

“Yes, I am. This is going to take longer than expected. I don’t know when I’m going to get back. I’m really sorry. I’ll let you know when I get back.”

Apologetic and angry at the same time. Loki screwed his face up and was tempted to throw the phone against the wall. Was it so hard to seek out whoever was this tiny little magic user? Well, Loki hadn’t felt anything since the incident, so how should they? Anyway it was still annoying him. “It’s okay. You’re not… in danger or anything?”

“No, don’t worry. At the moment everything seems fine. We’re still busy figuring out what happened here and I have to stick around for that.”

“Have to? Steve… you’re not doing this again, right? Doing everything yourself, although you could easily let others do it who are just as qualified.” A little reproach spiked with worry. That was perfect and he already heard the Captain sighing. “You saw it on television, didn’t you? I can’t just sit around, I wanna help. The whole attack wasn’t handled delicately enough the first time and now I want… Never mind, I can’t leave right now.”

“Hey, I’m not the one trying to talk Captain America out of a mission. You know best what you have to do. I just want you to take care and time off in between your… working sessions. You’re in one city with all the other Avengers, let them take care of some of the stuff… Those were flying robots, right? Isn't that Tony Stark’s area?”

Loki wanted to click his tongue and closed his eyes to fully enjoy whatever was about to come, because it would be lovely. “He thinks so too. Robots, his area, he can do whatever he wants, no matter how reckless his actions are… I’m sorry, this is not the right place.”
Rogers tried to stop himself, but he had made it fairly obvious who his anger was directed at. What would William do? Continue to ask questions or let it pass? William was honest, but he was nice and considerate. No, he wasn’t going to push it. Stark was easier and more fun to push. “It’s okay… Look, Steve, I have a class in five minutes, I gotta go. Can you just promise me to take care and watch out for yourself?”

“I always do.”

To hell with it, Loki could push it a little bit. “Yeah, but… I don’t feel at ease, because I can tell that you don’t feel at ease. I don’t know why. Because of the robots or because you feel like somebody doesn’t have your back… Just watch out and call me sometime, so I’ll know you’re alright.”

A slight pause at the other end of the line and Loki knew that Rogers was swallowing deeply right now. Oh, poor thing. Releasing that a friend is worried about him… and that said friend had notices his doubts concerning another Avenger. “I’ll do that. You do the same. I’ll call you. Bye.”

“Bye Steve.” The second Loki hung up he continued to hum. “But what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game…”
Thor was still in New York and Loki didn’t like that. After hundreds of drafts Loki had found the perfect way to create the perfect illusion. Not for New York though with all the other Avengers present it was more likely that they would end up talking about it. In London there was Jane Foster waiting and she was the one who was going to listen to Thor’s story. About the things that were hunting him. Maybe then she would pluck up the courage to ask him a few questions.

His so called brother was still here, so Loki had to wait to put this plan into action. If Thor wasn’t heading back to London soon, Loki would really have to seek out the little troublemaker who had assembled the Avengers. The city had been dead for some days now. No magic to be felt and Loki didn’t care that much. If this person came out to make trouble, he would take care of it, but they were the Avengers. Weren’t they used to fight enemies all the time? Loki couldn’t do everything for them.

Stark was such a considerate person he was trying to keep Loki entertained. Today he had invited him for lunch and Loki had instantly agreed. Everybody else seemed to need time for themselves after the attack. At least Stark texted him still everyday.

When Loki entered the elevator he was instantly greeted by Jarvis, but not by the usual music Stark picked for him. This odd, something was different and since Jarvis was involved Loki knew he had to be ready for a fight at any second. He was still full of awe for the spirit Stark had created, but he would never be off guard around him. “Good day, Mr. Pine.”

“Hello Jarvis.”

“This may seem a little bit unorthodox, but Miss Potts asked me to talk to you without Mr. Stark’s knowledge.”

Just like Thor would never fail to fall for Loki’s illusion, Loki would never stop to be amazed by Jarvis. “Oh… are you allowed to do that? Going behind is back?”

“Technically no, sir, but Mr. Stark has given a lot of liberties to Miss Potts and it is my main purpose to maintain Mr. Stark’s well being. If I am of the opinion that following Miss Potts’ advice will ultimately be to Mr. Stark’s benefit I am free to take it.”

Killing Stark at the penthouse would not be the best idea, Jarvis was the best protection one could wish for. But what if Loki could get Jarvis to think that Thomas himself was necessary for Stark’s wellbeing? A plan he had to work out later. “So… what does Miss Potts want you to discuss with me?”

One of the rare times that Loki was actually curious.

“Last night and this morning Miss Potts and Mr. Stark had an argument about him working too much. A reoccurring theme. Miss Potts claims that she is worried and asks you to maybe propose having lunch outside of the penthouse to Mr. Stark. He hasn’t left the penthouse in three days and it’s been 19 hours that left his workshop. I agree with Miss Potts. I think it would do Mr. Stark good if he got away from work for a few hours.”

Not sleeping and doing nothing else but working. Did Loki really want Stark to stop doing that?
“So… she’s asking me to take him to a restaurant?”

“Exactly, Miss Potts also apologizes for this odd way of asking this favour of you, but you seem to
be the only person right now that still seems to be welcomed in the penthouse.”

Loki definitely wasn’t going to risk that. Especially since Stark liked him so much, because he
didn’t try to talk him into anything. “I’ll see what I can do, but I won’t try to convince him of
something he isn’t keen on. If people don’t want to go out, they don’t want to. Nothing bad about
that.”

“I see. I will notify Miss Potts about your cooperation. Thank you, Mr. Pine.”

“Just a question, Jarvis. I’m curious… can you lie to Mr. Stark?”

“No, sir. If Mr. Stark was about to ask me if I had a conversation with you, I would tell him.”

Hmm, so all Loki had to do was some making Stark ask. In consequence Stark would be even
angrier at Miss Potts and then push her away even further. The person who is responsible for him
still being alive. Loki probably didn’t have a lot to do to make that relationship fall apart. Stark’s
isolation would only increase his dependence on Thomas. It didn’t take great observation skills to
realise that Miss Potts was one of the constant and good things in Stark’s life. Loki couldn’t afford
having her pulling Stark out of his starting depression. That was Thomas’s duty. Or he would push
him deeper into the darkness. Loki hadn’t decided yet, whatever would serve his plan better. The
Captain and the Man of Iron would fight each other, the way to get there was secondary.

“I’ll tell him that I’d like to eat somewhere else, but I definitely won’t drag him out of here.”

“Thank you, Mr. Pine.”

A few seconds later the elevator doors opened and Loki stepped out. Stark was nowhere to be seen,
but Jarvis had already told him that he was spending his whole time in the workshop. How impolite
to invite Thomas and then not being there to greet him. “Jarvis, could you please inform Mr. Stark
that I’m here.”

“Already happened, sir.”

Nodding Loki sat down on the couch and waited, desperately trying to not crunch his teeth in
frustration. If Stark knew who he was, he would never even think of letting him wait. This was
only Thomas and as Thomas Loki was nothing else than a worthless mortal. Disrespect was
something else that they were going to pay for.

Minutes. It actually took Stark minutes to show up and then he didn’t even seem to be sorry for
letting Thomas wait. “Hey there, Tommy. Already made yourself at home. Are you more into Thai
or Chinese? Or we could have both. How about we let Jarvis order from 10 different Asian
restaurants? Since I’ve discovered this extremely spicy Korean chicken I can’t live without it
anymore…”

Wow. Did he get paid by word? How could anyone talk so quickly? Loki couldn’t react like
Thomas. He had to be a little off, so Stark would get suspicious. “You want to order in? I thought
about going out. You know… if you want to… of course.”

Stark stopped dead in his tracks and openly stared at Loki. His eyebrows slowly went up and he
shamelessly pointed at him with his index finger. “Wait a second, slow down there, buddy. Did
you just… ask for something?”
“Uhm… yeah?”

“Asking. You. The guy from England who tells me to shut up every three seconds and acts like he owns this place… You just asked for something and want to know if I’m okay with it?”

“Yes?”

Now Stark’s eyes almost popped out. “Okay, cut the bullshit!” Completely rushed Stark stalked towards Loki, grabbed his shoulder and shook him. Every bit of reflex control was needed to not break Stark’s neck right now. “Tommy, if you’re in there! Talk to me! Don’t worry, I’ll get you out!”

Okay, that was enough. Roughly Loki pushed him away and scowled. “Get your bloody hands off me, Stark! What’s wrong with you?”

“Oh, thank God, there you are! I was worried somebody had brainwashed you or erased your memory like in Total Recall!” Stark sighed happily and then smirked to show Loki that he enjoyed pissing him off. “Now, for real. What’s up?”

Actually Loki hadn’t expected Stark to react so quickly, but that was working for him. “Nothing, I just wondered if we could grab dinner outside. We’re always spending every damn second in this penthouse.”

“Yeah and you adore the penthouse. You adore Jarvis, the tools lying around and my pad that you’re constantly using. You love it, so why wanna go out?”

Acting clueless Loki raised both hands and then dropped them again like he didn’t know what to do with them. “Because… it’d be nice to get outta here for some time.”

Stark narrowed his eyes at him and cocked his head, obviously thinking. Then he turned slightly away. “Jarvis?”

“At your service, sir.”

“Miss Potts didn’t get to talk to Tommy by any accident, did she?”

Perfect

“She didn’t, sir.”

“I’m waiting for the big bad ‘but’ here, Jarvis. There is a but, spit it out.”

“Miss Potts might have asked me to ask Mr. Pine for a favour.”

There was no explosion, nor a fit of rage or whatever. Stark played it down, just crossed his arms in front of his chest and looked generally disappointed. In both Thomas and Jarvis. “Can you believe that? When you’re here, she wants to throw you out and when you come back… she wants to use to do the dirty work. And you – come on, you’re supposed to be my cold-hearted bastard. You can’t just try to help Pepper to make a better person out of me. You’re supposed to tell people to fuck off when they want something from you.”

Shrugging Loki rolled his eyes. “I like your girlfriend, she seems intelligent, sophisticated, polite and can stand her ground. She’s concerned about you. It’s just a choice between eating here or in a restaurant. I didn’t think it was such a big deal.”
Marvellous, it was like dancing. Loki said something and Stark reacted perfectly. He could do this all day long. By now Stark was obviously pissed off, but not at Thomas. Never at Thomas. “That sounds so nice. Supportive, concerned… pretty words to say – tries to control my fucking life! I’m a grown ass man. Fuck, I’m an old man! I can decide for myself if I want to eat in a fucking restaurant down the street or next to my fucking desk!”

“Great, no need to yell at me! You know, you’re right. It was stupid to ask you or to let myself get dragged into your mess. You can decide where you want to eat by yourself. I’m outta here.” Loki turned around on his heels, but he couldn’t even make one step. “

“Okay, sorry, I didn’t want to snap at you. It’s not your fault and it’s not you I’m mad at.” Stark pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed in defeat. “I’m just… She won’t let me catch a fucking break. Not even for a second…”

He stopped himself from continuing, eyes darting around, looking for something else to focus on but Thomas. If Stark looked at Thomas right now, he would spill everything. Oh, Loki wanted him to do that, Loki wanted him to hear every single word that would drop from those lips. He would gather them and later on use them as needles, piercing Stark’s skin. “Okay… So? I’m slowly getting hungry.”

Such a simple phrase, but Stark suddenly was at loss. Absolutely helpless and Loki couldn’t quite grasp why. Maybe he still hadn’t figured out everything about this relationship. Was there still love? Stark was hunted by what he had endured during Loki’s attack, but perhaps that wasn’t the whole story? Was it more personal? Was Loki really the only person Stark talked to? How could he know for sure?

“We could… There’s a nice Turkish place just around the corner. I’m not the greatest fan of their… cuisine, but the desserts are a dream come true. We could go there… they don’t deliver, that’s why…”

Fascinating. Such a loud and confident man was suddenly so little and his voice resembled nothing but a bare whisper. What had just happened and why couldn’t Loki get a hold of it? Well, he hadn’t had Turkish yet. “Sure. I’ve never had Turkish before. But for the love of God put some decent clothes on, I can’t be seen in the company of a bloke who looks like he hasn’t slept nor showered for a week.”

“You’d still be seen in the company of a billionaire. Wouldn’t be that bad.”

“Bollocks. I’m hungry, hurry up or I’ll go alone.” Loki pointed at his watch and raised an eyebrow.

“Fine! Don’t go all British on my ass. Holy shit and I thought Jarvis was bossing me around.” Muttering under his breath Stark left the living room and Loki sat down on the couch again. “Sorry, Jarvis. I guess I didn’t do too well.”

“Quite the opposite, sir. You succeeded.”

Not yet, but he was getting closer.

Half an hour later they sat at a table in said Turkish restaurant. Stark had obviously left his bubbly personality at home, since he was just starting at his plate and poisoned the whole atmosphere with his dark aura. What kind of friend would Loki be if he didn’t at least try to make it worse? “I don’t get you.”

“Nobody does. That’s why people love me, I’m an adorable enigma.”
Loki hinted a smile. “Nah, people love you, because they want to be like you and because you saved their arses. A lot of people can’t stand you for the very same reason. Hell, even I can’t stand you most of the time. So why would you be so angry at a person who cares about you?”

“Stop that. Being sympathetic. No, no, doesn’t suit you.”

“I’m not being sympathetic, I’m calling you stupid.”

“Yeah, that’s more like you.” Stark tried to grin, failed miserably and then there was only silence for a couple of minutes. Loki didn’t mind. The food was good and Stark was going to let him in. He didn’t even have to wait especially long.

Again Stark wouldn’t meet his eyes, instead he preferred to watch the patterns he drew on his plate with his fork. “I lived through this moment. A moment of pure helplessness. I couldn’t imagine that before, not being able to do anything without having your hands tied. I couldn’t do anything and nothing has ever felt so horrible than being helpless. Whenever I’m doing nothing, just sitting around or lying in bed… this feeling comes back. So I keep myself busy. I work and when I’m done working, I watch a movie, I play a fucking video game… whatever. I just want to get really tired, then I can fall asleep the second I lie down. Pepper wants to deal with my problem for me. She wants me to catch a break, to relax, but I can’t do that. And I can’t let her or anybody else do that for me. Cause then I’d be helpless again. Not going to happen. I’ve always taken care of myself and I’ll continue to do that.”

Against all odds Stark succeeded in surprising Loki. So it wasn’t what he had seen. Not the Chitauri or the look beyond this world, beyond what he had thought possible. This hadn’t robbed him the ability to sleep, but his own powerlessness. Stark wasn’t afraid of the unknown of something that might possess greater force than him. He was afraid of being unable to do anything against it. Something that Loki actually could relate to.

“Perhaps she would be more understanding if you told her that.” Loki made an effort to sound at least a little sympathetic, but Stark didn’t care anyway. “I don’t tell her about it, because I don’t want to tell anybody about it.”

“You just told me.”

Stark grimaced, then finally met Loki’s eyes. Something similar to a smirk seemed to spread across his face. “Well, you don’t count. You’re the cold-hearted Brit. With you it’s like talking to a wall. All the emotional stuff bounces off you.”

“Oh when I think it’s ridiculous.”

“Do you?”

Loki tightly grabbed the arm rest, trying so hard not to tremble from excitement that his knuckles turned white. There was actual, real fear audible in Stark’s voice. The Man of Iron was scared of what Thomas might think of him. Talking about not wanting to feel helpless, yet he surrendered, gave up all power. There weren’t enough words in any Midgardian language to express the bliss Loki felt in this very moment. This was victory. “I don’t. It’s serious, understandable. I still think you’re dim though. There are other ways to handle unwanted care than to chase people away. I don’t know her, I don’t know the dynamics of your relationship, but this woman is too smart to stick with you if you continue like this.”

Which would be perfect.
“Maybe that would be for the best.” His expression stern, his voice dry, but Stark still couldn’t convince him that he didn’t care. “This way it wouldn’t be me who tells her to go.”

“You want her to leave you. Why? This would be just stupid.”

Stark didn’t react to the insult. Rather shrugged and searched Loki’s eyes. “You said a relationship can’t totally change something. It makes you feel better or worse than you already do, it doesn’t turn everything around. I feel bad and she makes me feel worse. She doesn’t understand, but that’s not her fault. Nobody would understand that. She doesn’t want to be the person walking out on a damaged guy and I don’t want to be the one who sends her away. That’s not the same as wanting to be with each other.”

Sentiment. Loki wanted to retch or use the knife on the table to give Stark something to really worry about. Such a ridiculous ordeal. “You are a coward. You dress up in your armour, fight aliens, but you are too much of a coward to end a relationship. I’ll stick to what I’ve said. It would be a stupid decision.”

By now the tension was so thick Loki was sure he’d be able to cut it with said knife. Stark’s face resembled a mask. So stern, without his usual smile or playfulness. Strange even to Loki’s eyes. So much honesty did not make the god of lies feel at ease. Finally Stark decided to smile, although it was obviously forced. “What would you know? You’re the cold-hearted Brit.”

“I understand more than you’d think. Whatever… it’s your life, your decisions. Do whatever you want. I’m curious how it’s going to turn out.” To make a point Loki focused his attention now on his dish, but he could hear Tony chuckling.

“Me too…”

For a short while they fell indeed silent and Loki realised that this had never been the case before, it they weren’t watching a movie. Loki wasn’t entirely sure, but he would count it as a good sign. Stark sighed and seemed to be trying to pull himself together. “So… you’re an interpreter. What are you interpreting exactly?”

More backstory about Thomas? Why not. “Literature. I’m working for a publishing company. I figured it’d be better than working for the UN as a simultaneous interpreter. I’d cause the Third World War during my first day. It’d be hilarious, but I guess they would fire me pretty quickly.”

Stark snort in amusement. “I can’t picture you quoting someone else’s work. Okay, you translate it, but aren’t you tempted to rewrite stuff all the time? Or smuggle some dirty messages in?”

“No, but the next time I’m going work in some death threats against you.”

“Good boy. Send me a copy when you’re done. What languages do you translate?”

“Mostly French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Catalan, Basque, Rumanian…. I prefer Roman languages.”

“You’re having me on. What are you? Some kind of language genius?”

“Yes.” Loki kept it simple and Stark laughed. “Fine, say something in French.”

“Si je connaissais un moyen pour voler Jarvis, je n’hésiterais pas à le faire.”

To Loki’s surprise Stark started to laugh. “Hey, you wouldn’t be the first to try.”
“Tu parles français.”

“Oui, je l’ai appris pour emmerder des hommes d’affaires français qui se foutent de ma gueule quand je suis juste à côté d’eux. Après je peux utiliser tout ce qu’ils ont dit pour les rançonner.” Stark shrugged and Loki couldn’t help but smile. “C’est génial.”

“Je sais. Alors, comme tu es un frimeur j’aimerais bien t’entendre parler en portugais. Je veux que tu dises...”

“Mr. Stark!”

Loki almost hissed at the man who interrupted them. Clearly Stark knew him, because he sighed instantly. Also the man didn’t seem to bother the least bit to burst into a conversation. Why couldn’t Loki sit here as himself? This feeble creature wouldn’t dare to even approach them and more importantly – Loki would be able to crush him with a single hand.

This image wasn’t helping the least bit to stand the man’s annoying voice. “I’ve been looking for you all around the tower. luckily the secretary said that you only walked down the street. We’ve been trying to get a hold of you for hours, you don’t have your cell phone with you? Anyway Miss Potts is in need of...”

“Excuse me, would you please be so kind to answer me a question.” This stupid mortal wasn’t the only one who could interrupt people. Although this fact seemed to be news to him, judging by the look of surprise on his face. “Uhm...”

“Was your mother too stupid to teach you manners or didn’t she care? Perhaps she herself was an uneducated fool who doesn’t think it’s necessary to introduce oneself before starting a conversation with somebody. Or, another possibility, she did indeed have some wit and soon recognized your lack of it, so she didn’t even bother to tell you how to express yourself in public so other people wouldn’t think you were an idiot. Or are you deaf and blind and you simply didn’t realise that Mr. Stark is having a private conversation and doesn’t wish to bothered by employees who don’t know how to properly address their boss. No, Mr. Stark is not going anywhere and he would like it very much if you left right now after apologizing to him and to me for your rude behaviour. Did you get all of that? Fine. Then sod off!”

All the man could do was to blink in shock and Stark beamed at Loki as if he had saved his life and brought him presents. “Well, you heard the man. Apologize and get lost before my friend here bites your head for.”

Completely lost the mortal started to stammer. “But...”

“For God’s sake! He’s too thick to follow simple orders. This is giving me a bloody headache.” Loki rubbed his temples and Stark indicated with an unmistakable hand gesture that his employee should leave. Luckily Loki had managed to scare him and he ran off. Good, one potential murder less.

No matter how shocked and dumbfounded the mortal had looked Stark now had found his good mood again. “That was so epic. Awesome. Damn it, you do hate rude behaviour, don’t you?”

“Yes. That’s why most of the time I still don’t like you.”

“We’ll work on that, because I do think your British rage is kinda useful. Maybe I’ll hire you as my personal assistance to piss people off. You could do it in several languages! God, the possibilities!”
The rest of their dinner was quite entertaining, even for Loki. He thought they would part after leaving the restaurant, but Stark immediately stopped his attempt to say goodbye. “Hey… you want to go back to the tower and… I dunno… have another drink? Hang out a bit? You can try to come up with a way to steal Jarvis. You are already teaming up against me so… What do you say?”

Someone who wanted nothing more than being left alone was seeking his company. That was it. Loki knew he had won. Stark was ready and Loki was dying to get things started.

Chapter End Notes

Hi there,

I hope you enjoyed the chapter, it's my personal favourite so far :)

Here the few French phrases:

“Si je connaissais un moyen de voler Jarvis, je n’hésiterais pas à le faire.” - If I knew a way to steal Jarvis, I wouldn't hesitate to do it.

“Tu parles français.” - You speak French

“Yes, I learned it to piss off French business men who are always talking shit about me when I'm standing right next to them. Afterwards I can use everything they said to blackmail them.

“C’est génial.” - That's genius / awesome

“Je sais. Alors, comme tu es un frimeur j’aimerais bien t’entendre parler en portugais. Je veux que tu dises... ” - I know. Well, since you're a showoff I would like to hear you speak Portuguese. I want you to say...
Hello everybody,

I don't have much to say today... Loki is establishing is life on Midgard, stalks Avengers and sneaks into other people's bedrooms... right

Don't look over your shoulder
'Cause that's just the ghost of me you're seeing in your dreams

Ghost of me ~ ~ Daughtry ~ ~

Jane Foster finally turned out to be useful. Loki didn’t know if she had urged Thor to return to London or if he went there on his own, because he missed her. She was the reason for his departure and Thor was gone, so Loki was happy. Finally time to play and to test his own abilities. He had put a lot of effort into this and he wanted to see it pay off. Loki would have loved to go full force today, but then his plan would immediately fall apart. Slowly, step by step, no matter how badly Loki wanted to step up the game. He wasn’t his idiot brother though, he knew that it couldn’t work if he didn’t act carefully. Planting a seed, letting it grow. You couldn’t collect the fruits before they were ripe and Loki would settle for anything else than perfection.

Before even heading for Thor’s and Jane Foster’s apartment Loki called a local theatre and booked a ticket for a Shakespeare performance tonight. After all he had to take advantage of being in London, he enjoyed the city for all it’s culture. Of course the performance was already sold out, but such tiny little problems couldn’t bother a magic user. Unfortunately the performance began at 8 pm, so Loki had to do his task afterwards.

The play itself was gorgeous. Brilliant performances and Loki’s general fondness of Shakespeare’s poetry and words grew even bigger. Too bad that he had to spend most of his time in New York. Instead of teleporting straight into their apartment, he walked quite a long while before taking a cab that dropped him off in front of the building they lived in. For a few minutes Loki just watched the façade of the large house, focusing on the windows of their flat. The lights were off and Loki sent out his magic to make out Thor’s location. Bedroom. Perfect. Hopefully asleep, Loki wasn’t in the mood to deal with anything else.

Time to get things going.

Invisibility first and then he teleported himself straight into the apartment. All quiet, almost peaceful. That was going to change soon. Ever so slowly Loki walked towards the bedroom. His feet on the floor didn’t make a single sound. Loki wasn’t moving in the shadows, he was a shadow himself. Impossible to grasp.

The bedroom door wasn’t even closed. Thor must think himself in total security. He was an idiot,
nothing else what Loki could say about that. Not even a single magical object to prevent that an
enemy might… teleport himself right here. Maybe not the best time to complain about that.
Without hesitation and without a sound Loki stepped into the bedroom and watched the two lovers
fast asleep in their bed. Jane Foster faced the wall, while Thor was lying on his back. Mjolnir was
placed on the nightstand. So there he was the great prince of Asgard, helpless, having no idea what
was about to hit him.

It happened seldom, but sometimes Loki’s emotions and urges were so strong, so demanding that
his magic went to fulfil them before he could voice them. Loki looked at his right hand and saw
the dagger he was holding. He couldn’t remember summoning it. What he knew for sure was that
it didn’t belong in his hand. It’s place was right between Thor’s rips. Loki desperately wanted to
thrust it into his skin, but that would be stupid and useless. Not enough pain. Loki wanted to see
him broken, to see him suffer. His whole world had to end and perhaps then Loki would grant him
the gift of death.

The dagger disappeared again and Loki walked up to the bed. His aura was down, his movements
only evoked silence and Thor continued to sleep. Peaceful. He’d better hang on to that feeling,
because this would be the last night of deep and restorative sleep. Loki actually knelt down,
watched Thor’s face and he was so close. It would be so easy. No, it was so easy. Loki slowly
brought his lips to Thor’s ear and told himself to keep it simple. Let the seed grow.

A whisper, desperate, powerless. The voice of somebody who was dying. Somebody with a hole
ripped through his chest and who was slowly, painfully bleeding to death. “Thor… please… help
me…”

As soon as Loki’s words faded away Thor’s face hardened even though he was still asleep and
Loki’s work here was done. Grinning he got up again and left the apartment. He was in London, so
he would amuse himself.

***

It was Sunday and the first time after five days that Stark didn’t send him a text message even
before noon. Since Loki didn’t believe in coincidences he knew that this had something to do with
Stark’s and Banner’s weekly meeting. Loki wasn’t going to miss that.

They met in the same restaurant as usual and Loki arrived there 15 minutes before them. Sitting
down at the table next to theirs Loki took out his newspaper and made himself comfortable. Once
again Banner was the first one to arrive and Stark was yet nowhere to be seen. At least he was
letting everyone wait, not just Thomas.

Banner’s waiter brought him a green tea and Loki got his glass of red wine. The same second Stark
entered the restaurant. Loki had his back turned to them, so he wouldn’t raise any suspicions. It
wasn’t even necessary to look at them, Loki’s ears were good enough. Hopefully they’d skip the
boring talk and straight get to the point.

Paint a picture? It’s too awesome to just say it.”

Interesting. Stark was in a good mood. For real, this wasn’t just show. What had happened? Most
of the time Stark was just pretending, but not this time.

Anyhow his good mood caused Banner to say “Hello Tony. Nice to see you too. Why don’t you sit
down before talking so fast that I don’t get a single word you’re saying?”
Loki could hear a chair moving and a hoarse laugh. “There, I sit! Now listen to me and be amazed…”

“You don’t even ask how I’m doing?”

“Oh come on, I have amazing stuff to tell!”

A slight pause. Banner was probably giving Stark a dark stare. “Okay, fine. I’ll be nice and talkative. How are you doing? Smashed any buildings lately?”

“Very funny, Tony. I’m fine. I wondered if you were too.”

Now Stark wouldn’t like that, because there was no way he wouldn’t figure out why Banner was asking this. Loki knew exactly what was going on.

So did Stark. “Oh my god, you too. Did Pepper recruit everybody to join her little club? I so don’t wanna hear that. We’re not going to talk about that. I’m going to tell you my amazing news and you’re going to be amazed!”

“But she’s wor-“

“If you even dare to finish this sentence, I’ll walk straight out of that door.”

That was no empty thread, Loki was sure of that. “Okay, okay, I’m sorry. Forget what I said. Tell me the news, amaze me. Let me guess, it has something to do with that robot you shouldn’t even have and that’s going to get you into so much trouble when Fury finds out about it.”

True and sooner or later Loki would make him find out about it. With the Captain around. But simple knowing about Stark’s doing wouldn’t be enough. Maybe Loki would cause a little incident, making it look like Stark was responsible for putting people in danger, because he was working on this robot.

“Exactly, but who the fuck cares if the old pirate gets mad, because I got it to work! I figured it out! You know about how the mechanics didn’t resemble anything we’ve seen before? Well, we were wrong! It’s not that strange, just a completely different way to look at it. The basics are the same…it’s like… upside down. So definitely no alien technology. Kinda sad actually, I would have loved to get my hands on that. Anyway from the way it’s designed I would say that it is supposed to look alien. It isn’t, so whoever built it doesn’t want us to find out who made it. I wouldn’t be surprised if we even knew that person…”

Boring. If this person was going to cause trouble, Loki was going to take care of that. He wouldn’t have somebody else doing his job.

“You have any ideas who that might be? I can believe that there might be some genius who can build one robot in his garage, but there were dozens of them. You need to be able to afford all the tools and materials to build them. Apart from the… magic. You have any idea who we’re up against?”

A feeble magic user. Loki would smash him with his thumb and it was strangely frustrating to hear them talking about a minor foe, although their real enemy was sitting at the table next to them. Well, they would realise soon enough that they were too stupid and too willing to trust the man who would take them down.

“Not a clue, but if our new friend is going to show up again, I’ll be ready. Give me a couple of days and I’ll be ready to write a programme that allows me to control this technology. If they send
new robots, I’ll press a button and it’ll be my army of robots. God, that’d be so awesome…. I can’t wait till an army of murdering magical robots attacks the city… that just didn’t sound right.”

Loki smirked about Stark’s eagerness. Fine, so he was happy. Still Loki was sure that he had been working on the robot for the last couple of days. He didn’t look like he had gotten a lot of sleep. Miss Potts obviously was still very worried, a fact that Stark didn’t appreciate.

Even after all the information Stark had just shared Banner sounded surprisingly calm, not actually excited. “That would be great. Not the robots attacking, but being able to control them. We definitely haven’t seen the last of that… So, yes, I’m amazed. You did an amazing job. Don’t you think… you maybe deserve a little break?”

If Loki possessed the same acting skills as Banner, even the Captain would have figured out immediately that William was an enemy.

“Bruce, I told you to not even start with that bullshit. I don’t want to hear it. I’m fine, I’m a busy little bee and I’m seriously getting pissed off at Pepper for telling all my friends to look after me. I’m a fucking adult! Sometimes I even act like one. Did she call you? I’m starting to feel like being stalked.”

“Damn it, Tony. She’s your girlfriend. Of course she’s worried and…”

“Yeah, my girlfriend… by the end of the week, we’ll be done with that…” Just a whisper, barely audible and Loki smirked. Poor guy was in need of a friend.

News about robots left Banner cold, but the state of Stark’s relationship seemed to shock him. “What…? You’re planning to break up with Pepper?”

Once again silence. Loki guessed that Stark was shrugging.

“Come on, you can’t just say something like that and then give me the silent treatment. Why would you want to break up with her?”

How unusual that Stark’s reply didn’t come as fast as his other remarks. “Maybe I’ve met someone else…”

“Yeah, sure, don’t give me that. What the hell is wrong with you? Come on, Tony, people are evidently going to piss you off even more if you don’t tell them what’s pissing you off. So tell me. I won’t leave you alone until you do.”

Another reminder why Loki liked Banner.

“I… I have… I have to deal with this myself and she won’t let me do that. It’s not even her fault, it’s just… She gets things done. She thinks I have a problem, so he wants me to instantly work on it, but that’s not how it works. Not how I work.”

Banner hesitated. “That’s no reason to end a relationship though. You can talk about that.”

“No, we can’t, because I’ve tried. But I’m sick of it. I don’t want Pepper to take care of me. She isn’t able to do that, I have to do that myself. I feel bad all the time and she’s making it worse, but until now I didn’t care. I didn’t give a shit. Now I do, I wanna feel better, I want to feel good, so I can… I want to feel better and I have to get there myself. Pepper doesn’t make me feel better, but worse and… I don’t want to be with her anymore.”

For once without all irony, he sounded collected, calm and Loki smiled sinisterly. He could hear
Thomas’s words. Stark was reciting them if he realised it or not. Perfect. No better way to prove his influence on Stark and he needed Miss Potts out of the way anyway. No sensible person should be too close to Stark, Loki didn’t like interferences.

“Honestly I didn’t get a word you’re saying, but… Okay, I got that you don’t want to break up to be able to screw around again. Have you really thought about all that? Pepper is the best thing that ever happened to you. Do you really want to lose her?”

Sooner of later Loki would grow tired of rolling his eyes. Why were people always insisting on having to find luck and happiness in another person? It was for sure pleasing and a beautiful experience to share happiness with someone else, but before that you had to find it in yourself. So what if Stark wanted to do that? Midgardians… so unable appreciate themselves. Disgusting. Banner was a smart person, he should know better. So this was a general Midgardian problem. What else to expect?

Loki’s thoughts were interrupted by Stark’s sigh. “That’s so funny. I always wonder about what people might tell her. Nobody tells her that I’m the best thing that has ever happened to her. Is that fair? I… don’t want this anymore. I want something better for her and honestly… I also want something better for me and no I’m not talking about someone else. We’d be both better off without each other.”

“I don’t know what else to say than I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I actually think it’s a good thing. We don’t work out, but we’ll do better when we’re not… dragging each other down anymore…”

Fine, so you’re breaking up. Loki thought that was great, but he didn’t want to listen to it all day long. Was there nothing else? Mocking the Captain? Talking about how they loathed Fury? Or leaving S.H.I.E.L.D behind them? Well, that was a nice idea. Loki would look into that.

“I’m sorry.”

“Stop saying that. Need to change the topic. Why don’t you tell me your own love life? How are things with your science chick going?”

Was this pointless relationship talk ever going to end? Loki could be talking with Barton, hating on the rest of humanity. Instead he was listening to this bullshit. Banner was obviously thinking the very same thing. “She is just a friend, Tony. A very good friend. She could be married, I don’t know and that’s not important anyway. She’s smart, nice and it feels good to talk to someone who doesn’t instantly see the green guy. That fact that she’s a woman is irrelevant.”

What a gentleman.

“Okay, I got it… but she’s doing fine?”

An awkward attempt to make conversation and Loki was getting more and more frustrated. It dragged on for a few minutes until Banner excused himself to go the bathroom. So he needed a break from Stark too. Finally time for Loki to read the article about some scientists that were trying to clone an animal. Foolish and arrogant mortals. Did they think of themselves as gods? When only a few lines were left Loki was suddenly feeling very lucky that he had turned off the sound of his cell phone. The second Banner had left him alone Stark had started to write Thomas a text message.

Already got plans for tonight?
Yes, a skype date with Captain America and then he was going out to eat with Jane Foster and Thor. Which meant that Loki had to do a lot of yoga and other exercises to relax himself, so he would get through the night without murdering anyone. Thor.

Lots. None of them involves you

The response came within seconds. You’re breaking my heart. Going out was surprisingly fun. Wanna do it again? Tomorrow night? My treat.

Smirking Loki let him wait for an answer.

***

Magic was a part of Loki, just like his eyes, his toes, his bones, his likes and dislikes. He had given it much thought. All his life he had been training his abilities and felt proud of being so powerful. Life without magic wasn’t possible for him. Loki didn’t know if there was a way to take it away from him, he doubted it, but if so, he would die. Similar to bleeding out. Magic was something vital, therefore Loki had never even thought about living without it. It must be horrendous.

The last three days Loki had been busy covering his tracks and cursing the stupid Midgaridan bureaucracy. Instead of one apartment in New York and one in London, Loki had now two more in New York and one in Washington D.C. Five different passports. His aliases now even had all health insurance. William Sharpe was registered at university. The internet was full of essays translated by Thomas Pine. Henry Laing had an employment contract with a joint-stock company. A website of Elizabeth Stone’s small company was online. The University of Copenhagen now had a graduate in art history named Lori Lorenzen.

So many illusions, hypnosis and so much work. It was quite laborious to create several fake identities on Midgard. After three days Loki was pretty sure that he had thought of the most important things if one of the Avengers decided to google their friend. Sooner or later William had to invite the Captain and maybe Stark would get curious too. It was better if each alias had his own four walls. Loki suddenly felt grateful that his sixth persona was a cat. A cat didn’t need a passport. The good thing about the new arrangement was that five flats were a lot of storeroom for his books.

Relaxing on Thomas’ couch Loki studied a book about brain surgery. So barbaric and outdated and yet fascinating. Since he was used to getting interrupted while reading Loki wasn’t surprised when the Captain called him. So was he finally coming back to Washington?

“Hi Steve, how are you?”

“Hello Will. I’m fine. Bored maybe. Sitting around, doing nothing. I’m not half as helpful as I thought I would be. So I’ll come home by the end of the week.”

Finally Rogers was way easier to manipulate if they talked face to face and not the phone. Therefore Loki was actually pleased to hear these news. “That’s great. When you get back take some time off. No, better idea, when you get back you come over and this time I’m going to cook. Are you at least done… fighting robots?”

“Nah, I haven’t done anything during the last couple of days. You know how I think about taking days off… Anyway I wanted to ask you something. What do you think about coming to New York?”

“Well, despite not making any progress the people here decided to throw a party tomorrow night. I want to invite you. Do you want to come?”

Party. S.H.I.E.L.D. Avengers. Probably all of them. Interaction. Tension. All the heroes united and Loki right among them. He’d rather die than miss that.

“Wow, that’s nice, but I don’t even know how I’d get there…”

“Don’t worry about that. S.H.I.E.L.D invited people from all over the world. There will be a plane, picking up people from Washington tomorrow morning. I can get you a seat on that plane if you want. It would be nice if you could come. There are some people I would like you to meet.”

Perfect. Loki was so close to start loving the Captain for being his perfect, little, obedient puppet. Even Loki, who used words as weapons, wasn’t able to express how much he was looking forward to meet those people. “If that’s really possible… I don’t want to cause you any inconveniences…”

“You aren’t. You’re invited. I would be happy if you could come.” That much was obvious, Loki could hear it in his voice. It would be too cruel to leave his dear friend alone with the other Avengers who couldn’t understand him the way Loki could.

“I’ll gladly come to the party.”

The Captain smiled and Loki didn’t need to see him to know that.

***

Loki arrived too early, but entirely on purpose. Jane Foster had suggested having dinner. With Thor. From what Loki had learned by now it was rather unusual for three Midgardians to have dinner together. Especially if two of them were a couple. It would be one of the dullest nights of Loki’s life, filled with thoughts about murder and torture, he wasn’t looking forward to it. Still he hadn’t been able to wait and now he was early.

There was nothing he could care less about than this dinner. All Loki wanted to know was if the seed he had planted had already started to grow. He had been careful, maybe it had been too little and he needed to step up his game. Or it had been too much? Thor was a stupid brute, but he knew Loki. Thought he knew Loki. There was a possibility that his voice would evoke doubts within the prince of Asgard. Loki was going to find out if his idea was as good as he had originally thought.

Jane Foster looked a little bit helpless when she opened the door. “Lori! I’m so sorry, we aren’t ready yet. Come in, you want to drink something while you’re waiting.”

“No, thanks. Don’t worry, take your time. I’m too early.”

Where was Thor? Loki didn’t care about Jane Foster, he wanted to see Thor. All Loki needed to do was to look into his eyes. Then he’d know everything. Instead of Thor he had Jane Foster who led him into the apartment and handed him a glass of water. “We’ll be ready in a minute.”

It took them five minutes and Loki was ready to murder her in cold blood when they both finally showed up in the kitchen. A forced smile on his face Loki desperately tried to hide his eagerness and curiosity, but all he could do was indeed staring at Thor.

He was tired. Yes, Loki spent centuries at Thor’s side and he knew exactly what Thor looked like when he was troubled. Or when he had spent a bad night.

Thor had slept very badly that night and Loki felt like dancing.
Again Loki was standing next to their bed, both fast asleep and he hoped that Thor enjoyed this privilege. Soon he would desperately long for sleep, but barely remember what it felt like. This time Loki went for a little bit more desperation than pain. “Please, Thor… I’m afraid… don’t let death take me… please…”

Loki hesitated. He couldn’t go too far, not so soon, but it was the sweetest temptation he could imagine. So he added a silent “Please… brother.”
Hello everybody,

So Loki got invited to a party and everybody is going to be there. Almost everybody

One more thing before we start the final face-off,
I will be the one to watch you fall,
So I came down to crash and burn your bagger's banquet

Infra-red ~~ Placebo ~~

The Captain was a very thoughtful man, he proved that much. Even hours before the party he came
to keep William company in his hotel and to tell him everything he needed to know about the
people he was going to meet. Well mannered and thoughtful indeed, Loki could appreciate that.
“I’m going to stick out, am I? Lots of secret agents and persons who work for the government…
You’re really sure that it’s okay if I’m coming with you?”

Rogers replied with a soft smile. “Some of them are agents, but not every single one of them. There
are a lot people who are just doing office work and some rich guys who will hopefully invest some
money. It’s pretty much a little bit of everything. You don’t have to worry. Just stick with me all
night if you don’t feel at ease with the others.”

How cute. Playing the hero although he just wanted William around him, because he felt better in
his company than in the company of the Avengers. Loki still pretended to be relieved and returned
Rogers’ smile. “Thanks again for inviting me.”

On the way to the party Loki tried to gain some information, innocently asked the Captain about
what he had done until now in New York. No details of course, just William’s usual fear that
Rogers was working too much. Once again that thought got quickly dismissed. Instead Rogers kept
smiling and Loki began to honestly wonder who was going to win. Stark or Rogers. Their battle
against each other was inevitable, but who could actually walk away from it? The Captain was
stronger, but Stark had wit. Most importantly he wasn’t afraid to cheat. How Loki would love it if
Stark was indeed able to do the deed. No matter how much they hated each other it would still
pain him to have killed the other man. Loki preferred Stark to the Captain. Yet in the end, it didn’t
matter, they would all die anyway.

Loki felt a bit surprised when the vehicle they were riding in pulled up in front of the Stark tower.
No, he didn’t expect that. Stark let them have this party at his home? Didn’t he care or did he want
them close, so he could keep an eye on them? Or was he just waiting for an opportunity to piss
them all off? Hard to tell.
Perhaps it would be wise to concentrate on himself. Loki was most likely to interact with all of the Avengers tonight, William needed to be perfect and believable. Loki didn’t doubt that he could do it, but he had to admit to himself that his heart was beating a little bit faster than usual. Excitement. What was life without a challenge?

The whole way to the elevator the Captain didn’t say a single word. When the doors closed behind them Loki eyed him intently and cursed himself. How could he be so busy wondering about his own excitement and therefore not noticing how nervous the Captain was? Why? Why would he be nervous? He was about to meet his friends and… Hands clenched to fists, a stoic look on his face, what…

No, Loki had been perfect. He had always been in character and played his role like a trained actor. This couldn’t be a trap. They couldn’t have figured it out. No, they weren’t waiting for him up there. So why was Rogers so nervous? “Are you alright? You seem to be a little jumpy.”

Instantly the Captain started to smile, obviously embarrassed by what Loki had seen. “No, it’s just… I’m sorry, I don’t feel at ease at these kinds of events. I feel out of place. That’s also the reason why I invited you. A normal person to talk to. Not that the others aren’t normal, they’re nice, don’t worry, but… Most of the time I don’t think that they understand me… I’m sorry, I’m realising right now that I shouldn’t have invited you just to make feel better.”

“Actually that’s quite a common thing to do. It’s okay. I’m your friend, it’s part of my job to accompany you to a party if you don’t want to go alone. But you can’t leave me alone in there with tons of secret agents.” Loki smiled shyly, but he indeed felt relief that there was no trap waiting for him. The Captain wasn’t that much of a good actor.

When the doors of the elevator opened they faced a big crowd of people, obnoxious music and silly laughter. Oh no. Loki had forgotten one thing when he had been looking forward to meet all six Avengers at once. He loathed parties.

Well, he would have to gloat over the fact that he was a wolf among lambs.

At least the Captain was eager to entertain him, because he immediately introduced him to some person called Sam Wilson. A friend, soldier, uninteresting. For a second Loki thought that he would have to tear them apart, so the Captain would focus more on William, but it wasn’t necessary. The reason was quite simple – Loki was a way better friend than this Sam Wilson. This strange little man didn’t understand the Captain, his desires, his fears in the least bit.

A man who had lost everything, thrown into a time that wasn’t his own, where he wasn’t supposed to be. What would you do to make him feel at home? Tell him a couple of movies he should see and songs he should listen to. Small minds bore small ideas. It was all to Loki’s advantage though, Rogers had brought him here and his whole body language told him that he felt more at ease in William’s presence than in Wilson’s. Time for a little experiment. The second Loki had entered this room he had made out the Widow. She was standing behind a bar, wearing a pretty, yet elegant dress and mixed cocktails. It couldn’t be a coincidence that she could overlook the whole room from there. Loki was dying to exchange words with her. He also wanted to see how the Captain would react if William left him alone for a moment.

“I’ll get myself something to drink. You guys also want something?”

Both nodded and wanted a beer. Loki smiled obediently and made his way through the crowd towards the bar. Stark was nowhere to be seen, weird since it was his own tower. If he had been here, Loki would have already seen him. Loud and reckless madman. Banner was engaged in a conversation with two other men that Loki had never seen before. The Hawk was lingering in a
dark corner, also talking to some other man. From time to time he stole a quick glance at the widow. Nice.

She looked up at him and for the first time Loki could look at her with the eyes of a man and not with the eyes of an animal. Beautiful, her physical appearance was impeccable. Even to Asgardian standards. Then again, she was a warrior, but still a woman. Loki was sure she used all the weapons she had, including her beauty. Just like him. That made him respect her and therefore he detested her even more.

William didn’t though, he thought she was beautiful and intimidating. An Avenger, the kind of woman who could kill you without you noticing.

“Hey there, you want something to drink?” She didn’t smile, but sounded polite enough. Of course she had already noticed that he didn’t belong here. Was that enough to raise her suspicions? Probably.

“Uhm… yeah. Anything you can recommend?” Loki was again surprised with himself, he could play such a convincing shy young man.

“I can make a pretty good Black Russian.” She was teasing him, smiling, having fun with the fact that he seemed to be shy. Or maybe she was just testing the waters. Loki didn’t think that she was ever off-guard. He hadn’t been able to approach her in human form and now she was putting William to the test.

“Uhm… sure, why not? I’ve never tried one of those.”

Nodding she grabbed a glass and got to work. “I’ve never seen you around.”

Playing with him, but William was an ordinary mortal, he wouldn’t realise that and he wouldn’t play with her. “Yes, I don’t really know anyone around here. A friend invited me.”

“I see. Nice to know that Cap decided to go out and have a social life again. There you go. Anything else?”

Loki ordered the two beers and the Widow gave them to him without further comment. So she had made her judgement. It would be a big surprise if she didn’t think he was a normal civilian. Returning with the drinks to the Captain Loki saw that everything was perfect. Rogers’ eyes were searching for him and he smiled lightly when Loki was back. Perfect.

Wilson soon left them alone and Rogers was eager to introduce Loki to someone else. Somebody way more interesting. “William, this is Bruce Banner. Bruce, this William, a friend.”

Another person who didn’t feel at home at his party. Yet Banner smiled and tried being polite, maybe even relieved to see a person that didn’t look like an agent. William did know what Banner did look like. “Wow, hey, you’re… you are…”

“Yes, I am the green guy.” Banner laughed softly and shrugged, while Loki pretended to blush. “Sorry, that was really out of line. Nice to meet you. I’m sorry, I’m really feeling awkward around all these people. I’m forgetting my manners.”

“Don’t worry. I feel pretty much the same. You guys want to sit down?”

So Loki ended up on a couch between the Beast and the Soldier, having a rather dull, yet surprisingly normal conversation. William was a bit shy, but he spoke his mind and he was always friendly. It didn’t work out too bad for Loki, but he wondered where the oaf was? Or the man who
was the very owner of this tower? He needed Stark around, so it would be easier to drive him and Rogers further apart. If he didn’t show up soon, this would be a big waste of time.

“So, boys, is there still enough space for a lady?”

Okay, there were three of them now. How was this going to work out? “Uhm… sure… of course… wherever you want.”

The Beast was nervous in the presence of the Widow. Well, she probably had that effect on everyone. Gracefully she sat down right between Loki and Banner and smiled at both of them. Loki hated good liars, he didn’t like concurrence. “I’m interrupting your talk, am I? You’re so awfully silent all of a sudden.”

Banner obviously felt uneasy around her, while the Captain was just being polite. He was the kind of guy who let the woman decide the topic. “Well, Tony still hasn’t shown up and normally he’s the one talking. Or Thor…”

“Well, since they aren’t here it’s a perfect opportunity to speak up. Cap’s friend is going to get a horrible impression of us.”

“Oh no, not at all. It’s just… you’re making me nervous. I don’t know about the others… You’re making me nervous… Ma’m.”

The Widow didn’t laugh, but she smiled in amusement. She was enjoying the game as much as Loki and she wouldn’t let the men on the hook. “Am I? Come on, boys, tell him that I’m a nice person.”

Rogers smirked lightly and shrugged. “I’m with Will on this one. You’re scary, Nat.”

“Really? That’s just heartbreaking. Bruce, at least you’re on my side?” She leant back on the couch, crossing her legs, a smile tugging her lips. Oh, Loki hated her for being so good. He would have to concentrate to figure out her intentions. Maybe she just wanted to be unreadable, even for her fellow Avengers. It was possible, but would she be enjoying that so much? Again, possible? Yet her reactions towards Banner were slightly different. Was she adapting to a situation just like Loki? There could be some flirtation going on, but Loki wasn’t sure and he hated it. At least nobody else knew how to take it either. Least of all Banner.

“You… To me… Okay, yes, you’re terrifying.”

“Don’t act like you don’t like it.”

Four. The Hawk decided to leave the shadows. His expression was stern, eyes slightly narrowed. So Loki wasn’t the only person who didn’t really enjoy himself. Rogers introduced them, but Barton remained cold and barely looked at Loki. So much anger and darkness. Loki had wondered if the others knew about it. Rogers shifted on the couch, looking uncomfortable, the Widow was suddenly stoic and Banner was none the wiser.

“Clint, why don’t you…”

“Oh good lord, what is he doing now?”

Everybody’s head turned into the same direction and Loki tried not to grin. Stark was making it way too easy to play him against the Captain. The great, marvellous Man of Iron had finally shown up and he knew how to make an entrance. It was so ridiculous it could be Asgardian. Obviously it
didn’t suffice to show up late to this party, but he also had to do it drunk and with two women by his side.

Again, their reactions were what mattered the most. One of the Widow’s eyebrows was slightly raised, but that was all. Banner had taken off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose in pure frustration. Barton rolled his eyes. The Captain wrinkled his nose in disgust. Loki tasted sweetness on his tongue.

The music was too loud to hear what Stark was saying, but since pretty much everybody around him was already staring at him… he was most probably saying something stupid and highly inappropriate. Loki had to make sure everyone realised that a little bit more than necessary. Carefully Loki leaned over to Rogers, speaking at a low volume. “Does he… always do something like that?”

Would Rogers ever say something bad about somebody else? At least he felt good enough around Loki to show his discomfort and his disapproval. “Sometimes…”

“What is he doing with these two… girls? Is Pepper on a business trip and he’s trying to piss her off?” What a surprise Barton showed interest in something else than looking angrily at the Widow.

“They broke up two days ago…” Banner revealed this new information, muttering under his breath. Captain America looked genuinely shocked, the Hawk raised an eyebrow while the Widow wasn’t giving anything away. She probably had expected it. Loki too, but he had also had expected that Stark would call Thomas to spill the news. He hadn’t. Because it wasn’t important? Or should Loki be worried that he wasn’t Stark’s best friend? Well, he would have to find out.

“Well, hello there. Got the party already started without me? Bad Avengers, very bad. I’m just three hours late.” Now there was Stark, right in front of them, his arm wrapped around the waist of a dark haired beauty. The other girl was just standing next to him, smiling stupidly.

“Like you said, three hours late. How do you even do that? You live two fucking floors above here.” The Hawk rolled his eyes, while everybody else watched Stark without trying to hide their interest.

“I wanted to show how pissed off I am at the fact that I wasn’t asked if the party could take place at my tower. Now I am deeply hurt that you didn’t even notice my absence.”

“Oh, we did notice.” The Widow was talking and Stark didn’t care. “Of course, this room just turned a lot more awesome than it was a moment ago.”

“Do… you think this…” Rogers stopped, unsure how to continue, barely looking at the woman pressed against Stark’s side. “… is appropriate?”

Delicious.

“What? Having a good time and going out with beautiful women? Yeah, I know both of these things must seem kinda weird to you since you’ve haven’t done either of them yet.”

Time for a good friend to intervene, because Stark was definitely out of place here.

“I know this your place, so we’re all kinda your guests, but that doesn’t give you permission to talk like that to…” Stark cut Loki off and he only allowed it, because he was William right now. Loki would have instantly killed him. “So, who are you? I never forget the face of an agent that I pissed off, so either you slipped my radar or you aren’t an agent. Normally only agents are so eager to kiss Cap’s ass.”
The reaction of this man couldn’t be better and caused Banner to give up all hope on Stark. “God, Tony…”

Rogers still made the impression that he simply couldn’t believe that a fellow Avengers was drunk and insulting him, but his moral code still forced him to defend William. “He’s not an agent. He’s a friend and maybe you should better watch your tongue, Stark.”

The light threat didn’t bother Stark, but his eyes still grew impossibly wide. “Hold on a second! Friend as in civilian? Cap is too much of a boy scout to bring a civilian to a party where civilians aren’t allowed. Don’t tell me that civilians are allowed here and that’s just another thing you forgot to tell me about!”

Now the Widow saw herself in duty to point out the obvious. “You are in the company of two civilians, Stark.”

“Yah, but I brought them here to bug you! If it’s not against the rules, where’s the fun in that?” Stark looked genuinely disappointed, while the model who was still feeling him up seemed to be scandalized. “Hey!”

Stark didn’t even bother. “Seriously? This is a thing?”

“Tony, you’re an Avenger and this is your tower. You can bring anyone you like…”

“Well, that was great timing. Off you go. You failed to really shock anybody anyway. Next time I’ll go for the exotic dancer.”

Loki tried really hard not to laugh at the flustered exit of Stark’s company and how everybody else seemed to think of this as inappropriate and disrespectful. It was funny. Not for long though, because Stark chose to ignore them and instead dialled a number on his cell phone.

Something so simple. Something so trivial. Something so common that Loki had almost not thought it important. Everything could have ended right here in the presence of every single Avenger except for Thor. Because of a stupid ring tone.

Loki had switched the sound off before heading to the party. He hadn’t really thought about it and now it turned out to be his salvation. How would William have explained the fact that his cell phone started to ring when Stark was calling Thomas?

Now it was nothing more than soft vibrations against Loki’s legs. Nobody noticed anything and Loki thought that maybe he got into this whole mess a little bit too quickly. Okay, they were all around him and he could deal with it. But only as William, he didn’t need Thomas’ perspective on the whole thing. It was important to focus on the Captain, Loki had a target. So it came in handy that Stark turned slightly away to leave a message on Thomas’ voicemail. Loki would enchant this stupid phone as soon as he was out off here.

“I understand now why you don’t like him. He’s disrespectful and… drunk.”

And Rogers still tried to not say anything bad about another person although Stark had directly insulted him a minute ago. “He’s… having a hard time.”

“So? A lot of people do, that’s not an excuse…”

“Hey, where’s the big guy? He’s the only one here who knows how to party. God, this a bore. Where did you hide the good booze? Who does a man have to sleep with to get some action here? Don’t look like that, Nat, I know you love me. Has anyone…”
Loki didn’t hear the rest of Stark’s babbling, because his whole body suddenly tensed up. So close, approaching fast, almost here. How could he have missed that? He had been concentrating way too much on the Avengers and their different reactions to each other. Now it was too late, it was almost here. Loki’s eyes darted around, fighting the urge to slip into invisibility or his real form. His instincts were kicking in, his magic screaming at him to get ready and in combat mode.

Too late.

Stark’s words came to a sudden halt and the discomfort on the other’s faces turned into shock and surprise when the deafening sound of the explosion filled the rooms. Every single one of the huge panorama windows split into millions of tiny shards, flying across the room, evoking the first screams of terror and pain. Most agents didn’t seem to realise what was happening when the first robots entered and started firing at people. The Avengers were way quicker to get into action mode while Loki was fighting an inner battle. His magic wanted to be used, was running through his veins, ready to flow out of him at any moment. But he couldn’t let that happen.

William was a mortal. William didn’t possess magic, couldn’t turn invisible or turn these feeble creations into dust with a click of his fingers. William could be hurt, William could die and Loki didn’t have a plan for that.
The Aftermath

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

I honestly didn't think that the cliffhanger was so nerve-racking, but now you're finally going to see how Loki is going to get out off this situation... and what are the consequences

Have fun ;)

Within a second Loki felt an immense rage taking possession of him and his magic was already pooling in his fingertips, ready to destroy the person who had grabbed him and dragged him behind the couch. He was a god, nobody was allowed to touch him or to make him move if he didn’t want to. Especially not some mortal, even if he was designed to be the perfect warrior.

Rogers talked way too fast, his eyes wide with worry and his body was already moving away, ready and maybe even eager to fight the robots. “You stay here, okay? Don’t move! Nothing’s going to happen, but stay right here!”

The Captain actually did wait for Loki to nod hesitantly before he jumped up and ran towards the robots and into the gunfire. Inwardly Loki sighed. If there was one thing he hated more than feigned affection for the Avengers, then it was acting afraid. A mere mortal who wasn’t used to be in lethal situations would be terrified, frozen in fear while the heroes were fighting the bad guys. How annoying.

So Loki hid behind the couch and did his best to look scared although it made his skin crawl. Even more so when he heard screams of agony and the almost silent but familiar sounds of people dying. The darkness surged, wanted to take part in it, but William would listen to the Captain and stay where he was.

Beyond stupid, this whole ordeal. Whoever this mage was who seemed to like attacking the Avengers... Loki would have to get rid of him. This was horrendous and boring. Suddenly his magic reacted violently again and Loki sighed. Great timing, Thor, as always.

Loki didn’t need to see him to know that Thor had finally got here. How the hell not? There were robots to destroy, he wouldn’t miss that. Would somebody as scared as William even try to look over the couch? Yes, he would.

Again they were doing pretty good and this time they even had the support of multiple agents. Who were pretty useless. Bullets didn’t hurt the robots, what a surprise. Mjolnir did, Stark’s suit did, the Captain’s shield did, hell even the Hawk’s arrows did. The Widow didn’t actually attack the robots, but rather saved other people from their attacks. Huh... how had Stark even got into his suit so fast? Loki hadn’t seen this thing around...

Time to act scared again, three of the metal creatures were approaching his hiding spot. Cowardly Loki crawled backwards and already heard Thor’s voice. “Watch out!”
A lighting hit the robots and Loki wanted to roll his eyes. Right, he was still scared for his life. As it turned out not all the other guests were trained agents, because a lot of them were also hiding under whatever piece of furniture they could find. Some dead bodies were lying around too. Well, that meant that the Avengers would be horribly occupied during the next few days. Now he couldn’t even mess up their fighting routine, because Jarvis would notice and… Loki hated parties.

At least most of the robots seemed to be already beaten, when… one of them caught a glimpse of Loki. Something was different. It hesitated. How could a machine hesitate? Except for… Loki abruptly forced his magic down, keeping it all inside, fighting the natural instinct to protect himself. This machine or whoever was controlling it recognized him, there was no doubt about it. It happened fast. Two others obviously forgot about the Agents they were trying to kill at the moment and instead turned to Loki.

Damn

Not even the combined power of those three would be enough to kill Loki, but if he was just going to crouch on the floor, they would hurt him and he would be forced to defend himself. They had recognized him, so there was no chance in playing dead. William’s death would throw him weeks back. Only one way out, no matter how humiliated Loki felt. “Help!”

Rogers reacted first, naturally, but he was cornered by some robots himself. “Clint! Help him!”

The Hawk was the closest to him and only occupied by a single robot. Which was down and dead… or broken. There really was no need to repeatedly ram a knife into its head.

“Clint, damn it!”

Great timing to let the lust for violence take over. Loki would skin Barton alive. All three robots raised their arms and simultaneously fired at him. Suddenly was Loki immersed in bright light and the left side of his body exploded with pain. He got hurt. Loki had to actually get himself hurt because of these disgusting, stupid, unworthy mortals! Enough of these games! Enough of playing around! They were busy fighting metal and circuits, Loki would stab them all in the back and this humiliation would finally be over!

His rage threatened to set off his magic as he was grabbed by something hard and shoved to the side. The pain in his abdomen made him hiss and he lashed out at the person who touched him. Luckily Loki only used his hands and reminded himself not to use his real force.

“Hey, calm down! It’s fine! I just saved your ass!”

Stark. Stark had pulled him aside and Loki forced himself to calm down so he could make out what had happened. The robots were down, destroyed, Stark must have done that.

“Fuck… you’re bleeding.”

Really, Stark? So you do have eyes…

Gritting his teeth Loki had to fight against himself. His body already started healing himself and he couldn’t have that. They would notice. Unfortunately it was incredibly difficult to fight down such a natural instinct.

Within seconds Rogers was on his other side and did his very best to keep his calm, confronted with the fact that parts of Loki’s T-shirt were torn and he was bleeding. “Will, are you alright? Stark, what is wrong with you! You hit him!”
“It was a fucking ricochet! I’m sorry, but I saved your boyfriend’s life while Robin Hood over there is busy beating up a piece of metal!”

The Captain decided that a friend’s life was more important than arguing. “Can you walk?”

Could he walk?! This was nothing but a scratch! Caused by Stark! Loki would cut his eyes out. Rogers pulled him up rather gently, led him into the back of the room and by the time they got there the fight was over. Loki tried to keep it all inside, tried not to show his disgust by how careful Rogers treated him and how he had to feign real pain. “Okay, it looks like a superficial wound… I’ll get a doctor to take care of you.”

He did just that and Loki took a deep breath. Think, don’t be stupid like Thor. You are not impulsive, you’re calculating. William is hurt, not too bad. Stark’s energy blast had hit him and Barton had failed to protect him, a civilian. Good news, he could use that. A trembling doctor arrived, to treat his wounds while Loki watched how the Widow calmed the Hulk down.

This was new, Loki made a mental note. Everybody else was treating injured persons or tried to recover from their very own shock. Well except for the rest of the Avengers who were about to rip each other apart.

Delightful

“What was wrong with you?! The robot you were beating up was broken! William almost got killed and you didn’t realise that!”

“I was fighting my own fight! If you don’t want him to get hurt, don’t bring a civilian!”

“This was supposed to be party, not a battle!”

“I am not a babysitter!”

“No, you just like to beat up a big piece of metal.”

“Shut your mouth, Stark! You hurt him!”

“What?! I saved his fucking life by blowing up three robots! Don’t rain on my parade!”

“Yeah, but you’re not saving people when you’re hurting them!”

“I don’t have to listen to this bullshit! I called a friend who might show up here… now there’s a wall missing. I’m outta here and call some instruction workers.”

The Man of Iron took off, flew out a broken window and Loki was dying to listen to the message Stark had left on his voicemail. Right now he still had to pretend to be hurt and scared. Even more so because Rogers came back to him, while the S.H.I.E.L.D doctor was finishing bandaging him up. Loki couldn’t remember seeing the Captain ever so worried. William was a friend, so he smiled to stop Rogers from feeling bad. A pained smile though.

“How are you feeling?”

“It hurts… but I’ll be alright. Is this how these parties usually go down?”

Rogers didn’t even crack a smile. “I would have never invited you if I had known something like that could happen…”
“It’s okay… it’s not your fault. What… happened anyway? What are those things?”

Sighing Rogers ran a hand over his face. “I dunno, but we’re definitely going to find out.”

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If Loki had thought Rogers annoying, now he knew better. A worried and guilt ridden Captain America was even more annoying. For the next five hours Rogers wouldn’t leave William’s side, telling him all over again how sorry he was and that this should have never happened. He even escorted Loki back to his hotel room and stayed with him for a while, just to make sure that he was okay. So much about an immediate Avenger meeting. Loki was absolutely sure that Fury would want them to meet up after such a disaster, people had died, they had been attacked at their very core. Rogers still chose to stay with his hurt friend.

Slowly Loki began to think that this evening had been some kind of success.

It took him quite some convincing to get rid of Rogers, but they both had lost enough time. Within the blink of an eye Loki teleported back to where the party had taken place. Nothing of interest was there to be found, just a lot of agents cleaning up. Boring. The penthouse was also empty. Where the hell were these people?

Closing his eyes Loki concentrated on finding Thor. A few levels below him. Fine, Loki had to start somewhere.

Fury, Thor, Banner, the Widow and Barton. Nobody seemed to be in a good mood.

“… how often I have to repeat that… Hold on, a second.” Fury interrupted his discourse to answer a call on his cell phone. Speakers were on so everybody could listen. “Captain, how nice of you to finally call…”

“I’m sorry. My friend got hurt during the attack and he was only there because of me, so I had to make sure that he was okay. I’m on my way back now and I’m listening.”

“Quite honourable, but also unacceptable, Captain. You are needed here.”

“So you want to continue losing time by scolding me?”

Loki’s eyebrows went up, but he couldn’t fight the feeling of being a little bit impressed. Was the Captain finally standing up for himself?

“Fine, I am repeating myself. We have to instantly find out who is behind this attack. Right now we have tons of material, broken robots parts, but we still don’t have a clue who made them.” Fury’s voice was trembling with anger and Loki swallowed a chuckle. Incompetence could really infuriate a man. Probably the other Avengers already heard this part multiple times, because the only one who responded was the Captain. “Whoever made them must have access to an enormous amount of the materials the robots are made of. Can’t we use that somehow?”

Now the Widow was speaking up. “We’re already checking our databases. Still waiting for the results.”

Just about as silence was about to settle in Banner broke it again. With a whisper. “You should let Tony work on them. He is the best mechanic in the world. If someone can figure out who made these things, it’s him.”

Instantly Fury shook his head. “Stark doesn’t get to put a single finger on the robots. I will be
“damned to have a mental unstable person working on a magical killing machine.”

“The magic has vanished, it needs a source. The Man of Iron wouldn’t be able to locate it or recreate it.”

Applause, applause, Thor finally said something that made sense and was correct. Miracles did happen.

Fury just snort. “I don’t care. Stark doesn’t follow the rules, his alcoholism seems to be getting worse and he already has enough weaponry in his hands that could destroy this entire planet. I am not going to make a single man even more powerful when he’s completely reckless. After all I heard that it was him who injured your friend, Captain. Not one of the robots.”

What a disgusting hypocrite. Yet Loki was pleased. Isolating Stark was perfect.

“Tony is a little bit… reckless, but he is not a danger.”

“Doctor Banner, you’re his friend, you don’t have to say anything to his disadvantage, but you know him better than that.”

Thor seemed to have enough of listening and stepped forward. “We have to use all instruments at our disposal. Whoever is controlling these creatures is a master of magic. It would be most careless to underestimate them.”

“Believe me, Thor, I’m not treating this lightly. 9 people died today, 15 got injured and we have no idea who is responsible for all that. So if you know anything about magic that we could use. Just tell us.”

“I’m ashamed to admit it, but I always relied on my brother when it came to magic. He knew more about it than anyone else in the Nine Realms. I never had to bother to learn anything about it, because… I am sorry I’m no big help in this matter.”

Don’t worry, dear brother. You never are any kind of help

Sighing in frustration Fury shook his head. “We’ll continue to try to track them down by analysing what they used to build them. Until then I need you all ready and on standby. As far as we know the next attack could happen any second. So if somebody doesn’t feel up to their game, I need them to tell me, then I will take care of it. Anyone? Agent Barton, something you want to tell me?”

Loki was pulling the strings and he was loving it. Was Fury really to blind to see it? He was mocking a man with a deadly weapon in his hand. Darkness was slowly killing all the light in Barton’s eyes. “No, do you want to tell me something?”

“Don’t be a smartass! You were busy beating up parts of a destroyed robot while other people got attacked. Some anger management issues? You need some meditation advice from Doctor Banner?”

This fool was mocking him! Playing with matches next to dynamite.

“I fought a battle like everybody else. If you have a problem with that you can do the dirty work yourself next time. Wouldn’t that be a change? Doing shit and not sitting around until you can shout at us for not doing things like you want them to be done?”

Beautiful
Fury’s face got even sterner and he narrowed his eyes at Barton. “I know you’ve had a long night, so I will give you a pass. For now. Get some sleep, but be ready at anytime and somebody find Stark!”

He walked off, probably trying to look like he was still the one in control. Thor and Banner followed him, seemingly feeling uneasy. The Widow and Barton stayed behind. This was going to be good.

“Thanks for having my back in there, Nat.” His lips formed a straight line, his gaze full of anger and disdain. What a contrast since the Widow’s face was completely blank. “I couldn’t think of anything to say that would have changed anything.”

“Are you serious? You couldn’t think of anything?” Barton snarled and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

Once again the Widow didn’t show any reaction. “Fury is right. You lost control during the fight. What am I supposed to say?”

“You’re supposed to be on my side! Nothing happened! I took out a couple of those things! I wasn’t instantly there to protect somebody. That happens. Did someone die because of me? No. Give me a fucking break or do I have to turn into a green rage monster so people start to pet and coddle me?”

Jealousy. Loki wanted to click his tongue.

“Clint, you’re making a fool out of yourself. Tomorrow morning, training, 8 o’clock. We’ll talk then you’ve had the opportunity to calm down. Good night.” She walked past him and for a second Loki thought that Barton would stop her. He didn’t though, but his face showed how much he wanted to.

Loki was very pleased by all of that and left. Lying back down on his hotel bed he pulled out his phone and was kind of surprised to see 10 missed calls. Three voice mails from Stark. Well, what did he have to say?

Hey there, Tommy. Some weird people infiltrated my tower and are throwing a party. A real borefest. Wanna come around and spice things up? You could insult pretty much everybody, so they will stop making themselves at home? Just get your British ass over here. See you later. Nothing unexpected. Next one

Tommy, don’t come to the party!... Holy shit! That was a close one... There’s an attack... Uhh... Fucking piece of metal shit! I’m dealing with it, but don’t come over!

This caused Loki to frown. Did Stark call him during the attack? Well, obviously. Worried that Thomas would come over and get caught in crossfire. Like William.

Hey Tommy... So, attack’s over. I’m still alive, but it was... bad. Really bad. You’ll hear that tomorrow in the news... I just wanted to let you know that I’m fine and sorry for inviting you to a party that ended up like this...

Oh, Stark was worried, how sweet.

Just as Loki wanted to put the phone away it started ringing. Stark. Wow, somebody was really eager. “Hello Stark.”
“There you go, wasn’t that difficult to pick up the phone, wasn’t it? You got any of my messages?”

“I did. You are doing fine?”

There was a soft sigh at the other end of the line. “Yeah… that was a fucked up night. I was just gonna get real drunk and laid and then… Anyway, the reason I’m calling. You’re coming home soon?”

Instantly alarmed Loki sat up straight, forcing his heart rate to stay down. “What?”

“Well, I’ve been hanging around in front of your door for ten minutes now.”

No reason to panic, Loki had prepared for this possibility. The fact that he even had an apartment that Stark could find was saving his whole operation. Dangerous territory. Exciting, but Loki was taking a great risk here. He had to buy him some time. “You don’t even know where I live.”

“Hey, I’m Tony Stark, this is 2014 and the internet does already exist. So, are you coming home or do I have to come again tomorrow?”

Rubbing one hand over his face Loki tried to think quickly. What was he going to do? Stark had ignored an Avengers’ meeting after an attack to seek out Thomas, calling him multiple times. Whatever he wanted to do or talk about, it had to be important and this was the kind of moment where Thomas had to prove that he was a friend. Loki couldn’t let it pass. “I’m on my way home, I’ll be there in 10 minutes. Please, do not wake up all of my neighbours till I got there.”

“Cool. See you in a bit.”

Loki had teleported into Thomas’ apartment before he had even hung up. He spent most of his time here, furniture, curtains, cushions on the couch, paintings on the wall, everything was here that was expected from a real flat. Just way too many books lying around on the floor. With a lazy gesture of his hand Loki created another bookcase. As far as he remembered there was even food in the kitchen, take away. Loki was living here after all… part-time. Ten minutes and a few little touches to the apartment later Loki walked up the staircase to find Stark casually leaning against his door.

“Hey there, Prince William.”

Loki hesitated for a moment, looking Stark openly up and down. He looked tired, but had sobered up, his eyes were full of life though. Was it the thrill of the fight? Joy to be alive? Denying the fact that he had hurt the Captain’s friend? “You look like shit.”

“Well, thank you, Union Jack. I just kicked some magical robots’ ass and what have you done? It’s three in the morning, dancing all night long?”

“I was out with a friend, yes. You’re not hurt or anything? I don’t want you to bleed out on my carpet.” Sounding nonchalantly Loki opened the door and let Stark in. Immediately the Man of Iron started to look around, trying to take in his new surroundings. “Nice…” His eyes quickly focused on one wall of the living room that seemed to be entirely made of bookshelves and the books on them. “You like to read… you really like to read. Hell, I bet it’s your biggest fantasy to have sex in a library.”

“Been there, done that. You want to drink something?”

Stark slowly nodded and sat down on Loki’s couch. Awkward, Loki shouldn’t think too much about it. He probably should have created a place for himself. This felt more like his own
apartment than Thomas’. Well, too late for that. “You got Whiskey?”

No, but Loki could make it appear if he wanted to. One minute later they were sitting on the couch and sipping their drinks. Way less talking than usual, couldn’t be more obvious. “Why are you here?”

Stark focused on the glass in his hand and sighed softly. “Somebody attacked my home today. Well, not the actual penthouse, but it was the tower. People died, people got hurt. Someone brought that into my home and I needed to get out of there. Fury is probably now all over the place and wouldn’t give me a fucking break. So I left.”

Understandable even. Even more baggage for Stark to carry. “Was it about you? The attack.”

“No idea. About the Avengers probably. I’m going to take the bastard down. Some coward who won’t attack himself, but let’s some machines do it. Don’t give me that look, it’s still me wearing the suit! I’m going to wear the fucking suit when I make him eat his stupid creations. All I need is a good night’s sleep and then…”

“Wait a second, sleep? You are talking about sleep? They must have hit you on the head.”

“It’s been a long week and it sucked. I broke up with Pepper two days ago.”

Loki snort. “It’s official, you’re bonkers.”

A smile flickered over Tony’s face. “Probably. Today the attack. It sucked big time…”

“I see. Why are you here anyway? Shouldn’t you be… working out a plan on how to… battle flying, magical robots?”

The suggestion alone made Stark grimace. “No, thank you. I’d be listening the whole time to Cap bitching about hurting his boyfriend.”

There was nothing Loki could do but staring at him. “What?!”

“Nah, I wish it’d be as saucy as it sounds. I saved some boy scout’s life and he may have got a little scratch. Whatever… I don’t want to make plans with them tonight. But you’re right… Why should I want to sleep? You want to go out and paint the town?”

“Watching you getting pissed off your ass?”

“Stop the British talk, it’s getting weird. I’m disappointed, I thought you’d be a guy who didn’t care if I drank myself to death.”

“Oh, I don’t care, do whatever you want. It’s late and I just came home, so I won’t go out again. You can do whatever you like, you’re a grown man.”

Again Stark didn’t seem content. “Come on, say what you’re really thinking.”

Loki yawned and shrugged. “I do think you went through a lot of crap this week. Probably more than most people go through during a whole year. If you want to get drunk, do it. Why not? As long as you stop doing it tomorrow. Otherwise you’d be bloody stupid… Then again, I wouldn’t be surprised.”

There was no reply and Loki started to feel a little bit uneasy. It was getting hard to keep up with all of his different personas when he had to change between them during the course of a single day.
Stark had opened up to him, explained how he felt and that he was tortured. Thomas had reacted positively to it. Maybe he was too cold right now. Of course, Stark called him the cold-hearted Brit, but he still had to expect some compassion. Loki would never be nice, yet he was a friend. Yes, he had to come up with something better. More compassionate. “Look… if you’re having a hard time, you have every right to take a pause or… to freak out. But you still gotta take care of yourself, nobody else will do that. If you want me to scold you, I’m not going to do that. Because I do think you can take care of yourself… if you want to of course. It’d be better if you wanted to.”

That was it, Loki wouldn’t go any further. It seemed to be enough though, because Stark released a deep breath and then he indeed smiled lightly. “You may be even more fucked up than I am.”

“I am not and I don’t think that you are. You just like to play the thought.”

Again – silence, but Loki felt better. Yes, this was going to work out.

“Guess I’m going to let you get some sleep.” Sighing softly Stark got up from the couch, but then he didn’t move a muscle. “Uhm… you wanna go out and have dinner tomorrow night?”

Loki cocked his head and smirked. “Won’t you be busy with saving the city from weird robots?”

“Yeah, but a man’s gotta eat. What do you say? I know a nice French place, we could impress the waiters by talking French.”

“French food is atrocious.”

“Fine, just tell me what you like and we’ll go there.”

“I like Portuguese food.” That was actually true. Loki had now been two times to Portugal to check out the music Stark had introduced him to and he realised that he loved pretty everything about it. He would probably spend his next hiatus there. Or maybe getting an apartment there to relax from the Avengers.

Somehow the prospect of having Portuguese food made Stark brighten up. “Cool. We’ll eat a ton of fish. I pick you up at eight o’clock?”

Why not? “Fine, but don’t be drunk when you show up.”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

So when Stark left he wore a smile on his lips and Loki was strangely content to go back to his hotel room. It was one of these rare occasions when he was actually tired. Time to get some sleep before the Captain would show back up to make sure William hadn’t died from his injuries in his sleep.
At least Rogers had been okay with Loki getting on the next plane back to Washington DC. Well, he was a friend and he wanted William to be in a safe place. New York was being hunted by murdering robots, not the safest place on Earth. It also wasn’t a safe place for the Captain, since Loki would probably kill him if he apologized one more time.

William flew back to Washington and only minutes after Loki got off the plane he got a call from London. Right, Jane Foster, Loki definitely wasn’t going to have fun today.

“Hello Jane.”

“Hi, Lori. I was wondering if you might want to have coffee. I gotta take a break from work.”

Could be interesting, but Loki didn’t want to get his hopes up. It was just Jane Foster after all. “Sure, I’d like that.”

Two hours later Loki was in London, sitting in a nice café, opposite of Jane Foster. Pretty much every other person in this room was more interesting than her, but Loki had to find out if his little trick was still working. Maybe Loki was sleeping peacefully like a baby and that would be very disappointing.

Well, she looked worked up, but that could simply be due to last night’s fight. “Are you alright? You look like you could use some hours of sleep.” Damn, Loki was really losing his eloquence.

Not that it mattered much in the presence of such a plain mortal. Jane Foster sighed deeply and folded her hands on the tabletop. “You’ve probably already heard about… the attack in New York last night… I’m always getting fidgety about these things. I know, Thor’s a god and almost unbreakable, but he’s still risking his life all the time.”

Oh, please, shut your mouth. Thor’s been battling all kinds of creatures for centuries and he had encountered situations that had been way more dangerous than this little robot attack. Her lack of knowledge was disturbing. Did they ever talk? Or did their whole communication consist of sex? She was considered an intellectual… dear Gods.

“Right, I didn’t want… I didn’t really know how to bring this up. He is doing fine, isn’t he?”

“Yes, everything’s good, he called me after it happened. I just can’t get used to this kind of thing. Although I should be thankful that Thor is here to help us on these things…”

Just squeezing his hand. It wouldn’t take more. No effort whatsoever. Her neck would break like
“Yes… I guess we are lucky.” He let the words linger in the air, so she might get the idea that something was wrong, but not enough to get really suspicious. “The whole thing must be upsetting for you.” Get to the point, woman. He could be searching another mage, convincing Stark of killing the Captain, luring Banner into trusting him only to unleash the Beast inside of him. Yet he was sitting here and had to sweet talk her. So tiring.

At least he was doing a good job, because Jane Foster didn’t even seem to hesitate to share her thoughts with him. “No, I’m proud of him. It’s just so different from how life was before I met him. All I had to worry about was how to finance my work and not if my boyfriend would be coming home from saving the world.”

Dependence. There was nothing more disgusting.

“But it has been quiet for a while around here. Wasn’t it? At least I hope so. You can never be sure what kind of things are happening everyday that nobody but the government knows about.”

Now Jane Foster actually smiled, proving once again that she wasn’t an intellectual. She thought Lori was joking. “Good thing Thor isn’t a government agent. You’re right, we were spoiled. Now a few things just happened in a row. Especially the robot thing is getting to him. Suddenly he is around magic again and that is really putting him off. He seems to be constantly on the edge.”

Finally. No matter how quickly he got her to this point, it had still taken too long. “I’m sorry, I don’t think I understand. With me knowing nothing about Asgard and the place where Thor comes from… isn’t he around magic all the time? His hammer seems very magical to me.”

“Yes… well… I…” How could she not hesitate? Because she didn’t know a thing. Nothing about Asgard, nothing about Thor, nothing about magic. Loki himself was magic. Something her mortal brain was never going to understand. Stark or Banner would maybe be able to grasp it. Her? Not a chance.

“He explained it once to me… it’s rather difficult, but he doesn’t possess any magic. It’s the hammer. His brother was a magic user and… being confronted with magic here on Earth makes Thor think a lot of him.”

Should have been obvious. Now came the important part. Loki couldn’t let his rage have the better of him. “His brother? Thor has a brother? Is he also around to protect Earth?” How delightful to feign interest in himself and to see Jane Foster squirming.

Tell me, little mortal, tell me what you think to know about me. You shall be surprised how little it is.

“No… uhm… He died recently.” She sounded like she was having trouble saying it. Loki didn’t care why, his death wasn’t going to play a minor role in this. Loki let his face fell and lowered his eyes. He didn’t like playing an embarrassed girl, but he did it unbelievably well. “Oh, I’m sorry. Was he sick?”

Jane Foster slowly shook his head. “No, he… That’s such a long and complicated story. Thor and him were on very bad terms, naturally since Loki tried to conquer the whole world and fought him on multiple…”

“Hold on! Wait a second!” Loki threw both of his hands up and indicated Jane Foster with every part of his body that she should shut her mouth. Genuine shock. A person that learned about
something important, decisive, something that changed everything that had been there before. She had to understand what great of a deal that was. It would make her feel even worse afterwards. “Are you… serious? Because you are implying now that Thor’s brother led the alien invasion of New York… Tell me I got some of that wrong.”

It was written on her face that she had no idea where Lori was going to go with this. Jane Foster probably only thought that her friend was shocked to find out that a person Thor was related to could be responsible for such a horrible thing. Use your brain, you fool. Why could nobody see the obvious? Not even the Avengers. Asking questions was the one thing that made you a thinking, independent individual and they hadn’t learned it yet.

Biting her lip Jane Foster shook her head once again. “Sadly you didn’t get that wrong. Thor’s brother initiated the whole thing. He led the army that tried to take over the city and Thor went after him to stop him.”

“Why?”


How couldn’t she see it? How could anyone not see it? Were they all completely free of natural curiosity?

“How was he trying to take over the world? Did he do that with other worlds too? What happened to him when the invasion was stopped? Why have I never heard about him? This is probably the most important thing in Earth’s history and still hardly anyone knows what really happened that day. Why? Because they could come back?” Loki’s voice sounded high-pitched, he was talking way too fast and Jane Fast seemed to become smaller and smaller. Even her face was starting to pale.

Do you begin to understand, little mortal? All the obvious questions you should have asked ages ago?

“I don’t… I don’t know. Thor and I never talked about why… His brother was full of spite and didn’t have any respect for our planet like Thor does.”

Lori raised her eyebrows, her mouth hanging slightly open for a pure loss of words. Being so naïve was a sin. “That’s… that’s all?”

No reply and Loki was tempted to let the place burn up in flames. “Fine, he hated humans. Why? Is this general Asgardian sentiment? Is Thor the exception or is it the other way around? What did his brother want to do with Earth? Ruling it? Destroying it? Nobody could even invade a country all on their own, so did he have accomplices? Are they going to come back to finish what he started?”

“No, we’re perfectly save…”

“But you know that? I am very confused right now, I’m sorry! Thor’s brother… Why does nobody know about this? People have been asking for two years what happened… nobody said a thing. Not the American government, not the Avengers. People are still scared, because nobody understands what… you know who was responsible for this. Who led the attack and… you didn’t ask Thor further about it?”

Disbelief and the slightest hint of anger. It was time that Jane Foster realised her mistake.

“I… didn’t think… You’ve met Thor. He isn’t from this world, he’s a god. His presence is
overwhelming. He said his brother turned away from the good path and then he died. Since then Thor hasn’t wanted to talk about him anymore. I didn’t want to ask.”

Rubbing one hand over his forehead Loki shook his head. He didn’t even have to feign his frustration. “Jane, I don’t want to offend you, but… Damn, you’re a smart woman! I don’t understand why you aren’t questioning all of this. Okay, they were brothers. Did they grow up together? Why does one of them like humanity and the other one wants to enslave them? How is that even possible?”

“Why are you being so…”

“Why?! Because thousands of people died. Because somebody decided to conquer this world by force and somebody else decided that people shouldn’t know about it. You tell me that you know who is responsible for this and at the same time… you didn’t bother to ask for the reasons. I don’t get it, Jane. Everybody on this Earth has the right to know, but you seem to be the only person who could… you choose not to? I don’t get that. How can you not be dying to know what was going on?”

A little outburst, but still retained enough to not make other people look at them. They weren’t important, this wasn’t a show. Just a thinking human being that was incredibly upset and felt betrayed. It was a crime to not use gifts or opportunities that were given to you. Looking at her didn’t make it better. That clueless expression on her face, the way she stared at him and still didn’t know what was happening. Loki’s plan was taking way too long, he had to kill her already.

“Thor doesn’t like talking about his brother… and about what happened. It’s painful.”

Oh, it was painful? It was Loki’s story! His life and he didn’t mind talking about it. Or using it to his advantage. Yes, he had been greedy, full of rage, obsessed and he had made a lot of mistakes. Yet that wasn’t everything. A lot of things that happened before Loki fell from the Bifrost and most of it was Thor’s fault. Of course he wouldn’t take about it.

“I’m sorry. I got carried away. I just want to understand… If they’re brothers… and Thor’s brother went insane or was a criminal with different views… why was only Thor fighting him? Why conquering a planet anyway? Is this…” Loki hesitated, letting it sound like he wasn’t sure about saying this himself. “Is this a regular thing for Asgardians? Do they… conquer worlds?”

“Of course they don’t!” Jane Foster snapped, her eyes twinkled belligerently and Loki had her. A feeble mind like hers only got angry when trying to defend itself and when it knew that it was fighting a losing battle. Lori sighed and shook her head. How was she supposed to talk to another person who didn’t even realise the foolishness of her actions? Knowing absolutely nothing about Thor’s culture… He was constantly wearing an armour, carrying a weapon, his best friends were called the Warriors 3. Who could guess that their culture might resolve around war?

“I seriously don’t know what to think about all of that… People deserve to know what happened, to cope, understand and to maybe… prepare for what might still be coming. Somebody owes us answers. Till today I thought that the government was covering this whole thing up, but… perhaps it’s Thor who should explain some things. Sorry, nothing against you, Jane, but… I don’t know how to take all that. I gotta go…” Grabbing his purse Loki got up and Jane Foster once again looked utterly helpless. She couldn’t even voice a single word. Didn’t better anyway, because Loki wasn’t the one she should be talking to.

Go to Thor, little mortal. Ask him some of your questions. Try to understand what it’s like to be with someone from another world.
Rogers called and apologized. Again. Asked him if he was okay. Again. Somewhat annoying, but his guilty conscience made Loki feel good nonetheless. The Captain was incredibly invested in William. What if really something happened to him? Something bad and the Captain wasn’t able to save him. Would that break Rogers? Definitely worth a thought. What if one of his friends happened to do something to William, something worse than Stark had done? Maybe even killing him. The Hawk? The Beast?

Well, this was kinda cheating since Loki was pondering about doing the same thing with Jane Foster. On the other hand it would be so extremely satisfying to do the deed himself. In the end it had to be the way that hurt Thor the most, so Loki had to lie in wait.

After reassuring the Captain that he was doing fine and only needed more sleep Loki remembered that he had another duty to fulfil. The attack was all over the news, Elizabeth must have heard of it, time to call Banner.

But Loki didn’t want to. He wanted a day off. Away from the Avengers. Well, he had some work to do before he could relax. So Loki called Bruce Banner and slipped into Elizabeth’s skin. “Looks like it wasn’t the best idea to come back to New York… How are you doing?” Why saying ‘hello’ if you could instantly skip to the important stuff?

Banner didn’t seem to mind. “Hey, I’m fine… but I would like it very much if this kind of stuff stopped happening.”

Loki shared that feeling, it only slowed him down. “People got hurt?” Unnecessary questions, because the press didn’t know yet what exactly had happened, so Elizabeth couldn’t know. So tiring. Why couldn’t they talk about physics? Being sympathetic was so dull.

“Yes and worse… Still no idea who did it or why. It’s horrible. I’m sorry, but I don’t really want to talk about it. How are you doing? You’re back in New York?”

The poor man wanted nothing else but a normal life. Or to be more precise, he wanted to get rid of the whole Avenger aspect. Being the Hulk. Oh, Loki knew what to say about that. Not on the phone though.

“Yes, just came back yesterday, no time to relax, always working. I was wondering if you might want to grab lunch tomorrow. Usually I only have time to grab a sandwich and I like to go for a walk since I’m always working in closed rooms. Would you like to join me tomorrow? To do some catching up?”

“That sounds great, but… I’m pretty much buried in work…”

Why don’t you just say that they won’t let you go until they figured out who attacked them? Too bad that they are too stupid to ever get behind all of this. “Well, it doesn’t have to be tomorrow. Just give me a call and we’ll figure something out.”

It took some convincing, but Banner finally agreed to meet up with Elizabeth at the end of the week. Good, they would have a nice conversation. About what it meant to be an Avenger and only be recognized for the one thing you despised most about yourself.

That finally done Loki put the phone down and spread out on the couch. He definitely deserved some time off now. Tonight he was going to meet up with Stark but until then Loki decided he was on holiday. Last night had been strenuous and it all led up to something that happened very rarely.
Loki wasn’t in the mood to read. Television was a useful invention, so Loki could search some documentary. After all he wouldn’t waste his time by doing nothing or watching some stupid fictional series. Instead he ended up watching a programme about the Congress of Vienna. An interesting conference that decided about Europe’s destiny after the defeat of Napoleon. They mentioned an interested detail about being a ball held every day to keep the politician’s entertained. The footage showed actors recreating such scenes, dancing in beautiful halls. Actually they moved so elegantly and gracefully that Loki kind of forgot about the historical facts that were being told. Loki had seen people dancing waltz before, but he this time he paid actual attention. He had to leave it to Midgardians to come up with some… pleasant things. Dancing like this looked like Loki would be enjoying doing it. His foot was already moving to the rhythm of the music. Checking it watch Loki did the math.

It was a few minutes past midday which meant in Vienna it was a few minutes after six o’clock in the evening. Good chances he might still find an open dance school.

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The dancing teacher called Loki insane for just showing up and wanting a private lesson of Viennese Waltz. Not asking, demanding. All that while explaining that other students would only slow him down and he had no intention to participle in a regular class. He also said something about having never danced before, but he would still turn out to be the best student the teacher had ever had.

Although the teacher threatened to walk out on him twice, he was somehow intrigued by Loki’s cockiness. Just to prove him wrong or to show Loki that dancing was more difficult than he thought he danced with him without explaining the steps. Well, Loki had seen them on television, so he logically had remembered them.

Maybe the fact that Loki had chosen the body of an extraordinarily pretty woman also helped a little bit, but he spent the next two hours with an amazed teacher. Loki understood him all too well. It must be so frustrating to work all day with couples who have no real talent and just want to learn the basic steps for their wedding dance. No rhythm, no elegance, no grace.

Loki was the perfect student, eager to learn, quick to understand and he was enjoying every second of it. Reverse turn. Natural turn. Turn with inside twirl. Right foot back change. Reverse fleckerl. Natural fleckerl. Pretty much every figure there was to learn and it was such a splendid opportunity to relax and to clear his head. Fortunately his partner was also talented enough to make it a pleasant experience. It was also finally paying off having tortured himself by wearing high heels. Loki’s moves were swiftly, full of grace and he even liked the sight of his skirt fluttering because of his movements.

After these two hours Loki had to admit that he was actually starting to feel dizzy and his teacher also realised that he was dancing with a person that wasn’t a real student. Then again, Loki paid him and gave the young man a made up phone number. Most probably he thought that Loki was a professional dancer who had decided to have some fun.

Eight o’clock in Vienna. Early afternoon in New York. Enough time to go to Argentina and to learn how to tango.

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His short holiday ended with Loki having mastered waltz, tango, cha-cha-cha and bachata. There was enough time left to teleport into Thomas’ apartment and to take a nice, long shower. Having done that Loki sat down on his couch and read the newspaper.
The art of dancing turned out to be one of Midgard’s rare virtues. Then again the human race was still agonizingly stupid as the story about Stark having been seen with three different women since his break-up with Pepper Potts was considered to be worth a whole page. Embarrassing. Both for the newspaper and Stark.

Who turned out to be actually punctual.

What a surprise.

He didn’t come up the stairs, his driver rang the bell and Loki came down to see a limousine waiting in front of the building. Show-off.

“Hey there, Tommy. I decided to not drive myself so we can get totally hammered. I checked out the menu of the restaurant, they have some really fine port wine. Good thing you’re so into Portuguese.”

“Wow, you just opened your mouth and I’m already thinking about getting out of this vehicle.”

“Ahh, don’t be like that. I know you’ve waited all day to see me. I’m awesome and you know it.” A big grin was plastered on Stark’s face and Loki felt an overwhelming need to make him feel miserable. “I read in the newspaper that a lot of people think you’re awesome. You could have spared me your big emotional break-up speech and just said that you wanted to shag various, cheap looking, anorexic, models.”

Stark’s face fell and for a second he indeed lowered his eyes. Too embarrassed to look at Thomas? Out of the question. Perhaps he was nonetheless still upset over ending his relationship although it was his very own decision. Loki could even understand the reason. Well, he had instantly succeeded in ruining Stark’s good mood, so Loki’s was getting better and better.
Hello everybody,

I know it's a quick update, but I'm going on holiday, so I won't be able to give another chapter before in over a week. I hope you'll enjoy this one :)

“I am not. I know it could me an awful lot of time to respond to that question and we talked about three different things in the meantime, but it's important you know that - I am not.”

Another thing that didn’t happen often was that Loki felt confused. Right now he was. Stark’s fault of course. Loki was busy enjoying his amazing dish of Portuguese food. It wasn’t as good as the fish he had eaten in Porto, but he still loved the taste of it. Until now Stark had been unsettling quiet, but Loki had gotten used to it. So why was he now almost shouting in his ear.

“What?”

Stark’s eyes looked oddly bright and vivid. Not due to alcohol since he had barely touched his wine. Fine, so he was enraged. Interesting. “I am not fucking around and I'm definitely not fucking anorexic models. Anorexic isn’t sexy. Bones pricking you while having sex? Not sexy! Okay, forget that, not the point I was trying to get across. I didn’t break up with Pepper so I could screw around. I told you why I did that and I didn’t think you were the guy to believe everything that’s written in the newspaper.”

“I don’t. There were pictures, they talked for themselves. I don’t care about it whatsoever and you are an adult, you can do whatever you want. Whatever you're into.” Loki shrugged and turned his attention back to the dish in front of him, because it was perfectly delicious.

“It’s a curse being so good looking, I can’t take a single step without having my picture all over the news…”

“Stark, eat. Your food is getting cold. If you really want to keep talking about your face in the newspapers, fine. They were hinting at you rather getting drunk than working on how to stop the attacks on New York.”

“Bullshit!”

Good work, Stark, people are already turning their heads to watch us. “No need to tell me about it. I saw your little robot toy. Anyway I thought you weren’t giving a shit about what other people were saying about you.”

“I don’t. I give a shit about what you’re saying about me. Because you’re not dumb like most people. Also the arm is not a toy! I already figured it out. Pretty much. S.H.I.E.L.D and all their fucking equipment won’t be able to find a trace of magic on them and they have dozens of robot arms.” Stark nodded like he was agreeing with his own words and Loki raised an eyebrow. “I’m not dumb like most people?”

“Come on, don’t pretend that you don’t know that.” Now he even rolled his eyes, but at least a
smile was now tugging his lips. Loki noted that he still hadn’t touched his food. “You’re not buying every shit that you’re told and you’re not impressed by someone’s reputation until you have actually seen him do something. That is pretty damn smart. I have the displeasure of having to work with S.H.I.E.L.D. They aren’t worth shit, but everybody does what they say, because they are seemingly so important… I could take the whole place down within five minutes.”

Loki couldn’t help but laugh. Probably not the reaction most persons would have had, but judging by Stark’s face he was enormously pleased. “You mean Jarvis could take the whole place down within five minutes.”

“Well, fine, but Jarvis works for me, because I’m his daddy, so technically it will be me. I could do it.”

“You sound like an evil supervillian who wants to take over the world.”

“Lots of Monday mornings I’m really tempted to do so. I hate Mondays.”

Smiling Loki shrugged. He couldn’t tell the difference between the days of the week, for him they were all pretty much the same. “So what are you going to do about the robots? If… S.H.I.E.L.D is really that fucked without you.”

“Hey, you’re not doubting me, are you?”

“Constantly.”

“And I’m constantly working on the robot thing. Right now, actually.”

“You mean Jarvis is constantly working on it.”

“Same thing.” Stark took a sip from his glass of wine and then studied the glass closely. “As soon as I know what’s going on, I’ll take care of it myself. Since nobody else seems to be able to get it done. I’ve privatized world peace before, I’ll just do it again.

Amused Loki leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Right… you love it to get in conflict with pretty much everybody. You could achieve all your goals very easily, but instead you choose the hard way. You can’t just get the job done, you need the thrill…”

Now the whole atmosphere had changed, Stark’s usual cocky and joyful demeanour had returned. His playful grin was obviously supposed to challenge Loki. “Because it’s fun. Otherwise it would be stupid. Who am I telling that? You are exactly the same.”

Feigning innocence Loki shook his head. Matching Stark’s grin Loki picked up a piece of bread and took a very slow bite before he answered. “Me? No. I’m totally boring.”

“Right and I’ve never had a drink before.”

“I’ve always been a quiet kid. I still am. I’m perfectly happy to sit in my corner as long as I have a good book to read. I don’t need to make anybody feel miserable.” Loki watched Stark’s face carefully how he considered his words and how he decided to react to them. Stark was definitely thinking before answering. Something he didn’t do that often. “I don’t buy that. Not a second. I bet you were a troublemaker, just smart and subtle enough so most people didn’t realise it was you. Secretly you were laughing your ass off.”

Wasn’t too far from the truth and Loki couldn’t help but smirk. “That’s not all. I also made people believe that it had been somebody else.”
“I knew it. You framed you siblings, didn’t you?”

One single word was enough to suck all the delightfulness out of this conversation and Loki’s mood instantly turned sour. He shouldn’t be bantering with Stark although it was surprisingly entertaining. He should be encouraging his plans of working against S.H.I.E.L.D. Until now he had just been wasting time. There was absolutely no need in swallow conversations, Stark trusted him unconditionally.

For the first time Loki couldn’t hide a hint of bitterness in his voice when he replied. “I don’t have any siblings.”

A slight frown appeared on Stark’s forehead and Loki had to realise in disgust that his disguise had slipped for the very first time. The tiniest little bit, but Loki didn’t accept anything else but perfection.

“Okay, you’re an only child. So did you blame the neighbour’s kid you didn’t like?” No reproach, rather amusement.

“I didn’t have to blame anyone, I did nothing else but read.” Loki had no interest in continuing this conversation and showed that by turning his attention back to his dish. What would he give to really be in Portugal now? He had made his first mistake, just another sign that he was getting tired. Half a day of learning how to dance didn’t make much of a difference.

Stark must have noticed his discomfort, because he was changing the subject. Good, at least he wasn’t trying to get into conflict with his own friend. “Have you already finished the Machiavelli I gave you?”

“I have… you were right, I liked it quite a lot. Normally I prefer real books, but the file was a nice…”

“Mr. Stark, I must ask you to come with us.”

Damned mortals! Puny little creatures who thought themselves the centre of the whole universe, while everybody else was just laughing at them or considered them children! If Loki could be here as himself, nobody would even dare approaching him. They would know their place! How much he loathed their rude and uneducated behaviour…

Stark seemed to share the sentiment, he looked ready to kill all three of the guys dressed in suits who had walked up to their table. Very decent and subtle entry. Every person in this room looked at them and tomorrow there would be new headlines about Tony Stark. S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t even know how pathetic they were. Maybe Loki would destroy them too when he was done with the Avengers. Or work them into the plan.

“You guys just made a big mistake. My friend here doesn’t like being interrupted.”

Again Loki was completely ignored in favour of Stark. The knife he had cut his fish with wasn’t very sharp, it would hurt more. Why not cutting out this fool’s tongue, so he would never use it again in such a disrespectful way?

“I’m sorry, Mr. Stark, but Director Fury was very clear in his orders. You have to come with us.”

Loki swallowed his anger. The god of lies would simply kill them, but Thomas would be concerned. A little bit. “What did you do to make them angry at you? Bloody hell…”

“Not sitting in a lab the whole fucking day. Look, my nanny always told me I wasn’t allowed to
leave the table before I hadn’t finished my dish. I’m still eating, can’t come with you, sorry.”

A nice reply, Loki rewarded it with a smirk.

“Mr. Stark…”

“Oh shut up! I didn’t react the fifteen times he called personally today. You think it’d be any different if he sent some little agent that I’ve never seen before. Get lost! I’m not even working for your stupid club.”

“Mr. Stark, I have to insist…”

“Good lord, this is bloody annoying. They won’t stop bothering us and they’re spoiling my dinner. You don’t want me near you when something like that happens. As long as you’re here, they won’t leave us alone and I want to enjoy this delicious fish. So I say you leave.”

Confronted with Loki’s serious expression Stark came up with nothing else but letting his mouth drop open. For five entire seconds he stared at Loki, just staring. “You’re throwing me out. You want me to leave the dinner I invited you to, so you can eat in peace?”

“Well, yes.” Loki shrugged. “Why should both of us suffer?”

“You are by far the most… awesome person I’ve ever met. Never change. I’ll even go, but you at least gotta insult this clown here. Otherwise I’d be horribly disappointed.” Expectantly Stark crossed his arms in front of his chest and Loki shrugged. Why not? The S.H.I.E.L.D agent definitely deserved it. “I’d think that would be rather cruel. These poor men were sent to babysit a man who is more successful than they will ever be in their lives and who will most likely find a way to make their lives a living hell for the next weeks, because they interrupted his dinner.”

All anger was forgotten, Stark was beaming. “That sounds like a pretty good idea. You guys had ever someone messing with your social security number? Well, you’re soon going to know what it’s like.”

Loki laughed heartily while the agents were turning pale. Stark actually got up from his chair and Loki decided spontaneously to make a step towards him. “Call me when you’re done with… whatever this is and make sure they stop following you around. It’s annoying.”

“Believe me, that was the last time. I’m not going to put up with Fury’s shit any longer.”

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Loki enjoyed the rest of his dinner alone and thought how funny this whole thing actually was. He didn’t even have to do much, Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D were already doing a good job on driving the Avengers away. They were trying to control Stark. Stupid and even more pointless. A smart man who valued his freedom and wouldn’t let himself be used.

Pretty much the same applied to Barton. They wanted him to function, but didn’t take a closer look at how damaged he was. Fury didn’t care about, he wanted them to do the little dance he had thought out for them.

Sitting on his balcony Loki had a glass of wine and read German poetry. Night had already fallen and if Stark didn’t call soon there would be no time left to go to London. Till then Loki had time to work on his German.

When Stark finally called Loki waited almost ten seconds before answering. “So? I hope you told
them to go fuck themselves.”

A delighted laugh resounded. “Oh, you wouldn’t believe… they brought me back to my own
tower, can you believe it? Why? Because Fury thinks I should be working. He was still hanging out
here and wanted to scowl me as if I was some employee. Pretty much all the money they got is
from me and he thinks he can order me around…”

“If there are people in your tower and you don’t want them there, why don’t you throw them out?”

“Oh, I did! You should have seen Fury’s face, it was priceless! I told him to get the fuck out and
had Jarvis making sure that he won’t get in again unless he sings Lady Marmelade. His head
almost exploded and Steve looked like he wanted to yell at him, but as usual he didn’t have the
guts to. So, the tower is no 100 percent free of S.H.I.E.L.D and you can come over anytime you
like to see it yourself.”

“Maybe I’ll do that.”

“Did you at least have fun after I was gone? Since I’ve paid for I everything I hope that you got
yourself a few bottles of wine.”

Grinning to himself Loki shook his head about Stark. “I’m sorry I have to disappoint you. I
finished my dish, then I went home.”

“A pity. You come over, I’ll get the wine and we drink to the fact that I’ve made a thousand new
enemies. We’ll get shit faced and prank call Steve. It’ll be perfect.”

“You’re nothing but a child, Stark.”

“That’s the secret of my charm, Tommy.”

“My name is Thomas. I’m going to hang up now, don’t call again until you have remembered my
name. It’s incredibly annoying.”

Stark continued to babble, but Loki did as he told him and hang up. Good, Stark was showing
S.H.I.E.L.D the cold shoulder. He was eccentric, so this wouldn’t cause a major break up, but it
was a step in the right direction.

Closing his book and putting the phone away Loki closed his eyes. Invisibility came over him like
a cloak and then his magic was already pulling him away.

Thor’s and Jane Foster’s apartment was dark, of course. Again Loki’s feet almost hovered over the
floor when he slipped in the bedroom, not making a single sound. His so called brother had always
been a fool, thought himself secure when he thought he was at home. Thor had always convinced
of Asgard’s power and strength, being in his own room he had never bothered about anything.
What harm could come to him there?

Loki couldn’t have been more different. Not that he had been a paranoid child, but Loki’s nature
was… cautious. When he entered a room, he looked around to make sure he was alone. If he did
something that nobody should see, Loki would check every corner. Even back in Asgard Loki had
never fully trusted the security of its walls. Loki himself could become one with the shadows He
knew that no place was completely safe from intruders. Therefore Loki had always used magic to
shield himself or his rooms. A person, especially a prince, could never be too careful.

Thor would never learn that.
There he was, lying in his bed, dead to the world. His presence was the proof that Lori’s outrage had gotten to Jane Foster. Otherwise Thor wouldn’t be here. They probably had had a conversation and it hadn’t ended too badly because they still slept in the same bed. Loki hadn’t expected any different. A seed was planted and it took some time until it could actually poison real affection. It would though.

Their bodies didn’t touch. Well, there were few things that Loki didn’t know about Thor. If he liked to cuddle or not was one of them. Loki would die happily without ever gaining that information. Thor faced the window and Loki sucked in a deep breath, shortly closing his eyes. Magic wasn’t controlling him. He himself was magic. His emotions and his magic were one, so if he didn’t allow himself to lash out, it wouldn’t. No dagger in his hand this time. Everything worked according to plan and Thor deserved to suffer, deserved to be punished for what he had done to Loki. The man he claimed his brother.

If Thor hadn’t cared about a certain loved one dying in his hands, Loki would have him experiencing the whole thing again. Maybe he would care more this time.

Sitting down in Indian style next to the bed Loki cocked his head and watched Thor’s face. Little lines on his forehead and around his eyes. Stress. Not enough to rob his sleep. Time to take care of that.

Closing his eyes Loki thought of the void. How the cold had wrapped itself around his body and cut off his throat. How it made it impossible to breathe. Breathing through his nose Loki remembered the feeling and held on to it. He transformed his voice, so it barely resembled his own, he was being chocked. “Thor… why won’t you come for me?... I’m falling… it’s so cold… and I can’t breathe…”

Thor grimaced in his sleep and Loki put his hand around his own throat. “I’ve been screaming for so long… why don’t you hear me?”

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“I need to get laid or to beat somebody up.”

“Thanks for letting me know, but I can’t help you with either of it.”

Barton just snort and Loki sat down. Today there obviously would be no ‘hello’, but Loki didn’t mind. It was a meeting right after Loki’s taste. He already smelled it he entered the restaurant. Barton’s blood was boiling, he barely kept himself in check. A dog which was tearing on his chain. A bit too soon to let him go.

“You were supposed to say – Just drink a beer, that’ll make you feel better.”

Loki shrugged, but smiled lightly. “That’s a nice third possibility. First drink is on me. Tell me what happened and then we’ll decide if it was bad enough to beat somebody up.”

Sighing Barton nodded and impatiently tapped his fingers against the table. Restless. Still worked up over the recent events. It was so wonderful that all the Avengers were pretty much assisting him.

How long would they even continue to be a team without Loki’s interference?

As expected Barton didn’t voice a single word until the waitress had brought them their drinks. Once again Loki sipped on his beer and inwardly wished for wine. Open your mouth, Barton, make it worth it.
“I need to work alone… No, I have to become my own boss…”

“99 percent of the working population shares this sentiment. I’m working for idiots, pretty much everybody is. It’s quite reassuring that it’s not any different with you. What did they do? Cut your pay? It’s weird that you’re complaining about your teammates or your boss when it’s all over the news that you’re being attacked by robots… I don’t have to worry about a robot coming into this place, do I?”

“No idea, but I don’t think so… One should think that they’d be too busy with the robots thing, but they still make it to give me a hard time… It’s me who risks his ass everyday…”

Either Barton was so angry that he didn’t want to hold back anymore or he trusted Henry enough to not bother. Whatever was behind his reasoning, Loki was more than content. “Okay, I need more information here to get what’s going on. What happened?”

So Barton told him about the attack. A surprisingly accurate tale, he didn’t make up bits or tried to make himself look better. It was simple and monotone. Until the relevant part. “What it comes down to… somebody got hurt. I was in reaching distance, but I didn’t get to him because I was busy destroying one of the robots. I know, I probably took too long, but it was during the middle of the battle. Now everybody is giving me shit for not being focused…”

Loki frowned and narrowed his eyes, making himself look like he was thinking. “I still don’t understand. You were attacked... I’m not a soldier, but I think everyone knows that you can’t fully plan out a battle. Especially not if you don’t know that you’re going to be attacked… by an unknown number of enemies. You have to react. I don’t think you can be everywhere at once. The person who got hurt… was it bad?”

Barton pursed his lips and finally shook his head. “No, some cuts and burns. He’s fine and back home.”

“So what is the big fuss about? Okay, I wasn’t there, but this guy obviously didn’t die or got paralysed or some other shit. I’m sure you wouldn’t let anyone get hurt if you could do something about it. You are an Avenger and… there’s no way to put that nicely, but… you can’t make an omelette without breaking the eggs. The whole meaning of the attack was to kill people and it’s impossible to completely prevent these things from happening. People are always going to get hurt. All you can do is to try to keep the damage to a minimum. Why is it your fault anyway? Weren’t there a lot of other people around? If somebody got hurt because you didn’t do anything… that means that the others didn’t do anything either.”

There was no verbal reply, but Barton nodded slightly and Loki could see in his face that he couldn’t agree more. To hell with everybody else. Barton just needed someone to agree with him to chase away the little doubts.
Hey everybody,

I just got back from my holidays and since you've waited so long I think you deserve a very long chapter. Something important is going to happen. It has something to do with Tony and Loki... guess I don't need to say more :)

P.S. - Minor Spoilers for the First Season of Game of Thrones!

______________________________

Hey you, I'm making an offer that
No one could ever refuse
Don't play the adamant
Don't be so arrogant
Can't you see I'm falling for you?

Hey you ~~ Shakira ~~

______________________________

“Just wanted to know how you’re doing.”

Loki had stopped to feel annoyed, now he was immensely pleased. The Captain cared. He cared oh so much that he couldn’t stop worrying about Loki. Because of a stupid scratch. Affection. Nothing more valuable than this.

“I’m fine, Steve. No need to call me every 12 hours. I should be asking you how you are doing. Any progress? Do you know… now what happened there at the party?”

“We’re working on it… I wish we’d know already more than we do but… It will stop, I promise that.” Confidence even when he had no idea who he was up against, a real soldier.

Loki paused, letting Rogers wait a little bit for his answer. “I left so quickly… I didn’t even ask you how they are doing… They didn’t get hurt or anything?”

A nice reminder that the Cap hadn’t talked about them to him. “They are fine, thanks for asking.”

“And… how are things going with Stark?” His voice wasn’t wavering, but a slight hesitation was still audible.

“He’s fine. Fine…”

Not knowing what to say… Captain America at a loss of words. Loki smiled to himself propped his feet up on the couch. What was he going to do today? He hadn’t been in Arabia yet. “Yeah, fine…
and he’s being dragged out of a restaurant by two… secret agents.”

“What? How do you know about that?” No distrust, just surprise.

“It’s all over the news, Steve. There are a lot of different theories… that it has something to do
with the Avengers, the attack… maybe even that he built the robots and they turned on him and he
got arrested for it. The whole Terminator thing. Sorry, you haven’t seen that one yet. I know it’s
the news, so it’s most probably complete nonsense, but… I am worried.” His voice dropping a
little bit and it was perfect. Pinpricks. Little by little.

Rogers cleared his throat, clearly just wanting to buy himself time. “He definitely didn’t build these
things, that’s nonsense. He was needed to work on the identification of whoever created them, so a
few agents came to pick him up.”

Nice way to sugar coat it, Captain. “Pick up Tony Stark… You mean he didn’t bother to show up
and you guys knew no other way to get him to come.”

“I guess you have every right to be angry at him…”

Damn it, Rogers, just admit to it.

“I’m not angry. He saved my life, but I’m worried about you. I’m sure he’s a good, strong man, but
he… I thought he was reckless… and I don’t feel entirely at ease since you’re already doing an
incredibly dangerous job. I would like you to do it with other people you can rely on. When I read
this article I didn’t feel very good about it. As long as you tell me it’s okay, I’ll believe you.”

Hesitation, of course. “Tony is a good man.”

Repetition. So he could believe it himself.

“He’s different, not a soldier and very stubborn. But he’s a valuable team member, I trust him, so
you don’t have to worry. His methods may be unorthodox, but that also allows me to get a new
perspective.”

“I see, that’s good. Maybe I just didn’t like the way he acted at the party. He was disrespectful and
mean. And drunk.”

“That’s why you shouldn’t take everything he said seriously.”

Stop telling yourself lies.

“I’ll keep that in mind. Any chance you’re coming back to D.C soon?”

“Not as long as there could be an attack on New York any second. Don’t worry, I’ll be watching
out for myself.” Again Rogers tried to appease William, to make all of his worries go away,
although that wasn’t possible. Loki was still grateful, today he wouldn’t push him any further.
Thomas should do the rest. “Good, take care of yourself. I’ll call you to make sure and stop
worrying about me. I’m fine. Just let me know how you’re doing.”

After the end of the conversation Loki decided that it was time to do some travelling. He had spent
so much time with the Avengers lately that he had almost stopped learning about Midgard. There
were still so many things left to discover. Today he’d go to Asia. Their costumes were so entirely
different from the West and Loki was curious, he wanted to learn about it. All he needed to do now
was to make a choice. China, India, Vietnam, Korea, Laos… so many different…
There was a knock on the door and Loki flinched.

Who would come here? It was Thomas’ apartment. Of course, it could be a random person, trying to sell something but Loki doubted it. If there was one thing he didn’t believe in it would be coincidence. Slipping into Thomas’ skin Loki walked towards the door and opened it. Magic pooling in his fingertips.

A most common man was standing in front of him, wearing some kind of uniform, a small package in his arm. No harm was going to be caused by him, but Loki was still wondering what this was all about.

“Mr. Thomas Pine?”

“Yes?”

“Here’s a delivery for you.”

That was all, Loki was handed the package and the man disappeared again. Not even a signature? It could only be from Stark. Nobody else really knew Thomas Pine. Closing the door behind him Loki opened the package and found a book inside. Not just any book. Letting his fingers softly run over the cover Loki could feel how it was talking to him. Years and years, different hands which had touched it, places where it had been. It was old. Of course not as old as Loki, but it reminded him of Asgardian books. Everything on Midgard was so young. Most old buildings and mounoments had been replaced by newer things. Few places were even older than Loki himself and they started to fall apart. Old words were printed on new paper or they were even read on those damned pads. Now Loki realised that he had been missing this feeling of something antique. Something true and original.

Turning the book in his hands Loki breathed in his scent. Half a thousand years. Looking at it with admiration Loki read the title. *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha.*

Yes, Loki had heard of it before, a novel written in the 15th century. The book in his hands must be an original edition. Judging by Loki’s knowledge this book must have cost a fortune. With careful fingers he opened it. His own, not Thomas’. There was a letter slipped between the first two pages. Two simple lines of handwriting.

*Since you’re such a snob and think that Kindle is a harbinger of the apocalypse I thought you’d rather enjoy reading something like this. Have a fun nice little read, Tommy*

“His name is Thomas…” Loki mumbled to himself while he was putting the letter away. Sitting down on the couch Loki started to read the first paragraphs. Spanish, beautiful lines and words, elegance and eloquence and a soft, yet sharp humour to it. Loki wouldn’t go to Asia today.

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“Is it just me or are you constantly looking over your shoulder?” Loki smiled heartily while asking this question and found himself amused when Banner had the decency to blush. Amusing and a welcomed difference to Barton’s coldness and Stark’s cockiness.

“No, sorry. It’s just… lately everything seems to be a bit off. I’ve been spending day and night in the laboratory for the last week. I kinda expect everything to go down when I’m not there.”

“If you’re too busy to…”

“No, absolutely not.” Banner quickly shook his head, trying to not offend his friend and also
showing that he wanted to get out of there. “You are right, it’s necessary to take a break sometimes. Also I really need to get something to eat.”

Loki smiled again and noticed that he did that quite a lot as Elizabeth. It wasn’t even hard. Before getting here Loki had thought that he would be tense or even scared. Memories of his humiliation always came back to his consciousness when he saw this man face to face. Although he wasn’t the Beast. Not really. Loki found it surprisingly easy to separate them.

So here they were, casually walking down the street. Banner seemed to be more nervous about this whole thing than Loki. Phone conversations were always easier than talking to someone face to face. “What are you working on? Something I’d be interested in?”

Banner shook his head and Loki thought to hear him sigh. “No, I don’t think so. It’s all about the robots and their… magic powers. Trying to analyse it… figuring out how it works.”

It was amazing how quickly Loki grew tired of this story. A minor event, so unimportant, but it kept them busy. They were mortals, they didn’t possess the abilities to figure out magic. It simply was not possible. Even most Asgardians lacked the power to create or master magic. Loki wouldn’t need more than a single minute with a part of one robot and he would know everything. Therefore it wasn’t the least bit entertaining to see the mortals struggle with it. What a waste of time.

Hiding his disgust Loki raised both of his perfectly plucked eyebrows. “You are a physicist. What does your work have to do with magic? If there really is such a thing as magic…”

Banner looked at him in bewilderment. “You don’t believe in magic? After all the things that have happened lately? Like aliens invading this planet?”

“Life on another planet has nothing to with magic. I’m surprised to hear you use such a word. As a scientist.”

A soft laugh was Banner’s response. Obviously such distrust seemed only natural to him. “I see your point. That example was a badly chosen. We live in a world where a lot of things are possible like Tony Stark’s armour or my own misfortune. It may not be called magic, but a few hundred years ago people wouldn’t have been able to imagine these kind of things. They would have been considered magic.”

This was now rather interesting. “You believe that… it’s not really magic but some kind of advanced technology. So advanced that we would call it magic, because we lack to understand it?”

A slight nod and a soft smile as if he was merely making a proposition. “Why not? From what I’ve seen until now magic has always been tied to some object. I can’t say I’m an expert, but you and I know fairy tales, legends and stories. Of course there are enchanted objects, but shouldn’t there also be people who have magical powers? Who are actually able to enchant objects? Mages, wizards, witches… whatever one would like to call them. I’ve never seen anything like that. So I have no reason to believe in magic. What I can understand is that there are objects that seem to have a lot of power and we fail to understand how they work. So I settle for advanced technology. Magic is just the word we use to describe it.”

Loki seemed to be pulled into two different directions at once. Inside of him his magic was raging and feeling insulted. Calling out to him, urging him to make its presence known. Real magic inside of him, a part of him like his arms, fingers, eyes or ears. Loki himself was magic and Banner had just denied his existence.

Yet Loki’s mind rested incredibly calm. Banner was trying to understand what was beyond his
imagination. Something he couldn’t grasp. He was using the knowledge he already had to comprehend. A man wanting to learn, to understand and he wasn’t judgmental. Loki had had worse experiences.

“I see… Still doesn’t sound exactly like your domain. You’re working in Tony Stark’s laboratory. Isn’t he the expert on… machinery? No matter how advanced it might be? I’m just asking.”

“Oh, you’re right. Tony is also working on it and hundreds of other people probably too. So we quickly find out who is responsible for all this… I’m sorry, it would be nice to not be thinking about that for a moment.”

Quickly Loki nodded. “Right, sorry. Look, this place just over there sells great sandwiches. You’d like that?”

“Sure.”

So they did that and sat down at a table outside to eat. Loki observed him cautiously and it was so obvious that Banner felt uneasy. Not because of Loki, no. “Is everything alright? You seem to be… I don’t know… like you don’t feel very good about being outside.”

Again, a light blush appeared on Banner’s face and Loki was still amused by it. “That obvious? Sorry, I’m clearly not the best company…”

“I never said that. I just want to know if there is something that’s upsetting you.”

If he didn’t feel comfortable enough to talk about it, Loki would lose time and his amusement would be all gone. “Don’t worry, this has nothing to do with you. I… just don’t get out as much because… Well, I guess it’s quite obvious… I’m not really fit for the company of others…”

Why did Loki feel angry about this? It was the truth after all. He was a danger, uncontrollable, a ticking bomb. Loki had felt the invincible force himself, something he had absolutely underestimated. Banner was scared of it himself, of what he might do to other people.

Loathing his very own power, because he knew of what he was capable. Nobody should feel this way. Instead he should be proud, he should be using it to his advantage. Fear was such a useful tool. Good enough to rule the world with it. Banner was too good to see it. Or too weak. He recognized and feared his own power. Loki could appreciate that, he admired intelligence and self-awareness. Yet he loathed the Beast. Maybe Banner and him had that in common.

“What? I think you’re perfectly normal and you’re doing great.”

Banner’s smile didn’t reach his eyes and Loki could clearly see that he was tortured. He was longing for something that he couldn’t have, but was always in plain sight. Loki could relate to that. “Lizzy, I know you’re trying to be nice, but you are smarter than that. Everybody knows what… the other guy is capable of. There is always somebody looking over their shoulder when I am concerned. Rightly so. The other guy is dangerous and impossible to get rid of.”

Those were the magic words.

Loki shifted in his chair, brushed a strand of blonde hair behind his ear and lowered is eyes. Only for a second, then he looked back up with new found confidence and determined to be honest. “I know you think you’re dangerous, but the world, this city is filled with dangerous, despicable people. Just because you don’t see it at the very first glance doesn’t mean it isn’t there. Statistically it’s impossible that on our way here we didn’t see some criminal or…”
“Yeah, but whoever we might have seen is not capable of destroying half a city in under a minute.”

Smiling softly Loki shrugged. “Well, maybe we did see someone working for the government… they could destroy a few cities in less than half a minute.”

For a second it looked like Banner was going to smile, but then he didn’t quite make it. “It’s really nice what you’re trying to do, but we both know that it’s something different.”

“I know… Still you’re here. I know you wouldn’t go out to have dinner with me if you didn’t know it was alright. ”

“It’s a low risk, but still a risk.”

Now was the right moment to take out the real guns. Loki did his best to look unsure and a little bit uncomfortable, but some questions just had to be asked. “Do you… How do I put this? The Hulk helped saving this planet, he had a big part in it. He also helped to fight off the robot attack. The other guy is capable of doing something good. I know it’s a big sacrifice you have to make, but… some good can come from him.”

For a moment there was nothing but silence and Loki felt tensed. He should have phrased that differently. Now he had failed to make his point and wasn’t going to…

“That’s what I’m trying to do, but… I don’t think it can erase what has already happened… or… there is still a risk. Just the existence of the Hulk is a risk and most probably I shouldn’t even be here… on an open street.”

Perfect, Banner saved this conversation for him. Now all he needed was a little push. Sad eyes, compassion, biting his lip a little bit and bowing his head, so his hair covered parts of his face again. “I’m sorry, I was being… I tried to make something sound good that can never be considered good… for you I mean. Even if I think you’re doing quite fine… I get that you can never really feel at ease. I should have considered that before proposing this… Do you…?” Pausing Loki licked his lips, searching Banner’s eyes which were watching him carefully. “Do you… think that you might ever find a… way to undo this?”

An awkward wording, but Elizabeth would be at loss, so it was fitting. The words hit home anyway. A shadow was creeping over Banner’s face and Loki knew that it would linger there. Behind his eyes Loki could see pain and longing. Where Barton was hiding darkness, Banner was hiding hurt and scars. He had to cover these, so nobody would see that he was constantly at the edge of breaking down. “I don’t know. I tried. For a long time I didn’t do anything else than working on finding something that would make the other guy disappear. Didn’t work out. At all. So I stopped for some time, kind of accepting that there would never be a way to get rid of him. Now after all I’ve seen… and since we’ve been talking about magic… I do think it’s possible or at least I hope so. Unfortunately there is always something else to do… like aliens trying to conquer the world or flying robots attacking the city… also… the Hulk is doing some good. When it comes down to it and he is the only force left in an important battle… do I even have the right to take him out?”

He was actually asking the question and Loki wanted to sing that song of the Rolling Stones again. It was so simple, with all of them. They were all unhappy people and everybody looked away from the other’s misery. Did anybody realise how much this man was suffering? So you turned the monster into a hero – everything has to be fine now. What did they know about having something inside of you, something dark that you didn’t even dare to seek out. No way to control it. Puny mortals…
“Who but you would ever the right to decide about taking him out? That’s your life. It’s your decision what you do with it. Nobody has a say in this but you. If you want to get rid of the Hulk, then do it.”

And when you’re done, you’ll find out how much damage a puny god’s hands can do to your throat…

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“Mr. Pine, it’s a pleasure to see you.”

Again Loki looked up at the ceiling of the elevator like he always did when talking to Jarvis. He was in such a good mood, he didn’t even feel stupid because of it. “Hello Jarvis. I thought I’d drop by.”

The mechanic voice sounded playful to Loki’s ears. Was he imaging that, because he liked Jarvis? No, this machine had a real personality that made it so interesting. “I wasn’t informed about your visit, so I assume that Mr. Stark also doesn’t know about it?”

Loki shook his head. “No, he doesn’t. I hope this isn’t a problem?”

“Of course not. Mr. Stark is always happy to see you and I just informed him of your visit.”

God, Loki really had to figure out a way how to keep Jarvis after getting rid of Stark. Seemed impossible right now since Loki would never gain that amount of knowledge about Midgardian technology, but he could make up for that with determination.

Loki’s great mood was being endangered when he felt that something was off. “Jarvis? Is there any chance that this elevator is moving slower than usual?”

“No, sir, you are exactly right, but Mr. Stark told me I shouldn’t tell you why and he wants you to stop being such attentive bastard. I apologize for his poor choice of words.”

He would definitely be more attentive, but Loki couldn’t help but smile. Stark was doing his best to keep him entertained.

“I will ask him about it, thank you, Jarvis.”

Why would he slow the elevator down? Loki was naturally sceptical, but he had learned that there wasn’t really a reason to everything Stark did. He was a crazy man after all. Even the slow elevator reached the penthouse ultimately and the doors opened. Once again the penthouse was empty and Loki felt his good mood slipping away. Crazy man or not, nobody let Loki wait.

“Well, hello there. God save the Queen, how are you doing? I know you are old fashioned and you think that every device with a screen might steal your soul, but you could have called before showing up here. I didn’t have time to roll out the red carpet.”

Stark stumbled more or less into the room, looking strangely dishevelled and babbled more nonsense than usual. Loki walked in on something.

His heart rate sped up as excitement came over him. Had he been again working on something? Behind the back of the Avengers? That would be perfect. “Am I interrupting something?”

Stark quickly shook his head, shrugged at the same time and put such an innocent look on his face that it was obvious he was trying to hide something. “Nope, but I’m sick of this penthouse. The
curtains are making me sick… there are no curtains. Whatever, you see, I’m already losing my mind, because these walls are closing in on me. We should go out, instantly. Portuguese food! We’ll go out and have some of it! Off we go!”

In quite a hast Stark stalked over to Loki and actually tried to push him back into the elevator. “What are…”

“Tony, I can’t find my… Oh, hey.”

What an enormous disappointment. A woman. Stark was hiding a woman for some reason. She was properly dressed, but in the same awkward state as Stark. So common and average. Well, Loki could still laugh at Stark’s reaction. How he screwed his face up and rolled his eyes so hard before he turned around and faced the woman. “Was I talking in Chinese when I told you to wait until Jarvis told you it’s okay to leave? Jarvis?”

“No, sir, you were talking in English. May I add that your choice of words was once again very clear, but not really appropriate.”

Loki didn’t even try to hold his chuckle back, the pure frustration on Stark’s face was just priceless. “Doesn’t matter what kind of words I’m using, because nobody is listening to me anyway!”

“If I’m interrupting your daily shag with some model whose name you don’t know I can leave…”

“Hey, I’m not having a daily shag! Would be cool to have such a thing like a daily shag, but no… and I do know her name. It’s Shelly.”

“Molly.”

“I’m three letters off, that still counts as a win.”

Now it was too much and Loki burst out laughing what caused Stark’s supposedly one night stand to scowl. Evidently she saw no reason in staying any longer since Stark didn’t know and didn’t care about knowing her name. Loki laughing at the situation could also be misinterpreted. He had forgotten about his disappointment, Stark had given him a show and Loki liked having fun at the expanse of others.

So the woman walked past them, not even glancing at them before stepping into the elevator. Turning to Stark Loki raised an eyebrow at him and the mortal tilted his head, just looking at him, his expression completely bland. “Uhm… you want a drink?”

Grinning Loki crossed his arms in front of his chest. It had been so long since he had played a little game. “You sure you didn’t forget about another girl you have here? Maybe one of the models you were photographed with? I slowly begin to understand why you ended your relationship.”

“Very funny. Remind me to laugh my ass off later. I need a drink. You get one too and you’ll stop giving me shit.” Was Stark sulking? Loki had expected some banter, a witty remark or Stark’s general lack of caring what anybody thinks about him. He was getting none of that, instead Stark got himself a drink and handed Loki a glass of whiskey. “There. You’ll be a good boy now?”

“I will pretend you didn’t say that, so I won’t have to spill this drink over your head.” Today Stark was dancing on a rope. One second Loki was genuinely amused because of him and the next second he reminded him of his disrespectful personality and how Loki should teach him a lesson.

Why was he smiling now? “There you are. Good to see the British coldhearted bastard. Come on,
Taking a deep breath Loki forced himself to keep his calm and sat down next to Stark. “I came over to tell you that I massively enjoyed the book you sent me.”

Stark had to suffer from the disease the mortals called ‘bi polar’. That would at least explain how quickly he went from frustrated to being overjoyed. “Cool, I knew you would love it. Took me quite a while to find such an old edition. It cost a freaking fortune.”

Stark looked expectantly at Loki who only cocked his head and frowned. How could he not know what Stark wanted to hear? “Yes, that’s obvious. If you want to give me another one, I won’t say no.”

“You know, a lot of people would say – Oh, no, you shouldn’t have spent so much money for me. I can’t accept this.”

“Yeah… no.” Loki shook his head, wearing a grin on his face. “You can afford it and I didn’t ask for it. It’s a great piece of literature and I won’t pretend that I can’t accept it, because hell no, I’m not giving it back. So thank you very much.”

Although Stark shook his head he didn’t look the least bit offended or annoyed. Instead the smug smile on his face told Loki that he liked the cheekiness of Loki’s little speech. Probably because his own thoughts would be quite similar to Loki’s. “Since I’ve got no problem with repeating myself, I’ll do just that. You, my British friend, are completely awesome.”

They clicked their glasses and both took a sip when Loki decided that it was probably time again to actually be Stark’s friend. “You know… when you told me about why your relationship turned sour I believed you. I got that and I was surprised why you would tell me that. You didn’t have to make up a story for me though. I don’t care if you want your freedom to do whatever you want. That’s your damned right.”

Stark’s face hardened and he pursed his lips before answering. “I didn’t make up a story, it was the truth… About the girl… I told you that I like to keep myself busy and that’s a nice way to do it. Nothing more. She was a stupid pain in the ass anyway. She was only interested in me, because my name is Stark.”

Loki raised his eyebrows and Stark added something else. “Which would be fine, because Tony Stark is a genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist… I’m totally awesome. She didn’t see any of that. She just wanted to be able to say ‘Winter is coming!’.”

It had to be some kind of reference, because Loki didn’t have the slightest idea what Stark was talking about. His clueless look did something to set Stark off. His eyes grew wide and his mouth dropped open. Loki would probably never get another glance of Stark in genuine shock. “No. I know you’re a classy motherfucker and you’re all into string quartets, red wine and books in foreign languages that are over thousand years old, but… you have to know Game of Thrones! It’s based on books! I thought you would know them by heart.”

“Are you talking about some fantasy TV series?”

It was completely ridiculous, but Stark pretended to fall off the couch. “Jarvis! Season 1, episode 1, right now! We must save his British, evil soul!”

Once again Loki rolled his eyes, took a sip from a drink. He had no plans for the rest of the day anyway, so he could easily hang out with Stark and watch some stupid television. “Fine, whatever,
I just hope you don’t make me watch some boring shit again.”

“Good lord… Bring it on, Jarvis. It’s our responsibility to make this man appreciate the greatness that is Game of Thrones. Winter is coming! A Lannister always pays his debts! Let it rain on Castamere! Come on!”

“If you’re having a seizure right now, don’t expect me to do something about it.”

“Shut up, you’re already missing the pure awesomeness of the trailer.”

Sighing Loki leaned back and crossed his legs. Whatever, time for some mindless entertainment. To his surprise this series was quite engaging. “Bloody hell, this is disgusting. They’re twins. This is weird.”

“You know, normally people are more shocked by the fact that a child just got thrown out of the window.”

“Well, what else should he have done? He can’t have running this kid around and telling everybody that he is sleeping with his twin sister.”

“You have issues.”

“Me? You wanted to watch this show about incest and child murder.”

“Because it’s awesome! Episode 2, here we come!”

It got better, even better, Loki enjoyed it. Maybe this was actually a series he could back behind. One episode was followed by another and Stark and him actually got to episode 8 before they needed a little break. Loki was kind of shocked that more than seven hours had passed. Normally he would consider seven hours of watching television a waste of time, but it had been entertaining. The craziness of the show and Stark’s comments were a nice combination. Stark handed him a new drink, sitting down next to him, a smug smile on his face. The look of a man who knew he had been right. “See, I told you it’d be awesome and we still haven’t seen the great finale with fire and dragons and shit. Spoilers by the way.”

“I admit it’s very entertaining. The character of Tywin Lannister is formidable. I’m totally supporting his claim.”

Loki couldn’t help but feel a little bit disgusted when Stark spit his whiskey straight across the room. “What the fuck?! What is wrong with you?! He is evil! He eats cute dog puppies for breakfast and sleeps on a bed made out of the skulls of his victims. Okay, I made that up, but Tywin is nobody’s favourite character. Everybody respects him, but he is a complete jackass.”

“He is smart, ruthless, thinks ahead and knows there are things greater and more important than him. I respect that.”

“He’s an asshole. He treats his kids like shit.”

“His kids have an incestuous relationship, they are disappointments.”

Stark snort and Loki couldn’t believe that they were arguing about this. “Tyrion is totally awesome. I am usually the smallest person in the room, I can relate to him. Also we’re both geniuses and awesome. His father is treating him like shit. Fuck the incestuous twins, he can gladly let some direwolf eat them. He should give Tyrion a break, because Tyrion was awesome.”
Fascinated Loki watched how the so soft brown of Stark’s eyes turned to black. The muscles on his face seemed so hard, his jaw clenched. Of course Stark was a childish person, he could really get into a conversation about a television series. Yet his voice was too bitter, too hoarse. No chance that there wasn’t more to it. Stark was a lonely person and here he was, complaining about the family relations of fictional characters. Loki wouldn’t let this pass.

“You draw an awful lot of comparisons between yourself and Tyrion. Are you really having a problem with Tywin or are you taking this whole thing way too seriously?” Loki played with the glass in his hand, pretending to not really care and Stark uttered a sigh. “I don’t like fathers being dicks to their kids when their kids are completely awesome.”

Something inside of Loki’s chest clenched and quickly reminded himself of the comforting fact that he didn’t have a father. He didn’t care about this sort of thing, but he would not hesitate to use it to his advantage. “So you are allowed to be a terrible father if your kid isn’t… completely awesome?”

“No, of course not. It’s just… It’s so unfair when you’re treating your own child horribly, because it can not live up to your crazy expectations and at the same time you’re too much of a fucked up asshole to even see that your kid is working his ass off to please you. A lot of other people see that Tyrion is brilliant, he knows his father is a dick, but he stills just wants a pad on the back. It’s… unfair when effort and intelligence doesn’t get acknowledged by your own parents. So yes, Tywin is a dick.” After his final and surprisingly calm and quite statement Stark drowned his drink and was brooding.

Loki didn’t have a family and Loki didn’t have a father, so there was no explanation for the spark of sympathy he felt inside of him. It didn’t matter what Loki thought about all of this, he could use it and there wasn’t more to it. Stark had issues with his dead father, so Thomas would make him feel better about this. Slowly, like a sensitive person.

“If you…” Acting uneasy Loki let out a deep sigh. “Look, I’m always in for the villain. Mostly because I’m a bad person and I find them more interesting. So much about my opinion on it. I still know that he’s the bad guy and that Tyrion is the hero. He’ll walk away from this, because he is better than that. Therefore he also doesn’t need the approval of his father. He will realise that, sooner or later. Like you said, he’s brilliant.”

Slowly Stark’s face seemed to relax and there was a slight glimpse of warmth in his eyes.

“Thanks… that is really nice coming from the coldhearted bastard. Weird and awkward, but nice.” Then he smiled and Loki felt content.

“Come on, I want to finish off this season before I go home and it’s already past midnight.” Loki propped his feet up on the couch table, indicating Stark to give Jarvis orders to show them the next episode. Stark did just that before nonchalantly turning back to Loki. “You know you can spend the night here if you want to. No problem.”

Thinking about it Loki shrugged, not giving a concrete answer. Why not? It would be the perfect way to learn a little bit more about Stark’s routine and the ultimate proof that he was welcome in this house. “Fine, I’ll stay.”

Leaning forward Loki put his empty glass back on the couch table and within seconds his instincts screamed out to him, because suddenly Stark moved closer as if to attack him. Loki turned his head, ready to strike, but he wasn’t being attacked. He was being kissed.

Stark, a mere mortal, was kissing him, a god. The very god who could and would crush his bones. Every single fibre of his being was rebelling, raging to lash out to push him away and rip his spine
out for the insolence of putting his mouth on Loki’s. Hot burning anger against Stark that could only be outweighed by how much Loki despised himself at this very moment. Failure was unacceptable, he was Loki, the god of lies, he could not fail and yet he did.

Loki had failed. He had created Thomas to become Stark’s friends, a person he felt genuine affection for, someone to listen and to turn to.

The passionate way Stark kissed him was a proof of desire. This was what it all came down to. Stark didn’t care enough and Loki had been fooled. Thomas was interchangeable. Could easily be pulled into Stark’s bed to then be tossed aside like the girl he had seen when he had entered the apartment. When Loki himself had approached Stark as a woman he had already failed and he had thought himself so smart when he had changed to a male body. Not even that mattered to Stark he would seek his carnal pleasure with anyone, because Loki had not made it to make him care. The two models and Stark had even had a girl here a few hours ago to only now make a move on his so called friend.

Enough of all of this. A charade, a game that Loki was growing tired of and he simply couldn’t stand the feeling of these lips on his own. So what?! Loki could give Thomas up. He would ram a dagger right into the back of Stark’s neck while revealing who he was. The other Avengers would be out to get Loki who was very much alive, that wouldn’t stop Lori from slicing Jane Foster’s throat. He would come to all of them in his human form and…

No, it wasn’t enough. Not enough suffering, this way he would never stop feeling thirsty. Also they wouldn’t trust anyone anymore if Stark’s new friend turned out to be Thor’s dead brother. Loki couldn’t…

Stark softly put his hand around the back of Loki’s neck and he snapped.

“What the bloody hell!” Loki jumped to his feet, his hands trembling with rage and it got even more fuelled by the look of surprise on Stark’s face. “Don’t worry, I didn’t use my tongue… yet.”

There he was, the god of lies, almost speechless. Almost. “How dare you to kiss me??”

A little bit of the surprise faded to be replaced by confusion. “Well, because I wanted to, because you’re awesome and good looking and cool and you can’t possibly tell me that I was that subtle about this. I told you more times that you’re awesome than I said it about myself and I like talking about my awesomeness.”

Loki would cut said tongue out, any second. “Bugger off… go shag whoever you want…”

Someone new. He would create someone new, he would think about the details tomorrow, he would come up with something, but right now he had to go or he would kill him. Turning around Loki stalked to the elevator and he instantly heard Stark rushing after him. “Fuck… Tommy, wait! Don’t play hard to…”

“My name isn’t Tommy!”

A hand touched his arm and Loki yanked his arm away, pressing the button of the elevator.

“Okay, okay, sorry. Thomas. My timing was a little bit off, but…”

“Goodbye, Mr. Stark.”

“Come on, you don’t get to leave just…”
Loki stepped into the elevator, fiercely pressed any button to get out of here, when he heard Stark saying it. “Jarvis, the elevator won’t move till Tommy will listen to me.”

This time Loki didn’t give a reply, instead he just snarled at Stark and let the last bit of his mask fell from his eyes. Stark should see how angry he was, that letting him go was in his own best interest.

For a second they just looked at each other and Stark seemed to be pleading while Loki balled his hands to fists. Finally Stark let out a little breath and immediately bit his lips. “Fine, Jarvis…”

The elevator door closed and Loki felt his magic already in the palms of his hands, so eager to do damage and he knew he would only be able to hold back for so long. Tonight he was going to destroy something. Something big.
Hey everybody,

Thank you all for your nice comments. Seems like you're all upset with Tony for being... stupid. Loki is furious, so now let's see how they both deal with it :)


After bringing all three down Loki felt a little bit better, but his rage couldn’t subside so easily. Part of his plan had completely failed and Loki had no idea how to create a person Stark would care about and without wanting to fuck them.

Thomas had been perfect, Loki liked Thomas. Now Thomas wasn’t of any use anymore and Loki had to get rid of him. Something he didn’t want to think about yet. Loki wanted to tear down cities, to burn down buildings, to create nightmares and to drive people insane. At least something to get rid of his anger.

Well, Loki knew somebody who was also constantly angry.

“Who the hell pissed you off?”

Barton held the sandbag while Loki was hitting it over and over again. It didn’t help the least bit since he had to hold back to not tear the thing apart. Yet it felt good to hit something. Through clenched teeth Loki hissed “An idiot.”

There was no real answer, but the sound Barton made let him know that he was being understood. The next fifteen minutes Loki kept hitting the sandbag and then he finally had to fake exhaustion. He probably would feel satisfaction if he used Barton as his punching bag. Instead he just sat down on the training mattress and imagined throwing Stark out of the window once again.

Sitting down next to him Barton handed him a bottle of water and waited until Loki had drunken half of it. “So what happened? Lost some money in a deal? Something like that?”

Although he was still raging Loki realised that Barton showed interest. He didn’t let it rest, wasn’t happy with Loki beating up the sandbag, but instead he asked why he was upset. Loki wouldn’t let himself be fooled into believing that Barton cared, but he was definitely interested. At least some good seemed to come from his failure.

“I was working on a project for quite a while now. I was working really, really hard on it. I was doing a perfect job on it. I spent nights preparing, paid attention to details and… I was proud of my work. Sadly it’s a job you can’t do entirely on your own. I needed a second party and guess what…”

“They fucked it up.” Barton kept it simple and Loki wanted to get up again and tear the sandbag down. “Exactly. Now I’m right back where I started from and I’d like to snap his neck because of it. Didn’t even realise how he fucked it all up.”
“They never do, because they consider all you do a no-brainer. It’s all taken for granted.”

Not exactly what had happened, but when Barton put himself into Loki’s shoes, it could only be a good sign.

“I gotta do it again and I don’t want to. I already wasted so much time and it could have been so much easier if I had done it alone…”

Barton nodded in agreement. “Do you have to take any shit for it? It concerns your work, doesn’t it? You’re going to get in trouble for it?”

Loki shook his head, playing with the now empty water bottle in his fingers. “If there is one thing I can do then it’s staying out of trouble. I’ll get by, but I was doing so well and I even liked that damned project. It’s like… yeah, you can only rely on yourself, nobody else. The minute you do, you get fucked over. It’s also me who gotta take care of everything now. He doesn’t give a shit…”

“Sounds familiar. You can be as good as you like when you’re depending on other people, sooner or later, you’ll be lost, because they let you down.”

A little bit of the anger now vanished and Loki did feel better. The Hawk was distancing himself from his battle companions. The thing that Loki had wanted all along. Now it fell perfectly into place. Until now Henry had advised him to not send everybody else away, maybe he’d see the things a little different now. “That’s fucking depressing, but yeah… kinda. It’s me who had all the work and it’s me who has to get everything back to work.”

“You know why he fucked everything up? Did he do it to screw you over?”

Wonderful. Barton feared that somebody might betray him. He probably was still upset about the Widow not having his back during the confrontation with Fury. Distrust was already there, more than enough of it. All Loki needed was a spark. Something to make him go off, the final straw to make Barton turn against the Avengers. It had to be something big. Loki was still too furious to even think of proper possibilities, he knew he was close and for today that was enough. “No, he didn’t try to set me up or anything. He’s just a stupid moron. That’s all.”

“Yeah, I know a couple of them too.”

A small smile spread across Loki’s face, because he was pretty sure that they were taking about the same moron. Stark really had it in him to get on everybody’s nerves. “Guess a lot of them are around.”

“You wanna have another go?” Barton nodded towards the sandbag and Loki nodded. “Yeah, I think so. Thanks for the talk by the way.”

“Don’t mention it.”

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It was way too early, but Loki wanted to hurt him, to give him nightmares, to destroy every single happy moment he has ever had. Loki would take Thor apart, bit by bit. He might have failed concerning Stark, but his plan for Thor was brilliant. Therefore Loki would continue to pursue it. So Loki cloaked himself in invisibility as usual and teleported straight into Jane Foster’s apartment.

The light was still burning. They were still awake.

Today wouldn’t get any better, Loki was so sick of it. What if he just set the place on fire? It
wouldn’t solve any problems, but it would burn. Loki loved the flames, he loved the heat. Nothing was as sweet as the smell of hot ashes.

Nonsense, he had to focus. No voices, no talking. Weird. Loki drew in a deep breath and reminded himself of the fact that he was a shadow. Nobody would hear him, least of all Thor. His feet made no sound when Loki entered the living room and found Thor there. Thor and something even more interesting. In his hands Thor held a small stone. Runes were written on it. So Thor had travelled to Asgard. Probably to gain information about the mage who combined his human technology with magic. Not that Asgard would be able to help with that, they didn’t bother to learn anything about humans or other magic than Asgardian. Loki would be able to help, Loki even knew how to find him… Maybe he should be doing that. Find the mage, show him what real magic was before ripping his heart out.

Thor’s fingers traced the runes and Loki tilted his head to better make them out. Ha, nothing special, a protection spell. If they had given him several stones, Thor had most probably placed one in the Stark Tower. Good to know, but no a real obstacle. Loki had learned long ago how to make the stones useless. They were no match for his magic and even less so when he knew that one was around. When Loki had been so very young he had used the stones to first practice magic. Enchanting them, mostly to play pranks on Thor. Now Loki was too powerful to rely on something as… common as stones. Then again, it made sense that Thor would have one.

A stone he couldn’t stop looking at.

“Thor, you’re coming to bed?”

Jane Foster was standing in the doorway, already wearing her pyjamas. Her face showed worry, but not enough. There was still work for Loki to do. A realisation that made him even angrier. Was there nothing to be found but a series of failures? Jane Foster was rather worried about Thor than distrusting him. Stark wanted a lover without attachment and no friend.

“I do not feel tired yet. Don’t wait up for me, Jane.”

Fool, go to sleep, so I can give you nightmares!

Jane Foster bit her lip, clearing swallowing the words lying on her tongue. She seemed a little torn, not knowing if she should walk further into the room or just go to bed. “You’ve been staring at this stone for the whole day…”

“I am waiting for it to give me an answer. Though it seems I am waiting in vain.”

Either Jane Foster knew what he was talking about or she didn’t care. After a nod she turned around and left the room. Loki should most probably do that too. He was invisible and Thor was an oaf, but sooner or later Thor had to sense something. To suppress an aura completely could only work for a limited amount of time. If Thor decided to stay awake all night, Loki was wasting his time.

Indeed Thor kept sitting there, turning the stone in his hands and Loki wondered what this was all about. You weren’t supposed to touch them too much, especially if you’re not a mage. Even Thor had to know that. When the front of the stone was once again visible, Loki started to frown. It could be one of his. No way to be sure, Loki had stopped using them years ago and there had been lots of them. What would Thor do with one of Loki’s stones?

Sentiment
Maybe Loki’s little visit here wasn’t a waste of time anyway. No, he would use it perfectly. An idea grew inside of Loki’s mind and it was hideous. Perfect. Yet again it was too soon to strike. With Thor awake, there was nothing Loki could do. He might well just pass his time. Two or three hours to pass in London, Loki would spend them in some of the museums. By the time he got back, Thor better be asleep or Loki would tear the building down.

London worked his usual charm and time flew by, although Loki felt so much unknown impatience. Not even the British Museum could completely calm him down. To be sure not to get back too early Loki walked by foot. This would have been Thomas’ home, the place he came from. Unfortunately Thomas was gone now and Loki wouldn’t create another European person. He couldn’t afford to remind Stark of the person he had just cast aside. At least he had told Loki a few things that he could use. Why not giving Stark the father figure he so much longed for? Hopefully Stark wouldn’t want to get someone into bed considerably older than him, but who knew? This stupid, superficial man whose only virtue seemed to be to enrage Loki. He was going to miss Thomas, his favourite alias who gave him a lot of freedom.

So much about killing Stark last, Loki was now thinking about doing it personally.

When Loki returned to the apartment the lights were off. Good, so he wouldn’t have to set it on fire anyway. A pity. Loki teleported straight back into the bedroom and found both of them asleep. The stone was placed on the nightstand next to Thor. Why? Was he thinking it would protect him? From nightmares? Or did he keep it here to remind him of his long lost brother? In the end the reason did not matter, Loki was going to take advantage of it and Thor would regret his reasoning. Carefully watching Thor’s face Loki searched for a sign that his slumber wasn’t deep, but couldn’t find anything. No, fast asleep. Don’t get used to it. Picking up the stone Loki watched it intently and his fingertips remembered the feel of it. Definitely one of his own, but he hadn’t touched it in centuries. Now that would change. There was no other magic in the stone, nobody had tried use it as their own. It was still Loki’s. Thor would get a taste of that.

Closing his eyes Loki concentrated, thought about the illusion he had worked on so hard. He felt it underneath the skin of his hands, slowly slipping into the stone. It started to glow, a green light engulfing it. With a lazy gesture Loki forced the illusion into a slumber. Too soon. Thor had to be about to lose his mind, had to be dying of his bad conscience, then he would be ready. Until then Loki would continue to take him apart, piece by piece. He put the stone back in the exact same spot where he had taken it from.

Time to get real.

Loki towered over Thor, leaned down and closed his eyes once again. He had to step up the game a little bit. The void. The coldness and the emptiness that surrounded him. A shiver in his voice would be necessary. With desperation he was pretty much done. Fear and anger were the next logical step.

“You didn’t come for me, Thor… I screamed, I fought… you didn’t even look for me… so I gave up…” Loki paused, watching how the muscles of Thor’s face seemed to contract. “… and I fell into darkness…”

Straightening up Loki had about one second to feel content with himself before he felt strong, cold hands on his back, pushing him. Loki stumbled forward and suddenly his eyes could only see black. He was surrounded by it, closing in on him and this couldn’t be real. Loki was in Thor’s bedroom, on Midgard. He had escaped from the darkness so long ago. How could this be? Blinking Loki shook his head as if he could cast the shadows away. His heart rate sped up and Loki felt his magic running through him, eager to defend him, to pull him out. Yes, his magic was there, not
weakened, not drained. It was pulsing in his veins, strong and powerful.

Loki hadn’t felt anything in the darkness. So desperately he had tried to access it, searching it everywhere inside of him, but he hadn’t been able to find it. From this moment on Loki knew what dying felt like.

Now Loki still felt his magic, so there was no way he was back in the darkness. Squeezing his eyes shut Loki took a deep breath and searched the power within him. Unlimited, he would be able to wipe out all the life on his island if he wanted to. Yes, Loki was alive, he was strong and on Midgard.

Opening his eyes again Loki was standing next to Thor’s bed and nothing seemed different than from a few seconds ago. Disgusted with himself Loki turned around and let himself be pulled away.

The wonderful smell of the Douro filled his nose and Loki let the tension be washed away. He had gone too far, but he couldn’t allow himself this weakness. He would go back again, he would rip Thor’s mind apart and then the stone would do the rest. Loki had a glass of wine in a restaurant, sitting at a table directly next to the river. It was dark, but there were still a lot of people walking past him and Loki listened to them. He enjoyed the sound of the Portuguese language, its slight melancholy mixed with the desire to live life to its fullest.

Loki had no explanation for this, but everything about Portugal made him feel better. The country calmed him down and for the first time since he has left the Stark Tower Loki didn’t feel the urge to destroy something. Why not sitting here for the rest of the night? It wasn’t like he really wanted to do anything else tonight.

That couldn’t happen, of course. Somebody always had to disturb him in his free time. His cell phone started to ring. If this was Stark again, trying to get Thomas to talk to him, Loki would blow his tower up. His constant tries to get in contact were ridiculous. Annoyed Loki pulled it from his pants and looked up at the display. Banner. Yet something was off. After the incident at the Stark Tower Loki had spend hours enchanting the phone, to make sure that he couldn’t be tracked down. He also alternated the numbers and gave it a few magical additions. These allowed him to see that Banner wasn’t calling Elizabeth.

He was calling Thomas Pine.

Why? Loki had already put Thomas to rest. He was done with him, he had liked him, but now it was time to move on. Then again, Loki couldn’t fight down the curiosity. Banner had met Thomas only one single time and they had barely shared words. Their connection was Stark. Thomas had walked out of Stark’s life and now Banner was calling him? Something had happened. Banner and Stark must have talked, but Loki still failed to see the reason why.

No way that Loki wasn’t going to find out. Putting a hand on his throat Loki searched for Thomas’ voice, but no his body. He was in a restaurant after all. “Pine. Hello?”

Banner’s response started with clearing his throat. So he wasn’t really looking forward to this conversation. “Hello, Mr. Pine. This is Doctor Banner. We’ve met at the Stark Tower. Perhaps you remember…”

“Of course, I do. What can I do for you, Doctor Banner? I think I already do know where you got my number from and I must say I’m not…”

“Oh no, Tony has no idea that I’m calling you. He would probably kill me if I knew.”
Loki tapped his fingers against the tabletop and watched the silent river in front of him. This was some new and quite interesting information. Banner going behind Stark’s back? “So why are you calling me then?”

Now a deep sigh. “Look, Tony told me what happened and… I know he can be an idiot and most of the time he doesn’t even realise he is an idiot. I can understand that you think he was… out of line or… not serious, but… he genuinely likes you. He does. I don’t know if you’re into him or even into… well, guys, but I thought you should know that he is into you. In his own weird way… He probably would tell you himself if he wasn’t such an idiot.”

A strong wind was coming up, taking the waiters of the restaurant by surprise, but Loki didn’t even bat an eyelid. “What are you trying to tell me?”

“Uhm… Tony is a friend, but he is complicated and when he starts to care about people, he freaks out and acts stupidly. So whatever he said, you probably shouldn’t take it too seriously. He likes you and he is really beat up about the fact that you’re angry at him…”

A slight feeling of doubt was rising up inside of Loki, but he wouldn’t give in yet. He was a master of manipulation, he read people like books and Stark had always been so easy to read. How could he have missed something like that? “He kissed me.”

It was obvious that Banner felt embarrassed by his straightforwardness. “Yeah… uhm, he told me.”

“After a Game of Thrones marathon. When I showed up at his place he was busy throwing out a girl he had spent the night with. A few days ago he was photographed in the company of two models and a week ago he broke up with his long time girlfriend…” Nothing else needed to be said.

“I know, like I said… when he starts caring, he freaks out and… Well, about the girl… sometimes I have no idea what’s going on in his mind, but he said himself that he was being stupid. I’m repeating myself. I’m just calling you to tell you that he likes you, he cares about you and he is too stupid to show you that. He’s been talking about you a lot and… yeah. I don’t even know if I have the right to tell you all this, but I kinda felt obligated to. He’s my friend.”

Loki’s heart was hammering against his chest and he felt a little bit dizzy. No, he wasn’t making such foolish mistakes. He wouldn’t miss something so major, something so important, something so… useful. When something sweet turned bitter it could hurt oh so much. “I appreciate that you’re trying to help your friend, but… I have to understand your intentions. Are you trying to talk me into… going out with Stark?”

“God no, like I said – I have no idea if you’re gay, straight or bi and that’s none of my business. I’m just watching my friend who really likes you, but did something stupid to drive you away and I’m trying to clear up a possible misunderstanding. You’re also his friend, otherwise you wouldn’t be hanging out with him. He didn’t just want to… I dunno…”

“Shag me like one of the money digging models only to throw me out afterwards?”

“Uhm… if you want to put it like that. Yes. Tony’s always had bad timing and if it makes you feel better, he feels like shit. You can do whatever you like and if you’re too upset and don’t want to see him again, that’s fine. I just want you to think about it.” Banner’s tone was soft and honest and Loki’s mind went in five different directions at once. In the end it all came down to one question. “I see. Thank you for letting me know this, Doctor Banner. I will give it some thought, but… you don’t think that Stark wants to be my friend.”
“Well, I’m Tony’s friend and he definitely never tried to kiss me.”

The wind knocked over some of the tables, the promenade was free of people now and Loki’s magic was surging. He hated making mistakes and he hated admitting them to himself, but he would do it if he could learn from them. Perhaps Loki had been rash considering his opinion on Stark. Thomas would pay him another visit, just to find out if he was sincere. And if he was… Loki would use every last bit of his devotion to Thomas to make Stark suffer, he would cut the poor mortal’s heart into pieces and then he would feed it to him. By the end of it death would be a release almost too sweet to bear.
Hello everybody,

A lot of things are happening and we can only hope that Tony isn't going to screw all up. Thomas is coming over and wants to talk - what could go wrong?

Also Loki is meeting an old friend...

_______________________________________________________________

*I'll wrap my hands around your neck so tight with love, love
A thousand times I tempted fate
A thousand times I played this game

Up in the air ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~

_______________________________________________________________

Being called a liar was a title. It indicated that you had mastered an art. Although everybody lied every single day most people or creatures didn’t know how to. They needed preparation to not get tangled in their own web of lies. Their eyes had to support their words and most people didn’t have that much control over their face. Loki had. Loki could spontaneously make up the most confusing but yet logical stories, adding details like he wanted and his body language would never give him away. If he had a chance to prepare Loki could invent another universe and nobody would be able to find a single flaw in his story.

Concerning Stark, Loki was sure that he was a confident liar and could be quite convincing if he had enough time. Spontaneously? Not so much. He was very likely to spill the truth if he was asked directly. Also he was bold enough.

Therefore Loki didn’t call to announce his visit, Jarvis would tell Stark anyway as soon as Loki entered the building.

“Mr. Pine. A pleasure to see you, we didn’t expect you to see you again this soon.”

“Neither did I, Jarvis. Neither did I.” Sighing Loki crossed his arms in front of his chest and tried to look like he was in a bad mood when he was really excited. He had no idea how this was going on to play out. Banner could be wrong after all, but after giving the whole thing some thought Loki did believe he had misinterpreted a few things. It was possible. Everybody considered Stark as a ladies’ man, so why would Loki even expect that he might… show interest in a man. Falling for him? If Loki had intended it – of course. But he hadn’t. So Loki had to know what this was all about.

It was definitely about something since Stark was standing right in front of him when the elevator doors opened. Interesting. Again his look was tousled, but Loki could tell that he had been
“Hey, Tommy… Awesome you came over… you want to sit down? Have a drink? Something to eat? A book? A car? Just don’t get right back into the elevator.”

“I might do that if you don’t shut up… I’m not going to sit down, I don’t want anything to drink or whatever you said. I want to talk.”

“Well, that’s going to be difficult if you want me to shut up.”

This wasn’t worth the effort. Loki turned around to leave and like last time he was held back. Stark had learned his lesson and didn’t grab his arm. “Okay, okay, don’t leave! We’ll talk! I’m a great talker and I’ll even listen…”

Sighing softly Loki turned back around and came straight to the point. “Do you want to sleep with me?”

The truth would be found in Stark’s face, but whatever the answer would be, Loki wanted to hear it. His straightforwardness didn’t seem to bother Stark in the least bit. “Somehow I have the feeling that whatever I’m going to say to that, it will make me look bad.”

“Stark!”

“Hey, I kissed you! Normally when I kiss a person we soon do much more than kissing. I asked you out on dates! I stare at your ass every time you turn your back to me. Of course I want to sleep with you! I would do it right here in front of the elevator if you weren’t looking at me with those ‘I want to kill you’ eyes. Which is also kinda hot…”

Loki raised his hand to stop the babbling and tried to process everything that had been said.

Loki raised his hand to stop the babbling and tried to process everything that had been said.

Stark’s face fell and for a second he didn’t look in Loki’s eyes. Shame. Loki hadn’t thought that he was capable of feeling such a thing. “Okay, no way of making me look good concerning that… I didn’t give a shit about that girl, I didn’t talk to her about anything, I wasn’t doing very well and then… you showed up and you were… once again awesome. If you don’t want me to do that sort of thing anymore, done. I’m a perfect, monogamous guy.”

Once again Loki raised an eyebrow. “What would make you think that I’m even remotely interested in you?”

“Are you straight?”
“Such a thing doesn’t exist. People have preferences, that’s all.”

“There, proof number one. Two, I’m awesome. Three, we hang out a lot although you pretend to hate me. Four, you came back. Five, you are here, aren’t you.” A playful grin on his danced around Stark’s lips and he wiggled his eyebrows at Loki who snort.

Now there were only seconds left to make his decision. Loki had been wrong, Stark didn’t just want to sleep around. Again he seemed to be cocky, a bit reckless, but then Loki searched his eyes he could see a hint of vulnerability. Stark wasn’t sure enough of himself to completely open up. He wasn’t the kind of man who would show another person that he wanted to be with them. This was more than Loki had bargained for. He had tried to establish a friendship and Stark wanted to get romantically involved.

This thought almost made Loki cringe. Feigning a relationship was another level than to pretend being someone’s friend. Another level of intimacy. Touches, kisses, sex. All these things Loki had already used to get what he wanted. Repeatedly. In every form possible. A means to an end and sometimes Loki had even ended up enjoying himself, but he preferred other ways.

However Stark was a mortal and an Avenger. Loki could only imagine wrapping his hands around Stark’s throat instead of around his body like a lover would. That Stark was pleasant to the eye didn’t make any difference. Loki despised him and he didn’t want his hands on him.

“I can almost hear how hard you’re thinking, but you’re still here…”

Loki blinked and Stark was standing right in front of him. The cockiness had been replaced by a smile. Surprisingly soft and… a bit unsure. Banner had been right, Stark did like him. More important so, Stark wanted him. Stark wanted Thomas, but he regretted his first move. If Loki was going to take the risk, he would have to go all the way. It had to be real. There was no way Loki would invest even more time in Thomas only to be pushed aside later. Now, it had to be now.

Stark was leaning in, wanting to kiss him and Loki quickly pushed with both hands against his chest. “Yes, I am still here. I’m also British. I’m not conservative, but I value traditions. We’ll go out, you don’t see other people and the very second you start shagging around, I will throw you out off that window.”

No misinterpretation possible, Stark’s eyes lit up and a smirk spread on his face. “You wouldn’t be the first to do that. I can live with your terms, you wanna date, we’re gonna date. But I also want to add my terms to the list.”

Thomas was now officially dating Tony Stark. Better Loki didn’t start thinking about that too much or he would regret it instantly. “I guess that’s only fair. Unless they’re ridiculous terms.”

“Nope. Awesome terms. You get all the dates you want, all the classy British shit, but since we’re both older than 10 and I don’t have to play coy anymore I get to suck face as much as I want.”

All of Loki’s muscles tensed for a second before his forced his body to relax. He had chosen this path and now he would go with it, determined and thoroughly. Everything that was necessary to make him suffer and to get Loki what he wanted. Loki had done worse things anyway. “It’s five seconds later and I’m already regretting this.”

“Shut your pretty mouth.” Suddenly Stark’s hands were on his cheeks, cradling his face and so the Man of Iron kissed him a second time. Different now. Slower, less demanding and with actual skill. That should make the whole ordeal a little bit more bearable for Loki. Not a friend, but a lover. Thomas would be everything that Loki needed him to be.
Letting a soft sigh escape his lips Loki started returning Stark’s kiss. It had almost been ten years since the last time Loki had kissed someone and he hadn’t missed it. Then again it was a pleasant feeling. It would be better if he didn’t hate the man with who he was sharing the kiss, but Loki would have to concentrate on the physical anyway.

His response obviously gave Stark all the encouragement he needed, because Loki found himself with his back against the closed elevator doors. Stark’s body was pressed against his, the kiss got deepened and Loki would need a lot of time to get used to this. When Stark lightly bit down on his lip, Loki had enough. He broke away from the kiss, but made it to not actually back away from Stark.

“So… does it count as a date if I order some Thai food in and we watch the rest of the first season?” Stark smiled gently at him, his fingers were lazily stroking over Loki’s side. No way. No way in Hel.

“Another time. I gotta go, I still have work to do.”

“What? You come over, agree to go out with me and then you’ll leave again? Can’t have that.”

Now both hands were sneaking around his waist and Loki wanted to run. “Believe it or not, I’m still angry at you. I’m going to leave now, you can call me… tonight…”

“I don’t even have to try to convince you to stay, right?”

“Right.”

“I’m putting a copy of something Plato wrote into my bed. You’re sure you don’t want to check it out?”

“Jarvis, I’m leaving. Open the elevator, please.”

Now Stark let out a sound that was something between a sigh and a laugh. “I got it. You’re going to leave me longing for more. Fine, but I’ll do the same.”

Kiss number three and Stark was putting a lot into it. Was it supposed to be teasing? A taste of what he was able to do with this skilled mouth when he really had the time? Loki wanted to wrinkle his nose at the thought where Stark had put his mouth to gain all that experience. Then again, Loki’s young life exceeded a mortal one by hundreds of years, in comparison to them the sheer number of Loki’s partners must seem incredibly high. A question of different cultural perspectives.

Putting these thoughts aside Loki let himself be kissed and responded to it. Yes, he needed to go now, because he wasn’t fit to do that yet. Loki needed preparation. How to act as a love interest? As Tony Stark’s love interest. A Tony Stark who proved once again how persistent he was. Instead of letting go he pulled Loki closer against himself. Out. Out. Out. Loki needed to get out.

This time he pushed Stark definitely away who let out a sigh in response. “I’m still against you leaving.”

“Good bye, Stark.”

“It’s Tony. Tommy.”

Not saying a thing Loki stepped through the now open elevator doors and pressed the button for the first floor. As soon as the elevator started moving Loki felt the urge to wipe his hand over his
mouth, but there was a strong chance that Stark might be watching. And Jarvis was always keeping an eye on him, Loki was sure of that.

He had to wait until he had left the building until Loki could finally release the tension and cursed himself and especially Stark. The things he was ready to do to finally get his revenge.

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Loki thought of Lorelei and a lot of other people he had played with. How he had manipulated their feelings to get what he wanted. Power, a secret spell, a magic item, whatever. Seduction had never been Loki’s favourite tool, because he didn’t want people he didn’t like touching him. It hadn’t stopped him from using sex as a weapon though. A few times Loki had gotten people to fall for him, every single time he had tried. Only as long as necessary, a feeling based on lust and flattery. Loki had never been interested in having somebody sincerely falling in love with him or whatever person he had created. That was simply taking too long and other strategies worked out just as nicely.

By reactivating Thomas Loki had stripped himself of all other possibilities. If he didn’t want to start all over again, Loki needed devotion. Banner claimed that Stark cared about Thomas, liked him. People quickly came to like other people and they just as quickly grew tired of them. That was the very reason Loki had given up the plan of playing a woman for Stark. He had to be a constant in Stark’s life, somebody to really get to him. There was no romantic interest involved, but these kinds of flames could expire fast. Too fast for Loki. He was sure he could get Stark to turn against the Avengers just as a friend. What would he be able to do if he was more than that? What would he be able to do if the great, self-obsessed and arrogant Tony Stark was actually in love with Thomas?

Anything

The best outcome however was that Loki would be tearing two souls apart. Taking away what they held most dear, making them watch how they were dying in agony. Jane Foster was going to die and so was Thomas Pine. Both of them were going to die by the hand of an Avenger.

***

Although Loki knew exactly whereto go he took his time. It was a beautiful place, quiet, away from the loud noises of the city and finally a place of nature. Loki enjoyed walking between trees and breathing in the cold, sweet, clean air. Almost untouched. A rare thing on Midgard.

Once again Loki felt himself being pulled away from here. Towards the other eight realms and beyond. So many places he could go to visit and explore. Magic even beyond his knowledge. Things he wanted to learn, but couldn’t. Not yet.

He couldn’t leave with them still breathing. Every single breath they took was humiliating him. They had taken everything away from him, so he would make them feel the same. Even more so. Loki may have tasted concrete, but they would choke on their own blood.

Then he would leave. Leave this tiny world that was cutting off air and he would never turn back. He would find another place, wherever that might be.

Sitting down on the soft grass Loki folded his hands in lap and waited. He could already feel him approaching and Loki felt at ease. He watched the shadows between the trees and waited. It took more than an hour, but Loki didn’t mind. A proud creature came on his own will and wouldn’t do someone else’s bidding. Loki would actually be disappointed if it did.
It moved gracefully, had found itself a new home. A sin to lock an animal like this into a cage. The wolf slowly stepped out of the shadows, stopping to just look at Loki. They locked eyes and both knew who they were dealing with.

Tilting his head Loki admired the beautiful fur. Now it had a certain glimmer to it that hadn’t been there when it had been still locked up. Barbaric.

A smile spread on Loki’s lips when the wolf finally walked up to him. Loki didn’t move a muscle and let himself be observed by an animal that recognized him, that saw the wolf in him, but also knew that he was something else. Something in between. And the one who freed him.

Loki was part wolf. Loki could be anything. Loki would free himself.

The wolf laid its head into Loki’s lap and he carefully let his fingers glide through the soft fur. It was finally a quiet moment and all masks were off. It was only Loki and somebody… an animal… who saw him like he was.

Watching his pale fingers running through the grey fur Loki listened to his own breathing and to that of the wolf. His magic was humming contently and Loki thought that he saw a glimpse of a distant memory in the shadows. What had it felt like to be… at peace. He would get back there… eventually.

The wolf didn’t move, but it started to growl. Loki flinched and his head flung around. No, he would have sensed it if somebody was here. They were alone. Yet there was something, piercing needles into Loki’s skin. No, not his skin, deeper. His very being was attacked, his magic. Another growl, a snarl, directed at nobody. The wolf felt his distress and reacted to it. There wasn’t much pain, rather the cold touch of somebody who tried to get a hold of him.

This couldn’t be. Nobody knew he was here. Nobody knew that he was still alive. Nevertheless somebody was searching for him. For his magic. Loki was magic. It was him. Whoever dared to was reaching out for him and they had found him. How did he let himself get so distracted that he only noticed when they had already found him? Normally he would have realised something like that instantly.

This wasn’t Asgard, he knew Asgard’s touch better than anyone. Unknown, so he didn’t have to panic. The person who dared to seek him out would regret it. Even more so for finding him. Loki was shielding himself perfectly. If Heimdall couldn’t see him, how could anybody…

Of course. Nobody could look through his disguise, nobody could find Loki in his disguise. Unless if they weren’t actually looking for him, but for his disguise. So the other mage had taken an interest in Loki. What a foolish mistake.

Loki let him in. Let the needles struck, giving the other one the feeling that he was in control. For a mere second. Then Loki strode out with all his force and he felt the other one hastily fleeing from him. Now he had seen how much more powerful Loki was, so he was definitely already regretting looking for him in the first place.

The growling stopped, the wolf put his head back into his lap and licked Loki’s fingers. Destroying a robot was one thing, they had already seen him in William, but searching him out… Loki had to react. This had suddenly become his fight. He would take care of this little mage for the Avengers. Now it was personal.

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When Loki came back home he had a missed call from every single Avenger. Except the Widow of course. Stark had even left a message on his voice mail.

You said ‘Call me tonight’, it’s tonight, I’m calling. You’re not answering your phone. Again. I’ve been drinking an awful lot during the last days and I just want to make sure I didn’t imagine you coming to my place today. If so, I’m going to imagine it some more, because it was awesome. We were kissing, by the way. We’re also officially dating now. There are some rules to that. Like when you say ‘Call me’ you have to answer the phone. Then again, fuck the rules. Forget calling me, just get your cute, British ass over here, so we can do more of that. Not fucking the rules, but kissing. Because last time I left out a few things that… I’d really rather do that than talk about it. Don’t think I’m not crazy enough to put the suit on and circle above your apartment. Okay, scratch that, that was weird and a bit stalkerish. I’m going to hang up now and pretend that I also imagined this phone call. Unless you think it was charming, then it totally happened. I’m going to let Jarvis tell me now how badly I fucked that one up. Just call me or come over…
Hello everybody,

I know it's a bit early, but I'm finishing right now a long and very important chapter (number 34) and because finishing something feels nice, I want you guys to have some fun too.

There you go, number 28 - Tony and Loki spend their first moments together as two people who are dating... how will this turn out?

Meditation was a vulnerable state. Loki had to relax and to fully concentrate at the same time. It was all about his magic, about it talking to him. To do this Loki had to be completely focused on himself. Being aware of his body, of the magic in his blood. It hummed contently and Loki sent it out. This world was small and ordinary. The search wouldn’t take long.

Mountains, seas, forests, fields, his magic flew over all of them. Searching beneath every stone, in every shadow. Far away, but he could already sense it. Familiar forces that called out to each other. Inferior to him, but somehow similar. His magic rushed towards it, almost there. He could already…

“Damn you, you puny mortal!”

The connection broke and the burst of set free energy destroyed the window next to him. Sighing in frustration Loki repaired it with a lax gesture of his hand before reaching for the phone.

Jane Foster. Of course, he should have known. It had taken quite a while for her to call and now she chose the worst possible moment. Putting on Lori’s skin Loki answered the call. “Jane… I haven’t heard from you in a while.”

“Yes, our… last meeting didn’t end too well and I…”

“Right, I’m sorry for leaving like that. I was out of line.” Loki reached for a book lying on the floor. This conversation would be so dull, he could easily read at the same time.

Jane Foster didn’t disagree, but she hesitated. Good enough. “You had a few valid points, that I’ve… never thought about or that I didn’t want to think about. I just got mad, because… I got the impression you tried to make Thor the bad guy. He isn’t. He absolutely isn’t.”

Of course he wasn’t. That would require the ability to think. “It didn’t say that. I don’t think that. There are just way too many unanswered questions for my taste. After you said that the attack had been led by his brother…”

“I know… I… thought a lot about that and I realised that I should have talked with him about some things. I only wanted to avoid the topic, because I knew that it was… hurtful for him to talk about it. Those are still important questions…” She sounded shy, unsure and Loki knew exactly what to make of it.
“I see. I… I’m sorry. You’re a couple, of course you also see another side of all of this and I shouldn’t have… I lost my cool, that happens sometimes.” Loki hated this relationship talk. Therefore it was even worse that he was about to get into one. With Stark.

There was silence at the other end of the line and Loki longed for the day when he was finally getting rid of her. “Let’s just say the both of us didn’t act on our best behaviour…”

“That sounds reasonable.”

He could be searching the person who had been searching him. Tearing them apart. Instead he was stuck with a lovesick mortal that was in complete denial and didn’t see what was right in front of her.

“I talked to him about it…”

Finally they were getting somewhere.

“You did?”

Did he tell you about how he tossed me into the abyss? How he never asked? Not a single time.

He could hear her swallow and Loki realised that Jane Foster wanted to talk about it. So she was bothered after all. Loki’s words had gotten to her, the seed he had planted had indeed started to grow. The truth was Loki’s companion in this matter. Jane Foster had chosen to close her eyes and now Loki would help her to open them again. Wasn’t it important to know everything about the man you shared your bed with?

Loki had to think of Stark and quickly discarded the thought.

“Yes and… he still… he was very reluctant about telling me things. He got very upset and I’m not used to seeing him like that. Thor is such a joyful and bright person, but when I mentioned Loki… Thor was so hurt by his betrayal, but he still loves his brother and he is… devastated about his death.”

Did all this grieving make it impossible to organize a funeral for Loki?

“When I asked about… what happened before Loki tried to take over the world… Thor was very vague. I could tell that he didn’t want to… All he said was that Loki… He fell from grace, his thoughts were clouded by madness and… pain. Thor said that he should have been there. But he was on Earth and when he got back to Asgard… Loki was lost.”

Trying hard not to snarl Loki bit his lip. “You are right, that sounds really vague. He didn’t mention any reason for his brother losing his mind?”

“No, he didn’t.”

Why, Thor? Are you ashamed of what the All-father has been hiding? Are you too disgusted by it to tell your girlfriend about it?

“Well, I guess… family tragedy is really hard to talk about…” Loki got up and walked towards his new window, contemplated the city. The little mage definitely wasn’t out there. By now Loki was pretty sure that he wasn’t even in this country. Europe maybe? Could also be Africa?

“Right… it’s just…” Jane Foster hesitated again and Loki wished that could see her face, it would tell him anything he needed to know. Tell me, little human. Tell me if my plan is working. “He’s
been acting quite… odd during the last time.”

Like a man who couldn’t find any sleep? Because he was feeling guilty? What would make the great Thor feeling guilty?

“How so?”

Helpless, she was so helpless. “I don’t know. He’s… I told you pretty much everything he told me, he refused to say anything else about his brother. He rarely smiles and he doesn’t sleep well. First I thought that only the attacks in New York were getting to him, but… there was magic involved and that made him think of his brother. There is something he doesn’t want to talk about and it surely revolves around Loki… so you were right, I should have been asking questions, then I would be better able to help him. Something troubles him and I… I want to help him.”

No, this wasn’t what Loki had indented, but maybe it was a necessary step. They were in love, he couldn’t just plant a doubt and everything would fall apart. Not if real sentiment was involved. It would be the same with Stark. Jane Foster wanted to protect Thor. Fine, at least Loki knew now that the effects of his little game couldn’t be ignored anymore. Thor was hunted by demons and perhaps Loki should give Jane Foster a slight idea what kind of demons they were dealing with.

Nothing weighed heavier on the shoulders of a strong man than guilt. Thor hadn’t been able to save his brother and even more so, he was responsible for all that had happened to Loki Odinson. Who was dead and whose body was rotting. Abandoned and forgotten.

Who would leave his beloved brother behind like this? Not a man who really cared. If Thor didn’t care enough about his brother who he had known over a thousand years, who he claimed to love so fiercely… how could he be trusted to care about a mortal who he had only known for about as long as the blink of an eye?

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Jarvis greeted him, emphasising that they had been looking forward to see him. Loki just smiled, pretending to be nervous and fidgety. After spending half of the night thinking about how he would pull this of. Stark liked complicated and difficult things. He was smart, he liked to figure things out, he was a mechanic, a creator. It was endlessly important that Loki would keep things slow. First Stark would be annoyed, but he liked a good chase and he would have to get more invested to actually get close to Thomas.

The second part of the plan was more complicated. Thomas would have to lose some of his edges. A little polishing. Not much though. Stark had fallen for him although Loki hadn’t even tried to achieve that. Therefore it was quite obvious that Thomas couldn’t change too much or Stark would lose interest. At the same time Thomas was cold, he didn’t really care about anything and that wouldn’t work out if he wanted Stark to feel like he was in a genuine, loving relationship. Thomas would of course remain the cold-hearted bastard that Stark had grown to like so much, but people always showed unknown sides as soon as sentiment was involved.

Loki had explored possible character traits last night and he was feeling confident. When all was said and done Loki still had to feel at ease in Thomas’ skin. Right now he was his favourite and considering the circumstances Loki would spend a lot more time with Stark as Thomas. If Thomas lost his appeal to Loki the whole experience would be hideous and Stark would also notice. Out of the question. Loki would play this little game perfectly, like he always did.

He was ready, he was prepared. The game was on and Loki would give his best performance. Actually it had already started. Right now Jarvis was surely telling Tony that Thomas looked
nervous and that was part one.

The times when Loki left the elevator and entered an empty living room were definitely over. After a single step Loki felt an arm snaking around his waist. “Hey, you enjoy making me wait, don’t you?”

Taking a deep audible breath Loki pushed Stark softly away. “We need to talk.”

“Great, I love talking. I love it so much most people complain about how much I love it. We should talk about I get you to give me proper greeting.” Stark tried to lean in to kiss him, but Loki slipped out of his grip and took a step back. “Bloody hell, Stark, I’m being serious here. Okay, you love to talk, you get your chance, but first you’ll listen to me.”

Stark was definitely suppressing a sigh and a slight frown appeared on his forehead. He was obviously displeased by this development, but Loki had to make him work for it after all. Pretending to feel a bit embarrassed and at a loss for words Loki bit his lip before speaking up. “I did some thinking and… I don’t think this is a good idea. Us. Dating.”

“Yeah, I was wrong. I don’t like this talking thing. I vote against it.”

“Damn, listen to me! I’m not one of these agents who take all your shit… What do you know about me? Nothing, because you never asked me anything. You said that we were dating, but… you never asked me questions about myself. Then the whole story about that twat you had here when I showed up. What do you even know about me?” He searched Stark’s eyes and he saw everything he wanted to see.

Determination

His doubts didn’t discourage Stark, quite the opposite. A soft grin played around his lips. “Well, Tommy, people usually date to get to know each other, I will ask you all the questions you like, but I haven’t yet, because… I kinda know everything that’s important right now.” Raising his hand Stark started counting along his fingers. “First, I know that you are a hottie, because I have eyes in my head. Second, I know you’re British and that’s also hot. Third, I know that you don’t take my shit or anybody else’s shit. You’re smart, sarcastic, vain, hot tempered, sophisticated, a bit of a snob. You’re into classical music and literature, you’re not scared to try out new things, you’re eager to learn, you don’t like authorities and you would never suck up to a person that you don’t like. I know that you’re a cold-hearted bastard and you’re absolutely awesome. Is that enough for now or do I have to go on? You know that I love talking, it would be no problem. Or you could just sit down on the couch, have a glass of wine and let me give you a foot rub.”

Loki tried not to smirk, Stark had been attentive. Thomas would still be suspicious, but he liked Stark, so he had to give in at least a little bit. “I don’t trust you. You’re reckless and crazy and…”

“You’re totally into that.” Stark shot him a knowing grin and Loki laughed breathlessly. “Yes, kind of.”

For Stark this was evidently Loki’s permission to come closer again and this time Loki indeed didn’t back away. He still made sure though that his eyes told Stark to be careful. “It’s okay, you don’t trust me, hardly anyone does, we’ll work on it. I’ll win you over with my charming personality and if that doesn’t work out… I’ll buy and build you everything you want and I’ll have Jarvis do anything you want.”

“Is this a concrete order, sir?”
Loki had to smirk, because it was all too obvious that Stark hadn’t expected that Jarvis would enter this conversation and take him up on his offer. “Oh great, thank you. Now I have to instantly make him the new master of this house or I’ll look like a complete hypocrite.”

“You know, I like that idea…”

For second it seemed like Stark was actually giving it some thought, but then he quickly shook his head. “Nah, I said I’ll win you over with my sparkling personality first. Shouldn’t be too hard, I’m awesome. Can I stop the babbling now and we do more of the kissing? Kissing’s great and we haven’t actually done any of it since yesterday… and that’s such a long time.”

The kissing was inevitable, Loki knew as much and thanks to his preparation the prospect didn’t seem as bad as before. Stark’s features were pleasing to the eye and Loki preferred kissing him definitely to talking to Jane Foster. What kind of lover would Thomas be? Only one way to find out.

Taking Stark by surprise Loki put a hand on his shoulder and kissed him. His lips were soft, parting instantly under Loki’s and he thought he could feel him sigh happily. It was passionate, because Loki was passionate about everything he did. Barely enough, he made sure to take Stark’s breath away and then he just broke the kiss. Loki wanted to laugh. Of course Thomas would be a tease.

“Hey, don’t stop. Stop the stopping. Stopping is bad. Kissing is good.”

Rolling his eyes Loki grabbed Stark’s wrist and pulled him along to the couch. “I want to see the last two episodes of the first season of Game of Thrones.”

Loki sat down and Stark did the same. Close, really close. Their thighs were touching and Stark’s hand rested on Loki’s lower back. Being touched was strange. Even more so because he was being touched by an Avenger and Loki instinctively wanted to move away, but he didn’t. They were dating. People who dated were also touching.

His mind was taken off these things when Jarvis put on Game of Thrones and Loki could enjoy all the violence and the blood. Then again even now Stark couldn’t keep his mouth shut. “Do you have a middle name? Of course, you have a middle name, you’re British. What’s your middle name?”

“Shut up, I’m trying to listen to Littlefinger.”

“I’ll shut up as soon as you’ve told me your middle name. We’re dating, you told me I didn’t ask questions. Now I’m asking.”

Okay, that was worth looking at him with raised eyebrows. “You want to get to know me and your first question is what is my middle name? I thought you’d come up with something better.”

“Fine by me, another question. What’s the freakiest thing you’ve ever done in bed?”

Turning his head away Loki muttered a soft “James.”

“James, huh? Why was he so freaky? Some weird kinks?”

“Bloody hell, Stark, shut up. James is my middle name.”

The grin on Stark’s face was so big that Loki didn’t even have to look at him to see it. “Thomas James Pine. It sounds nice, very classy.”
“So you actually can say my name. I’m impressed. I hope you don’t forget it during the next five seconds.”

It definitely wasn’t the best idea to keep this conversation going. Especially not since Stark’s finger decided to get busy. Travelling up and down his back, every now and they slipped under the edge of his shirt. Who would be stupid enough to think that Stark would take things slow? “I’ve always known your name, I just prefer Tommy.”

“It sounds hideous. “

“It sounds cool and it fits you nicely. Moreover I’m totally into your bitchface that you get every single time when I call you Tommy. Tommy.”

This was going to be so strenuous. If he killed him now, he could at least pretend that it had been a lover’s spat. Turning back to Stark Loki glared at him. “If you don’t stop to…”

Stark did stop. Quite naturally because there was no way that Stark could call him ‘Tommy’ when he was so busy kissing him.

“Stop that! You can’t just…”

Pushing him away had only worked for those five words, because Stark grinned boldly and Loki found himself being pushed on his back with Stark on top of him. “Shut up, Tommy. I’ve been a good boy. I only made on embarrassing phone call and waited patiently for you to come over. I think I deserve some kissing.”

He also thought that he didn’t deserve Loki’s possible reply, because he just let his mouth brush over Loki’s.

Fine, Loki would go along with it. He had put up a little fight and that would be enough. Stark enjoyed the game, but he still wanted to have his fun at the end. Evidently this was the fun part. Trying to relax his body Loki let Stark push him down completely, his instincts were rebelling when he felt the mortal’s full weight on him. Such a vulnerable moment. All Loki needed to do was putting a hand around his neck and squeeze. Stark would never see it coming.

His focus was entirely on kissing Loki, one of his hands was running down Loki’s side, coming to rest on his thigh, rubbing it lightly. A nice spot and a skilled touch, it felt good. Loki was swallowing a gasp and Stark jumped at the opportunity to deepen the kiss. Yes, Loki definitely had had worse. The idea seemed so odd that he could find actual pleasure at the hands of Tony Stark. It was always fascinating to see how disconnected body and mind could be.

Loki let his arms encircle Stark, his fingers brushed over the back of Stark’s neck before running quickly down his back. It was pleasant, they kissed leisurely for quite some time and Loki greedily registered every little piece of information. Against his expectations Stark wasn’t rushing things, he was playful and he was… he liked being in control. He let Loki set the pace if he tried to, but the emphasis had to be on the word ‘let’. After it going on for a bit Stark became dominate again, with both of his hands buried in Loki’s hair he held his head down, kissing him like he wanted to. Loki didn’t mind, he could enjoy it. It also wasn’t hard to tell that Stark desired him, the very thing they were doing here was proof enough. But there was also affection. Stark wanted him to enjoy this and strangely enough Loki did.

Fingers slipped under Loki’s shirt and his magic reared up. This wasn’t going to be easy. Pushing Stark’s hand away Loki broke the kiss. “Do I even have to say it?”
“Yeah, yeah, I got it. I won’t even get you to take your shirt off before I haven’t proven myself worthy. Right?” Stark smirked. Good, so he wasn’t going to argue.

“Well, I have to somehow differ myself from the people you’re usually seeing.”

Biting his lips Stark propped himself up on his arms and Loki knew that they were mostly done with the kissing. Good. Brown eyes were searching his and Loki actually had difficulties to make out all the different emotions in them. “Damn, you’re really going to let me suffer because of that… Listen, Tommy, I’m not going… I’m not trying to… Oh fuck this, I like talking to you. You’re cool, you’re gorgeous and I don’t plan on throwing you out like… the girl you saw. I didn’t like her, I like you. I didn’t want to date her. I want to date you.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that you were screwing around while you were at least thinking that we were dating. I’m not going to waste my time by getting invested into something that’s going to fail inevitably.”

“Wow, you’re so romantic, I can hardly take it.” Soft kisses were pressed against Loki’s neck, but he didn’t let a single sound escape his lips. Instead he pinched Stark’s arm who squealed. “Okay, okay. You threatened to throw me out of the window if I should start fucking around. I’ve already had the very unpleasant experience of being thrown out of a window, I’m not eager to relive that. No fucking around.”

Playing his role perfectly Loki started to smile and then quickly frowned. “You were what?!?”

“Long painful story, has a lot to do with freaked out alien gods… I’m going to tell you that another time.” Almost playfully he brushed his lips over Loki’s, then he stopped, probably expecting Loki to move away once again. “There, we missed the same episode all over again… you wanna give it another try?”
Hello everybody,

Why are the updates coming so fast? Because right now I’m having so much fun with the story. Since Tony and Thomas are dating now, there is going to be more of Tony than of the other Avengers, but I don’t think you’ll mind that much :)

Have fun and yes, Tony’s got it bad

Europe. Loki was almost there, he could sense it. Pulsing, more powerful than he had expected, but it was still no match for him. Only a little bit closer then Loki would know where to go. Closing his eyes Loki let himself be pulled away, towards the source of magic. Just a little bit more.

Loki walked the branches of the world tree until he felt like he could touch it. Opening his eyes again Loki found himself in front of a castle. Impressive, big, beautiful architecture and protected by magic. So he had found it. Not knowing what he had expected Loki cocked his head. Definitely not a cave, but a castle? Kind of hiding in plain sight. Taking a step towards it Loki felt himself being pushed back. Not violently, but clearly enough. The protection spell was keeping him out. Wouldn’t be a big piece of work to break it, Loki wasn’t worried, but some research couldn’t hurt. Forming a small ball of energy in his hand Loki let it loose. It hit an invisibly wall, bounced back off and vanished. Magic-proof as expected.

After taking a look around Loki picked up a stone and threw it. Nothing stopped it from flying quite a distance, dropping to the ground near the castle’s walls. Protection spell against magic. As Loki himself was also magic he couldn’t go any further. Didn’t really matter, it wasn’t very strong, nor skilful. Loki would probably need a minute or two to undo it. Raising his hands Loki focused on the pure power of the spell and started to suck out its energy. A power play. No need to create a spell or anything a little bit more delicate. Just pushing through it. Then he would be inside, seek out the little mage and this annoying little farce would be over. His magic was pleased to interact with an equal and there was only…

A little beep and vibrations against his leg told Loki that one of the Avengers wanted his attention. Normally Loki would let them wait, but he had learned that this would get him into trouble. It wasn’t such an inconvenient interruption anyway, the blockade was easy to break. Another few minutes wouldn’t hurt him.

Grabbing his phone Loki took a look at the message. Stark. Of course.

Just a question – are you more into Rousseau or Descartes?

French philosophy? Was Stark preparing to have a stimulating conversation with him? Well, the sooner he replied, the better. Stark had the nerve-racking habit to write him again and again if there was no immediate answer.

Rousseau but both of them are geniuses
Stark texted back only seconds later. *Noted. 13:00 lunch at my place? I’ll order in Japanese*

Huh. So Stark had decided that they had a date? They had only seen each other yesterday, but they were somehow a couple… So it was naturally that we would meet more often.

*Okay*

Putting the phone away Loki turned his attention back to the barrier and began tearing it down. There was nobody coming to fight him off. It was almost done, the force field was trembling beneath his fingers.

The phone started to ring.

Oh, this couldn’t be true. Muttering under his breath Loki pulled it back out. The Captain. How wonderful. Loki would tear it down another day. Then he wouldn’t bring his phone. Teleporting back to his apartment Loki answered the call. “Steve, hey. How are you doing?”

“Will, hey. I’m sorry I haven’t called in days. I’m doing fine, everything is pretty calm right now.”

Typical. First thing to say was an apology. “So you… are done with the… thing that happened?” A little shiver in his voice should be enough.

“No, sadly not. It’s still… Whoever did that is still out there.”

Yes and Loki knew where. In Eastern Europe, he would take care of it. “Has something ever happened before? I mean… someone out there killing people and… nobody finds him?”

Rogers sighed softly. “I fear so. It’s kind of frustrating to feel so… limited. There is still absolutely nothing I can do. Tons of scientists are trying to figure out who actually attacked and I sit around and wait. I’m completely useless…”

How nice. The Captain called Loki, because he felt insecure. In need of a friend. “What are you even talking about? You’re Captain America. Steve, you’re as much a symbol as a real person. All you need to do is walking down the street to inspire people. You’re always helping, I’m sure of that.”

A little pause and Loki listened closely. Yes, there indeed was a smile on Rogers’ face. “Thanks for saying that, but I’m not so sure. All I do is sitting and waiting around. I can’t contribute anything.”

Well, most likely because he was just a big, strong man. Like Thor. Completely useless when there was nothing to hit. Banner was different. And Stark of course. “Well, that might sound a little bit stupid now, but… Find yourself something to do. Again, you are Captain America. Go to some orphanage and cheer up the kids. Help to build a… bridge… I don’t know. Something that makes you feel better than just sitting around.”

“You… have a point there. I actually thought coming back to D.C… But I fear the second I leave another attack is going to happen…”

Reasonable since all attacks had been on New York. “I see… I don’t have an answer to that. Sure it’d be nice if you came back to D.C. If there is nothing you can do… You know what I think about you beating up yourself because you can’t do everything on your own. If your… scientists don’t come up with anything… then there’s also nothing you can do.”

“I guess so… Could you… I don’t know… tell me about what you’re doing. Something normal.
How are your classes going? How's the weather? Anything.”

Well, Loki was dating a billionaire… but the Captain asked about William. So Loki made a few things up. Ordinary tales of an everyday life. He told Rogers about his classes, books he had read, the strange talking habits of a professor and so on. Rogers was listening to every single word. So desperate for the glimpse of a normal life. When Loki ran out of material to talk about he hesitated for a moment and Rogers continued instead of him. His voice sounded choked up. “I’m so sorry you got hurt. I should have never brought you to this party.”

Where did that come from? How could the Captain still be upset over this? William was doing fine. “Steve, it’s fine. Nobody could have known. Stop feeling guilty about this. I don’t blame you.”

“It’s just…” Rogers stopped and Loki knew that he was on to something without actually trying to get there. “…You’re my friend. Before the ice… my best friend died, because I didn’t pay enough attention, because I wasn’t there soon enough. That will happen never again and when I saw that you got hurt during this fight… You shouldn’t have been there.”

Pure gold and it was only waiting for Loki to pick it up. Being scared of not being enough. The Captain gave everything and yet he still thought that it wouldn’t suffice, that his whole world might end any second. Loki sat down, crossing his legs. “I’m so sorry, Steve. Do you… do you want to talk about it? I’m also a good listener. If you want to.”

Now it was actually hard to hide his eagerness, he wanted to know everything.

“I haven’t talked about him since it happened…”

“I understand if you don’t want to…”

“No, I want to talk about it.”

Then Captain America started to tell Loki about the real demons that didn’t let him sleep at night. About the one person that had truly cared about him. The one he had lost during a fight and who he missed still terribly. Because he had been his best friend despite the Captain being a nobody. Loki had known it before, but now he really realised just how desperately the Captain needed a friend.

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“You really like making me wait, don’t you?” Stark greeted him with a chaste kiss and took Loki’s hand, pulling him towards the dining table. Loki had indeed arrived late, because his conversation with the Captain had taken way longer than expected. “I got caught up.”

Smirking Stark pushed him down on a chair and sat down opposite of him. “A shame, Jarvis was already missing you. I could hardly keep him calm.”

“Sir, I fear you are mixing things up.”

“Jarvis, don’t let me down on this one.” Turning back to Loki Stark gestured towards the full plates on the table. Way more to eat than for just two persons. “I ordered pretty much everything from the menu. It’s also absolutely obligatory that you eat with chopsticks.”

Loki didn’t have a problem with that. “Everything looks really good and I’m sorry for being late. I wouldn’t want Jarvis to worry.”

Grinning Stark shook his head and reached for the sushi in front of him. Japanese food wasn’t
anything new and Loki enjoyed it quite a bit. At least until Stark decided it was time for some more of this relationship talk. “So… how old are you?”

“That’s quite a rude question to ask.”

“If you were a girl. Come on, this is part of dating. Getting to know each other better. So come on.”

Shrugging Loki thought how old he would be if he had been born a mortal. “I’m 31 and that’s quite a stupid question to ask to get to know somebody. Think of something better.”

Stark wasn’t one to back off from a challenge and he even seemed to give it some serious thought. “Fine… You read a lot. What’s your favourite book and why?”

This was a surprisingly good question and Loki had to think. “I guess that would be Hamlet.”

“Does that even count? It’s theatre, not a novel.”

“It’s beautifully written, every character is perfectly worked out, the story is intriguing and full of symbolism and deeper meaning. Even after reading it a few times you can always discover something new.”

“It’s a tragedy where pretty much everyone dies.”

“Happy endings are most of the time unsatisfying. They’re quickly put together to make the reader happy although they don’t make sense. It’s a tragedy, but it makes sense, it fits and therefore I like it. I like everything Shakespeare has ever written. I’m British, it’s probably not very surprising.”

In response Stark laughed. “Yeah, I guess so. Next question, why are you even here? Not here here, because here is with me and it’s awesome that you’re here. Why are you living in New York?”

Because I have to be close to my enemies.

“I like exploring new things, I want to see the world. New York seemed like a good place to start, but I’m going to return to London some day. That’s for sure.”

Stark didn’t show any reaction but a little nod. “Cool, lucky me that you like to explore. Now… what do you want to ask me? I know you’re dying to know more about my wonderful personality.”

There was the possibility to instantly dig deep, to gain knowledge about Stark’s demons, but Loki decided to go another way. “When did you decide that you were interested in me?”

“Strange choice of words, but… I thought you were hot the second I saw you and I thought you were awesome the second you opened your mouth. I guess I realised that I was into you when you were telling Steve to fuck off. I’ve never seen anyone stand up to his antics. Well except for Reindeer Games, but that was a whole different story…”

Loki’s right hand twitched and his magic was surging. He detested that nickname and he definitely hadn’t expected that this conversation would actually turn to him. Loki. Not Thomas. “Who?”

Watch your tongue, mortal.

To Loki’s big surprise a grin on Stark’s lips. “An old friend. Psychotic, weird, not from this planet, in desperate need of a new haircut. Complete jerk, but he brought Cap to his knees and that’s something I’ll always be grateful for. Anyways, you don’t take shit from anybody and I love that.”
Loki’s hand closed itself to a fist and he thought he could feel the energy in his fingertips. Psychotic and weird. That’s what you think of me?

“Sir, I’m sorry I have to interrupt your meal…”

“Then don’t do it, Jarvis.” Immediately Stark’s mood seemed to change, the idea of somebody interrupting them was not welcome.

“I have to inform you that Agent Romanov is on her way up to the penthouse.”

Annoyed Loki put his chopsticks down. “These constant interruptions are tiresome, Stark.”

“It’s Tony and no need to tell me. Why did I promise the Avengers all time access to the tower? Right, because I am an idiot.”

So he was about to see the Widow as Thomas. This would definitely be interesting. How would she react to find out about Stark’s relationship to him? And how would Thomas react to her? Thomas was so much like himself. Well, no matter how it turned out, Loki would amuse himself. Stark wouldn’t, he looked ready to murder someone and that was what Loki wanted after all.

They didn’t move a muscle when the Widow entered the penthouse. If she was surprised to find Stark not alone, she didn’t show it. Her face was as stoic as ever. Loki wondered where she had spent her time during the last couple of days. Of course he had been observing her apartment, but she hadn’t been there.

“Tony, we need to talk.”

“If it’s professional - make an appointment with Jarvis. If it’s private… same thing. Was nice seeing you, Natasha. Bye.”

Loki raised an eyebrow and the Widow walked up to them, so obviously unimpressed. “I’m sorry if I’m interrupting a business meeting, but this is important.” Just by the way she pronounced this phrase made clear that she already knew that this was anything but a business meeting.

“Stark, I just love the fact that all your friends who come in here are so nice and introduce themselves before they say what they want from you. So refreshing.”

For the first time her eyes settled on him and they were cold, almost unreadable. “Natasha Romanov and you are?”

“Thomas Pine, nice to meet you. If you are going to insist on me leaving the room like the Captain did – you’re going to get the same response as him. No.” Loki put a California roll in his mouth. The Widow didn’t glare at him, she didn’t show any kind of reaction, but Loki could tell that he had sparked her interest. “I’m not going to ask you to leave the room. I was sent here since Tony obviously has better things to do than answering Director Fury’s calls. Or working on technology that could save the lives of hundreds of people.”

“Wow, way to try talking me into having a bad conscience.” Stark rolled his eyes and Loki suppressed a smile. “Oh, I want to hear that conversation.”

The Widow didn’t say anything, just looked at Stark expectantly. “Nat, it’s really nice of you to play my babysitter and do the dirty work for Fury, but you see I’m constantly working. I’m working right now. Jarvis, am I working?”

“Constantly, sir. Yes.”

The Widow narrowed her eyes at Stark, a conscious decision. “How silly of me to think that you would be a bit more interested in an attack on your house that killed 9 people…”

“You know what, this is getting really old. The whole thing is kinda funny since Fury forbid me working on the robots and this other assignment he wants me on is a fake to keep me off the robots. I’m working on my own, so leave me alone. I work best without distractions.”

For a second Loki thought the Widow was going to start smiling when she looked at him. “I see that.”

Loki snorted. “I don’t think I like being called a distraction.”

“What would you like to be called? Iron Man’s boyfriend?”

This was getting really amusing and all Loki did was laughing. That would be the most frustrating thing for her. He wasn’t going to be upset and he wasn’t going to let anything slip. Thomas was anything but ordinary, he wasn’t going to be played with.

“Thanks, Nat. You just made it awkward. How am I supposed to get him into bed today now that you made it awkward?” Stark pulled a face and Loki rolled his eyes. “This is getting rather annoying.”

“Fine, I will leave, but I was only doing you a favour. Next time Fury might show up himself.”

“And he’ll be furious. I’m scared to death. Thank you for the interruption. Good bye, see you.”

Loki was a little politer and smiled at the Widow. “Have a nice day, Miss Romanov. It was nice meeting you.”

Without saying another word the Widow left and Stark wrinkled his nose. “Hey, you’re not going to blame me for that, aren’t you?”

“Well, these frequent interruptions are indeed tiresome. They also remind me of the fact that you should be working and not inviting me for lunch.”

“What can I say I’m a wanted man.”

“That’s nothing I’m interested in.”

For a moment Stark was just looking at him, a strangely serious expression on his face. From one second to another he could change his whole demeanour. What was he thinking right now?

“So… what are you interested in?”

Loki had no idea. He didn’t know what Thomas would want, because Thomas was nothing more than a character. A figment of his own imagination. What did he actually want? “Have the freedom to do whatever I want. That’s the basic principle. Desires constantly change, but if I want to do something, I want to be able to do it.”

A grin spread on Stark’s face before he got up and made his way to Loki. “That’s cool, but I wanted to know what you’re looking for in a guy.”

“Somebody who doesn’t want to stop me from doing what I want, but who does it with me… and who lets me do it alone if I want to. That’s it.” Since Stark was standing right next to him now
Loki had to look up at him and these brown eyes were actually sparkling. So Loki had definitely said something right. Stark grabbed his wrist and pulled him up to his feet and Loki let him.

Wrapping his arms loosely around Loki’s waist Stark kissed him almost sweetly. “I dunno if there’s a place you gotta be tonight, but… how about you spend the night here?”

“You said it yourself Stark, there is no way you’re going to get me into bed today.”

“Yeah, but just imagine all the fun you’ll have turning me down and completely frustrating me.”

Well, that could indeed be fun.
Hello everybody,

There is a god in Tony Stark's bed. Yeah, that's it.

Loki was going all in, but it was dangerous territory, so he decided to prepare the field a bit. Stark and him were sitting on big couch, their thighs touching, watching a movie about a crime organisation called Mafia. Surprisingly interesting, Loki would do some reading on it. Anyway, Loki wanted to ask some serious questions and before that he would get Stark a bit light-headed.

Putting his hand on Stark’s lower arm Loki let it rest there for a while, his fingers stroking lightly over the skin. “Don’t get overexcited now, okay?”

Confused Stark turned his head and only uttered a “Huh?” before Loki kissed him. A pleasant surprise from which Stark didn’t need a lot of time to recover. Almost instantly he kissed him back and the movie was completely forgotten. A shame, it was quite good. The kiss was also nice, Loki was putting more into it than usual. They made out, Stark’s arm went around Loki’s shoulders and he might be slowly getting used to it. The way Stark nibbled on his lip, deepened the kiss and then went back to being rather playful. Yes, the man could kiss, so Loki let it go on a bit longer than necessary.

Maybe too long, because Stark didn’t give a damn about Loki’s earlier statement and pulled the trickster into his lap. Stark’s hands were running up his thighs and Loki sighed softly. Time to get to the real thing. Putting his arms around Stark’s neck Loki gave him a final peck on the lips. For barely a second Loki hesitated. Only now he noticed how close they were. Loki could feel the warmth of Stark’s skin and his heartbeat. A little bit faster than usual. So open, so vulnerable. Stark’s neck. His life was completely in Loki’s hands. Not now, but soon.

“That was nice.”

First Stark pretended to be outraged, then his face broke into a smirk. “Nice? That’s the word you’re going for?”

Shrugging Loki smiled coyly at him, but made sure that his voice sounded mocking. “Yes… so nice that I’m only waiting for the next interruption.”

Mirroring Loki’s position Stark put his arms around Loki’s waist, pulling him even closer. “If you want to the whole tower can be locked down within a second. Nothing goes in, nothing comes out. Not even a phone call.”

Loki let out a soft laugh and shook his head. “Right. I guess if you did that these… agents would tear half off it down just to get to you.”

“What can I say? Everybody wants a piece of me. You can have as many pieces as you like.” A clear attempt to stop the conversation, Stark was kissing him again and Loki went with it for a moment. “Not that I’m concerned or anything, but what did you do to piss them off? Aside from
the obvious… Shouldn’t they be used by now to the fact that you’re obnoxious?”

“Ouch! I can’t be that bad, can I? When I first met you, you resented me with all your British passion and look where you are now… Don’t look like you want to kill me, that’s kind of hot… About S.H.I.E.L.D… they are used to calling the shots and they don’t like it at all that I’m not working for them, but occasionally working with them. They helped me out once, but generally… I don’t need them. I’m a genius, I have unlimited resources, I don’t depend on them. They’re spies and secret agents, they don’t like that kind of thing. I never stick to a plan, they don’t like that either. That’s it.”

Loki could agree on that. “Like I said, it could be easy. You just like the hard way. You need the thrill. Aren’t you worried that you might go too far one day? Hell, I don’t know exactly who these guys are, but… I’m quite sure that they also aren’t completely without resources.”

Stark’s wide grin almost made Loki want to hit him. “Isn’t that cute, you are worried about me.”

“I’m worried about what I might get into because of you. That’s all. Just because decided that you wouldn’t work on their… whatever.”

“I’m working all the time.”

“You are not. You’re watching movies with me, you’re going out with me, but you’re not somewhere working. I don’t say you should. I’m just stating facts.” Loki looked at him intently and Stark replied with soft laughter. “Do you believe in magic, Tommy?”

Reckless indeed. Was he really about to share this information with Loki?

“Magic? Like in Harry Potter?” Loki could remember reading the first book and hating it, but it would be good enough as a comparison.

Stark didn’t seem to mind. “A bit, yeah. For me it’s more super advanced science. Too advanced to be even compared to our technology. The stuff Thor uses. I would know a lot more if he let me examine his hammer… Anyway these robots were able to create energy boosts without any visible source, something we can’t track. There’s a signature to it, I’m trying to work with that and to be honest a few weeks ago I already thought that I had figured it out… it’s harder than that. It’s like opening a door and behind it are four new ones. You open one of them and then there’re eight. It goes on, on and on. While we’re talking Jarvis is constantly opening doors. It’s a question of time till he gets to the right one.”

Oh, how naïve he was. Little Midgardian, he wasn’t able to understand something that was beyond everything he knew.

“I didn’t get any of that, but… at least you make it look like you were doing something. Get it done, so I won’t get bothered anymore by these guys… walking into restaurants or your penthouse.”

“Uhm… well, I don’t think that’s going to happen anytime soon. Because… they actually assigned me to work on something else, not the robot thing. I’m kinda being a bad boy doing this, but that’s also what they’re expecting, so…”

“Stop talking, you’re making my head spin. I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Come on, don’t pretend you don’t think this is exciting. You’re dating Iron Man after all.”

Rolling his eyes Loki let his fingers run through the hair that covered the back of Stark’s neck.
“Stop showing off. I’m still trying to wrap my head around the fact that I’m starting to like Tony Stark. If you’re bringing Iron Man into the mix, I just might run.”

“Can’t have that…” After having barely finished his sentence Stark was kissing him again, but this time Loki pushed him away. “I’m being serious, Stark. I have no interest whatsoever in being dragged into something. I have no interest of dealing with… these people. I don’t like agents bursting into the room to drag you away while we’re having dinner. I don’t like other people casually coming in here and tell me to leave the room. I’m not in for that.”

“Got it, they’re out, you’re in. Fuck them, Jarvis can lock everyone out when you’re around. Trust me, I hate these interruptions more than you do. Can we stop the talking now? You mentioned something about the kissing being nice. I’m not a nice guy, I can do better.”

No way Loki was going to push him away right now. They kissed for quite for a while until Stark once again thought that it was time to slip his hands underneath Loki’s shirt. Would it really be such a bad idea to break a few fingers? “Just to make this clear, Stark. I’m not going to sleep with you tonight.”

“You’re breaking me heart…what if I really let Jarvis do anything you say… Okay, if looks could kill, I’d be dead now. I promise I won’t try to ravish you, but that will involve constantly biting my fist.”

“Good.”

Of course Stark didn’t get excited about Loki’s little promise, but waiting would suit his purpose better. After all what Thomas had seen he would be careful with Stark and this way the mortal was more likely to take him seriously. Besides that Loki could buy himself some time before he had to sleep with Stark. Not something he was looking forward to.

The rest of the evening went by without any big incidents. A new movie, more kisses and Stark asked him about the size of his clothes… and his favourite colour. “Hey, I just want to get to know you better.”

It was past midnight when Loki decided that it was enough. “I’m tired. If you want to stay up all night, that’s fine, but I’m going to bed. Jarvis can show me where to go.”

Stark couldn’t tell Jarvis to shut off the television soon enough, he jumped to his feet and grabbed Loki’s hand, pulling him along. The bedroom was nice, Loki liked the look of it. Dark curtains, panorama windows, there wasn’t anything else in this room than the bed itself. A place to sleep. “Bathroom’s over there, you can hit the shower if you want, I promise I won’t look.”

Loki didn’t take a shower, only brushed his teeth and tried to not ask himself why Stark had some additional toothbrushes lying around, still wrapped up in plastic. Looking at Thomas’ reflection in the mirror Loki took a deep breath. Tonight he needed Thomas. There was no way Loki could sleep in the same bed as Stark without ripping off some of his limbs. Thomas could and Loki had to concentrate on that. It was just another one of his games, he had done thousands of them. It would be easier if he wasn’t so angry. Concentrating on Thomas Loki turned around and walked back into the bedroom. Stark was lying on the bed, watching him and his eyes told Loki that Stark like what he saw quite a lot. “Okay, I think I’ll sleep on the couch.”

“Whatever makes you feel comfortable.” Loki shrugged and slipped under the blanket, blocking Stark’s view. He couldn’t help but feel a little smug. Thomas’ body was very similar to his own and if Stark’s eyes nearly fell out while seeing Thomas in his underwear Loki could also take it as a compliment. Stark himself was clad in his shorts and black tanktop. The sight of him wasn’t
apalling, but Loki’s magic still told him that he shouldn’t be lying in this bed. He should be tearing him apart.

“I got it you’re making this hard on me. I deserve it. But…” Instead of getting up Stark shot him a grin. “I can also make it hard on you.”

Loki was almost surprised when Stark started kissing him. Well, here he was. Literally in bed which one of his archenemies and this one was also kissing him. The nasty feeling in Loki’s stomach almost faded completely away and was replaced by… satisfaction. He wasn’t the only one out of place here. What would Stark say if he knew who he was really kissing? How humiliated, ashamed and betrayed he would feel… Smirking into the kiss Loki almost regretted that he would never let Stark know it. Too bad.

When Stark quietly slipped out of the bed Loki pretended to be asleep, but of course he wasn’t. He was lying in bed next to an Avenger, he hadn’t slept a single second. At first Loki had played the thought of leaving an illusion behind and wandering around the penthouse, but he wasn’t sure what Jarvis could detect if he was touching something, even if he was invisible. Apart from that Loki did know about Stark’s unusual sleeping habits. He could wake at anytime and Loki had to be there when that happened.

It was still really early and Stark tried hard to not make any sound while leaving the room. What was this about? Probably Stark was just being attentive and didn’t want to wake his sleeping boyfriend. Despite having studied the different forms of courtship Loki wasn’t sure if that term already applied to them. Midgardians were so terribly vague. Well, Loki would insist on going out publicly. He would also need another meeting with the Captain, then he could get Stark to actually use his knowledge about the robots against S.H.I.E.L.D.

Loki stayed in bed for about two hours before he pretended to wake up and yawned. He barely had the chance to take a look around, Jarvis was already greeting him. “Good morning, Mr. Pine. I hope you had a pleasant night?”

Sitting up Loki nodded. “I did… where’s Tony?”

“Mr. Stark had to leave early, he recorded a message for you. Would you like to hear it?”

Jarvis played the recording and Stark stressed voice filled the room. “Hey Tommy, you’re going to kill me, I know. Look, I kinda forgot about a super important business meeting that I have to attend. I know, normally I’m like - Fuck these meetings – Then you’re here and there’s no way I would have left if I hadn’t promised Pepper. After the whole break-up thing she said she’d leave the company if I didn’t show up. Oh great, now I said that I left because of my ex-girlfriend… She’s still my CEO and I want her to stay, so I gotta do this and you’re going to rip me to pieces and you’re totally right. I’m so sorry, I suck at apologies… Listen, I’ll be back during the afternoon and I’ll take you out for dinner, anywhere you want… Hey, I didn’t try anything last night, I still got bonus points because of that, don’t I? I’ll call you and I’m so sorry. Just so you know, Jarvis will do anything you want the whole day. I’ll see you tonight and… just for the record, you are incredibly hot even asleep.”

That was it and Loki didn’t know if Thomas found this amusing or outraging. Loki thought it was
funny. Even a reckless man like Stark had some obligations. So Loki smirked softly while getting out of bed. “Don’t tell him that I thought it was funny.”

“I would never do so, sir.”

His own apartment was designed exactly after his own taste, but he could definitely enjoy this bathroom. The second Loki stepped out of the shower and started looking for his clothes, Jarvis spoke up to him again. “Sir, there are fresh clothes in the living room at your disposal.”

Frowning Loki decided not to ask. Instead, he wrapped a towel around his waist and walked into the living room. On the couch he found a small pile of clothing, all black and green. His size, expensive, nicely cut.

“Mr. Stark thought you might want to wear something else than the clothes you wore yesterday. Since you didn’t plan on staying here over night, Mr. Stark called his tailor and had a few things delivered, hoping you would like them.”

“That’s why he asked about my favourite colour and my size.”

“Exactly, sir.”

“That’s weird. A bit creepy.”

“I agree, sir, but I assure you that he did it with his best intentions.”

Loki chuckled and dropped the towel, putting on the new clothes. Stark’s tailor deserved applause, the clothes fit well and were beautiful. Going out with a billionaire had its advantages. It wasn’t like Loki needed money to get the things he wanted, but it was nice to get some gifts. “Jarvis, was he joking about you doing what I want?”

“Mr Stark told me to fulfil your every wish as long as it’s not something crazy, violates the security protocol or has something to do with me turning into Skynet. His choice of words.”

Laughing Loki shook his head and quickly thought about what a mere mortal would do in his situation. Having breakfast, mortals were always eating. After asking Jarvis if it was okay if he got himself something to eat, Loki made himself a sandwich and thought about how to start an actual conversation with a machine. What would Thomas say?

“Uhm, Jarvis… does Stark… Tony… does he sometimes talk about me? Good lord that sounds weird…”

“I assure you, sir, it doesn’t. Yes, he does talk about you. If you are worried about Mr. Stark’s intentions, there is no need. He thinks very highly of you and he only speaks positively about you.”

“Did he brief you to tell me this?”

“He reminded me of making him look good if you should ask, but it is true that he only speaks highly of you. He was most happy about your change of heart about seeing him again.”

Good, almost perfect. Tony Stark was smitten with him.

Smiling softly Loki took a bite from his sandwich, putting on a little show for Jarvis, because there was no way Stark wouldn’t ask the same questions as him. “I just want you to do one thing for me Jarvis. Please, don’t show him any footage of me getting dressed or in the shower.”
“Of course not, sir.”

Loki wasn’t sure if he could trust this promise, but it was all for appearances anyway. Taking his time Loki finished his breakfast and was just about to get ready to leave when Jarvis was nice enough to warn him. “Mr. Pine, I should inform you that a visitor is coming up to the penthouse. They probably want to talk to Mr. Stark.”

Wonderful, even more interruptions. “Didn’t you tell them that he wasn’t here?”

“Mr. Stark ordered me to not address Mr. Odinson when nobody else is around, because he tends to forget about me.”

Thor. Loki bit his lip, trying not to snarl. “Who?”

“Thor, Mr. Pine.”

“A god, how wonderful.” If there was one thing Loki hadn’t planed for today, it was interacting with Thor. Time to improvise and there was something you simply had to love about Thomas, he wouldn’t like Thor very much. Walking back into the living room Loki saw the elevator doors opening and there was Thor. Well, Loki could at least try to have some fun with this, but most probably it’d only be torture. “Hello?”

If Thor was surprised to see someone else than Tony he didn’t show it. “Greetings, I am looking for Tony Stark.”

Loki raised an eyebrow. “Tony isn’t here. He won’t be back until the afternoon.”

Thor smiled gratefully and stepped into the penthouse. “I am not in a hurry, I can wait for him.”

“Listen… uhm…” Loki watched Thor carefully and he saw lots of little signs of distress. Good, maybe his nightmares were the reason why he was here. Sadly Loki couldn’t discuss that with him. “I don’t know you and I’m going to leave. I don’t know if I can just let you stay here. Alone.”

Thor seemed bewildered by this, of course. How could anyone refuse the prince of Asgard entrance. Normally it would be an honour to have him here. “I am sorry, your name is Thomas if I am not mistaken?”

So Thor remembered him. Interesting and a bit surprising. “Yes and you are Thor, we’ve met. I know you’re Tony’s friend, but this isn’t my apartment and it feels weird to let somebody stay here if Tony isn’t at home.”

Obviously Thor had no idea what to say to that. Loki sighed softly and spoke up again. “Jarvis? Is it okay if I leave and Thor stays here? Would Tony mind?”

The response was quick. “Mr. Odinson has access to the penthouse and I have already informed Mr. Stark about his presence. He doesn’t mind.”

Loki put on a little smile and nodded. “Thank you. I guess it’s okay then. I have to go now. Have a nice day.”

Thor nodded and only said something when Loki had already stepped into the elevator. “Will I see you now more often around the Stark Tower, Thomas?” His words sounded warm and Loki wondered why Thor didn’t know Thomas, why would he like him? Moreover Loki was surprised that Thor seemed to have understood what Thomas was doing here. “I guess so, yes.”
“These are good news. I hope you have a pleasant day.”

Loki nodded and let out a deep breath when the doors finally closed. Yes, if Thomas really was to be Stark’s official partner he would face the other Avengers more often. It didn’t matter if Thomas didn’t like them very much or didn’t want to be involved in these kinds of things. Then again, whose side would Stark choose if Thomas forced him to?

***

The Widow hadn’t been at home for days thanks to the robots. Now that Loki was sitting on her window sill and mewing she instantly let him in. Maybe she felt sorry for neglecting him, because Loki was immediately served food and she petted him softly. “Where did you get all the goodies while I wasn’t here?”

Loki only mewed in response and ate the tuna. As delicious as always. Sitting down in Indian style the Widow picked him up, put him in her lap and stroked his fur. She was seeking an awful lot of contact today, perhaps the unsuccessful search for the robots was getting to her. For now Loki let her do as she pleased and purred.

She only stopped petting him when a silent noise filled the room. The Widow got a phone call, this was about to get really interesting.

“Cap, what’s going on?”

Rogers? A cat couldn’t ask the Widow to put him on speaker, couldn’t it?

“Yes, I’ve been there and talked to him. I got why you are worried, but I honestly think that he is doing fine. Most people would say his timing is in bad taste, but he’s Tony. The usual standards don’t apply to him.”

So the Captain had asked the Widow to come to Stark’s place to check on him. William was doing a great job, Loki would have to give himself a pad on the shoulder later. Right now listening was more important.

“He was unpleasant, because I interrupted his dinner with his future boyfriend. Boyfriend, yes. As in girlfriend, only male. Cap, this isn’t the forties anymore, there are a lot of things you might have to get used to. I don’t think Tony cares about something like gender, I clearly walked in on a date. Yes, I know it’s very soon after Pepper, but that doesn’t have to be a sign of disrespect. I am glad for Pepper that this relationship is over, it’s better for both of them and Tony is obviously interested in someone else. We’ll see if this is going to work out better. The last three times I’ve seen Tony, he was sober. That’s progress and I’m convinced that he is trying to please the object of his affections.”

For a second Loki thought that he could hear amusement in the Widow’s voice and Loki realised that all Avengers except for Barton knew about Thomas and Stark. Time to change his mind about this plan had run out. At least he knew now thanks to the Widow how hard Stark tried to please him.

“The background check was normal, he is clean. Thomas James Pine. 31 years old, British citizen, professional interpreter, only child, born in Westminster, London. Studied multiple languages and interpreting at Oxford University and moved to New York two years ago. He seems to be a bit of a loner, but nothing out of the ordinary. For now Tony’s new boyfriend rather looks more like a blessing than a curse. Cap, you don’t have to like him, he is not your boyfriend.”
Loki would be damned if she felt him tensing up. The summary of Thomas’ biography she had just given only proved that Loki had done everything right. She had been looking for information about him and what Loki had provided looked authentic enough. Still it was all happening faster than he had expected. Therefore he tensed, barely for a second and the Widow responded by tickling his chin. Might be the most bizarre moment of Loki’s life.

“I don’t care if Fury thinks Tony should stay away from the project. Right now he is doing fine and we need all the help we can get. Bruce also told me that Tony is working on some robot parts anyway. I’m more worried about Clint than about Tony. He isn’t talking to me and now he volunteered for a mission in the Middle East. There is going to be a lot of damage. He’s angry…”

The tension slipped away and Loki made himself comfortable. Everything went like clockwork. Maybe it was about time he created an incident, they seemed to be ready.
Hello everybody,

Tony and Loki have a date, Tony is serenading Loki and some clothes come off. So why is everybody completely frustrated? :)

_________________________________________________

So rock and roll, so corporate suit
So damn ugly, so damn cute
So well-trained, so animal
So need your love, so fuck you all

Come undone ~~ Robbie Williams ~~

__________________________________________________

“There you are, I’m ready to go and the table is… You look so hot in green.”

Stark’s eyes openly travelled up and down Loki’s body and the latter simply raised an eyebrow. “These are the clothes you chose for me. Which is a little bit creepy, by the way.”

“Yes, but you’re wearing them and you are looking good. I’m so going to show off with you.”
With a wide grin on his face Stark reached for his jacket and rushed into the elevator to Loki. “Jarvis, ground level please. And slowly.”

Loki didn’t comment on that, only looked at Stark while the doors of the elevator slid closed. Turning to him Stark’s grin became a bit softer. “Hey there…” Putting his hands on Loki’s shoulders he gently pushed him against the wall and Loki swallowed down the urge to break his fingers.

“Just to make sure I’m not getting my ass kicked in a second… you’re not pissed off at me for leaving this morning?”

“Why should I? You left a message and you had a perfectly good reason. And Jarvis was there to keep me company.”

“Yeah, you two get along way too well. I’m starting to get jealous…” The smirk on Stark’s face told a different story and his eyes rested on Loki’s face for barely a second. “You’re beautiful. I haven’t told you yet, but I should have…”

The compliment sounded and felt strange. Of course Thomas was beautiful, Loki always chose beautiful forms. But he hadn’t created Thomas to look beautiful to Stark. What did it matter anyway? Stark was smitten.
The reason why he wanted the elevator to go slower was also quite obvious. Stark’s lips felt soft against his own and he kissed him sweetly. Like a man who had been missing his lover and Loki had to admit to himself that he did not only get used to it, but he also enjoyed the kisses. They were nice enough that Loki didn’t actually dread sleeping with Stark in near future.

For now kissing did definitely suffice and Loki had to play along. Wrapping his arms loosely around Stark’s shoulders Loki kissed him back and maybe he should spice things a little bit up. Stark may be falling for Thomas, but one could always make things more interesting. Loki pulled Stark tighter against him, caught his lower lip playfully with his teeth before letting his tongue flick over it. With an immense satisfaction Loki noticed how Stark paused for a moment because his breath got caught. A mere second later he pressed Loki harder against the wall, his hand grabbing Loki’s hip while he was now deepening the kiss. Every gesture was a proof of desire and passion and it still seemed so odd to Loki.

“You know… I kinda don’t feel like going out anymore…” The words were muttered so softly against his lips that Loki almost didn’t make them out.

“Bad for you. I’m hungry.”

Stark’s lips brushed over his neck, his warm breath tickling his skin. “We’ll order in… unfortunately I broke all the plates I had at home… easiest way would be to eat it off your naked body…” A hand ran up his thigh, coming to rest on his rear and squeezed the tiniest bit.

Loki’s hand opened itself on its own, ready to summon his dagger in his palm. No. Not Loki. Thomas, it was Thomas. Just a mortal, not a prince, not a king. Thomas wouldn’t ram a sharp blade into the back of Stark’s neck. He would push him away though. Time to cool him off. “We are going out. Remember what I said about dating?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m still on probation, but did you look at yourself today? You look so hot in these jeans…” Putting his hands on Loki’s hips, pulling him away from the wall, but again closer to Stark.

“You got very lonely during your meeting, didn’t you?” Shaking his head Loki grabbed one of Stark’s hands and pulled him slightly away, towards the doors. They arrived on the ground floor a second later and got out of the elevator. “You can’t imagine just how lonely… Okay, don’t give me that dark glance, because it’s kinda hot… Are you into Mexican food? I got us a reservation, but we can still change…”

“No, Mexican food is great.”

Stark didn’t drive himself, a car was waiting for them in front of the tower. After getting into the car Stark introduced him to his driver, a man called Happy. Loki doubted that it was his real name. He was polite though, turning around in his seat to shake Loki’s hand. “Nice to meet you, Tom.”

Before Loki could say anything Stark gladly helped him out. “Don’t shorten his name, he hates that. It’s Tommy.”

“It’s not. It’s Thomas. Pleasure to meet you… Happy.”

“Mexican it is. Happy. Let’s go.” Stark put an arm around Loki’s shoulders, pulling him close and Loki noted that he wasn’t bothered at all by the presence of another person in this car. Well, if this man was his driver he had probably seen a lot of indecencies in this car. “Jarvis told me that you met Thor today.”
This topic of conversation definitely wouldn’t get Loki to sleep with him. It rather ensured that this evening would quickly turn sour. “I did, yes and I seriously don’t know how you can live with the fact that pretty much everybody seems to have free access to your home.”

“Not everybody, just the Avengers.”

“Yeah, great. Does that mean Captain America could walk in any second while I’m in the bathroom?”

“Of course not. Steve always knocks, he’s way too scared of walking in on something. Especially when I’m around.” Stark leered and Loki rolled his eyes. “I didn’t know if it was okay to let him stay since you weren’t there. It was strange seeing him standing there. With his hammer in hand and everything.”

“He’s quite a sight, isn’t he?” Stark chuckled and his second hand started drawing patterns on Loki’s thigh. “Although I was a little bit disappointed. When I got home he had actually figured out what you were doing there. I thought he’d be having a little heart attack, but seems like Asgardians aren’t as uptight as I thought.”

Again Loki wanted to roll his eyes. Asgard believed in joy, in happiness, colours, brightness. If you fell in love or in lust with a person the gender didn’t matter. An Asgardian wouldn’t even understand why this could be an issue in another realm. As far as Loki knew Thor had never shown interest in other men, but he would never be bothered if someone else did. He had never cared about Loki’s male lovers.

“Did he really wait half the day for you? Doesn’t he know about cell phones?”

“Thor likes a face to face talk. He wanted to discuss something… private.”

Suddenly Loki’s interest was sparked, he desperately wanted to know every detail of this visit, but he kept his face expressionless. Loki only raised his eyebrows a little bit, indicating Stark to continue.

In vain. Stark didn’t say anything, just made a dismissive gesture. Inwardly Loki snarled. Smitten, yes, but not enough to give this kind of information away. “Whatever. It was still strange.”

Stark chuckled lightly and chose to end the discussion by kissing Loki. This wasn’t going according to plan. Loki wasn’t going to be shushed with kisses. They should get Stark to do his bidding.

The Mexican restaurant was nice, the food good and Stark had found his tongue again, using it to tell the usual nonsense. Between that he tried to respect the rules of dating and wanted to learn more about Thomas. Which annoyed Loki massively since he was dying to know what Thor had wanted from Stark. This mortal talked about everything, he had shown Loki a part of robot he was hiding, but he wouldn’t talk about this? It had to be something important, something major…

“Tommy, I enjoy talking to myself way more than the average person, but I’d still like to get an answer.”

“Uh? Sorry… what was the question?”

Despite their table being barely illuminated Loki could see little sparks dancing in Stark’s eyes. The evening was definitely to his liking until now. Maybe he was interpreting Loki’s hesitation as a sign of nervousness or excitement. “Beatles or Stones, pick your poison, Union Jack.”

Smirking Stark shook his head. “So typical.”

“Are you mocking me?”

“No, I’m being amazed… Getting to know you is fun. I’m impressed that you reveal even more snobbish qualities by the minute and I think that’s so cool.”

“You think I’m a snob?”

“Hell yes, you’re British, into literature, classical music, jazz, you haven’t seen a single cool movie and you’re wrinkling your nose at everyone who drinks a beer. The way you dress, your haircut… total snob, but you’re also awesome. It’s not like being a snob is a big deal. I’m an egoistical, narcissist with a god complex. Nobody is perfect.”

Loki wasn’t a snob, he was royalty, but who was Stark to understand that. “Your charm definitely doesn’t know any limits. You’ve never tried to change for anyone, Stark?”

“Why should I? I’m fine with who I am. If someone isn’t, then fuck them.”

A perfect answer and Loki didn’t even try to hold back a grin. “Right… glad you were listening to me when I explained that to you.”

The conversation was fun, a bit superficial maybe, but Loki had decided that tonight was about making Stark feel good and about making him fall even more for Thomas. Perhaps a bit later Loki would try to find out more about Thor’s visit, but nothing more. He wanted to have Stark eating out of his hand before using the big guns.

Unfortunately Stark seemed to think something similar. His hand was resting between Loki’s shoulder blades, discretely running up and down. “You know… I love tequila like every other guy, but I think I have a better idea. I got some great Scotch at home. How about we get our drinks at my place?”

Brown eyes that were shining brightly and left no room for further interpretation. Stark’s intentions couldn’t be more obvious and Loki swallowed a sigh. He would have loved to delay it a little longer. No, he had to. Thomas would lose all of his credibility. He was cautious, suspicious and not impressed by Stark’s behaviour. Then again Thomas had to show a bit of affection, it was necessary that Stark didn’t get the impression that he was the only one who was invested in this relationship. Thomas was interested, but he knew who Stark was.

“I can’t say no to good Scotch.”

Stark’s smile couldn’t get any bigger.

The ride back to the tower was… interesting. Stark had him pressed against the door and was ravishing Loki’s mouth. Although he wished for pretty much anybody else to be in Stark’s place, it was rather… nice. Loki remembered vividly the immense pleasure he had found in the seduction of an elf in Vanaheim. It had been a cruel scheme, a distraction and his way into a fortress to steal a magical artefact. The elf had been of fair appearance, but his personality all the more loathsome. Loki had despised him with a passion… what hadn’t stopped him from using this exact same passion when they had been rolling in the sheets. Even in hindsight Loki still found it hard to believe how the elf had made him shiver, had turned him into a writhing mess and had made him cry out in ecstasy. One of the best experiences Loki has ever had and during all that he hadn’t stopped hating the elf. After putting his plan into practice Loki had left, not even turned around and
when he thought about the elf today it made Loki’s skin crawl with disgust. Still he had been able to bring him immense physical pleasure.

In this very moment Loki thought it could be the same with Stark.

Back in the penthouse Loki made himself comfortable on the couch while Stark was getting their drinks. It tasted delicious, although Loki could still taste Stark on his lips. “So… I suppose you’re going to ask me during the next five seconds if I want to spend the night here.”

“You are a smarty-pants.”

Smiling softly Loki shook his head. “I still don’t trust you, Stark.”

“Oh come on. I’m acting like a perfect gentleman.”

“How long has it been since you’ve had Molly here? Half a week?”

“Six days… and I’m pretty sure that her name is Shelly.”

Loki couldn’t tell if Stark was just being funny, so he simply scowled and Stark laughed softly. “God, that was so stupid… But I told you before that it doesn’t matter. Bimbo, boring, forgettable, annoying, only there to scratch an itch. You’ve never picked up a girl, because you were frustrated because you haven’t plucked up the courage yet to hit on the hot British guy you recently met? It’s a common problem.”

Make him work for it, Loki always enjoyed it to get them frustrated, but this was still unknown territory. He had never tried to make Stark fall for him, so this wasn’t really his game to play. “Ah, now you admit that we definitely weren’t dating?”

The cocky smirk faded away and Stark stared at him speechlessly. He needed to take a sip from his drink before speaking up again. “That’s all you heard? I just told you that I would have rather had you…” The endless self-confidence quickly came back and Stark’s hand that wasn’t holding his glass reached out, his fingers running gently over Loki’s lower arm. “I would rather have you anytime. You’re brilliant, sexy, your ass looks great in tight jeans and you don’t take shit from anybody and I love your little sighs when I kiss you. Speaking of that…”

Stark kissed him, one hand in the back of Loki’s neck, his fingers playing with his hair. Loki didn’t sigh, at least not consciously. Yes, yes, desire, attraction, obviously. That wasn’t what Loki was looking for. For a second Loki gave him a taste of what a real kiss could feel like before pulling back. Thomas was a mortal, he had a heart, a tiny little heart. He was a strong and independent person who didn’t need anybody, but his plan wouldn’t work if Thomas didn’t show the tiniest bit vulnerability. “Listen, Stark… you’re right, you’re an arrogant, narcissist, unpleasant, annoying jerk… at first sight. At second sight you’re still an arrogant, narcissist, unpleasant, annoying jerk… but you’re also smart and talented. I don’t mind arrogance when the person is capable. I may actually start to like you, but I hate wasting my time. I’m not a nice person. If you make me lose my time, it won’t be pretty.”

Stark’s lips formed a soft and somehow amused smile and Loki knew that it was done. At the end of all this he had to let Stark know that it had been him all along. Just to see the look on his face. Sadly that wouldn’t happen.

“Jarvis told me that you were nice when Thor showed up… and you were calling me Tony.”

“So?”
A soft laugh escaped Stark’s throat and he shook his head. “You could do that when I’m around too. Calling me Tony, not being nice. You being a bastard is hot.”

Again Loki had to admit that Stark was immensely entertaining. Being attracted to somebody who was cold, barely showed any affection towards him and repeated all the time that he doubted his worth. Another proof that Stark was a madman and had some serious issues. It worked out quite well for Loki.

“I will start calling you Tony when you start using my name.”

How could a person’s grin be actually bigger than their face? Instead of giving him a decent answer Stark started to sing. He did it well, but that didn’t make it less bizarre and Loki’s hand itched to smack him. “Tommy used to work on the docks. Union’s been on strike, he’s down on his luck, it’s tough. So tough.”

“Stark, stop it.”

“This is for the ones who stood their ground. It’s for Tommy and Gina who never backed down…”

“Stark, stop singing.”

He didn’t, he just switched to another song while putting his glass down on the table. “Tommy, can you hear me? Can you feel me near you?”

Loki felt a tingle on his skin when Stark emphasized the lyrics of the song by scooting closer to him. With his hand on Loki’s shoulder Stark pushed him down on his back, crawling over him. Every gesture was done with natural confidence like he knew that the possibility of being pushed away didn’t even exist.

“Tommy, can you see me? Can I help to cheer you?” The glass was taken from Loki’s hand, put away and the next second Stark’s fingers were running down his chest, coming to rest on his waist. “Oh, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy…” Leaning forward Stark only stopped when his face was directly above Loki’s. He could feel Stark’s breath on his skin, the warmth radiating from his body and just like last time the closeness caused his magic to stir. Attentive, ready to defend himself against an attack any second. It came in the form of smile and a purr. “Tommy…”

Stark’s lips descended on his and Thomas sighed. Yes, it definitely could be pleasant and Stark couldn’t keep his hands off him anyway. Maybe he could… Fingers were running through his short hair and Stark lay down completely on top of him. Loki could feel his weight, the hard muscles, almost unbearable heat and… something cool. Right in the middle of his chest and it was… eradiating. The sudden realisation caused Loki’s heart rate to speed up and he was filled with excitement and curiosity. The memory of this piece of metal was all too vivid. Having been able to resist the sceptre… something so powerful. Loki also remembered Stark mocking him because of the sceptre’s failure.

Stark moaned softly into the kiss when Loki grabbed his shoulders a bit too tightly, using his fingernails.

Now Stark wasn’t the only one here who was feeling a strong desire. Loki wanted. Loki wanted it desperately. He wanted to see it, learn about it. Realise what had made Stark immune. Originally Loki had planned to not sleep with Stark tonight or even this week, letting him wait was important, but Loki wanted him to and needed him to take his damn clothes off. Or just his shirt.

Fine, making a decision was the hardest part after all.
Loki deepened the kiss, wrapping one leg loosely around Stark's hip. The mortal was obviously pleased, his hands travelling down Loki's body, starting to explore. Instantly Loki's magic wanted to react, talked to him, offering wonderful ideas how to get this unworthy fool off him. No.

A hot mouth pressed kisses against his neck, teeth nibbling on his skin and Loki uttered a sigh. He would actually be enjoying this if there was something else he could think about than the blue light underneath Stark's shirt. Time to take matters into his own hands.

To Stark's obvious surprise Loki pushed him back up and crawled into his lap. The new position didn't seem to displease him, instead he pulled him closer, his arm wrapped around his hips. "You gotta be on top, don't you?"

"Not at all. It's just an easier way to get what I want…" Loki kissed him again, his hand dangerously close to Stark's neck, but the temptation to see the hidden object was stronger. Fortunately Stark was actually helping him, his hand slipping underneath Loki's shirt, eagerly pulling it upwards. Feeling Stark's touch on his bare skin Loki told himself not to flinch. It was Thomas' skin after all.

To Loki it felt surreal letting Stark pull off his shirt, even more so when Stark took a moment to marvel at his revealed skin. "Yeah, this is what I'm talking about…"

"Good lord, shut up…" Kissing him was a good way to silence Stark and Loki wanted to finally see it. Now. His fingers made quick work with the buttons of Stark's shirt, only to find out that he was wearing a black tanktop underneath. Seriously? So eager to get Thomas into bed, but wearing so many clothes? Loki bit down on Stark's lip, a little bit harder than necessary. Even from underneath the tanktop Loki felt the energy and he was sure if he put his hand on it, it would probably feel cold.

Loki's hands were lightly shaking from excitement when he grabbed the tanktop, trying to lift it. Out of a sudden Stark's hands were on Loki's, stilling them. Even the kiss was getting a bit more chaste. The change was so evident that Loki pulled away. "What?"

Stopping hadn't been Stark's intention since he was already trying to kiss Loki again. "Don't stop… just… I'll leave it on."

Loki's hand twitched, it had nothing to do with his magic, he just wanted to slap Stark. Why not ripping the cheap piece of garment into shreds? He could hold him down and simply study it… It would be so easy. Loki would do that, but Thomas couldn't. At least he would get angry. "What? Are you serious?"

A fascinating sight, something similar to embarrassment suddenly appeared in Stark's eyes, although he tried to play it down. "I just want to keep it on… It's a quirk…"

Evidently it wasn't. Stark didn't want him to see it, Stark didn't trust him. Which made it clear that whatever he was hiding was important. Loki's desires pulled him into two different directions. He wanted to snap the mortal's neck for not trusting him and at the same time he was so thrilled by the prospect of what he might find. Energy, technology… Loki wanted to pick it apart.

"Are you having me on? Is this your idea of a joke?" Loki made sure that Thomas already sounded a bit mad, ready to go off if Stark gave the wrong answer.

"No, I just don't want to take it off. Don't worry, my pants are coming off. That's ten times more important, isn't it?" With a smirk on his lips Stark tried to kiss him again, but Loki pushed him away. "You want to have sex, but you don't want to take your shirt off? Great, we want to keep it
fair though. If you don’t take off your shirt, I’ll keep my trousers on.”

“Come on, Tommy…”

“What? If you want a cheap, half-dressed, quick shag, then go to a bar…” After more or less snarling these words Loki made an attempt to get up, but Stark quickly held on to him. “Hey, don’t get your panties in a bunch, Tommy. Are all Brits so overdramatic? It’s only a piece of clothing and…”

They were interrupted once again by a loud, obnoxious song that filled the penthouse and Jarvis. “Sir, incoming call from Captain Rogers. Avengers protocol.”

Stark let out a groan while Loki was rolling his eyes, trying a second time to get up and Stark still wasn’t loosening his grip on him. “No, no, no. Steve calls all the time, because of nothing. He’s a big guy, strong, handsome, American, he can handle that alone. I don’t hear any explosions, can’t be that bad.”

“Sir, I urgently advise you to answer that call.”

“I’m in the middle of something, Jarvis. If there is no alien invasion or someone to blow up my tower, I don’t care.”

“Answer that call, Stark. Otherwise the dear Captain is probably going to show up here personally.” This time Loki didn’t let himself be held back and stood up. Stark had never sounded more frustrated. “Jarvis, please…”

Loki’s mood was only worsened by the sound of Rogers’ voice while he was picking up his shirt. “Tony, put on the suit. S.H.I.E.L.D was able to trace the creator of the robots.

What?! Impossible, they didn’t have the means to do that. Stark also had trouble believing the news. “Sure? S.H.I.E.L.D? That would be the first time they got something right.”

“Tony, we don’t have time for this. We’re launching a surprise attack, then this whole thing could be over. The hideout is in New Jersey, we’re already on our way.”

“Cool, you don’t need me for that, right?”

“Tony!”

“What? You remember the last time I was involved in a battle with robots? I shot your boyfriend. The time before that a building collapsed on me. Me joining you is a bad idea.”

Rolling his eyes Loki put on his shirt. “You can go. No need to stay because of me.”

“Who’s there?”

“My lawyer, Steve. He’s trying to find a way how I can get out of our little club.”

“Tony, this is serious! Nine people died during the last attack! My best friend got hurt! This is personal. They won’t hurt another person! So put on your suit and get over here to help us!”

It was a challenge to keep up his annoyed look when Loki really wanted to smile. Foolish, gullible Captain had found a new best friend and was eager to avenge him. A real knight in shining armour.

“Fine! I’m on my way. Try to keep Thor from destroying everything with his hammer before I get there.”
Jarvis ended the call and Stark stood up, but he didn’t really look like he was in hurry. “Hey, that will be quick. Just flying to New Jersey, blowing the place up and I’ll be back before midnight. Try to stay awake for me?”

Naïve fool. Loki was about to go out to save their lives. New Jersey. It could only be a trap. After all Loki had stood in front of a castle in Eastern Europe, surrounded by a protection spell. There wasn’t a single trace of magic to be found in New Jersey.

“This date is over, Stark. I’m going home.”

“What? No. Look around you. You could do anything you want while I’m gone. I’ll even let Jarvis hack into every computer for you. You could stalk your old classmates and ruin their lives. Just stay here…”

Shaking his head Loki let out another sigh. Too many for a single evening. “I’m going home, Stark. Call me when you get back and we’ll see each other tomorrow.” For a second Loki thought about just leaving like this, but Thomas had already given a proof of sentiment. It would be wrong to emotionally crush Stark now. So Loki walked up to him and kissed Stark with more tenderness than he had during the whole night. “Try to… not have a building collapsing on you. Take care.”

Before letting him go Stark kissed him once again thoroughly and then turned to leave to get his suit. Loki himself used the elevator and left the building. Outside he could see a bright spot in the dark sky, already at a quite distance. Good, Loki would play guardian angel once again. Feeble humans who couldn’t take care of themselves.
The Ambush

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody,

Don't be fooled, updates are definitely going to slow down by mid-September (because of job and real stuff and other annoying stuff), but until then... let's have some fun :)

I know what you're thinking - Tony didn't get lucky last chapter, Loki didn't get to see the arc-reactor and we have no idea what's going on in New Jersey... well, this chapter is all about... character development? Somehow?

There was nothing in New Jersey. Loki didn’t feel the tiniest bit of magic, so what did they think that they had found? A trap, Loki was fairly sure. New Jersey was so empty that Loki had no idea where to go, he had to concentrate on the Avengers to find a place where he could teleport to. Thor was always easy to find.

Loki arrived late, they had already entered the so called hideout. An abandoned factory hall, dusty and dirty. Ten minutes ago Loki had thought he would be having sex with Stark and now was stuck in this place. Nice to know that Loki could still be surprised.

Still feeling terribly annoyed Loki walked behind the Captain and the Widow who were securing the hallway. It must look weird, two Avengers who were on their guard, ready to strike at any moment and Loki was just nonchalantly following them, trying not to yawn. Something had to happen, right? Why would they be here?

“Thor, any signs of the robots?” The Widow was talking to her wrist and Loki swallowed a deep sigh.

“Nothing to be seen yet. Everything is quiet and looks abandoned.”

Because it is.

The next minutes were painfully eventless and Loki even thought about attacking them himself, at least something would be happening then. Finally they entered the big central hall of the factory and by now the Widow and the Captain seemed less tensed and instead a bit frustrated. Thor entered the hall from the other side and he didn’t look like he had seen anything out of the ordinary.

“You saw something? Anything?” Rogers sounded confused and a bit angry. Oh, he would take the people apart who sent them here. Well, Loki only knew one person who would be even more upset about this turn of events. A bit later than everyone else the Iron Man finally showed up and of course he created an exciting entrance for himself. Or at least he thought so. One of the windows simply exploded and a flash of red flew inside, landing next to the other Avengers.

“Normally I would make a joke now or comment on Cap’s flashy costume, but you called me off some very important business. On my way here Jarvis already scanned the building. There is nothing here, nada, none. Even the rats living here are having a night out to make Cap look like a complete idiot.”
Once again Loki was delighted by their antics. What did they need him for when they could take themselves apart on their own?

The Captain pursed his lips, his eyes giving away how angry he was at himself. Therefore he remained silent while the Widow spoke up. “S.H.I.E.L.D traced the energy signature of the robots back to this place. Something has to be here… or has been here.”

Stark snorted and nobody had to see his face to know that he was rolling his eyes. “Oh, come on. Until now I couldn’t trace it! Jarvis couldn’t trace it! You think that some of your overpaid Gallagher playing idiots could figure this out if I couldn’t do it? You’re hurting my feelings, Nat.”

“Fury guaranteed…”

“Fuck Fury. He hasn’t any idea what this is about, he’s just sitting behind his desk, barking orders and enjoys that everybody else is doing the work. Hell, he probably just sent us here to ruin my evening.”

Loki smirked, but reminded himself to keep paying attention. There had to be something…

“Enough, my friends. Although I ignore the reason why we have been sent here, but we are here now and should make sure that there is nothing here. We can afford missing a potential thread.”

Surprisingly it was Thor who made a sensible statement and even the other Avengers looked surprised. Of course the Captain was the first to agree with him. “Thor is right. We will search the whole facility and afterwards we can…”

“Hold on a sec…” Stark raised his hand and Rogers fell instantly silent. Not because he was intimidated, but even Loki could hear the change in Stark’s voice. Frustration had been pushed into the backseat, instead there was now a hint of worry in his voice. Jarvis must be talking to him right now. Maybe something was interesting was going to happen after all. “Fuck! Everybody out of here! Now!”

What?

Having Stark screaming at them was obviously enough for everyone to jump into action. Thor swung his hammer to fly away, the Captain and the Widow used their physical fitness to make their way to the next window by climbing, jumping and running. Stark just took off and Loki was left standing there. He better should get going to, fleeing Avengers were never a good sign. No magic was to be found here, something else must have scared Stark off and for now Loki would not go to find out for himself what it was.

Teleporting outside Loki had to wait a few seconds, but then all four Avengers caught up with him. They didn’t stop though. The Captain slid behind a parked vehicle and the Man of Iron more or less grabbed the Widow, shielding her with his body.

Only the next second the whole building turned into a giant ball of fire. Every single window burst into pieces, the glass transforming into dangerous projectiles. The wall collapsed, fire and dust mingling together. That was all Loki saw before the blast wave of the explosion threw him back.

What a stupid, foolish act.

It hurt, not badly though and Loki teleported away before crashing on the floor and finally stood unsteadily on his own feet, putting enough distance between him and the explosion.

Parts of his tunic were burned and Loki sighed softly. Although it was very well capable of hurting him Loki thought the fire beautiful. Its heat, the bright colours, its incredible powers, the way it
could equally create and destroy. Something deeply inside of Loki adored the sight of the dancing flames in front of him, how they were eating up anything that was left of the building.

Despite the sight being marvellous Loki felt the rage taking a hold of him. No, the explosion wouldn’t have killed him, but Loki hadn’t paid attention. It had taken him by surprise. He had walked into his trap just like the Avengers.

The Avengers

Were they alright? If the other mage had killed one of them Loki would cut off all his limbs while making sure that he stayed conscious so Loki could marvel at his agony.

“Holy shit! Everyone alright? I’m going to kill Fury!”

So Stark was okay. He let go of the Widow who had slight burns on her left cheek, but that was all. The Captain and Thor also seemed unharmed, but furious. “What happened in there?”

“What happened in there?! I fucking tell you what happened in there!” Stark was getting up on his feet, demonstratively pointing at the fire behind them. “This place’s lower levels were full of explosives, so well hidden that Jarvis only detected them when I was close enough! This was a fucking trap! I told you! I told you that they wouldn’t be able to trace the magic if I wasn’t able to do it!”

His burning tunic was quickly forgotten, Loki was completely entranced by this conversation. Hopefully it soon would be a conversation, right now Stark was only yelling. Filled with anger that was new to Loki. This man was always inclined to joke, to jest, to insult other people with snappy remarks, but now he was livid. Surprising, Stark should be used by now to people making an attempt on his life.

“Our enemy must have set up a trap and fooled the S.H.I.E.L.D analysts…”

“Yeah, possible, sure, right, totally, 100 percent… or somebody sent us here to get blown up!”

“What are you implying?”

“Don’t you fucking listen!? I’m not implying! S.H.I.E.L.D sends us to this empty, fucking place and it blows up three seconds after we got all in! Weird coincidence!”

Loki clicked his tongue and the Captain looked like he was about to lose it and rip the suit off Stark to beat some sense into him. “Are you out of your mind? S.H.I.E.L.D trying to kill us it utterly ridiculous.”

As expected Stark had an answer to that and he didn’t hold back his anger when he shouted it straight into Rogers’ face. “I’ve learned something the hard way and it’s the fact that pretty much anybody can turn on you! Okay, maybe S.H.I.E.L.D is indeed innocent of trying to kill us, but it’s still bloody guilty of being dumb as fuck for getting fooled into sending us here! That building was supposed to kill us! If S.H.I.E.L.D really is so nice and fluffy like you think then they got played and sent us here, because they were too stupid to figure that out! Two possibilities and both of them makes S.H.I.E.L.D look like shit and I will ask Fury about that!”

The second his little and quite outraged speech ended the Iron Man took off, flying away to put his words into action.

“Tony, wait! We have to… Damn…” The Captain’s first reaction was to pinch his nose and to take a deep breath. Loki was tempted to sympathize with him, because he knew too well how
frustrating Stark could become. Still remembering his position as a leader Rogers straightened up.
“We have to get back to S.H.I.E.L.D and to stop Tony from…”

“The Man of Iron has a point. We have to find out what happened here.”

Very great comment, Thor and very needed.

Loki watched him taking off and the Widow and the Captain left instantly, not wanting to miss the imminent conversation. Well, Loki would be present too.

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It was oddly entertaining. Stark completely lost his temper, bursting into the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters in full armour and yelled at pretty much everything and everyone that he wanted to see Fury right fucking now or he would blow a hole right into the ceiling and have Jarvis hack into their system so that their computers would only be able to connect to porn sites. Bad porn sites.

Luckily for the poor agents Fury quickly showed up and he and Stark started a yelling contest. One minute later Thor showed up, way calmer than Stark, but he also insisted on wanting to finally find the magic user who was causing all this trouble and bloodshed. He would not be slowed down by S.H.I.E.L.D if they couldn’t provide them with useful information.

Loki bit his lip to not burst out laughing, while Stark blinked for a second and then eagerly raised his arm, wanting Thor to highfive him. The vein on Fury’s forehead seemed to be ready to explode any second.

Things only calmed down when the Captain and the Widow finally caught up with them and Fury wanted to know from them what had actually happened, since the god and the drunk were only babbling.

“It is quite simple. We got in, Jarvis located the explosives and we barely got out fast enough before the whole place blew up. It was close and Stark is upset, because there was nothing there. Not even the slightest hint why you would have sent us there in the first place. We are all wondering what happened.” The sound of the Widow’s voice didn’t give anything away, the touch of death didn’t seem to bother her at all. There was also not a single trace of a reproach to be found, almost as if she was talking about a movie or something else that wasn’t connected to her at all.

Fury obviously preferred talking to her than talking to the two weird, mad guys who had flown in earlier. “We got fooled. We don’t know yet how they did it. We are working on it.”

“Wow, really reassuring. Your guys were stupid enough to get fooled in the first place, there is no way they figure this out by themselves.”

“Stark, you may think that the world isn’t able to turn without your help, but you should be surprised what other people are capable of.”

“Yeah, like saving your own damn Hellcarrier from crashing into the sea… Oh, wait, that was also me!”

Baring all his teeth Fury clearly held back from simply ripping Stark’s head off and Loki chuckled softly. He could see where Fury was coming from, but Stark also had a point. S.H.I.E.L.D was the pure definition of incompetence. They hadn’t been able to contain Thor, they hadn’t been able to contain him and the Avengers had saved the planet on their own, without S.H.I.E.L.D doing anything but twiddling their thumbs. Right now the one person who had tried to conquer the planet was standing in the middle of their control room, invisible, but he was right here and nobody had
“You better leave now, Stark. It’s late and you must be tired after such a horrifying incident.”

A decent person would go home now, get some sleep, call their boyfriend to tell him that everything was alright, but Stark wasn’t a decent person. “You wish. I’m going to stay here, looking over their shoulders until they’ve found out why they sent us into an obvious trap. If they did it by accident…”

“Tony, leave it be.” The Captain tried desperately to stay calm, still wanting to believe that somebody else in this world could be as noble as him. Poor guy, he was indeed one of a kind.

A few minutes later Rogers and Stark were sitting at a table, Stark suspiciously watching everybody else and Rogers watching Stark. “You don’t seriously believe that someone sent us there in an attempt to kill us.” Calm, slow, just a question.

Sadly it didn’t matter how carefully he tried to approach the topic, Stark was way too angry to have a normal conversation. “Steve, you should know exactly that pretty much anything is possible.”

“S.H.I.E.L.D are the good guys…”

“Good or bad, god, you are so sweet.” Stark uttered a dry laugh. “Do you really think the bad guys do think of themselves as the bad guys? They don’t. Okay, maybe they are all nice and fluffy, but you only need one guy who thinks his paycheck isn’t big enough. One guy who is pissed because we didn’t save somebody fast enough. Somebody who doesn’t like your haircut or my last TV interview. Hell, maybe he is a fucking misogynist and just wants to blow Natasha up. Or the guy or the organisation who built loads of robots has a guy in here. You see that? Hundreds of possibilities why S.H.I.E.L.D could send us in there and I’m not even mentioning the fact that Fury’s bosses actually might think that we’re dangerous.”

Loki was tempted to nod and tried to not feel impressed. Underestimating Stark was something he really should stop doing. The man turned out to be more perceptive and thoughtful than Loki had realised. He even did it to shake up the Captain a little bit. “It is good to be careful, but you shouldn’t be paranoid.”

“Paranoid… yeah and you shouldn’t believe everything your officer in command tells you. Not everyone is as nice as you.”

“When you say nice it sounds suspiciously like stupid.”

“For an old man you have pretty good ears.”

The Captain pursed his lips and seemingly decided that he was a better man than Stark. Or at least a man who was too good to snap because of such an uncreative insult. “I will talk to Fury, see what’s going on.”

“Yeah, you do that.”

So the Captain left Stark alone and Loki sat down in Indian style on the table. He didn’t wonder if Stark was right or Rogers. It didn’t matter, they would find out and the mage was Loki’s business anyway. He was still here, because he wanted to hear a certain conversation and it had yet to take place.

For the first time ever Thor did what Loki wanted him to and joined Stark at the table. Had he waited for Rogers to disappear? Loki couldn’t imagine Thor and the Captain disagreeing on
anything. Stark didn’t seem to mind Thor’s presence and for a moment he did indeed stop to let his
eyes dart around the room. “Hey there, point break. How are you doing?”

Why was he sounding so nice? As nice as Stark could be.

“I am upset that somebody tried to kill me and my friends, but I am even more troubled that we did
not get the chance to seek out the one who has been attacking us.”

Loki took his time to look Thor up and down. For someone who didn’t know him there wouldn’t
be any clue that he wasn’t feeling fine, but Loki could see the signs. He could see it in the way
Thor was sitting there, slightly tensed. He could see how heavy his arms seemed to be. Thor was
tired, Thor didn’t sleep well and Loki felt the pleasant warmth of contentment.

“We’re gonna get the guy. Not with their help, they’re as useful as wet socks. I’m on to something.
We’ll find them and take him out.”

Stark tried to reassure him, to be an actual friend and the pleasant warmth quickly turned cold.
What had Thor told Stark?

“That would be really… good.”

As eloquent as ever.

Stark tapped his fingers against the tabletop and clearly was at a loss of words. He kept talking
anyway, because he was Tony Stark. “It’s the magic, I know, but… you are from Asgard, you must
be constantly confronted with it. Okay, not that much on earth, but… really nothing since the
London incident?”

Thor shook his head, his eyes fixed on the hammer in his hand. “Nothing that’s so similar to Loki’s
magic.”

Said magic was raging because of this insult, urging Loki to cut Thor’s eyes out.

“Not as powerful or contained or… graceful, but it… has the same core. It constantly makes me
think about him.”

That couldn’t be everything. Thor had turned to Stark to admit that he had been thinking of Loki a
lot? He thought the mage responsible for it, perfect for Loki’s plans. Why should he go to Stark
with that? No way, Loki was missing something.

“Well, your brother and I haven’t always been on good terms… considering our only meeting
consisted of him trying to kill me and taking over the world. I don’t have to like him, he was your
brother. If you’re thinking about him, remember the good times. There must have been good
times.” How nice of Stark trying to help, but Loki had to go or he would cut both of their throats
any second. He had heard enough anyway, Thor was blaming the mage for his frequent dreams
about Loki and Stark was highly suspicious that S.H.I.E.L.D was working against him. Everything
was perfect.

Teleporting back home Loki turned on the TV and there were already news about a factory hall in
New Jersey blowing up. No word about the Avengers. Good.

Grabbing his phone Loki dialled Stark’s number and smiled to himself when his call went directly
to voicemail. “Hey, I heard about a big explosion in New Jersey. You said that you were going to
New Jersey. So I only see three possibilities how this thing is going to play out. Number 1 – you
are dead, so it’s obvious why you can’t call. Number 2 – you are hurt and in hospital, maybe
unconscious so you can’t call. Number 3 – you are fine and there is no reason why you wouldn’t call me to tell me that you are still alive. Which means that you are an arsehole and I am furious. I don’t care about most stuff you do, but it would be nice to know if you are alive or dead. So fuck you, Stark. If you are dead or injured, sorry. “

Hanging up Loki dropped on the couch, feeling strangely tired. Sleep was welcoming him with open arms. Loki calmed down, finding a bit of peace in the short moment before drifting off.

Darkness. Darkness all around him. Engulfing him, eating away his limbs. His magic gone, out of his reach and Loki was falling. He was falling endlessly.

The impact pressed all air out off his lungs and he was surrounded by mirrors. Loki looked at his reflection, but it wasn’t there. Only a monster stared back at him. Banging with his fists against the glass Loki screamed, but not a sound passed his lips. Finally the mirror broke and the shards were cutting deeply into his hands. Blood welled from the cuts and it wasn’t red. Loki screamed.

Waking up in cold sweat Loki sat up straight, his eyes darting around, his chest quickly heaving and sinking with his staggered breathing. Loki stared at the palms of his hands and even in the darkness of the living room he could make out all the delicate lines. Lines on white skin.

Closing his eyes Loki searched his memory, that single phrase, that voice, spoken centuries ago. Fingers running over his arm, lips so close to his ear.

*I have never seen skin as pale as yours. So white. You are beautiful, Loki Odinson*...
Hello everybody,

Tony didn't call Loki - bad idea. Now he has to make it up to him... Loki is going to make it very hard for him

Have fun, tell me what you think :D

_________________________________________________

*Master of puppets, I'm pulling your strings*
*Twisting your mind and smashing dreams*
*Blinded by me, you can't see a thing*
*Just call my name, 'cause I'll hear you scream*

*Master of puppets ~ Metallica*

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At exactly 7:32 there was a knock at his door and Loki let the books about Communism and Socialism disappear which he had been reading the entire night. Clicking his fingers Loki was wearing Thomas skin, dark jeans, a white T-shirt and a black jacket. Ready to leave. Show time.

Opening the door Loki stopped in mid-motion when he saw Stark standing in front of him. Looking like he hadn’t slept in two days, a book in his hands, his hair sticking out in all directions and he smiled like a man who knew that he was about to get punched in the face. “I am so sorry! I am scum, I am a reckless, bad, bad, bad person. Listen, the suit got totally destroyed and then suddenly every single phone in New York didn’t work due to an electromagnetic field that… No, I’m just an ass. I am sorry.”

Loki looked him up and down and hesitated for a second, but he would be relieved… only to make Stark’s life a living hell. “You are alive. Good for you.”

“Yeah… you have a fucking good reason to be mad at me… so I won’t even try to explain or to make myself look good… I’ll just try to buy myself free by giving you an expensive gift.”

Stark handed Loki the book and again it was a very old version. A collection of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Nice, Loki always enjoyed these. “I looked up your thesis, you wrote about different translations of Shakespeare into roman languages, so… Here’s a two hundred years old copy of Shakespeare. My way to say that I’m an idiot and I’m sorry. Is it working? Do you already hate me less?”

Letting his fingers run over the book Loki uttered a sigh. “Now I’m glad that you’re still alive.”

“That’s a beginning, right. Can I come in?”
Stark was asking, interesting. He must really feel bad. “No, I’m just about to leave.” Loki put the book on the little table right next to the door and pulled the latter shut behind him.

“Okay, listen, I should have called you. I’m just not used to calling people to tell them I’m alright, because… I can’t finish that sentence without sounding really sad and pathetic.” Loki couldn’t quite believe it, but Stark was using his puppy dog eyes at him. No dignity whatsoever.

“What about Miss Potts. You never called her?” His voice was filled with spite, leaving no doubt that he was still angry and Stark slowly shook his head. “No, uhm… she was most of the time connected to Jarvis and knew about my vitals. Look, that was stupid and it won’t happen again. If you go to my penthouse when I am out, doing Iron Man stuff Jarvis will tell you anything. How many heart beats per seconds and if I already shit my pants in front of a bad guy… Scratch that… if you aren’t around the penthouse, I will call you. Cross my heart, hope to die. You aren’t angry anymore, are you? If so, give me some hours and I get you something Shakespeare has signed personally.”

Rolling his eyes Loki let him hear his frustration. “Keep making me gifts, I love them, but none of it is going to change my mind. I asked you to call me, you didn’t. I’m angry. This is how it works. Deal with it. You just gotta wait till I’m not angry anymore and call the next time.”

Loki tried to walk past Stark, but he gently grabbed his wrist. “Tommy, you’re right, I am the bad guy. You’ll get the whole day to be angry, but tonight I’m going to be here and we’re going to do something. Something awesome. I don’t know what yet, but I’m a genius and a billionaire. I’ll think of something.”

“Fine…” Freeing himself from Stark’s grip Loki headed straight to the stairs and decided to throw a dog a bone. “I’m glad that you’re alright…”

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“You look tired.” Not the nicest greeting, but the Captain appreciated William’s honesty.

“I am tired…” Rogers didn’t even try to wrap it up nicely, no sweet talking him. Were they finally getting somewhere?

Loki leaned closer to the laptop, studying Rogers’ face and the dark rings under his eyes. “What happened?”

Now the Captain smiled softly what made him look like he was about to fall asleep. “Nothing out of the ordinary. A little argument with Tony and… the people we’re working for… with. It wasn’t pretty…”

Loki opened his mouth, closed him again, shook his head and let his face show all the disappointment William was feeling. “Why do you do that? Why are you putting up with this? You are fighting crime and… evil… what is there to argue about? I don’t know Stark, but judging by what you tell me about him…”

“Well, I guess he had a good reason to be upset. I don’t agree with him, but… He is hot tempered and likes to jump to conclusions. We didn’t agree, that’s it.”

Stop doing that, stupid mortal! Always trying to appease everyone, even himself. No, Loki was not doing him this favour. He wasn’t going to nod and smile. Instead he sighed and pulled a face. “You should stop doing that, Steve.”

The Captain’s eyes showed his confusion. “What do you mean?”
“Making up excuses for him. Look, I know you are a nice person, you want everybody to get along. I know you’ve seen bad things and that’s the reason why you want to avoid any kind of conflict, but… This guy is a complete jerk!”

That was enough to startle Rogers. “You mean Tony?”

“Yes! Every time you talk about him it’s about something he has said or done to make other people miserable. I don’t know the details and I don’t need to know the details, because I know you. You are a good guy and I’m sorry, Steve, but you take way too much crap from him. What did he do now?”

“He only voiced a theory that I didn’t agree with. He did nothing.”

Taking a deep breath Loki spoke up again, this time his voice was softer. “It was nothing, right. That’s why you look all beat up. You’re too nice and I’m getting tired of saying that all over again. You don’t have to stand up for everybody. A few people deserve a ‘Well, fuck you’ and Tony Stark is one of them.”

If Loki couldn’t say it, he would have somebody else do it. Hopefully the Captain and hopefully he would break the Avengers apart in the process. It would be so much easier if Rogers wasn’t clinging to his nice and supporting behaviour like it was the only thing he got. He had William now.

Loki didn’t know if he liked the smile on the Captain’s face. Anger, that was what he was looking for. “It’s nice that you are trying to look out for me, but I can do that myself.”

“Shut up, Captain America. You worry about the safety of this country and I worry about you, because you don’t worry about yourself.” For a moment Loki himself was startled by the softness of his tone. He was way too good at this.

“So good that Loki could actually read on Rogers’ face how moved he was by this little outburst. “I know you do, but you don’t have to. I am fine, really.”

“No, you aren’t. I’m sorry, Steve, but you aren’t. You are stuck in New York where you can’t do anything to help anyone and every time you call, you sound unhappy. That’s not the definition of doing fine. Isn’t there any chance you can come home? For a while? I’m pretty sure that Captain America also has the right to go on holidays.” Loki’s lips formed a small smile and Rogers lowered his eyes for a second. “Yeah, I feel kinda stuck… and the whole thing is tearing on everybody’s nerves. Everything’s going to be fine when we’re done with the robot guy.”

Keep telling that yourself, someday you just might end up believing it.

“It’s been weeks… are you any closer to find out who is behind all that?”

The frown on the Captain’s forehead said more than enough. “No, we’re stuck. I wish I could tell you something different.”

“Please tell me that you’ve been doing something else during the last days than just waiting around for them to find you a foe to fight.”

A light blush started to spread on Rogers’ cheeks and Loki groaned. “Good lord, Steve! You are not responsible for everyone and everything! Doesn’t anybody tell you to take a break once in a while?”

Of course they didn’t. All they saw was a superior being, strong and persistent. In their eyes that was all what there was to him. They had forgotten that underneath the shell there was still a person.
Too bad for them, Loki would remind the Captain of his worth. “Okay, enough is enough. Get your phone, Steve. We’re going out.”

Now he had definitely confused the poor Captain who seemed a bit lost. “What? How? You’re in DC.”

“Yes, but you are in New York. There’re thousands of things you can do there. Have you already visited the Museum of Modern Art? Who am I talking to, of course you haven’t. You are going there right now. Get yourself a phone with a huge screen and some earphones, I’m coming with you.”

“Are you serious?”

“Of course, I am serious. You have to do something you enjoy for once in a while and since I’m in DC, you will have to get me on the phone. After all I will have to talk you out of going back the second you leave. Come on.” Loki smiled, but made clear that he wouldn’t accept Rogers refusing.

“I can’t just leave right now… We are looking…”

Sighing Loki crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Are you doing something? You, not some other guy who wants you to wait till he got his job done. Are you doing something right now?”

“No, but…”

“No buts. You refuse to take care of yourself, so I’m going to do that. You need to go out, I’m not there to drag you out, so we’ll do it like that. Get your phone and we’ll take a trip to the museum.”

The startled expression slowly faded away and Rogers started to smile softly. “You are bossing me around and you are having fun with it.”

That was the truth actually. “It would be more fun if you were already heading towards the museum. On the way I will tell you what I think about the internet taxes the government is talking about. It’s nonsense and I will personally start protesting if they are going through with that. Paying for the internet. Are they out of their minds? Hey, you aren’t moving yet! Get moving!”

And the Captain did. Loki spent the next four hours on a couch, taking with the Captain about everything and nothing, sometimes demanding that he would show Loki the painting he was looking at right now and then he let Rogers marvel at said piece of art. It was a nice change, quiet and calm, quite a contrast to Stark. After looking at about a hundred paintings the Captain sat down, turned the phone in his hand so he could once again look at William. “This… was a really nice afternoon. You were right. Thank you.”

“My pleasure, I hope that will teach you that I’m always right and you should be listening to me. All the time.”

You really should, Captain. I’m going to give you a purpose, so do what I want. You won’t regret it.

Rogers continued to smile at him and now it looked so much more natural and unforced. Like he really felt genuinely happy at this moment. All it took was going out to a museum… or maybe having somebody telling him to do something just for himself. Wasn’t it nice to be treated like person? Not like a weapon which happened to talk. “I will remember that. Listen… I really miss you. It would be nice having you around here. I think you are the only person in this… entire century who’s normal.”
Because I also don’t belong here…

“Thank you… I guess. It was a compliment, right?” Loki laughed and the Captain nodded instantly. “Yes, it was. This really was a great idea. I didn’t realise how badly I needed to get out of there for a few moments. It was nice.”

Say it out loud. Come on, do it.

“I don’t get that. Isn’t there anybody who tells you to… take a day off? If I can see via Skype how tired you are of this shit, then everybody you work with can see that too. You deserve a day off like everybody else. Even from saving the entire City of New York.”

Rogers didn’t answer and Loki thought that was perfect. “If Captain America is watching out for everybody, who is watching out for Captain America?”

“Well…” Rogers paused for a moment before smiling softly. “…you are.”

Loki smiled back at him and finally shook his head. “I can’t call you three times a day to make sure that you eat enough. No, seriously, you have to watch out for yourself. You are such a good person. So good that you forget thinking about yourself. It’s not about selfishness, but about what’s good for you. If arguing with an alcoholic in a tin can makes you feel bad… stop doing it. And for god’s sake, take a day off every once in a while. You aren’t the government’s personal slave.”

But you’re going to be mine. I don’t need a sceptre to control your feeble mind…

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Thomas’ eyes were beautiful. Bright blue, soft, but able to become completely cold. His skin was white, he got easily sunburned, but nobody would describe him as pale. Running his hand through the short brown hair Loki let out a sigh. Swiftly his features changed into Loki’s very own face and green stared back at him.

Biting his lip Loki took a deep breath and fought down a tingle of melancholy. He was missing his face. Some people probably wouldn’t understand. Loki could be everyone and everything he wanted. Oh and he had been more people than he could ever count, not the mention other creatures he had chosen to imitate. Yet, Loki missed his own appearance.

Well, as soon as Loki would be done with the Avengers he wouldn’t have to wear any other face than his own.

The green of his eyes faded away, being replaced by blue and only a second later his phone started to ring. Punctual, he was really trying.

Stark was waiting in his car in front of the building. An Aston Martin, driving himself, obviously showing off. Unimpressed Loki got into the car. “So? What are we doing?”

“Hello to you too.” Even though he was in desperate need to make a good impression Stark still thought it was a good idea to be cocky. “My first idea was to fly to London, but an eight hour flight seemed a bit too long and you might feel too much at home and refuse to leave, so… just wait and see.”

“I hate surprises.”

“Don’t worry, if you don’t like it, no reason to leave my sorry ass instantly. I have two alternate plans and by the end you will have forgiven me for being…”
“An inconsiderate arse?”

“Yep…” Stark shot him a grin before focusing on the road and driving off. He wasn’t the most careful driver though, immediately turning back to Loki. “You look amazing. That jacket and the way you… wear it…”

Rubbing his temple Loki let out a deep sigh. “Look at the street, I don’t want you to get me killed. Also stop babbling.”

“Good, you’re still pissed. That’s great actually, because my plan is to make you love me and adore me till the end of the day. It will be an even bigger achievement if you hate me now.”

Well, at least nobody could reproach him for having too little self-confidence.

Loki snorted and crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Really? Go ahead, amaze me.”

“Don’t worry, just three minutes, then I’ll start working my magic.”

Stark’s magic turned out to be a theatre performance. In a park. Luckily Loki had already heard about this kind of thing, otherwise he would have been completely clueless what was going on. Weird Midgardian customs. They loved designing buildings so much, bigger, greater, all those things. Now a play being performed in a Park? Loki had long stopped questioning anything, probably they just enjoyed the scenery. It looked pleasant enough.

“You know, I met a guy yesterday who made me think about Shakespeare in the Park. Don’t ask why, but I thought that’d be exactly your kind of thing. King Lear, a classic. I know it’s not London, but you gotta give us uncivilised Americans a chance. Or do I have to switch to Plan B?”

Cocking his head Stark looked at him intently and Loki enjoyed watching him squirm a bit.

Every single one of Shakespeare’s works was a gem, Loki enjoyed the theatre and Stark would be forced to keep his mouth shut for more than two hours. It was a win win situation. “Shakespeare in the Park is fine. Let’s hope for them that at least one actor is British.”

Loki’s lack of refusal to see the show caused the biggest grin he had ever seen on Stark’s face. “Cool! Well, if you feel like they’re doing something wrong, feel free to shout at them. That would be awesome!”

Or he wouldn’t be able to keep his mouth shut.

The play itself was entertaining, the acting decent and Loki had a good time. Due to the fact that Stark was really trying. It was impressive, every now and then he actually heard him biting his tongue or the mortal was shifting in his seat, some snarky comment wanting to get out, but he didn’t say anything. Stark didn’t want to ruin the play for his British, Shakespeare loving boyfriend who was still angry at him. For anybody else this wouldn’t be a great accomplishment, but this was Stark. There was a good possibility that he was going to die if he didn’t use his mouth a certain number of times to say something stupid. Loki could only guess how much he had to say about men wearing thighs.

Thomas would appreciate this.

When the play was over Loki could hear him releasing a long and relieved sigh. Finally able to talk again. “Did you like it? I hope so, because I’m freezing and I terribly miss the sticky air you can only get indoors.”

“Yes, the fact that you were suffering during the whole thing made it quite pleasant.” Loki cracked
a smile and Stark instantly raised both arms in a victory pose. “Yeah, told you so. Phase 1 of my genius plan is now complete, off we go to phase 2.”

What a surprise, but Stark slowly got better at courting. Therefore Loki rewarded him by not asking what they would do next and simply continued to smile. Back in the car he decided that Thomas was appeased enough to have an actual conversation. “What happened yesterday? I know about the explosion, but… did somebody get hurt?”

Stark’s grip on the steering wheel tightened and his breath left his lips in a silent growl. “No, nobody got hurt. Thanks to me… well, thanks to Jarvis. I made Jarvis, so thanks to me. Did somebody thank me? No. When I called them out on their shit, everybody was like ‘Shut up, Tony’. After saving this entire island it’s probably taken for granted that I save everybody’s ass. No need to thank me.”

Again, surprisingly accurate version of the actual events. Yet Loki had to frown. “Okay, I’m missing some details here. You mind telling me the story from the beginning? So I can understand what you’re bitching about? And tell you if you’re wrong or right.”

The growl turned into a hoarse laugh and Stark’s eyes stayed fixed on the road while telling Loki what had happened the day before. Not leaving out a detail, completely unbothered by Thomas’ status as a civilian. “Wait a second… this… secret… anti-terror… whatever organisation… sent you into an abandoned building that was full of explosives, because they were too stupid to check?”

“At the moment it looks just like that. Jarvis is looking through their data right now. If it wasn’t them being stupid but them trying to blow some Avengers up, I’ll soon know about it. Right now it looks a lot like stupidity.”

Loki huffed, slowly shaking his head and for now he remained silent. It was his best card and this wasn’t the moment. He wanted Stark open, willing to listen and receptive. At a moment where nothing existed that could be more important whatever Thomas had to say.

“You don’t have to take me to another place or do something special. I’m not angry anymore. Well, not that angry. I think I’m going to be fine if you’re going to be more considerate… yes, I know there isn’t much hope.”

Stark glanced at him, his brown eyes attentive, little sparks were dancing in them and his expression was strangely serious. The only time he had ever Loki he hadn’t been that serious. Angry, yes, but… different. “You already think I’m crazy, so I guess it won’t make any difference when I tell you that I like it that you’re angry.”

“Okay, stop and let me get out of the car.”

“Let me finish, okay? Yes, you’re hot when you’re angry, but that’s not the only reason. I told you, I’m not used to… telling anybody that I didn’t get hurt or killed. I’m not used to a lot of things, so I’m definitely going to screw up at a lot of things and you’re going to be furious and you’re going to kick my ass, but… You are angry, because you were worried about me. You can deny that all you want, you were worried and… I like that. You still want to get out of the car?”

The smile was supposed to be cocky, trying to convince him that Stark was in control of the situation. That nothing what he had said made him feel uneasy, embarrassed or vulnerable. His eyes gave him away though and no matter how cold Thomas may be, right now he had to be compassionate or Stark would probably close up. Not going to happen.
A soft smile and slightly shaking his head. “No. It’s fine.”

Their destination turned out to be the Stark Tower and Loki didn’t comment on it. For Stark their date must be working out great, he had succeeded to open up to a person he cared about and Thomas had reacted positively to it. Again Loki’s plan was working out just like he wanted it to and he definitely wouldn’t ruin it, because the closeness made him weary. When they entered the tower Stark reached for his hand and in the elevator he pulled him into his arms. Loki let him.

“I am new to the whole… apologizing thing… how am I doing?”

“Surprisingly well. I especially like the part when you said ‘sorry’ all over and called yourself scum. That really gets the message across.” “Yeah, I have my way with words. Maybe I should write a book, you’d love it. There would be a lot of references to good scotch and hot British guys. Would you like it if I dedicated it to you?” Their conversation in the car had given Stark all his confidence back, he was flirting and Loki was honestly amused. He wondered what kind of book Stark would write. “I’m curious… maybe I would actually read it.”

Obviously exactly what Stark wanted to hear and despite his cheeky smirk he was leaning in slowly, giving Loki more than enough time to back away. He didn’t though, accepted the kiss and Thomas sighed.

Stark was trying, he was trying real hard. Dinner was ready and nicely served the second they entered the penthouse. Portuguese, how thoughtful. Red wine, delightful cheese, the fish was grilled perfectly. Dinner was great, Stark was funny, attentive and a bit desperate to make Thomas comfortable, although he hid it quite well. Tonight he was easier to read than ever. First he had started out hoping he could make Thomas forget about his anger. Then he had tried to get him in good mood, now he thought that he maybe could even get sex tonight. Quite an accomplishment. Even more so because Loki considered sleeping with him. The circumstances couldn’t be better, the whole evening Loki saw nothing but affection in Stark’s eyes. Thomas wouldn’t be cast away after giving himself to Stark. Rather the opposite and Loki was dying to see what Stark was hiding underneath his shirt.

Also Loki wanted to play his trump. Prepared by the Avengers themselves, he wanted to whisper it into Stark’s ear and watch how the poison would spread and take effect. Stark would willingly drink it from Thomas’ lips. Every single drop.

“Just so you know… you’re smart you have already figured that out…” Stark leaned back in his seat, then instantly changing his mind, leaning forward and shoving his glass of wine to the side. Was this supposed to show how serious he was right now? “This… thing yesterday, somebody calling me, because they need Iron Man… that’s going to happen… a lot… What can I say? I’m so awesome, somebody constantly needs me to save the world. I should charge by second. I know you are already super annoyed by the Avengers waltzing in here uninvited and unannounced. But this is… part of who I am and how things go down in my life. Which doesn’t say I can’t shut the penthouse down if you want to, I would pretty much enjoy that too. But sometimes… I will have to leave like yesterday and when I am done I will call you to tell that I’m amazing and saved everybody’s life once more, but… you know that will happen once in a while.”

Loki licked his lips, now it was him desperately trying to hide his excitement. He had him, he had Stark, his to do with as he pleased. “I don’t mind… as long as I get a warning before they show up and I don’t have to be nice to them.”

“Were you born like this? Being such an awesome bastard or did you have to work on it?”

Mirroring Stark’s grin Loki shrugged. “I’m from Westminster, we’re all like that.”
The comment made Stark laugh, taking a sip from his wine and it was impossible to miss how his eyes left Loki’s face, running down his upper body. So obvious and Loki didn’t shy away from addressing it. “Wow, I think I have never seen anyone look at me with such a serious case of ‘I want to fuck you so bad’ eyes.”

Pretty much anybody would be startled now, but Stark just put down his glass and now focussed on Thomas’ blue eyes. The corners of his lips started to form a little smirk. ‘First things first, that’s ridiculous. Pay attention, everybody looks at you like that. Can you blame me? We got interrupted yesterday and I had a lot of time to think. To imagine. To picture. Blame yourself for being such a fine piece of ass and moreover I’m pretty sure that you don’t mind so much.”

Loki preferred being called a coldhearted bastard, but he was still able to appreciate a compliment. Also he relished the game, against all his expectations it was fun. He didn’t have to pursue it exceedingly though, yesterday he had been ready, prepared and they had gotten interrupted. Stark wanted to continue where they had left off and Loki would do him this favour.

Getting up from his seat Loki casually walked around the table, pushed Stark’s chair back before sliding into his lap. Of course he caught the barely noticeable gasp, but didn’t comment on it. Instead he let his fingertips dance along the edge of Stark’s shirt. “I had a great time tonight… don’t fuck it up.”

Judging by the following kiss Stark didn’t have any intentions to fuck something up. Nothing like in the elevator, their lips moved passionately, almost greedily against each other. Stark’s arms were tightly wrapped around Loki’s hips, his mouth travelling from Loki’s ear down his throat, sucking kisses into his skin. Feeling his breath speeding up Loki thought of the elf and there was no doubt about it, physically this would be a pleasurable experience. If he got a look at the device in Stark’s chest, then there would be nothing to complain about.

Things worked out extremely familiar to last night when Loki ended up with his shirt lying on the floor. Now Stark’s hands moved from Loki’s hips over his stomach, up to his shoulders. Exploring, admiring and Loki tangled his fingers in Stark’s hair, yanking his head up to press his mouth against the mortal’s. He was aching to tear this shirt off, ripping apart, to see what was underneath, but Loki remembered all too clearly what had happened yesterday. Maybe he should make sure that Stark got a bit carried away first. Shifting closer Loki first tentatively grinded against Stark, before softly circling his hips, causing both of them to groan.

By the Norns, this did feel good… Loki shouldn’t get too distracted himself, but it already was exactly like the few times before. His senses were slowed down by lust, he in fact wanted a person that he loathed. It had happened before and Loki had never gotten distracted enough to lose focus. But why shouldn’t he enjoy himself if the opportunity presented itself and he was lucky enough that the person he was seducing was skilled and attractive.

Snaking his hand down Loki cupped Stark through his jeans and that was enough to eliminate whatever patience Stark might have. “Jarvis, phones off. Now. We, bedroom.”

Loki was pushed off him, only to have Stark grab his hand and pull him along. It was hard to not laugh at Stark’s eagerness to sleep with a sworn enemy without even knowing it.

The bedroom was dark, but it didn’t matter too much since there were so much other things to experience. Stark’s warm breath ghosted over his skin, his lips brushing over Loki’s chest while he was being pushed down onto the bed, Stark crawling over him. They were engaging in another heated kiss while Stark started to work on opening Loki’s jeans and this was the perfect moment. Loki slid his hands under Stark’s shirt, running them up his stomach, higher, until…
This couldn’t be true. What was wrong with this insane mortal?

Stark had grabbed his hands, forcing them to rest on his rips. Again?! Lust was quickly fading away to be replaced by anger. “Stark… you’re starting to fuck it up.”

Stark’s heavy breathing and his slightly shaky grip on him showed just how much he didn’t want to stop, so why did he do it? “Can’t you just…”

“You do realise that wanting to keep your shirt on is weird. Especially since you’ve ripped mine off instantly…”

A loud sigh and Stark sat up, straddling Loki’s hips. His eyes were glazed over, his lips slightly parted and he really didn’t look like a person who wanted to have a conversation. “I… this has nothing to do with you. I generally don’t like taking it off in front of anybody”

Yes and therefore Loki wanted it even more, see it, study it. “Good lord, I’m already lying in your bed. You didn’t strike me as the guy being worried about his physique.”

“Don’t be ridiculous… it’s…” Stark hesitated, searched his eyes before simply leaning down and kissing him. An attempt to calm him, gentle, surprisingly sweet. “You said that you didn’t trust me, so maybe you can… understand that… what happened to me before Iron Man is general knowledge. It changed me… physically. I don’t want to talk about it or other people to see it. Which… I admit is kind of a downer… but I really don’t want that.”

Opening his mouth Loki pretended to be looking for words. He knew exactly what to say. “Are you talking about… scars… or…”

“Kind of… not really. Can’t we just continue before this is going to completely ruin the mood? Again?”

What would Thomas say? Would he understand, would he be angry? Or maybe he would have no idea what to say. “We’re just getting into this thing between us… I understand that there are things you aren’t comfortable with, but… I have no idea what’s going on right now and honestly I feel weird about sleeping with somebody who doesn’t want to take his shirt off when I don’t understand why…”

Stark probably didn’t understand it too, because he so obviously wanted him. “Okay…” Taking a deep breath he seemed to gather his thoughts and then looked at Loki. Vulnerable. Perfect…

“Tell me something about you.”

“What?”

“Tell me something about you. Something dark, unpleasant, I don’t care. If I’m supposed to explain this to you… somehow then you’ll have to tell me something about you. Otherwise I’ll freak out… something that’s hard to talk about…”
Hey everybody,

You all are so curious what Loki is going to tell and I have no idea what you're going to think about it, but somehow I think that by the end of the chapter you won't even remember :)

_______________________________________________________________

This is a fight to the death
Our holy war
A new romance
A Trojan whore

Conquistador ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~

“Something I have done? Or something that happened to me?”

Stark shrugged, lying down next to Loki, propping his head up on his arm. “Something… you don’t like to remember, that you wouldn’t tell just… anybody. Because that’s what the shirt thing is all about.”

In response Loki started to bite his lower lip and looked at the ceiling. For a few minutes there was only silence in the room and Stark just watched him, slowly running his fingers over Loki’s stomach. Sighing he turned his head, making out Stark’s brown eyes in the darkness. Attentive, vivid, strangely beautiful.

“When I was young I fell in love with a friend. She was beautiful, sweet, lovely and we had known each other for quite a while. We’ve always liked each other, but for me one day it became different. I told her, asked her if she wanted to go out with me, not as friends. Well, she said no. She was very considerate, I knew she cared for me, because she tried so hard to not… make it hard on me. I was a great friend and she actually felt horrible that I felt this way about her, because she liked being friends with me. She didn’t want things to change between us. It was… alright. Of course you don’t like to be rejected, but she was the nicest person you can imagine. If some person ever made it to reject someone in a quite… dignified and kind way then it was her.”

Loki paused and Stark’s fingers shortly stopped drawing circles on his skin. “You got your little heart broken, but it was okay?”

“I’m not done yet, wait a second, will you?” Sighing Loki continued and Stark restarted caressing his stomach. “I was fine with it, it wasn’t that much of a big deal. She just didn’t feel that way, that happens. Shortly after she fell for another guy. She wasn’t running around, telling me about that, like I said, she was nice. I’m very observant, I realised on my own and I got furious, because I hated him. He was a moron and she preferred him to me. Call it hurt pride, whatever. I was so
angry at her for caring about this dumb piece of… I did something bad.”

Stark’s arm slid around his waist and he shifted closer, pulling Loki to him. “Go on. What did you do?”

“I started sleeping with the guy she was interested in.”

“What?!”

“He wasn’t particularly known for liking guys, but it wasn’t really hard. Maybe that also played a part in it, that he was guy just like me. I did it to make her feel bad, although she had never wronged me and of course our friendship was over. Today when I think about it, I feel terrible that I got involved with somebody I hated for being stupid and annoying for an even stupider reason. It’s embarrassing.”

Next to him Stark let out a dry laugh. “Rather mean-spirited and a complete jerk move. Wow… you ever apologized?”

“No and I don’t think she would have been interested in an apology. I’m not proud of it and I pretty much want to forget every single second of this experience. Did that help? I have no idea what you want to tell me, but if it has something to do with a terrorist kidnapping I think that my story will look like peanuts in comparison… but it’s something that makes me look and feel bad. Something I don’t like to talk about and it changed the way I see myself.” Loki turned to lie on his side, facing Stark, looking at him expectantly.

Now it was Stark’s turn to sigh and Loki could hear him swallow a second later. “It’s not about comparing. It’s about… trusting you with a secret and I wanted to know if you would also tell me one, something unpleasant. I won’t go into too much detail, but…” Stark grabbed one of Loki’s hands and put it on his stomach, his breathing was slightly faster than usual. “Don’t freak out, this is going to feel different.” Now Stark replaced Loki’s hand, putting it on his chest, exactly over his heart. First of all he could feel the fabric of the shirt, but also the energy pumping beneath it. Some kind of power, exciting, unknown and Loki had no idea what it might be capable of. Thomas wouldn’t feel the power though, he would concentrate on the cold metal under the shirt. Hard, adamant, cool, nothing like soft skin.

“What’s…” Seemingly confused Loki’s eyes shifted to his own hand. “Is this some kind of metal?”

“Yeah, it’s a souvenir from Afghanistan. I got hurt, badly, there was an emergency operation and now I’m stuck with a big piece of metal in my chest. I worked it into my suit and it’s a piece of high-tech, but… it’s a reminder of a not so happy time.” The usually cheeky tone of his voice was gone, nothing but hard reality left and Loki knew that he wasn’t allowed to show the tiniest bit of his fascination. Thomas would be horrified, but Loki was impressed. He knew about what Stark had endured in Afghanistan thanks to Agent Barton’s mind. A cave, that’s where he had been. How he had been able to implant such a big device in his own body in such an unfit place? Loki wanted to know more.

At least now he didn’t have to pretend to be looking for words. “I… That was several years ago… why didn’t you get it… removed? By some real doctors… I don’t know.”

“Because it’s too big. It’s a miracle that it got in there, removing the whole thing… I would bleed out before they even got really started. I’m going to make a connection with every metal detector for the rest of my life.” Stark shrugged, now trying to play it down while Loki’s mind started racing. He couldn’t just ask what it did or how he had built it. What he needed was to look at it. “But… you got it looked at… I mean… God, I’m not a doctor I have no idea what it might do.
What does it do?"

Stark’s fingers gently caressed Loki’s. “It’s a power source for the suit.”

“No, for you! You didn’t put it there for the suit…”

“When they put it there it was necessary for my heart to keep beating…” Stark paused, quickly looking down at their hands, then back into Loki’s eyes. “But not anymore. It’s the power source for my suit and I can’t remove it. There are also a lot of bad memories… attached to it. That’s all I want to say about it now.”

Look at that. Tony Stark tried to lie to the god of lies and Loki could barely lie still. This was too good, too perfect. It wasn’t just a power source. Stark was depending on it, he needed it. Didn’t matter if he didn’t trust Thomas enough to admit that or if he didn’t want to scare him. Loki didn’t care, he wanted to see it, then he would draw his own conclusions. “Okay… I understand why you’re weird about the shirt…”

Not knowing what else to say Loki kissed him softly and decided to let Thomas be a little unsettled by it. “You mind if I feel like having a drink now?”

“No, it makes me think that you have excellent ideas.”

They got up, back into the living room, Stark got them two glasses of scotch and Loki downed his drink instantly. Stark smirked at that, again watching him openly. There was nothing in his face which hinted at regret. At least for now Stark didn’t think it was a bad idea to have shared his secret. “You know… me telling you this makes you technically my boyfriend.”

That was sudden. “It does?”

“Yeah, I’m not really known for talking a lot about personal stuff and it can’t get more personal. At least for me. Now there’s nothing to be done about it. You listened, you accepted. You’re my boyfriend. Boyfriend of a genius and billionaire who is also a superhero. Deal with it.” Raising his glass in a toast Stark grinned and Loki chuckled. “Lucky me then. May I add narcissistic, arrogant, reckless and crazy?”

“We already established that you’re into that…”

Amused Loki put his glass away, only to turn serious. “Is it that what you want? A relationship? I told you to that I’m not joking about these things. No bullshit, no shagging around and you call me when you’re done saving the world… and I don’t have to be nice to Captain America.”

“I want you around, because you’re fun, gorgeous, awesome and we’ll see how it works out. Is that okay?”

More than okay. It was exactly what Loki wanted. “No, it’s not.”

Stark’s eyes almost fell out. “What? Come on, you’re totally into me. Don’t forget how awesome I am.”

“Again, let me finish. I think you’re going to like this. I’m of the opinion that it can only be called a relationship when you’ve gone all the way…”

Instantly Stark’s eyes lit up and Loki couldn’t even blink, so fast Stark was on him again, kissing him deeply. “Third time’s a charm, isn’t it?”
Seconds later they were back in the bedroom, kissing passionately, hand exploring. Somehow Loki lost his jeans before lying down on the bed, tangling his hand in Stark’s shirt, pulling him to him. After dipping his head to kiss Loki Stark shortly slowed down, his hands resting on Loki’s shoulders. “I don’t want you to touch it, okay? I’m cool with a lot of kinky stuff, but don’t touch it…”

Only slowly Loki caught up with the meaning of these words and quickly nodded. In a swift movement Stark pulled off his shirt and Loki saw it. Beautiful. Bright, blue light, pure energy that called out to Loki’s magic. It wanted to slip under Stark’s skin, become one with it and learn from it.

Unfortunately there was not a lot of time to look at this, because Stark pushed him back, capturing his lips in a searing kiss that tasted like lust and desire. Well, it was about time to give Stark what he was craving for and Loki didn’t mind that much, by now he was sure that he was going to have fun. Besides that Thomas would be eager.

Loki’s fingers made quick work, opening Stark’s jeans, ripping them more or less off his legs, while Stark was kissing him like there would be no tomorrow. Again an attempt to dominate him and Loki didn’t resist, just clung to Stark when the mortal let his hand glide into his underwear, wrapping his fingers around Loki’s cock.

There he was, the trickster, the god of lies, Loki in bed with the Man of Iron and the latter succeeded in making him gasp for air. Kisses were trailed over his neck and shoulders while Stark tightened his grip, starting to move his hand.

Since Loki had never been with another mortal he didn’t have anyone to compare Stark to, but at this point he didn’t care. Right now all that mattered were these calloused fingers, the thumb that teased the head of his cock and Stark’s enthusiasm to please him. Mostly to hide a moan Loki kissed Stark and bit down onto his lip when the mortal dared to let go of him. He received a hoarse chuckle for that before Stark slid his tongue into Loki’s mouth.

During the next seconds they both lost their last pieces of clothing and Loki wrapped his legs around Stark, trying to get the same delicious friction like before. To his immense satisfaction Stark broke the kiss, panting heavily. “Fuck, you’re…”

Instead of finishing his sentence Stark rolled his hips against Loki’s and a mortal really shouldn’t make him feel this good. Heat was rising up inside of him, spreading to all of his limbs, mingling with the lust that was clouding his thoughts. He barely noticed Stark’s hand rummaging in a drawer of the nightstand. What couldn’t go by unnoticed was the feeling of wet fingers, sliding teasingly over his entrance.

Loki’s fingers dug deeply into Stark’s back and for barely a second he had to take a deep breath and fight his magic. His own core, his deepest desires which didn’t care about the momentarily state of lust he was in. Magic that urged him to end it, lash out at the man on top of him. All he needed to do was to put his hand on the back of his neck and squeeze…

It wouldn’t serve his plan though and if it was one of Stark’s few qualities to bring him physical pleasure Loki wouldn’t deny himself that.

His own moan interrupted his thoughts when he felt two fingers being pushed into him. So Stark was running out of patience, fine. Although he relished how good it felt, Loki wouldn’t stop watching Stark. The mortal’s eyes were fixed on his face, probably marvelling at the reactions he was causing.
“How about… here?” Only so slightly Stark twisted his wrist and a silent curse escaped Loki’s lips, his hips jerking upwards, seeking more of the stimulation.

Stark looked so immensely pleased with himself while he continued to stretch and prepare Loki. Not just that, he was skilled, knew what he was doing. A lover who knew that this could turn the other one into a squirming, panting mess if it was done right. Then again Stark wasn’t the only one who knew a few things.

Suddenly Stark’s moves seemed to falter a bit, Loki’s hand on his erection could do miracles. “God, I… are you…” Another phrase that was left unfinished, Stark preferred adding another finger, spreading all three of them.

This was getting too much, Loki wanted it. Now.

Loki let go and pushed with both hands against Stark’s shoulders. “Enough, do it now.”

No more encouragement was needed, Stark pulled his fingers out and reached for a condom that was lying on top of the nightstand. So you didn’t ask if the other one carried a disease, you just used protection in any case. At least Stark did. Raising his head Loki watched with genuine interest and also lightly fascinated how Stark expertly rolled the condom onto his cock, a move obviously practised more than a thousand times. Even in this situation the whole prospect still seemed odd to Loki.

Stark chased these thoughts away by shifting closer, spreading Loki’s legs a bit further and guided his cock to his entrance. The first thrust almost filled him completely, pressing all the air out off Loki’s lungs. Not stopping to let him catch his breath Stark pulled slightly back, only to push back in. Small thrusts that he repeated a few times until his entire length was inside of Loki, their bodies completely connected.

Only now Stark stopped, panting, his arms shuddering lightly with the effort of holding still. Loki admired the lust filled look on his face that gave away how desperately he wanted to move, to take him hard and fast. Moaning softly at the feeling of having somebody inside of him, Loki swiftly pulled Stark down, kissing him eagerly.

Again that was all it needed. Stark started moving, building a fast rhythm of deep thrusts and Loki welcomed every single one of them. Hooking his legs around Stark’s waist Loki tried to pull him deeper inside and was rewarded with a loud groan and a shudder. “Fuck, Tommy… you’re so tight…”

The almost unbearable heat, the smell of sweat, Stark’s skin brushing over his and the perfectly timed hard thrusts that made Loki’s body tingle and squirm – everything melted together into an overwhelming feeling of pleasure. Loki’s fingers left deep scratches on Stark’s back, to at least hurt him somehow while he was coming apart, moaning against those lips that wouldn’t stop kissing him.

Grabbing Loki’s hips in a tight grip Stark gave some final thrusts before burying himself deeply inside and coming. He stayed like this for a moment, gasping for air, eyes closed, a blissful smile on his lips. Slowly letting his legs sprawl out on either side of his body Loki fought the urge to actually purr. He had to leave it to Stark, this had been highly pleasurable. Now he felt spent, some muscles ached and it was all so good.

When Stark finally pulled out Loki knew that he was looking forward to more of this. A mortal who could give him such pleasure… Midgard was full of surprises.
After discarding the condom Stark slumped down next to him, sighing contently. “Awesome… that was… awesome.”

“How eloquent…” Loki chuckled softly, only to have Stark’s arm snaking around his waist. “Shut up, great sex always reduces my vocabulary.” His mouth brushed Loki’s neck before stretching lightly, obviously relaxing during the aftermath. Loki would like to do that too, but he didn’t have the time. He had to make his move, his trump still waiting to be played.

“Just so you know, you didn’t fuck it up. That was really good…” Loki smiled softly and Stark leered at him. “Naturally… don’t worry we’ll do it again. First thing in the morning.”

Stark’s other hand went to play with Loki’s hair, which was surprising, Loki wouldn’t have thought him to be the type to search any kind of contact after sex. “This is nice…”

Laughing softly Stark commented on the pleasant sigh. “Sure, it is… and you’re oddly domesticated after sex.”

Well, it indeed helped to relax and it gave him just the perfect opportunity to say what he had wanted to say all night long. Thomas was Stark’s boyfriend after all, he could tell him what he was thinking about. “Kinda… would be a shame to get interrupted now…”

“Phones are off, unless somebody blows up the pentagon and S.H.I.E.L.D decides to hack my system, we’ll be perfectly fine.”

Turning around Loki looked into Stark’s eyes. “How does this work anyway? This… whatever… organisation calls you to do something and you fly off and do it? Like this thing in New Jersey?”

“No, I don’t, but that doesn’t stop them from showing up uninvited to tell me what they want me to do, because they’re too useless to do it themselves.” A bit of mocking, Stark always liked to make fun of serious issues, but Loki wouldn’t let him. “Why?”

“Because they’re idiots.”

“No, why do you do what they want you to do? I’m not talking about aliens destroying the city, but sending you into a warehouse any without reason whatsoever. What do you get in all this?” Honest interest, but not too eager, Stark wouldn’t suspect anything. Anyone would ask these kinds of questions. Anyone who cared.

Stark clicked his tongue. “I get to fund them and them calling me in the middle of the night to send me somewhere without saying please.”

In response Loki blinked and pretended to think about it. “Right, so people who don’t like you and you don’t work for want you to do shit for them and to pay for their stuff… considering that you’re risking your life I’d say it’s a pretty shitty deal.”

The words took effect and Stark hesitated. Perfect. “It’s a little bit more complicated.”

The wheels in his head were turning and Loki had done enough damage for tonight. As soon as S.H.I.E.L.D or one of the Avengers would show up to disturb their sweet… togetherness Loki would play his next card. Slowly pulling Stark away from the others. “You can explain that some other time, this is not the sexiest pillow talk.”

“You want me to spice it up?”

“No, I want you to sleep.” Moving a bit closer Loki shut his eyes, only to have Stark kissing him.
“Stop, sleep now.”

Stark was quick to fall asleep and Loki took a moment to admire the situation. The mortal next to him was clueless. No idea with who he shared this bed and his secret. How much he would love to open his eyes and take a long, intense look at the device Stark was trying to hide. Jarvis would be watching though and Loki really couldn’t afford gaining distrust after their first night together. There would be others and probably a lot of sex and opportunities to look at the device to understand how it works and how to use it against him.

***

“I heard about a Midgardian tale about a royal girl with skin as white as snow and hair as black as… coal, I think. She is described as an incredible beauty. We’ll only need to add emerald eyes to the list and the tale could be about you… It made me think about you…”

A fleeting touch and sleep fell off his eyes and somebody was there, next to him. Loki’s magic came inexorably to life, ready to kill any aggressor. Fingers closed around his arm and Loki’s sat up straight, all of his magic concentrated in his hand.

“Hey, calm down, Tommy! Wow, it’s been a while since you’ve stayed over night somewhere.” Stark was lying next to him, looking like the most content man in the world. Yes, right, Midgard. He was on Midgard, he had slept with Stark last night, he was wearing Thomas’ skin and there was no immediate danger.

“Sorry, it’s just… I was dreaming…” Rubbing his temple Loki tried to chase the last remains of said dream away and sighed.

“Normally people only dream about me after I’ve slept with them… It’s a common thing.” Stark’s hand slid over Loki’s chest, pushing him back onto his back. Good to know that Stark was always the same even instantly after waking up. “Morning…” A gentle kiss was pressed to his lips and everything was so awkward about this. Waking up next to Stark and having him kiss him. Probably it was about time to get out of here, there was only so much Loki could take at a time.

“Good morning…” Loki sighed softly into the kiss and then pushed Stark away. “I didn’t talk in my sleep, didn’t I?”

“No, I didn’t even realise you were dreaming… but I’m still determined to give you something to dream about.”

Loki realised quickly that he couldn’t just leave after the first night he had spent with Stark. People who weren’t one night stands didn’t do that. It didn’t turn out that bad when they got in the shower together. Not even Loki’s silvertongue would be able to find the words to express the immense, smug satisfaction he was feeling. The Man of Iron went down on his knees in front of Loki. Right where he belonged. Where they all belonged. Now it was Tony Stark who fell onto his knees, without being asked to. The wantonness was the one thing that pleased Loki most, even more than what Stark actually did on his knees. He was good at it, very much so, but to simply see him smirking, with bright eyes full of desire and how much Stark wanted to do it.

Never had the temptation been stronger. Showing Stark who he was while he was on his knees. Could there be a greater satisfaction? Loki wouldn’t know, because he didn’t do it, but he definitely enjoyed it nonetheless.

Afterwards they had breakfast in the kitchen… where Stark was completely useless, it was Loki who made them scrambled eggs, something Youtube had taught him. God bless the Internet.
“You want to do something today? It seems like it’s going to be a nice day.” Stark was smiling, his attention more fixed on Loki than on his breakfast. No chance, Loki needed to get out of here, he needed a break from Stark and from Thomas. “I have an appointment with my publisher. I get new scripts to translate today, so no. I don’t have time.”

“A pity. Tonight? Yesterday we watched Shakespeare, the next logical step would be to watch Terminator. The American Shakespeare.”

Loki didn’t comment on that just slowly shaking his head, making sure to smile. “Fine. Tonight. Just stop comparing Shakespeare to… anything.”

“So British…” Laughing Stark leaned over the table and kissed him. Thankfully they got interrupted by Jarvis. “Sir, incoming call from Doctor Banner.”

“Cool, finally a call I want to answer.”

Loki watched Stark and it shouldn’t surprise him how happy sex actually made Stark. His mood obviously couldn’t be better.

“Tony, hey. You got a few minutes? I got something you might want to take a look at.”

“Fun-related or S.H.I.E.L.D related?”

“It’s interesting and important.” Banner already sounded a bit annoyed by Stark, so early in the morning. Loki right now shared the sentiment, it was time to get out. “I’ll get going. I will see you tonight.” Getting up from his chair Loki pressed a short kiss onto Stark’s mouth and had the intention to just leave, but of course Stark pulled him into a deeper kiss.

“Tony? You’re still there? Somebody’s with you?”

Smiling softly Loki shook his head. “He’s all yours now, Doctor Banner.”

So Loki left, dying to get some fresh air and to clear his head. All the Captain needed was a little push, Barton was estranged, Thor was distracted and Stark didn’t trust anybody. The only wild card was Banner, but the Hulk would be glad to help Loki out. It was time to stop playing them against each other, Loki would let them do that on their own. Just a little push.
The War

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Tony and Loki had a lot of fun during the last chapter, this time it's only Loki who's having fun... at everybody else's cost

_______________________________________________________________

Time to escape
The clutches of a name
No this is not a game
It's just a new beginning

I don’t believe in fate
But the bottom line
It's time to pay
You know you've got it coming

This is war

The Escape ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~

The security measures of the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters were a joke and it amused Loki to no end that he could just walk in there and nobody had the slightest idea. When Loki had sneaked into a fortress of Muspelheim, he had spent a month preparing. Here he was just strolling in, invisibility, shape shifting, everything would do. There was no magic to keep him out, it was almost boring.

At least the structure and the organisation of the building were quite confusing. Loki had to follow agents around to discover the different control rooms and so on. He didn’t like the incredible amount of screens and technology around. They were no obstacle to his magic, but it would take a little time to get into it. Moreover Loki couldn’t just sit down in front of a computer, not even as an agent.

So for an entire day Loki did nothing else but watch. Trying to understand how things worked around here and who was responsible for dealing with the Avengers Initiative – That’s what they called it.

After more than 12 hours lurking around Loki left, teleported into Thomas’ apartment, got ready and then showed up at Stark’s place. They were supposed to have dinner, but Stark pretty much pounced on him the second Loki entered the penthouse. Loki went with it, they had sex on the couch and again it was very enjoyable. Afterwards they were just lying there, catching their breath and Loki voiced a weird thought that Thomas might have. “This may sound funny, but… is Jarvis watching us when we’re doing it?”
As expected Stark burst out laughing. “Jarvis has a watchful eye on everything that happens inside 
this building. What do you say, buddy, did you enjoy the show?”

“I would rather choose to not answer this question, sir and reassure Mr. Pine that his privacy in the 
penthouse will always stay intact.”

“Yes, you’re right, Jarvis. Thank you. I really don’t think you will start going around 
gossiping.”

The next thing they did was getting dressed and having actual dinner. For Loki nothing of 
importance happened during this evening, it was trivial work, making Stark trust him, making 
Stark falling in love with Thomas. Not quite there yet, but the little casual touches all the time were 
gentle, affectionate and when Stark’s eyes fell on him, they were bright and clear. They were 
beautiful like this.

Everything was relaxed, they watched a movie, went to bed, had sex again and Loki spent the 
night. The next day Stark had a meeting concerning his company, he suggested cancelling it, but 
Loki told him he wouldn’t be interested in Stark if he lost all his money, because he wasn’t taking 
care of his business. Stark had a good laugh, they agreed to meet during the afternoon.

After breakfast Loki returned to the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters, now finding his way easier around, 
Loki found out that these little humans were terribly afraid of Stark. Or of people like him. Smart 
people with abilities similar to Stark’s. Technology was an important Midgardian tool, but it was 
also their greatest weakness. It made so many things easier for them, yet could used against them. 
From what Loki had heard Stark had used Jarvis during Loki’s attack to enter S.H.I.E.L.D’s 
databases. Clever guy, better than Loki had expected and it amused him that Stark had no qualms 
whatsoever.

Well, it had taught S.H.I.E.L.D an important lesson, they had to improve their protection against 
these kinds of assaults and that maybe they shouldn’t put every piece of information into a 
computer.

Irony had it that it was Fury himself who led Loki into a highly secured area. Finally some 
resistance. Even Fury was checked, his eyes and fingertips were scanned to verify that it was 
indeed him. The controls told Loki that there were also scans who would register his body 
temperature if he would just walk in there invisible. Blindly teleporting was an option, but Loki 
didn’t know what would wait for him inside of that room. Shapeshifting into Fury was too easy and 
would be discovered later on, Loki didn’t want to leave any traces. Once inside Loki could always 
teleport away, getting inside was the interesting part.

The old fashioned way would do. It took some time, but when an agent showed up, several files in 
his hands, Loki turned into a midge. A form he loathed, but considering the fact that he was 
sleeping with an Avenger, this was a minor sacrifice. Hiding between the wrinkles of the agent’s 
shirt Loki got simply carried into the locked room.

Opening the lockers Loki went through the files, but nothing wasn’t of much interest for him. 
Plans to build weapons and testing them, surveillance of ordinary citizens, plans and codes to hack 
into the servers of the governments of several countries… Hmm, the Germans definitely wouldn’t 
like some of the stuff Loki found and Indonesia had reason enough to instantly start a war with the
United States. Secret identities of agents who were currently undercover, science projects… Loki stopped shortly when he found notes about attempts to re-enact the procedure that Rogers had undergone. It had failed and the test person would spend the rest of their miserable life in a wheelchair. What a pity.

It was another locker where Loki found a treasure. A whole drawer full of files that were titled – Potential threads, under constant surveillance. Oh, this was going to be good. Really good.


Stopping instantly Loki pulled out the file and blinked. This shouldn’t surprise him, just because it wasn’t what he was searching for. So Fury was aware of the danger that was Barton. His file didn’t say much though. Mostly they were suspicious if being under Loki’s control had left any impact that remained unseen. What if the mind control could be reactivated? Or if Loki’s madness was still inside of Barton and he would sooner or later strike? The file also said that until now there was no sign that Barton was about to do such a thing. Until now he seemed tensed and aggressive, but the report of an psychologist said that this wasn’t unusual after being mind controlled. Huh? Was mind control a common thing on Midgard? Loki knew it wasn’t, so he decided that the psychological report didn’t matter.

S.H.I.E.L.D was aware of Barton being a potential problem. That was more than enough for Loki. He was here for something else.

The next file almost made him tingle with excitement. Banner.

Notes about the experiment gone wrong, Banner’s personal life. Seemingly endless information about the Hulk, nothing that Loki didn’t know. Finally – constant surveillance and plans to take him out if necessary. A satellite turned into a gun. Very creative. A toxin strong enough that would even kill the Hulk. Supposedly. Plans about a sniper taking out Banner, not the Hulk. Loki doubted that any of it could work, not that it mattered. Memorizing the file Loki put it away, already thinking about in whose hands it should be given. Stark’s? The Captain’s? Banner’s? This was too important to make a quick decision.

Teleporting into another control room Loki clicked his fingers, it was time to cause some mischief. Loki quickly spotted the computer where he could do the most damage, again all it needed was an illusion around the area and Loki sat down, getting to work. He wasn’t an expert concerning these things, but Loki always knew how cause chaos. Time to give the Avengers some work. Nuclear weapons? No, too extreme. Loki didn’t want too many dead people, that wouldn’t serve his purpose. What else did S.H.I.E.L.D have to offer? Cutting off the entire power of the city? Oh, the riots… Scanning through his possibilities Loki finally found something and he couldn’t stop smiling. Perfect.

A special trained group of assassins, not involved in ordinary missions and kept highly secret. They only could be activated with a special code and called off the same way. They weren’t obligated to react to other orders of any kind. All Loki needed to do was to give them a target, then the little trained soldiers would eagerly do whatever they were told. Special codes and protocols were perfect, everybody knew what to do without asking questions. So Loki gave them a target, two to be exact. An ambassador of an African country who was supposed talk in front of the UN tomorrow. The head of a huge research facility that was working for the American government and S.H.I.E.L.D. Pressing a little button and it was done. To make sure that the Avengers would get there on time Loki also had S.H.I.E.L.D sending to two drones exactly where he wanted them to.
They would get there faster than the soldiers, but only cause minimal destruction, Loki just wanted them to be noticed. There was no better way to start a battle than with an explosion. Fitting with such an uncivilised culture. Wiping his hand over the screen Loki made sure that the system went haywire, S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn’t be able to call their killers off any time soon.

Now Loki would go and watch them being undone.

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Exactly 9 minutes and 49 seconds later Stark called Thomas. Loki didn’t answer the call, but he knew very well that Stark was only telling his boyfriend to stay away from the battle area. Too bad that Loki was already there.

It was almost shocking that a certain code was all it needed. Mindless puppets, that was all they were. The drone had caused a minor explosion in front of the hotel the ambassador was staying in and now people were panicking. Highly armed agents pouring out of all corners didn’t help either to calm the people down. Screaming, running around and Loki loved it. How he thrived in chaos.

The Captain and the Widow were the first ones to arrive with lots of average, not compromised S.H.I.E.L.D with them. Confusion was clearly visible, so they had already been informed that another S.H.I.E.L.D unit was their enemy this time. Loki could imagine how desperately they were trying at the headquarters to figure out what had gone wrong and how to call their own killers back. They would make it during the next three minutes, but until then Rogers and the Widow were busy fighting their own people. Not that Loki cared much about that for now.

The jet they arrived in had landed on a building next by. Banner had come out, looking down on the street, clearly worried, but not getting involved. Until now the situation didn’t need the Hulk. He would do more bad than good and yet they brought him along, maybe just in case. What a mistake.

Loki acted quickly, knocking out one of the agents he took the only thing he was interested in. The rifle. Not bothering about all the chaos that was going on around of him Loki aimed and fired with cold determination. Even before the bullet hit its target Loki was already gone.

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“Tommy, I saw you tried calling me. I know this shit is all over the TV and now I can’t reach you… I’m fine. Some asshole fucked up majorly and now I have to pick up the pieces. It’s gonna take a while…” Stark turned a bit away from the others, lowering his voice. “Look, can you show up at the penthouse, so Jarvis can tell me that you’re alright and happy that I called. Bye.”

Turning back to the others Stark and the Captain met eyes and although they were in the middle of a huge disaster, there was actually time for an awkward moment. One feeling embarrassed that the other publicly showed affection for his male partner and the other one quickly switching from caring to be outraged. Like he was supposed to.

Silvertongue or not, there were no words in any language Loki knew to express how gleefully content he felt. No, he definitely hadn’t felt this good since his death. Everywhere he turned, everywhere he looked he saw despair, weariness… just a bunch of broken people. And they were angry.

Stark and the Captain were still staring at each other. Parts of the armour were completely ruined, the rest of it dirty, damaged and looked utterly useless. There was also a cut right above Stark’s eye, nothing more. Now it was reduced to a piece of rubbish, but the armour had definitely done its
job of protecting Stark from further damage. Physical damage, his eyes showed that he had been hurt in quite another way.

Like expected Thor and Rogers looked mostly unharmed. A deep scratch along the Captain’s forearm and the way Thor held his shoulder it was obvious that he was hurt. Strangely enough it was the Widow who ended up on the bad end of all of this. That’s why she wasn’t here, she was still in medical care, they treated her concussion and a wound on her ankle. Then there was the Hawk who had luckily enough returned earlier from his mission and had joined the battle. He was mostly unharmed and yet he was the person one should worry about in this room. Everybody could see that Stark’s blood was boiling, the Captain had a crisis of faith, Thor simply looked beaten and weary while Barton simply had his arms crossed in front of his chest, leaning against the wall and not saying a word. Darkness was surrounding him, almost dripping from him and the way his lips twisted made Loki think of what a superb killing machine he would have made as a mind controlled puppet. Well, Loki would make up on this missed opportunity.

It was all too sweet to see that Barton’s eyes weren’t just staring into nowhere, but were fixed on Banner.

Well, seeing him like this was quite the contrast to the disgusting yet mighty creature which just had rampaged the streets of New York City. Loki felt nothing but spite for him and to see him this tiny, broken, wrapped up in a blanket should make him tremble with delight. It didn’t though, not really. How odd. What was it?

Loki cocked his head, looking Banner up and down, taking in everything about his appearance. He wasn’t even really sitting in this chair, rather looking like he had slumped down, carrying something that was just too heavy to bear. Wrapped up in a blanket, he was just small, keeping his head down. His skin had a frail, almost sickly tone to it. Banner was so small, having nothing in common with the Beast that had beaten Loki into the ground.

This wasn’t what Loki wanted. Loki wanted the Hulk down, beaten, bloody, dead. Seeing Banner in this state was strangely… unsatisfying.

Then again Barton’s dark, grim eyes and the way Stark positioned himself in the room, kind of shielding Banner was all worth it. The silence hung heavily over them until finally the door swung open and Fury entered. Even for a man who didn't know how to smile he looked immensely grim and like somebody had robbed him 10 years of his lifetime. Still he didn’t have the time to really look menacing, because Stark instantly grabbed him by his black coat, even surprising Loki by how quick he moved without his armour on. “You better explain this fucked up shit to me right now! No beating around the bush! What the fuck is going on here?! If you are trying to kill us, then be a fucking man and do it yourself, because I’ll fuck you up if…”

“Tony, get a grip!”

Grabbing Stark by the shoulder Rogers pulled him back and Loki stepped closer to read his face. Holding back and he only held Stark back, because he didn’t want the situation to escalate. As if this was even possible. Yes, the clean cut, nice Captain America was in doubt and also furious by what had happened today.

Fury just brushed off Stark’s outburst and told him by looking at him that he hadn’t expected anything else. Loki wanted to shake his head at him, Stark and the others had all the reason in the world to be filled with rage, to almost lose their minds and still Fury had the audacity to play it down. “Maybe I should try to kill you, Stark. You only seem to show up when you feel threatened.”
“Cut the bullshit! Those were your guys! Give me a fucking explanation or I will show you how much of a pain in the ass I can really be!”

Surprises simply wouldn’t stop this day, because now it was Thor who supported Stark and although Fury would never let it show if he was intimidated, having the god of thunder growling at you was something different than a middle aged mortal who wasn’t even wearing his armour. “I demand to know what happened today! We were fighting allies. Whose orders were they following?”

Fury snarled and it was easy to tell that he’d be rather asking questions than answering. “We don’t know that. This was a highly secret combat unit which can only be activated by typing a specific code into a programme that can only be accessed within this facility. None of the security footage has registered somebody entering or leaving. Nobody has seen a person that doesn’t belong here. Yet the computer’s gone haywire.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Stark barked out a dry laugh and Loki didn’t miss how Banner flinched, still not daring to look up. “Are you seriously trying to tell us that you got hacked again?! Well, congratulations, it’s an utter miracle that you guys show up to work properly dressed, because you are too damn incompetent to put your pants on!”

“Tony! You are not helping!”

“What?! First the New Jersey incident and now this shit! Either way S.H.I.E.L.D is too stupid to stop their own protocols being used by outsiders or this is just an attempt to kill us!”

Every single word tasted like honey and Loki licked his lips. What a temper, but Stark was right to be furious. Loki actually felt a bit disgusted by the Captain’s lack of… outrage? Standing up for anybody else but himself…

“Funny that you’re mentioning our systems being hacked.” Fury made a step forward and it took some courage to simply ignore the god next to him, even if said god was a complete moron. “You won’t be too shocked, Stark, that it came to my mind that the only person who ever succeeded doing that was you.”

As if the whole atmosphere hadn’t been tense enough, now the director had gone one step too far and Stark seemed to forget that there were still other people around him. Not even trying to hold back. “Oh, now it’s me who’s been fucking with your computers! Sorry for calling you stupid when you are really the greatest dumbass this world has ever seen! You want me to hack into your system!? I’ll have Jarvis just do that and clean the whole fucking place up!”

“Tony, do me a favour and shut your mouth for one minute!” Now the Captain also had had enough and finally decided to act like a leader. “Nobody is being accused here. We have to understand what happened today. Did I get that right that those agents thought they got the orders to kill a politician and a scientist? They thought this was some kind of… mission. Because somebody accessed… the computer which could send them the message?”

“Exactly although there is no trace of anybody doing such a thing. Everybody is working on finding out what happened.”

Stark snorted at that and Fury grimaced. “Right now damage limitation is just as important. We had a battle between the Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D with half of New York watching. Thankfully very little human casualties, but the property damages caused by the Hulk will make the public lose their shit.”
Banner was becoming even smaller and Loki was almost offended by Fury’s complete lack of leader skills. Even Thor had done a better job, leading warriors into battle and Thor was an idiot. A blind man could see that Stark would immediately jump to Banner’s rescue. “Oh, don’t you fucking dare! I swear I will fuck you up!”

So much rage and potential and Stark was almost trembling. Loki’s magic was tingling.

Fury’s comment did suffice to breathe some life back into Banner. He was raising his head so slowly that one could think he barely had the power to do it. “How many? How many did I kill?”

Instantly Stark spun around and he stared at Banner, his expression was only softening the tiniest bit. “Stop. Rewind, you didn’t even ask that. You don’t let this asshole talk you into a guilty conscience.”

Banner’s eyes remained hard, while he pulled the blanket a bit tighter around him. “I asked how many did I kill, Tony.”

Now Captain America was quick to answer and Loki wondered if this was due to his fear that Banner might lose his temper again or if he really wanted to put the poor man’s mind to rest. “None.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“Hey, you won’t start underestimating me, right?” Stark tried to grin, but failed miserably. “You helped me making Veronica. It worked. Yes, we’ll have to rebuild some buildings and yes, people got hurt, but you didn’t kill anybody. None of what happened was your fault.”

Loki didn’t know if this was the truth or not, but the information didn’t seem to help much anyway. “How is Natasha? How badly is she hurt?”

Stark and the Captain shared a look, but Banner got his answer from the only person who had been silent until now. “She got a hit on the head and a twisted ankle. Nothing that’s going to keep her tied to the bed longer than a day.” The Hawk’s voice didn’t give away if he thought this was a good or a bad thing, his face like a stone.

At least Banner looked immensely relieved and released a deep breath. Still the atmosphere wouldn’t lighten up. “Sorry to interrupt your little banter, but we’re still facing an utter disaster here. Compromised agents and an entire city which sees the Avengers fighting one of their own. Especially since we have no idea how any of that happened. Doctor Banner, it would be best if you stayed here until further notice.” Fury definitely wasn’t asking a question here and Banner was still feeling too bad to refuse. All he did was nod. That was all Stark needed to finally lose it. He did way better than Loki had expected. “No! Fucking hell, no! Are you all completely insane?! Bruce is not going to stay here!”

“Stark, you don’t seriously believe that…”

“Don’t Tony me, you aren’t my fucking boyfriend and not even my boyfriend calls me Tony! I am sick of this and I can’t believe that none of you calls him out on his bullshit! First Cap, Natasha, Point break and me almost get blown up and now this! Bruce hulked out during a battle against a bunch of your agents going rogue! Now you’re accusing me of being an evil mastermind, because your guys are nothing else but some dim-witted… Bruce is a free person and he is leaving right now. Just like me.”

“Stark, you don’t seriously believe that…”
Again Loki was almost shocked to see Thor once again interfering. “The Man of Iron is right. None of us is obligated to stay here and after these two events I begin to doubt your ability to control your people.”

Was it even possible to enjoy something more? Loki loved every second of it. Their alliance with S.H.I.E.L.D was breaking apart, for a moment it would even bring the Avengers closer together. A very short moment. Loki felt immense satisfaction when he saw for a second a glimmer in Fury’s eyes. The second he realised that everything was falling apart and there was nothing he could do about it. “You should think about your next move, Stark. Because it will…”

“Don’t even fucking talk to me before you figured out what the hell is happening in your own organisation. Because until then I don’t fucking trust you.” Stark spat, his voice dripping with venom and his arrogance more visible than ever. Despite that a second later it all vanished when he turned his attention to Banner. “Bruce? You wanna leave? To the tower? No S.H.I.E.L.D assholes around there to bother you.”

He got a weak nod in response and Fury huffed, but knew better than to say anything. Thor narrowed his eyes at him and Rogers’ expression wasn’t the one of a man who was going to support him. Not that Loki was interested in them, the Hawk was catching his eye. Not saying a word, but so attentive and… furious. Anger directed at another Avenger. A clear target. Until now he had only been a vessel, filled with darkness, without a purpose, without direction. Now it was different and Loki knew he had succeeded. From here there was not much more left to do. Two of them were already too far gone to be saved. Another one would soon lose his mind and the monster would take his own life.

The only one resisting was the Captain and even he was dancing on a rope, about to fall.

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“Bruce, you are not answering your phone and… I don’t know where you are right now and what’s going on, but… call me as soon as you have the chance? Please, I just want to know that you are alright. I don’t know what… it’s not your fault. It’s not you, it’s the Hulk. Please, call me, I can’t… I just need to know that you’re doing alright.”

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“You are not answering your phone and the news channel is only showing me buildings lying in ruins! Steve, call me when you hear this message… People getting shot, the Hulk tearing down half of New York. The last picture I saw of you on TV was you falling off a fucking skyscraper. Text me, whatever. Let me know that you are alright and that you are finally going on holiday.”

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“Jane, hey, this is Lori. I can’t reach you and I’m sure you have other things to worry about, but… I saw what happened on TV and… if you need somebody to talk to or… just somebody to be around. Don’t hesitate and call me.”

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“Fuck, I… are you alright? This is Henry and… Clint, I have no idea if you’re dealing with this kind of shit everyday, but… give me a call, so I don’t need to worry.”

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“Are you really sure he is fine, Jarvis? Hell, he’s Stark… I wouldn’t be surprised if he is running
around with a concussion or both his hands broken…” Loki took a sip from Stark’s finest scotch, his hand slightly shaking.

Tonight Loki was extraordinary. Expect for the cat he had played every single one of his roles and he was outstanding. Being back into Thomas’ skin and sitting down on Stark’s couch was almost relaxing. Acting like a proud man who tried to hide that he was worried about someone was too easy. Well, it would be if Loki wasn’t so incredibly satisfied and full of glee. Jarvis wouldn’t know that though. All he saw was a worked up Thomas who had come to the penthouse just like Stark had wanted and who was now waiting impatiently for the billionaire’s return.

“When Mr. Stark took of his suit all off his vitals were perfectly normal. His estimated arrival at the tower is going to take place in about 4 minutes.”

“Thank you, Jarvis.” Swallowing the last sip of his drink Loki put down the glass and continued to walk aimlessly up and down. Of course Thomas would be worried. The city was in a state of panic. Avengers fighting some kind of terrorist group in the streets, the Hulk trying to tear down entire buildings, smashing Captain America into the ground, hitting Iron Man with all his force… The reporters at the scene got the story of a lifetime. Loki had turned on the TV and instantly muted it, but there were no new information about what had happened, only speculation. There was even talk about some of the Avengers being dead and their killers were still on the loose. Thomas wouldn’t care about that, he wanted Stark to show up, to tell him what had really happened and to see that he was really alright.

Until then he was pacing, staring out the window and he flinched when suddenly the elevator doors opened. What happened then was a bit weird, even Stark was gasping in surprise when Loki threw himself into his arms and hugged him tightly. “Thank god… there you are…”

Since it was Stark it couldn’t be a real emotional moment, although he was closing his arms around Loki. “Jarvis, I thought you said Tommy was waiting for me. Not this creepy person who actually seems to give a damn about me.”

Snarling Loki pushed Stark away again, thankful that he didn’t have to make Thomas any more vulnerable and considerate. “Silly me for being actually a bit concer-“

The words died on Loki’s lips, because Stark was pulling him in a thorough, then sweet, almost reassuring kiss. As if he was trying to tell him that it was okay to be worried and that Stark himself was indeed okay. Giving in Loki responded to the kiss and relaxed into Stark’s embrace. “I called you this time, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did… thank you. I still didn’t feel much better until now.” Giving Stark’s hand a little squeeze Loki turned around to face the man whose presence he had aware of from the very beginning. “Doctor Banner… I hope you’re doing fine.”

There was no change, Banner still made the impression of having gone through hell. His eyes met Loki’s, but he wasn’t actually looking at him. “Hello Mr. Pine… Tony, your boyfriend’s here, so it’d be better if I left…”

“Forget that. You’re both here, because the bad and evil people are out there. Bruce, you get some sleep, we’ll figure out how to deal with this mess tomorrow. Just do what I say, this is the only time in my life that I’m acting like a responsible human being. Don’t ruin it.”

Since Banner seemed to have lost his own free will Stark didn’t have to do much more to convince him. As soon as he had disappeared into one of the bedrooms Stark turned to Loki. “Look, before you start kicking my ass and screaming at me…”
“I don’t mind… he’s… He looks terrible. If you think him being around is safe… I don’t mind. But about the screaming part – What the bloody hell happened today?!”

The energy with which Stark had yelled at Fury seemed all gone. Now Stark was only looking tired, like he had dropped all pretence. Because he had come home, because there was no need to pretend in front of Thomas. “Shitheads fucking shit up and trying to blame people who are completely innocent. Can I… can I tell you all the shitty details tomorrow? I’ve already summed up this shit multiple times today and I’ve seen so many ugly, stupid faces and now I’d rather focus on your gorgeous face. You look amazing…”

Stark tried to kiss him and Loki pushed him away. “ Seriously? All this… stuff is happening today you come home, don’t want to tell me anything, but you’d like to fuck?”

“You’re cute when you’re angry, because you’re worried about me.”

Loki rolled his eyes at Stark’s grin and grabbed his hand. “Come on, we’ll go to bed. You’re off the hook for now, but tomorrow we’ll talk.”

“Right, uhm… I was thinking about going to the workshop to figure a few things out…”

“When? Before or after fainting? Look at you, you’re tired. You need to sleep. I don’t take no for an answer. You may be Iron Man, but don’t think I can’t beat the crap out of you if you don’t do what I say.”

“And you are really not trying to turn me on? Ouch!”

So Loki more or less forced Stark to go to bed and there loosely wrapped an arm around him. Thomas would do that, it had been a rough day, Stark could have been hurt and Thomas would have been worried. Time to calm Stark a bit down and a rare chance to let Thomas show some emotion, not too much though, it had to be believable.

“Thanks for calling me… and having Jarvis call me again… it was good to know that you’re alright…”

Smiling softly Stark pressed a gentle kiss on his temple. Now so calm and relaxed after being furious half an hour ago. “Yeah, I was scared of what you might do to me if I didn’t call.”

Hinting at a smile Loki closed his eyes although he didn’t intend to sleep at all. He felt Stark’s breath against his neck when there was this silent whisper. “Jarvis… activate high security protocol. Nobody enters and leaves the tower.”

Damn, so Loki was stuck.

At least Stark decided to keep him entertained, because the second he thought Loki asleep, he slipped out of bed and left the room. Gone working, probably. Loki would love to finally get into the workshop. Pretty much the only part of his life that Stark hadn’t shown him yet. For another hour Loki kept lying in bed, thinking about his next steps and smiled to himself, because the day had worked out so much better than he had expected it and still he wasn’t done.

Pretending to wake up Loki looked around until asking Jarvis where Stark was. “In his workshop, sir. He has forbidden me to contact him if it isn’t for some kind of emergency.”

Sighing Loki pushed the blanket back and got up. “Show me the way to the workshop, please.”

“That would be pointless, sir. Only Mr. Stark himself is permitted access to it.”
“I’ll still give it a try.”

He didn’t get far though, because there was something more interesting to be found in the living room. Banner was curled up on the couch, a glass of Stark’s liquor in his hand. A person who desperately needed to sleep, yet wanted anything but. To Hel with the workshop, this was better.

“I guess nobody in this house is sleeping tonight…”

Looking up Banner winced slightly. “I’m sorry, I’m going to leave.”

“Don’t. I mean you don’t have to if you don’t want to. Tony already sneaked out of bed, I don’t want everybody to leave when I get into a room.” Loki showed a small smile before also sitting down on the couch. He gave Banner some space, rather than avoiding him. The other one still seemed uncomfortable with his presence. “I’m… I don’t think anybody should or wants to be around me right now.”

“Like I said, I don’t mind. Quite the opposite, we should have talked way earlier. I want to thank you for calling me and talking about Tony. I probably would have never spoken to him again. I did, because you convinced me I should give it a try and… Well, I’m sure he already told you more than I would even want you to know. He just can’t keep his big mouth shut.” Loki shrugged, carefully watching the doctor who seemed to wake up for the first time from this state of trance. For a second he blinked and wheezed. “You are… after all what happened today you want to talk about… seriously? Now I get what Tony likes about you…”

Playing it down Loki shrugged. “He likes that I don’t take his shit…”

Banner stared into his drink of which he hadn’t taken a single sip yet. “I’m glad for Tony that you guys are… together, but why… why are you even talking to me? I tried to kill your boyfriend today, I destroyed most of his armour and smashed him through several walls… You shouldn’t even want to be here.”

“Tony doesn’t think you’re responsible. He also wouldn’t want me here if he thought there was a danger. I saw what happened on television, some of it. I didn’t see you doing anything. It was something else. Someone else. I’m not pretending that I know what’s going on, because I clearly don’t, but… I know that you didn’t want to hurt Tony or anyone and I’m not scared of you.”

Every word was chosen with care and every single one hit its target. Stark was already heavily emotionally invested and Loki also needed Banner to like Thomas. The two scientists were a unity, they were friends and Loki wanted to keep them together. After all how else but Stark could find a way to take the Hulk down?

After the inevitable break between the Captain and Stark there would be sides and Banner would be on Stark’s. Their time with S.H.I.E.L.D was about to end and the Captain would soon be forced to make a choice. About the same time when they all would realise that they couldn’t trust the hammer wielding oaf anymore, because he was losing his mind. Not to mention the bloodthirsty agent who only needed a bit of encouragement. Loki was close.

“You are nice… Tony used a lot of words to describe you. Nice wasn’t one of them.”

Letting out a little laugh Loki shook his head. “I’m not a nice person. I’m just calling things by their names…”

For a short moment they locked eyes and Banner put the glass in his hands away. “I guess I did something right when I called you… It’s odd to see Tony looking forward to come home and
being… a happy person. Guess that’s being in love does to people. Even to Tony Stark…”

Obviously Banner didn’t think there was much to his words, but for Loki they sounded like a hymn to his triumph. Falling in love… It should never be treated so lightly since love always went hand in hand with madness.
Hello everybody,

So Loki stirred things up and now Tony and Bruce are dealing with the consequences... Loki is surprised by the outcome

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*Quémame en tu fuego*
*Quiero morir en tu veneno*
*Beberlo de tu piel*

*Quiero morir en tu veneno ~ ~ Alejandro Sanz ~ ~*

(Burn me in your fire
I want to die in your poison
Drink it from your skin)

---

Eyes that could watch him all the time, eyes that didn’t need to sleep. Not even Heimdall was this attentive. Loki was constantly fooling Heimdall and he had stayed awake the entire night to prepare himself to fool Jarvis once again.

It was pretty much the same trick as last time, Loki left a clone lying in Stark’s bed and turned himself invisible. The timing was perfect and Loki watched Thomas lying under the covers, breathing slowly. It was a bit odd to see him like this. Shaking his head Loki turned around and left for the kitchen.

Banner was preparing breakfast, he looked better than yesterday, but Loki would still go for the word terrible. Every few seconds Banner stopped in his movements, staring into pace. Again Loki felt this tingle of dissatisfaction. Not Banner, the other one.

“Morning, Bruce… Damn, that smells good.”

Stark came into the kitchen and Banner flinched before quickly straightening up. “Just a pathetic attempt of making pancakes…” Loki didn’t miss how Banner took a deep breath and only then turned around to face Stark. “Is Thomas coming too?”

“Nope, still asleep. I totally wore him out last night.”

Loki and Banner both rolled their eyes. “You didn’t even go to bed last night…”

Sitting down at the table Stark nodded. “Yep, I was taking this fucker of a robot arm apart, but I still can’t track it down… I feel like going crazy…”

After rolling their eyes Loki and Banner shared their confusion. “You were working on the robot?”
“Yeah, I didn’t figure it out… but some other very interesting things. We should discuss them.”

“I get to go first.” Banner put a plate of pancakes in front of Stark and sat down opposite of him. “I think it would be best if I left, Tony. Like I did before. It’s just too dangerous.”

“No.”

“Did you just listen to anything I said? I didn’t ask for your permission either?”

After chewing on a big bite of pancakes and swallowing it Stark shook his head. “Yes, I listened and I think it’s stupid. You’re needed here and we won’t do what S.H.I.E.L.D wants us to do.”

Banner raised an eyebrow, but Loki could tell that Stark had sparked his interest. “Fine, I will play along. What are you talking about?”

That one bite of pancake evidently had been enough, because now Stark shoved his plate away and folded his hands in front of him. Was this his attempt at looking serious? “Okay, Bruce… I’m going to tell you something and I need you to stay calm.”

“Tony…”

“No, I mean it. You are not going to like it and it’s some bad shit, so please don’t go green on me. It’s important, believe me.”

Loki couldn’t help but feel a bit intrigued. With a bit of luck Stark had completely fallen for his plan and was now pulling Banner down with him. “Tony, after what happened yesterday…”

“It is about what happened yesterday and it will help you! But before that there is a strong chance that you might want to punch a hole into the wall.”

Now Banner was actually considering it and gave a reluctant nod. “Okay, what is it?”

Not losing any time Stark reached into the pocket of his jeans and pulled out a little object. Loki bit his lip to stop himself from uttering a scream of joy. Perfection. Even the smallest bit of his plan was working out perfectly and Stark was doing pretty much everything to support him. Such an obedient little puppet.

Putting on his glasses Banner took a good look at the piece of metal in Stark’s open palm. “This… looks like it used to be a bullet.”

Say it, Stark. Say it and I promise Thomas is going to be so nice to you

“Exactly. This is the bullet that hit you and made you hulk out.”

With a dark smile on his lips Loki leaned against the kitchen counter, enjoying the scene playing out in front of him.

A shadow seemed to creep over Banner’s face and he took the bullet from Stark, letting his fingers carefully running along it. “Yeah… I… I think I remember some pain… I guess I could have been hit by something… How did you get it?”

Despite the seriousness of the situation Stark smirked smugly as if Banner had asked something that was all too obvious. “I had Jarvis checking out the scene after the main battle had gone down… Now about the part that you aren’t going to like. I did a few scans and… this bullet was fired by a S.H.I.E.L.D agent.”
Stark wasn’t just eager to drink Thomas’ poison, but also Loki’s.

“I don’t see your point. Of course it has to be one of S.H.I.E.L.D’s. We were fighting them… or at least we were supposed to.”

Shaking his head again Stark recited all the words that Loki had prepared. Whispering them directly into his ear wouldn’t have had a better effect. “It was fired by one of the guys who got there with us. Not the super secret assassin squad. I had Jarvis verify the results three times. A regular S.H.I.E.L.D agent who was there to help us fired at you.”

The second Banner understood his eyes turned a bit darker, but he refused to accept the meaning of all of this. “There was a battle… it could be ricochet.”

“You were on a fucking rooftop, Bruce. Those guys are snipers… Somebody did that on purpose and they fucking believe that we’re too stupid to figure that out.”

A short silence settled in, Banner was processing, trying to keep calm and gather the meaning of this. It was a turning point and Loki had made it an easy choice for them. “You think that S.H.I.E.L.D staged the whole thing? That they wanted me to hulk out?”

“Or they tried to kill you. Or trying out ways to kill you. Us. I never trusted them, Bruce. They were always in for themselves. Fury is treating us like we fucking belong to him. Now he realises that we’re not doing the little dance he wants us to do… he wants to get rid of us.” Not hesitating once, no shiver in his voice, just stern determination.

The darkness seemed to disappear and instead Banner grew a bit pale. “So you’re convinced that nobody hacked into their system? That the New Jersey incident was Fury’s doing… as was the whole disaster yesterday. He is trying to get kill us, but makes us believe that we are fighting an enemy that doesn’t exist.”

“Don’t forget the robots.”

What? Loki frowned. This was new. What was Stark impl… Oh, brilliant. He was smart. The insane mortal was even surpassing Loki’s ideas and expectations.

“Wait… I’m still having trouble to believe that Fury wants to kill us. The robots? How could he be behind that too? They attacked a S.H.I.E.L.D party. Nine agents died.”

“Collateral damage, agents die all the time and it would be a great cover…”

“Okay, but what about the magic. Fury doesn’t know a thing about magic, nor does anyone else working for S.H.I.E.L.D.” Banner brought up a good point and Loki was honestly curious to hear Stark’s explanation.

When it came, Loki felt his blood freezing in his veins. “You remember when we were all asking Thor about magic and he didn’t know shit? Well, there was one thing he noticed. The magic controlling the robots reminded him of Loki’s. He told me that it was oddly similar to the stuff reindeer games could do. I don’t think that it’s just a similarty. I think that it actually is Loki’s magic.”

Being directly referred to caused it to stir. Loki’s mind was razing. Over. If they knew Heimdall would find him within minutes. It was over and he needed to get out, but not before painting this kitchen floor with their blood. He had held back so long for, because he had wanted to be perfect, to get his revenge, to finally find some peace. If he couldn’t have that, Loki would at least have blood.
“Loki is dead.”

“Yeah, I know and we’re all very happy about that, but he left something behind when he and Thor left earth.” Stark was grinning, not having a clue that death was hovering right above his head, ready to strike. “His sceptre. Natasha gave it to S.H.I.E.L.D and since then we’ve never heard from it again. Maybe they figured out some way to use it.”

Feeling relieved and so foolish at the same time Loki pulled back. It disgusted him to realise that his breathing had sped up. Was he actually scared? Scared of being discovered? Why? How could he even think that? Nobody would find out, because until now Loki hadn’t made a single mistake.

“That makes sense… but we’re still missing the why here… I understand why they would want to get rid of me, but… if you’re right, they are after everybody. Why? Especially Steve… S.H.I.E.L.D going after him makes no sense. He is their poster boy and Steve is pretty much all the time on Fury’s side. Not to mention the public outrage if something should happen to Captain America.”

Loki wondered what it would have been like to be surrounded by two men like this in Asgard. Smart, curious and who were trying to work a problem out, not solving it by brute force. Banner and Stark were men who won a war before going into battle, they were making plans, finding the best strategies, got to know their enemies. Like Loki would. But this was a war they couldn’t win.

“Nah, Fury can cover everything up if he wants to. Steve may be a boy scout and he will do a lot of stupid stuff if you order him to, but he won’t do anything that his conscience doesn’t allow him. I can think of hundreds of reason why they would want to get rid of me or you. Maybe they just now realised that putting a team like us together wasn’t a good idea and if they want to take out some of us, they have to take out everybody. Hell, I don’t know, but I’m not waiting around to find it out.”

Banner bit his lip once again before he slowly nodded. “I really don’t want to believe that, but unfortunately… you are probably right. What are we going to do? I’m not keen on dying either.”

“First… we gotta find out what the others are going to do about it… Hell only knows what Natasha’s plans is for something like that and I’m sure she has a plan. Clint, same thing. Fucking spies. Steve… Steve is only going to believe that S.H.I.E.L.D wants him dead when an agent puts a bullet in his head. Don’t even get me started with Thor.”

“I don’t think it would matter to Thor in the end… We hardly know if anything we have could kill him and if they tried… all he has to do is to say ‘Screw you Midgard’ and he goes back to Asgard. We’re his friends, he’d choose us over S.H.I.E.L.D anytime…”

Right, noble Thor…

Stark let out a huff and Loki raised both eyebrows. “I don’t think Thor is the right person to count on right now.”

“Why?”

“He came here a few days ago and… No way to tell this without it sounding weird… He wanted to know our Midgardian ways to stop us from dreaming. Yeah, I know. I told him if he was having bad dreams he should just get him some magic that makes them go away, but he said that wouldn’t help. He barely opened his mouth, but when I was pushing it, he said that the robots made him think of Loki. Of Loki dying. I told him that there was not much one could do about it. Except us taking out the robots and him working through his issues.”
The second they would get a few minutes alone Loki would tear Stark’s clothes off and ravish him.

Things were working out so enormously well and Loki felt like celebrating. It hadn’t been like this for years, Loki was feeling the thrill and Thor was seeking out a mortal’s help. Stupid and desperate. It seemed to be about time to add an image to his voice. Right now Loki couldn’t imagine enjoying it more than he already did.

In contrast to Stark Banner seemed to feel some compassion. “He watched his brother die, I guess everybody would be hunted by that.”

“Whatever, he could have chosen a better moment to work through his family issues… He’s all about taking out whoever is controlling the robots. Okay, if it’s really S.H.I.E.L.D and if they are using Loki’s sceptre… Thor is going to tear the whole fucking place down. That would be good for us…” Clearing his throat Stark straightened up. “Okay, here’s what we are going to do. No more meetings at S.H.I.E.L.D HQ. If they want to talk to us, I want to have them here, where Jarvis can watch every move. You are not going to set a foot into a S.H.I.E.L.D lab, mine’s better anyway. I have acted a bit carelessly yesterday when I screamed at Fury…”

“You repeatedly used the words ‘I’m going to fuck you up’.”

“Right, maybe not the best idea ever… Fury knows that I don’t trust him, that’s alright, but we shouldn’t let them know that we figured out that they shot you. At you. Or that they are behind the robots. We’ll be careful and trace the robots back to them. Fury already pretends that I’ve hacked their system. I’ll do him a favour and let Jarvis snoop around. You try to kill us, we’ll fuck you up.”

Nothing of what had been said during this conversation pleased Banner and yet he was smart enough to know that Stark was right. Well, almost. There was no way for them to find out that they were already were stuck in the trap Loki had set for them. Yet Loki liked listening to them, loyal and intelligent, what a strange and quite unusual combination. None of them found pleasure in the fight, it was merely inevitable. Sometimes the mortals outdid themselves and succeeded in amazing Loki.

Neither of them said anything for the next minute, just sipping coffee, pondering their own thoughts. Most probably wondering how their lives had ended up like this. Not knowing that they would end once and for all quite soon. For now it looked like Loki wouldn’t get anymore information. Not very disappointing, Loki had heard more than enough, his skin was still tingling from excitement under the invisibility. He was just about to turn around when Stark put something on the table. Small, silver and black. A bracelet.

“Do me a favour. Look at it. You see anything out of the ordinary?” With a lot more care than Loki had ever seen him do anything Stark handed Banner the bracelet who eyed it intently. “Looks like a normal bracelet to me… a bit heavy. I don’t think you would ever give me a normal bracelet to look at, so I guess you can call the suit with it? Nice job, I wouldn’t be able to tell. It looks pretty new… you didn’t make it last night, did you?”

Grinning Stark took it back and nodded. “Yep. Yeah, I know, I said I was entirely working on the robots, but this is important.”

“One of your bracelets is broken?”

“No. It’s for Tommy.”

Loki’s eyes grew wide and luckily Banner was there to ask the questions he couldn’t ask. “What? You want Thomas to have a suit?”
Turning the bracelet in his fingers Stark shook his head. Suddenly his gaze looked somehow distant. “No, he’ll be able to call a suit controlled by Jarvis.”

Why would he do that? How could he put just a weapon into Loki’s hands? Was the poor man now losing his mind faster than Thor?

Unlike Loki Banner seemed to understand, to read something on Stark’s face that Loki couldn’t see. “You were terrified last night. When we left for the tower… you didn’t say a word… until Jarvis told you that Tom— Thomas had arrived at the tower. You were worried about him.”

Fascinating how Stark wouldn’t meet Banner’s eyes, completely focusing on the little piece of silver and metal in his fingers. Right now he didn’t look at all like the man who always had a joke on his lips and who couldn’t take anything seriously. “I couldn’t reach him. I called him before I even got to the battle, I called him during and I had Jarvis call him every five minutes to make sure he wasn’t in the area close to… the Hulk’s rampage. I know, New York is big city, but… People who I care about somehow always end up in this those kinds of situations. That’s not the reason for the bracelet. S.H.I.E.L.D is doing some shady business and someone tried to blow me up. He’s my boyfriend. There is a chance that he might end up as a target to get to me… I want him safe, that’s all… I was also thinking about asking him to move in.”

“You’ve been together for how long? A week? I talked to him last night and I don’t think he is the type of guy who would…”

“You talked to him?”

Loki could make out a little smile on Banner’s lips and this was his personal triumph. “Yeet, I did. I… like him. He was… Usually that kind of thing never happens. Especially after what happened yesterday with the other guy. He wasn’t afraid. Not at all. He’s nice… in a very British way.”

Laughing softly Stark nodded before getting up and patting Bruce’s shoulder. “I’ll check out how the British sleepyhead is doing and you… get some sleep yourself. We can slay our foes in the afternoon.”

“I will call Natasha and ask how she’s doing.”


Loki didn’t need more encouragement, he was working perfectly under pressure. Teleporting back into the bedroom Loki slipped into his own clone, getting into the exact position before letting it vanish. Ten seconds later the door was opened and Stark didn’t even try to make no noise. Loki stirred a bit, opening his eyes to Stark directly next to him. “Morning gorgeous…”

Yawning Loki just closed his eyes again. “So you are done working all night?”

“No… can we go back to the moment when you were so happy that I’m alive?”

Blindly Loki reached out, tangled his fingers into Stark’s hair and pulled him towards him. “I don’t like people sneaking out of bed when I’m still in it and I don’t care what you were doing. Just don’t get into bed at all or stay there.” Opening his eyes Loki allowed himself to smile, because he actually wanted to smile so desperately. He had been working so hard on his masterpiece and today he finally got to see it unfold in front of him. “Since you’re already here…” Loki brushed his lips playfully over Stark’s and then kissed him for real. For three seconds. “You’re going to tell me now what happened yesterday?”
Stark’s brown eyes were the ones of a man who had just been kissed and wanted to more of that, not having a conversation. “I could give you a long, complicated explanation… but I guess we’d rather skip that and I come straight to the point. Somebody wants to kill me.”

A look full of expectation and Loki frowned. What did the mortal want from him? “Do I have to act surprised?”

“A little bit, yeah. I’m also okay with shocked or worried.”

“You are one of the richest persons in the world, a former weapon manufacturer, a highly controversial figure with a lot of political influence, you possess technology that can’t even be matched by the government of this country and on the top of all that you are an Avenger and have pretty much pissed off every important person on this planet. This is for sure not the first time somebody wants to kill you.”

Clearly searching for some words to say Stark decided to let out a hoarse laugh. “Nice to hear it summed up like that. Could you do it again… this time making it sound like you give a shit?”

“I will give a shit if you tell me that it’s something to worry about. You are Iron Man, you must be used to this and until now you didn’t make it a big deal when you had to put your armour on and go somewhere. So? Do I have to give a shit? Should I be worried?” Loki kept his voice even, but made sure his fingertips were caressing Stark’s neck. A touch almost too soft to feel.

One of Stark’s arm slid around his waist and he shook his head. It was somehow cocky, but also sincere, Stark was convinced that this was something they could easily deal with. A foolish mortal who had no idea. “No, not more than usual. I’m Tony Stark, I’m awesome and I can easily outsmart these guys. The only problem is that we’re not quite sure yet who’s behind all that. It could be that I pissed S.H.I.E.L.D off for good and now they want my head on a plate. Too bad for them that Jarvis could send them back to the stoneage any second. Still… you said you didn’t want to be dragged into anything. Sorry about that… I’ve got something for you.”

There was nothing Loki could do. His heartbeat was speeding up and was tempted to eagerly nod. Stark was about to share the one thing with him that made him so special, that made him an Avenger. Yet Loki had to keep calm and feign surprise. “Okay…”

Being handed the bracelet Loki frowned. “Thanks… I’m not a girl though, you don’t have to buy me jewelry…”

“Damn, I’ll have to send back the diamond earrings now…” A sneaky grin, a kiss and then the great Tony Stark took a slight breath before starting to explain. Loki could almost smell how nervous he was. “Listen, this isn’t just about the… idiots who want a piece of me. Things can happen all the time… Who the fuck am I kidding, you are not only incredibly hot but also smart. Being my boyfriend puts you in tough spot and I want you to feel safe all the time. You said you don’t want to be bothered by any of this and this is me trying to… I dunno. Can I start over again? I kinda fucked this one up. Badly.”

“Stark, you’re not making any sense.”

“It’s Tony. Look, all you gotta do is pressing your thumb against this piece of metal for two full seconds. Doesn’t matter where you are it will send a signal directly to Jarvis and he will immediately send one of the Iron Man suits to you. It will be controlled by Jarvis and… well, do what you want him to do.”

Blinking, a little gasp and then a lingering look at the bracelet in his hand. “You are… giving me
an automatic Iron Man suit… as a bodyguard?"

“Yes, that makes sense! Why didn’t I think of saying that?”

“Oh, bloody hell… you are sure somebody is going to come after me to kill me, because I’m your boyfriend…”

“No!” Instantly shaking his head Stark repeated the same word about ten times. “It’s just… for emergencies… you know… you should be able to blow up someone’s car if they stole the last parking lot. Or you could use him to get you a coffee from Starbucks, there are always so long lines… Damn, you’re British, you don’t mind queuing…”

“For the love of god, Stark, stop rambling.”

“Fine!” Doing a bad job at hiding his frustration Stark let out a sigh and looked into Loki’s eyes. “I care about you. People want to keep people they care about safe. It’s a thing humans do. You wouldn’t know, you’re British and cold and awesome… I have the possibility to give you something to help you out no matter how bad the situation you’re in might be. So I want you to have it. I always used to do a crappy job at taking care of people who are important to me… guess I want to change that. This is awkward. Please just smile and say thank you for your new bodyguard.”

Not quite so quickly. Like Stark had said – Thomas was smart. “Wait a second… no matter where I am? Does that mean that this bracelet would constantly tell you about my whereabouts?”

“Well, to be honest… I could track your phone down anytime. Which brings up another point – don’t switch it off all the time!”

“I don’t want a possessive boyfriend who controls where I’m going.”

“Okay, okay, I swear that I will only be able to locate the bracelet if you activate it. What? Come on, could this face lie to you?”

Loki still frowned, slipping the bracelet on his wrist. It felt lighter than expected, cool against his skin. “What if I lose it? Or it gets stolen? Somebody would have a suit at their disposal.”

A possibility that got quickly dismissed by Stark. “Jarvis wouldn’t listen to them and more importantly… I need to scan your fingerprints, so the bracelet can only be activated by you.”

“You want my fingerprints?!”

“Just the thumb!”

Rubbing one hand over his face Loki rolled onto his back and let out a whine, not quite worthy of Thomas or himself. “I only wanted you for the sex and your money and now you want my thumbprint and to put a transmitter on me that will make it impossible to hide from you… I guess that’s karma.”

Softly grabbing his arm Stark rubbed his thumb over the skin beneath the bracelet. “You forgot the part about Jarvis killing every attractive person that crosses your way.”

Laughing lightly Loki shook his head and reached for Stark’s hand. Let him get a glimpse of what it would be like to be in a genuine, loving relationship. After all Thomas had done it before, this was another one of these moments. “You want me to be safe, I get it. I’m okay with that… You’ll even get my thumbprint, but we’ll better talk about what this thing can do and not… later. Thank
“Wow, that worked out way better than I thought... you’re becoming nice. Wow...” Stark was looking way too smug for Loki’s taste, so he kissed him. “Shut up. I was just staring to like you.”

Stark took this as an invitation to deeply kiss Loki and to press up against him. Always in the mood of sex. Right now this was a trait that Loki could appreciate. Today he was ruling this tiny little world. The Avengers were caught in his web of lies without even realising it. Iron Man was offering him his technology, weapons and even his body. Nobody could compete with Loki when he was playing the game at his own rules.

There wasn’t much time for their kisses and touches to grow bolder, because there still existed some things which even Loki couldn’t predict or stop from happening.

“Sir, I hate to interrupt you, but the Avengers are waiting in front of the door. They request access to the tower.”

Groaning in frustration Stark pulled slightly away from Loki. “Which ones?”

“All of them.”
Hello everybody,

The Avengers are in front of the door - we should let them in, shouldn't we? :D

_________________________________________________

Do you know the enemy?
Do you know your enemy?
Well, gotta know the enemy

Know your enemy ~~ Green Day

_________________________________________________

“I’m outta here.”

Loki had already jumped out of the bed and was putting on his jeans when Stark was only sitting up, looking a bit confused. “Wait, you can’t just leave…”

Bloody hell, of course, Loki wasn’t leaving. No way was he going to miss this confrontation and the opportunity to take part in it. He still had to pretend though. “A woman that can freeze your soul by looking at you, a god from another planet and Captain Murica who is going to tell me to go to my room. No, thank you.” By now Loki had put on his shirt and Stark finally succeeded in untangling his feet from the blanket. “You forgot Robin Hood… and Steve doesn’t get to send you anywhere. You’re the one sleeping with me, you get to send him anywhere you want.”

Sighing Loki waved it off. “I gotta work on the new script anyway. I’ll be back for dinner… if they are gone by them.”

Kissing Stark shortly Loki turned around and suppressed his haughty smile when Stark’s arms snaked around his waist, holding him back. “Hey, we still have to calibrate the bracelet. Then you can leave. Or – better idea – I don’t let them in and we have some great ‘Tony did something nice and emotional’ sex.”

Loki only raised an eyebrow and Jarvis came to help him. “Sir, Thor is growing rather impatient.”

Sure, what else to expect from such a stupid oaf who had never had the experience of not being welcome in somebody else’s house.

Another groan from Stark. “Is it hammer time already?”

“I fear so, sir.”

Accepting his defeat Stark muttered under his breath “Fine, let them in.” Loki still wasn’t allowed
to leave, because Stark firmly grabbed his hand, pulled him into the living room and made him sit down at the table. It was one of these rare moments when Loki was reminded of the fact that he still didn’t know anything about technology and that Stark was so much more gifted than S.H.I.E.L.D could ever hope to be. Within seconds Stark had... somehow hooked up Loki’s bracelet to a hologram and was... Loki had no idea what he was doing, but that didn’t stop him from watching him in amazement. Moving shapes, typing in codes and everything without Jarvis.

“What are you doing?”

“Just making sure that nobody but you will be able to activate it... I’m already done.” Smiling lightly Stark let his thumb run over the open palm of Loki’s hand. “So, when you’re not activating it, it’s a perfectly normal bracelet. Only you can activate it and the suit will only follow your orders. It’s still Jarvis, he probably won’t shoot every author of every book you don’t like. No, its job is going to be to make sure that you’re fine. Just press your thumb again this part here and the modifications are done. It’ll adapt to your print.”

Yes, please. It had been such a long time that Loki had received such a wonderful gift. Had he ever got one this beautiful? Power to use and manipulate like he wanted to and its only purpose was to protect him. To protect him from any harm. No wonder Loki’s heart was beating faster. Stark didn’t let go of his outstretched left hand while Loki pressed his right thumb against the indicated piece of metal. It became slightly warm under his touch. “That’s it?”

“Well, scan complete, Jarvis?”

“Yes, sir. The Mark XXVII now can only be activated by Mr. Pine.”

“Does that make me a superhero now?”

“No, but it does make me an incredibly awesome boyfriend. My awesome levels just went through the roof.”

Loki huffed, but Stark reacted the way he always did when he wanted to stop a potential conversation – he kissed him. Timing couldn’t be better, because the next second Loki could hear the elevator doors opening. Delicious. The Avengers walking in on Iron Man kissing Loki.

“Good lord... Tony? Seriously?”

Barton announced his presence and Loki grimaced. “I’m always fascinated with the different cultural costumes. In Britain we usually say hello when we enter somebody’s apartment.”

How things had changed now that they had finally come together again. This time Loki wasn’t lying crushed on the floor, just regaining consciousness. Not all. Moreover they weren’t closing in on him, no. Loki was sitting here, with Tony Stark who was still holding his hand. At this very moment he belonged here more than any of them. Because Stark wanted him to be here.

“Greetings, Stark. Thomas, I’m most happy to see you again.” Thor put a big smile on display, but it didn’t reach his eyes. The Captain was still busy supporting the Widow whose foot was obviously still not healed enough to put pressure on it. Barton was the most interesting, because he didn’t know Thomas yet. Not that he cared very much, instead his eyes closely followed the Captain who led the Widow to the next chair.

“So nice to have you all here. What would I do the entire morning if you didn’t force me getting out of bed...” Stark sighed before showing at least a bit of compassion. “Nat, how are you doing?”

“I’ve had worse.”
Snorting Barton looked around. “Where’s Banner? Or did you throw him out to have some quality time with Union Jack over here?”

“Thank you, Clint for making it so easy. Goodbye and thank you all very much for dropping by and fuck off.” Stark had a smile on his lips while saying that, but it couldn’t be more hostile.

Loki had no time to feel smug because of it, so he quickly continued playing his part. “No reason to throw anybody out, I’m going to leave anyway.”

An idea that the Captain seemed to be fond of. “I guess that would be for the best.”

Done. No way was Loki leaving now and he couldn’t even get up from his chair, because Stark tightened his grip on Loki’s wrist. “What? Because you want to discuss some super secretive business? Well, newsflash, Cap, I’ll tell him everything the second you leave. Maybe I’ll even text him while you’re still talking about it. Or I let Jarvis video stream it.”

“Tony!”

“What?!” Stark spat, looking from one Avenger to another, obviously ready to snap at any of them. “He is the only person right now that I actually want here. He came here, because I asked him to. You are here, because shit went down yesterday and my place is the nicest to hang out at… and the only one where we can’t be spied at. My place, I’m calling the shots. Tommy stays or you are going to leave.”

It was like pressing buttons and Stark would go through the motions. Thomas was able to keep a straight, calm face, but inside Loki was screaming with joy. “Stark, I don’t have to stay. I’m not even keen on it.”

Now Stark was looking at him intently, telling him with his eyes only to shut up and stay, because he wanted to make point.

“Cap, leave it be.” The Widow’s voice sounded even, clear, but Loki watched her closely. She wasn’t under the influence of any meds and therefore she was in pain. Her eyes barely gave it away, only a person as skilled as Loki would be able to notice. The situation was serious enough for her wanting to keep a clear head. “Tony said it himself, he is going to tell Thomas everything, so he stays. We shouldn’t lose anymore time over that. Where is Bruce?”

“I’ve already asked that.” Clint cut in, not giving a shit about Loki’s presence, his attention focused on the Widow and his body language was telling tales longer than a whole novel. For a moment Loki’s head started swimming and it only now the immense scale of his task hit him. All of them here, every single one and Loki in between.

No. Not Loki. It was Thomas. It always had to be Thomas.

Loki had to play Thomas, he couldn’t afford to slip one single time. If it was just that, it wouldn’t be a problem. There was so much else going on. Their interactions, words, gestures, looks, hesitation, eagerness, trust, doubt… Loki wanted everything, he wasn’t going to miss a thing. It was quite a lot to handle, but he could do it. Afterwards he would be exhausted, yes, but this was worth it.

“Bruce is still asleep, I sent him back to bed. He needs to get some rest, he had a shit day yesterday. Maybe you’ve noticed.”

Lovely how Rogers pursed his lips, desperately trying to not comment or to say something else that might cause Stark to really throw them out. “That’s good, but he should also take part in this
conversation. We’re trying to find out what happened yesterday and… who might be a threat.”

This last phrase was a gift and Rogers’ face showed how much he hoped that Stark would accept it. To Loki’s surprise, he did. Still some reasonable thinking left. Loki didn’t like that. “Jarvis… could you please tell Bruce about the little party going on here? If he wants to join in…”

Taking a deep breath Loki almost felt drunk by all the different emotions he could feel lingering in the air. The anger was so strong, so dark and numbing, it almost consumed everything. Loki would have loved to take a closer look at the window, yet Barton was way too distracting. Not uttering a word and still he was saying so much more than any of them. All softness was gone from his features, his eyes hard and unforgiving.

It had to be Banner. Something about him was putting Barton off. The Widow was the reason, she was the reason for almost everything that threw Barton off the rails.

Loki’s knowledge of venoms was vast and jealousy always did the job. It made the smartest man blind for everything else around him and if you got lost in it, you saw no other way out than to destroy the one thing that occupied your mind.

“Yesterday we got carried away… I understand why, but we’re weak if we get distracted. An easy target. We need to gather information about what happened yesterday and in New Jersey, so we can find out who did what and what happened…”

Stark couldn’t hold back a chuckle, not being bothered if he was making Rogers look silly. “We know what happened, Steve.”

“You’ve already come to a conclusion, Tony, we know.” The Widow was definitely better at this than Rogers. “We would also like to do that, but before that we should gather all the facts. Help us with your expertise, will you. Fury said that the S.H.I.E.L.D system got hacked and therefore Thor, Cap, you and me got sent to New Jersey. You’re the expert – is this possible? No other comments, just yes or no.”

“Technically yes, because S.H.I.E.L.D is fucking stupid, but…”

“Thank you. It’s possible. So it’s also possible that the system was hacked again yesterday. You agree or disagree?” The Widow cocked her head, looking directly at Stark and Loki’s magic was waking up. A rather unpleasant awakening.

“You want to play semantics? Okay. It’s totally possible, because I’m sure that 90 percent of S.H.I.E.L.D employees are morons. So, yeah, possible. I also like to ask questions – do you think it’s possible that it was an inside job. That the troops were sent there on purpose. That the special troop was sent to go haywire, so there would be an incident? Come on, Nat, is it really so unlikely that someone in a position of power would like to do something like that? For whatever reason…”

The sheer lack of emotion on the Widow’s face was impressive, but Loki was slowly growing tired of it. Her response was as calm and monotone as ever although the words should make her skin crawl. “Yes, it is completely possible.”

Stark flinched, obviously not expecting that answer and it took him a second to blurt out a loud, triumphant “Ha! Told you so!”

The Captain seemed in genuine shock now. “Natasha? We’re talking about S.H.I.E.L.D here…”

“Exactly. An organisation that hires assassins and former terrorists, because they might be useful. No, S.H.I.E.L.D doesn’t trust anybody, so it is easily understandable that Stark doesn’t want to
trust them. It’s not like most agents didn’t build themselves a secret backdoor, a way out if things should turn sour. Clint did and I did too. For this reason alone I can’t rule out the possibility that what happened is S.H.I.E.L.D’s doing. I’m not saying I think Tony is right, but it is just as possible as an outside attack.”

A speech for the Captain only and Loki didn’t miss how disgustingly content Stark looked now. Even more so when the Captain didn’t know how to reply. It was Thor who continued the conversation, his arms crossed in front of his chest, looking a bit detached from it. “What reason should our allies have to betray us?”

To Loki’s surprise it was now Barton who spoke up, a dark grin on his face. “Fury hates our guts. Well, except for Cap’s…”

“I side with Legolas on this one. The big bad Cyclops would be glad if I lost my head in an explosion working on my suits…”

“Just because Fury doesn’t like you he doesn’t automatically want to kill you.” So easy to tell that Rogers wanted every word of this conversation and the issues that were brought up. Life had been so much easier during the Second World War. Good guys and bad guys. If you’re working for the good guys – why ever distrusting anybody? “Let’s be logical here, we’re important to S.H.I.E.L.D. We’re doing most of the work, we’re doing things others aren’t capable of. Disposing of us doesn’t make any sense.”

Loki couldn’t hold back and that was good thing, because Thomas wouldn’t want to hold back. So he chuckled and everybody’s eyes were suddenly fixed on him. These were the very seconds, Stark was falling in love with Thomas right now.

“You want to say something, Mr. Pine?” Rogers’ personality and his manners wouldn’t allow him to show his animosity towards Thomas. At least not consciously. The Captain was a bad actor, he was wearing his heart on his sleeve and every blind man could see that he wished Thomas to be gone.

“If you care about a civilian’s opinion on the matter… It would make perfect sense to dispose of somebody who is capable of doing things that others can’t do. It’s a pattern that repeats itself through the course of history. Mostly soldiers or generals. They’re made big by someone who has faith in them, in their abilities. For a time they’re useful, bring glory and success, but somebody like that can’t be kept down. They rise up and become more powerful than the person who put them in a position of power. Napoleon. Caesar… Smart men who had an extraordinary understanding of tactics and strategy. Not even equipped with superhuman powers. If you have somebody working for you who can do what others aren’t capable of… Let’s say… summon thunder and lightning, build armours controlled by an A.I… or somebody who possesses fighting skills that can’t be matched by anybody else… not to mention the incredible force of the Hulk… Having people like that working for you, you’d prefer it if they didn’t have a mind of their own. Because I wouldn’t like seeing them turning against me for whatever reason. No matter how powerful an inferior is… you would want them to be submissive and obedient.” Loki paused for a moment and gave Stark a small smile. “Personally I think that some of you lack those qualities.”

There was a moment and Loki didn’t miss it. A glimmer that made the brown of Stark’s eyes look so much brighter. The corners of his mouth twitched and all the cockiness was suddenly washed away to make space for something soft. So this was it.

“Tony Stark’s paramour’s conclusion sounds reasonable. Do you believe this could be a possibility?” Thor’s eyes darted around between his friends and Stark’s attention left Loki. “Let me tell you one thing – Paramour?! What the fuck!”
Sighing in defeat the Captain came to accept that he couldn’t just discard their lack of faith in S.H.I.E.L.D. “Good, I guess your theory is as good as any. Still we have no proof whatsoever to think so. Or even a reason. Nobody of us has uttered a thread or showed interest of working against S.H.I.E.L.D. To me it looks like a big scheme to make us believe exactly that… We have seen the robots, haven’t we? Somebody who is capable of building such advanced technology should also be able to hack into S.H.I.E.L.D.’s system… I think we’re still dealing with the same enemy and if we start fighting among ourselves, we’re only going to do what he wants us to.”

What a smart man, but even right now he was dancing to the tune Loki was playing. “I agree with Steve. It would be stupid to attack us the way we were attacked. All of us together when we are the strongest. The attack on Stark Tower was directed at us and at S.H.I.E.L.D. We have to find out who designed the robots, that will answer all of our questions. Any progress, Tony?”

There was no time for Stark to answer, because one of the doors opened and Banner joined their little meeting. The distress hadn’t left him, it was all still so visible. How his eyes sheepishly darted around finally settled on the Widow. “Natasha. How are you doing? Everything alright?”

Loki would have loved to somehow slow the scene down to re-watch every single detail of it. The Widow smiled softly and yet there was a little darker edge to it. “I’m fine. I’ve had worse.”

“There are only so many times you can say that…”

Instantly the smile was gone and instead the Widow looked displeased at Barton. Now was a good time to let the kids to play by themselves. There was no way they would ever talk completely freely with him around and by the way things were going Loki didn’t have to worry. Like chess pieces on a board. “Look, this was really entertaining and disturbing, but Tony Stark’s paramour still has a job he has to show up to. I guess you’ll be happy to have me gone anyway. I’ll see you tonight, Stark.”

Getting up from his chair Loki leaned down to kiss Stark, showing that Thomas wasn’t bothered by the Avengers watching him or them. Stark smirked at him. “Cool, dress your fine ass in something fancy, I’ll take you out tonight.”

Loki gave him a little smile before turning around. “Bye… I hope you’ll find out what’s going on.” Some of the Avengers muttered a quiet goodbye, but it wasn’t like Loki cared. All he did was getting into the elevator and thought about how long he should wait before calling every single one of the Avengers again. Last night Loki had been busy with Stark, he was sure that Rogers had called in the meantime. He wasn’t sure about Banner, maybe he was too depressed to do that right now. There was still the whole day left to get into contact with all of them. Loki doubted that Stark would let them stay at his place longer than for a few hours.

Until then Loki would go home, finish his latest book and enjoy some Spanish food. One book turned into five and then Loki went to a Spanish restaurant he had found two weeks ago, by accident. Of course it was in Toledo, he only trusted the food to be really Spanish if the menu was written in Spanish too. The bracelet stayed at home.

After enjoying the tapas Loki thought he could now try to call the Captain. If they were still discussing at Stark’s place, then… Loki’s hand froze in mid-motion. His magic instantly reacted, shielding him from the possible attack. This time it was entirely different. Again the little mage was reaching out for him, but not aggressively this time, not trying to hurt him. Not even to scare him. It was rather odd, almost confusing. For the lack of a better word Loki would say that… the magic was nudging him. The little mage was saying hello. Sorry for interrupting your meal, but would you like to have a conversation?
An actual surprise. Loki had managed to scare him off, the little mage had understood quite well of what Loki was capable. That Loki’s magic was way superior to his own. Why would he want to talk though?

Loki let him in, showing him that he was listening and felt the other one starting to pull. Not forcefully, a suggestion. To meet up. A place where they could talk. Fine, but to Loki’s terms. Sending a part of him ahead, some island, far away from all civilisation. One could never be sure and Loki didn’t want any watchers if things should get messy.

After paying like a decent person would Loki went into a darker alley and teleported away, to the place he had indicated. An empty beach, the wind was playing with Loki’s hair, carrying the waves closer to the shore. Sitting down Indian style Loki watched the horizon gave into the connection. Now the little mage knew exactly where Loki was and vice-versa. Still in his little castle in Eastern Europe. “So let’s talk.”

The next wave washed over the beach and left some words behind, written into the sand. Nice trick.

*For a while I was actually thinking you were protecting them*

First line and it already made Loki cringe, but he could understand how the other one could get that impression. Writing his own words into the air Loki sent them away. “I’m protecting my interests.”

The answer came quite quickly.

*It’s a shame we interfered with each other’s work, because I do think we have common interests*

Laughing Loki shook his head. “I doubt it. I don’t have common interests with anyone of your kind.”

Almost he had used the word ‘mortals’, but Loki couldn’t risk to give any kind of clue about his real identity. If the mage wasn’t completely stupid, he would already know that someone as powerful as Loki couldn’t be human.

*What would you know about my kind? I don’t know who or what you are, but I know what you can do. I want to learn. Why don’t we put our differences aside? I don’t mind if you want to play a little game before getting rid of them.*

Fool. Did he really think he had anything to offer that would interest Loki in the least bit? “I’m not playing games.”

*The Hulk incident yesterday looked a lot like a game to me. A rather funny one. I was immensely entertained by your work. Didn’t you enjoy mine?”*

Loki snorted. “It was rather annoying, getting in the way of my plans.”

*This brings me back to my first point. We have a common goal, we shouldn’t work against each other. There is enough of them for both of us.*

How pathetic. “I don’t share. They are mine. They are all mine. I have unfinished business. You can do whatever you want to S.H.I.E.L.D or the military or the government. Whatever you want, I don’t care. The Avengers are mine.”

Now Loki suddenly had to wait. The other one was still listening, but took some time. *You think*
you can take them on alone?

“You have no idea of what I’m capable. What have you done until now? Your little toys didn’t do much damage yet.”

*These were only test runs. You also have no idea what I am capable of. Tony Stark would be dead if it wasn’t for you. I’m not playing with the Avengers. I want them gone. You’re taking too much time. You’re saving them. It’s not that I don’t value a great scheme, but from my point of you – you’re only waiting around and doing nothing. Are you getting comfortable? Do you enjoy hanging out at their parties? Are you enjoying their company?*

“Be careful now. I respect every magic user, but don’t think I won’t take you down if I feel like it.”

*That would be a shame, I would prefer a collaboration, but believe me – I won’t hesitate to fight you and you have no idea of what I might have in store for you*

Raising an eyebrow Loki shook his head. This had been funny enough and he respected the little mage for contacting him this way, but in the long run this wouldn’t matter. If he interfered with his plans once again – Loki would kill him.
Hello everybody,

Well, what is there so say? Without a doubt the most important chapter in this story so far. Why? You’ll see... or maybe you won’t. Just take a look ;-)  

____________________________________________________________________________________

_Pero es que tú, conviertes_
_Inviertes, te diviertes... esa es tu virtud_
_Te ríes de los tiempos y de su magnitud_
_Y a mí me haces olvidar el ayer_

_Camino de rosas ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~_

(But you, you change
_invent, amuse yourself... that's your virtue_
_You laugh at the times and their power_
_And you make me forget about yesterday)

____________________________________________________________________________________

“Inside job against you? You are sure you’re not working at Wall Street? Sounds a lot like my job. Hey, I couldn’t believe you even have a boss… you’re the Avengers. I wouldn’t dare to boss you around. Sure, I can get why somebody would want the Hulk gone, because seriously… it freaks me out, but… I know you can’t go into details. Don’t let yourself be fucked over. From what I’ve learned there is only one way to do that. You gotta fuck them over first.”

“Thank you, at least one person who seems to get it.”

***

“Oh my god… to me he sounds like a man with huge paranoia. You are Captain America. He’s Iron Man. Everybody in New York owes you their lives. The whole world owes you everything. Everybody knows that and they are thankful. Even if… it would make way more sense to use you as a weapon than… Good lord, get rid of you. I was there when the attack happened and... it wasn’t entirely focused on you, but at everybody. Tony Stark is a genius, I give him that, but… I don’t think you should listen to him.”

“I know, but Tony is stubborn… he doesn’t let up when he is convinced of something. Even when he’s completely wrong.”

“Just look out, Steve. He is going to drag you into something. You are their leader, right? You decide which way you’re going. You’re a smart guy and a good man. You will make the right decisions.”
“I hope so.”

***

“Jarvis, is Tony alone in the penthouse?”

“Yes, Mr. Pine, he is. Also waiting for you.”

Good, Loki had very specific plans for the next 20 minutes. No interruptions, just Stark and him. A means to an end. Loki had to clear his head. He was still strangely unsettled by his conversation with the little mage. Something didn’t fit and Loki thought he might have missed something. His plan was working out perfectly and still the whole day he felt… odd.

No, that also wasn’t right. Only a part of him had felt odd, but it was this constant nudging that wouldn’t let him take a break. Perhaps he was just upset that the pathetic little mage had really thought that they could be working together. Or the fact that all the Avengers had been in a room with him. Loki was fairly confident that all they saw in him was an arrogant mortal who was sleeping with Stark. No reason to worry about that, but Loki could acknowledge that it had been a special event.

Something was wrong. The bracelet on Loki’s wrist was itching and he felt tired. It had been a long day and Loki felt drained.

The little mage had lashed out at him. Almost playfully, just a shockwave of energy, not hurting him. That hadn’t been his intent, it was a power play. He was trying to show him that Loki hadn’t seen anything yet. Perhaps that was true, yet they both knew Loki was clearly stronger. Then again Loki had fought people who had definitely seemed to be superior to him and he had walked away as the winner. It was all a question of strategy, will, tricks, determination and also a bit of luck.

If Loki was going to get rid of him, he had to do it accurately. With a plan, prepared and with no chance of being surprised. Normally that would be a matter of two days. This was time now that he didn’t have.

Barton had asked him to meet and to pick up their regular work-outs.

Conversations with the Captain were never under an hour long.

Loki needed to sometimes show up at the Widows’ apartment when she wasn’t even there. Otherwise it would sooner or later be suspicious. When she was there… well, she had grown accustomed to him and he was allowed to stay there for quite a while. He was a cat, he couldn’t just sneak in, listening to her phone calls and be off again.

The contact to Jane Foster had indeed cooled down a little bit, Loki had to get to that.

Until now Banner still hadn’t called back, but sooner or later he would. Then Elizabeth would have to be there, physically, not only on the phone. Loki was actually lucky that William was living in D.C.

The one thing that made his schedule ridiculously tight was his relationship status. Stark left him enough freedom for an average human relationship, but it was still incredibly time consuming. About 8 hours every night that he had to pretend being asleep, breakfast, talks in between and until now Stark had been eager to spend every evening with him. Every romance would cool down after a while, but Thomas wouldn’t live long enough for that to happen.

To cut a long story short Loki had a lot of stuff to do and today everything had come together for
the first time… he was feeling tired. Yet he wasn’t going home to lie down and relax – he was going to play Thomas for Stark. Well, they definitely would play to his rules tonight. Loki wanted as little effort as possible tonight.

Reaching the penthouse Loki stepped out off the elevator and Stark was there right in front of him. Looking… good. A dark blue suit, a grey tie, his hair was impeccable, ready to go out. Right, he had something about that…

“Hey, babe… you’re always looking fine, but… I told you to get dolled up, right? Jeans and T-shirt aren’t really fit for the opera.”

“Opera?”

Grinning Stark nodded. “Yep. I can be snobbish too. We’re going to listen to some Mozart and then we’re going to my favourite club, so I have something to look forward to. Come on, I know you’re into operas.”

Sighing Loki shook his head. “I don’t feel like going out tonight.”

“Oh… okay. What do you feel like?”

“A good glass of wine, something to eat and a nice slow fuck.”

Stark blinked at him. “You awesome human being completely made out of awesomeness…”

Immediately Stark wrapped himself around Loki, kissing him deeply, but Loki wasn’t quite in the mood yet. Sex was the easiest way to spend the evening, no conversations, but a nice way to make Stark even more intoxicated with him. Besides that Loki needed some fun and Stark was a good lay. If Loki could manipulate him, he could also use him for his own pleasure. “I want the glass of wine first.”

“Just a second, Tommy, darling.” Letting go of him Stark walked to the bar and came back with two glasses of red wine. In the meantime Loki had sat down on the couch and he instantly noticed the loosened knot of Stark’s tie. They definitely weren’t going out, good. If only the bracelet stopped itching, Loki wanted to scratch himself.

“Had a rough day? You look beat up.” Stark sat down next to him, kissing him shortly before clicking their glasses.

“Nah… it was just long… nothing worth talking about. It was probably better than your day…”

“Because of the Avengers?” Stark waved it off. “I threw most of them out an hour after you left. Steve is an idiot, Natasha has some fucked up loyalties, Clint is weird and Thor was no idea what’s going on. Fuck that. Oh, just one thing, we talked about you.”

Not very surprising. “You did?”

“Yap. Clint said that we had a fucked up relationship, because you call me Stark and you don’t freak out when we’re talking about people trying to kill us.”

“I hope you told him that I only want you for the money.”

“And the sex. Of course. Wasn’t that point three on your list? What do you want to eat?”

Something simple, Loki wasn’t actually hungry, but Thomas would be. “Just order a pizza and
we’ll be fine.”

Pretty much everything he said tonight made Stark grin. “Jarvis, you heard the man. Just the usual.”

“Very well, sir.”

Taking a sip from his wine Loki savoured the taste. Midgardian alcohol couldn’t make him light-headed or even drunk, but Loki liked the softness of it. So much finer than anything to be found in Asgard. It did help Loki to relax and the kisses that were trailed along his neck also felt very nice. Stark’s hand slid across his thigh and Loki let out a little chuckle. “So now it’s you who decides the order of the events?”

“Pizza’s going to arrive in about 20 minutes… time that we could spend rather well, don’t you think?” Fingers on his hip that slowly moved to the button of his jeans. Horny bastard, but Loki was in the mood to let Stark distract him. “Show me what you’ve got in mind.”

Stark had been listening to him, the kisses were languid, but his hands were working quickly. Loki joined in and within seconds their clothes were lying on the floor. Moving to the bed was out of the question, but Loki was sure that Stark didn’t mind. He seemed rather content covering Loki’s stomach with kisses, dipping his tongue into his navel, pulling little sighs from Loki’s lips. Yeah, Loki had said nice and slow, but foreplay was for another time. Right now Loki just wanted to get off.

Pushing Stark back with his foot, Loki took advantage of his surprise to climb into Stark’s lap. “Again… I don’t need to be on top, but it’s easier to get what I want.”

“Oh, I definitely don’t mind that…” Stark let himself be pulled into a deep kiss and grinded against Loki. Yeah, that finally felt good. Good enough to cast the other thoughts aside. Even better than that, Stark seemed to get what Loki wanted. His fingers were boldly running down Loki’s spine, slipping between his cheeks. Preparation was dealt with like a mere necessity, quick and not very exciting. Thankfully Stark kept lube and condoms near every surface they would potentially fuck on, so only seconds later Loki could slide down on Stark’s cock.

Uttering a choked up groan Loki buried his fingers in Stark’s shoulders and watched the other’s face intensely. Stark’s eyes were wide, his skin flushed and his breath came in short gasps. His lust filled expression showed that he was enjoying himself just as much as Loki did. Probably even more.

“This is so much better than opera…”

“Shut up…” Loki started moving and Stark didn’t miss a beat. Nice and slow seemed to be forgotten. Instead it was fast, passionate and perfectly fulfilling. The last hours and Loki’s different thoughts were discarded, slowly fading away and he allowed himself to get lost in the moment. Hands that alternated between caressing and just groping him, soft lips leaving wet, hot trails his skin, the hard, attractive body of another male against his own… It didn’t matter that it was Stark, it could be anybody as long as he made Loki feeling this exquisite pleasure. When Loki reached his climax, he didn’t let the loud moan pass his lips, but instead bit into Stark’s neck. After all it was still Stark and Loki wouldn’t reject an opportunity to cause him pain.

Another thing that Stark didn’t seem to mind, because he followed Loki over the edge only seconds later. Despite panting heavily Stark pulled him into a bruising kiss and Loki let him. Yes, this had been fun and for now Loki didn’t feel actual tension in his muscles. At least something to give Stark credit for.
“Thank you. Finally a pleasant thing to happen during this day…” Mumbling these words against Stark’s lips Loki kissed him again before getting off him.

Leaning back Stark closed his eyes, a content smile on his lips. “My pleasure… also definitely the highlight of my day…”

How happy he seemed. How unfortunate that it wouldn’t last long. Unfortunate for Stark. Loki considered making him happy like an unpleasant, but necessary side effect. “I’m going to take a shower. You coming?”

“You don’t even want to cuddle? I’m feeling so unloved.” Stark pouted and Loki inwardly cursed him for ruining the moment. So much about feeling relaxed and good. “You’ll start feeling really unloved if you don’t move your arse into the shower.”

After they finished showering both put on their underwear and Stark got them the pizzas from out of the elevator. Jarvis must have somehow taken care of that. In hindsight this might be the most informal dinner Loki had ever had. Half naked, lolling on the couch, eating pizza without using a plate or knife and fork. Midgard had its easy going ways in comparison to Asgard.

“The thing you talked about… with the Avengers. You will figure this out, right? I’m not really worried, it’s just… Listening to your discussion and you giving me this…” Loki casually held up his wrist. “…you’re not making this a regular thing? You guys hanging out and talking about people wanting to kill you. Cause that would be horrible…”

Still munching on a slice Stark shook his head. “Nope, the others may be too dumb to understand what’s going on, but I’m not. Cap can say all he wants, I’ll work on the robots myself and I’ll find out what’s going on. When I’m working on something, I get it done. You don’t have to worry, worry doesn’t suit your pretty face.”

Loki couldn’t let this opportunity go by. Worn out or not. “Why does it matter anyway what the Captain says?”

“It doesn’t. I don’t give a shit. I’ve never had a boss and you can’t expect me to play nice… even more so when he’s wearing that ridiculous outfit.”

Thanks for pointing out something very important. “Your boss?” Loki let out an amused laugh and shook his head. “Seriously? What makes him the fearless leader of the Avengers?”

“Well, he is a Captain? And pretty much fearless, yeah.”

Rolling his eyes Loki took a big bite of his slice. Such an ordinary meal, but always surprisingly delicious. “That’s not what I meant. Fine, he is a big strong man. So? He’s a Captain, you’re not in the military, so you couldn’t care less. Yes, he’s a hero, because he beat up some Nazis. He helped saving the world. Thor did too. The Hulk, Miss Romanov, Barton and you did too. I’m pretty sure you did most of it.”

“We all know that I’m awesome.”

“Not the words I used, but okay.” Loki shrugged. “You are smarter than all of them. You created Jarvis. Jarvis is the most fascinating thing on earth. Don’t get all smug, but I mean that. You created him and that makes you… the smartest person on earth? Didn’t you mention some time that you were also funding this stupid organisation? How are you not calling the shots?” Now everything depended on the look of his face. Honest curiosity, a bit of confusion and a hint of affection.
Now Stark was slowly chewing on his slice, the conversation had turned more serious than he had expected. Loki wasn’t cocky about this, not like Stark had been. Loki was convinced that Stark was feeling slightly warm inside, happy about having a person believing in him… and voicing questions he was probably asking himself. Finally he shrugged it all off. For now. “Nah… what would I do being in charge? Like this I can complain about mistakes other people make. That’s what I do best.”

“I don’t doubt it.” Loki laughed softly, content with the thought he had planted in Stark’s head. They continued eating in silence, every now and then Stark’s fingers brushed over Loki’s arm. “You know… I can tell that something happened today. You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to. I’m bitching all day long, so it’d be only fair if you did that too. You looked stressed when you got in here… still do somehow. Kinda astonishing after great sex. What happened? Someone at work pissed you off? I can buy the place and throw them out if you want.”

It was only half a joke and Loki knew it. That didn’t make it better though. Thomas hadn’t had any problems today. Alright, the morning with the Avengers, but that was it. Loki was tired, Loki was worn out, but Thomas wasn’t. Loki had gotten distracted enough to let something show. It wasn’t an unimportant detail, so Stark thought that Thomas hadn’t had a nice day. No big deal. Unfortunately it could become a major issue very quickly if this happened again. “Nobody pissed me off at work.”

“Good, I don’t really want to invest in the publishing sector. Something else then. Trouble with your family?”

The delicious melted cheese turned bitter in Loki’s mouth and he quickly swallowed. How he had wished that Stark wouldn’t care about these sorts of tings. Too bad, he wanted him to fall love and people in love… well they cared about these things. “I don’t have a family.”

For a mere second Stark seemed to be embarrassed, felt bad about asking, but then he wanted to know more. “That… is a strange choice of words. How do you mean that?”

Had Loki just really called him the smartest person on this planet? Because after this remark he would like to take that back. “I meant that I don’t have a family.”

“Yeah, but… that sounds strange. You don’t have a family…” Stark frowned, suddenly looking at him so intently that Loki started to feel uneasy. Something that had never happened before. He didn’t like those eyes on him when Loki wasn’t sure what Stark was seeing. What of him, what of Thomas. Or both of them. “Did they die? Your parents? Or did you decide that you… don’t have a family anymore?”

It was hard to bite down the snarl that so desperately wanted to pass his lips. Too much, too close… “I decided that I don’t have a family anymore. So, no. I didn’t argue with my non-existing family. The day started with my boyfriend making me a gift. A robotic bodyguard, because he wants me to be safe. Then a discussion with his… superhero friends about who might want to kill them. Okay, I know that somebody wants to kill you all the time, but it’s still something different.”

A cop-out, but incredibly believable and Loki knew well enough that he was taking advantage of Stark’s fear. Losing Thomas because he wasn’t willing or able to deal with the sacrifices he had to make for being with an Avenger. He hit a raw nerve there and Stark instantly saw himself forced to do something. What he did was putting the pizza away and scooting closer to him. Not trying to cuddle or comfort him. “We talked about that. You know what it is like, you said it yourself. I don’t want to hide that shit from you, but I understand that it’s shaking you up. I’m sorry. Back to the plan about pizza, wine and sex?”
Smiling softly Loki nodded, feeling content to have Stark distracted from his mistake. “Sounds good.”

Loki had tasted a lot of kisses during his life. Lots of them had been sweet due to the mead or savoured of wine. Until now a kiss had never tasted like pizza. Odd. Fingers slid into Loki’s hair, Stark pulled him closer and Loki loosely wrapped an arm around the other’s waist. So easy to distract if you knew which buttons to push.

“Sir, as always I’m very sorry to interrupt you, but Mr. Odinson asked if you were busy otherwise he would like to take you up on your offer to watch a movie.”

Thomas faded away and Loki flinched so obviously that Stark broke the kiss, looking quite sheepish that Loki wanted to slap him. “Uhm… don’t I look busy, Jarvis?”

“He was very persistent, sir and it was you who made the offer.”

“Odinson… Thor? Does he want to come over?” Loki’s magic seemed to have woken up from a slumber. Not feeling drowsy, but well rested and furious.

Stark chose to smile and started with another very eloquent “Uhm… He wouldn’t come over, because he already is here. He’s staying in one of the lower floors.”

No. Simply not possible. Loki would have noticed, he could not have been missing such an important… His magic turned to him, enraged by his stupidity. Now he could feel Thor’s presence in the tower all too evidently. Could this day get any worse? What was Thor doing here? How long was he going to stay? With Jarvis watching there was no way for Loki even to try to ruin Thor’s sleep. How did he miss this? Thor’s presence lingered so heavily in the air… Nothing about this made any sense. Loki was always focused, Loki got never distracted and he never missed details. And this damned day just wouldn’t end.

“So he and Doctor Banner are staying at the tower?” It barely sounded neutral and Loki’s head was swimming.

“Yeah… about Thor… he’s having a hard time and probably wants to be around a friend… what do I know… he is an alien and I said it was okay. Don’t worry, that doesn’t mean that he is going to ruin our date.”

Maybe he should just do that. They would talk, Loki would listen and he would get some piece of information, something that would make up for all the mistakes he had made today. “I don’t mind… let him come up. He seemed like one of the nicer guys anyway. As long as he won’t move into the penthouse.”

“Really? Because if I have the choice between continuing kissing you and watching a movie with a big demi-god… do I even have to finish that sentence? You win, Thor stays where he is.”

Shrugging Loki grabbed another slice of pizza. “Jarvis, you can tell Thor that Mr. Stark would be delighted to watch a movie. If they both don’t mind that I join them.”

Of course Stark was surprised and probably would have preferred to stay alone with Thomas, but he didn’t complain… which told Loki that he knew something about what was going on with Thor. Had the oaf really gone so far to share his discomfort with Stark? That would be a strange choice.

They put on some more clothes and when Thor showed up, he was all smiles and Loki had to take a deep breath to keep his magic in check. What was the brute doing here and why wasn’t Loki already painting the walls with his blood?
“Thomas, a delight to see you again so soon.”

One try. Loki wouldn’t need more. The element of surprise, a dagger planted in Thor’s neck.

“Hello Thor.” Keeping it simple, to more he wasn’t capable right now. Thankfully Stark had no problem with talking and the discussion about which movie to watch took 10 whole minutes. This was almost worst than the talks about which weapon was superior. It was Asgard all over again. “Bloody hell… Jarvis, just choose some movie, they’re never going to agree on anything and I’m not going to wait all night.”

“A wise choice, Mr. Pine.”

“Jarvis, what did I tell you about teaming up against me with Tommy?” Stark acted offended, but in reality he was amused.

“That it would only natural for the British guys to bully the poor American.”

Loki would never understand why Thor was laughing now. As if he had any idea about American or British history or about their diplomatic relationship. Stupid moron. Although Stark reproached Jarvis of teaming up with Loki the AI still chose a mindless action flick. Not that Loki cared, all he to do was listening to them, observing their moves and make out how things were going for Thor. How much damage had Loki already done and what was there still to do?

But because Loki was cursed Thor and Stark both kept their big mouths shut and concentrated on the movie. What were the odds? Thomas hated talking during movies, so he couldn’t start. Did he really have to sit through this? Now Stark was putting an arm around Loki’s shoulder, pulling him close and Loki was suddenly overwhelmed by his hatred for him. He had let him touch him. This mortal, one of them, the ones who had taken pleasure in humiliating him. What was Loki doing here? He could have had him dead weeks ago. What had he done instead? Offering Stark his body to take his pleasure from it. Was this revenge when Stark got all he wanted and there was still life within him? Every beat of his heart was mocking Loki. He would stop it. He would stop it right now.

Raising his hand Loki only stopped when an even stronger feeling crept up his skin. So familiar. These eyes. Unmistakable. Turning his head Loki met Thor’s gaze, looking at him expectantly. Hoping that he knew, hoping that he would see. Then Loki could strike, take his pathetic life away and Loki would be free.

Thor didn’t know. Thor didn’t realise. Thor didn’t notice. Thor only smiled.

Loki hated this day, Loki hated him.

Shortly before the end of the movie Loki excused himself, kissed Stark quickly, said good night to Thor and went straight into the bedroom. Today Loki was weak, today he wasn’t himself. Today he would just go to bed and get some sleep. Not thinking, not doing anything and tomorrow he would be chaos, tomorrow he would continue with his plan, getting closer to completion. Today was just a bad day.

Stripping down his underwear Loki slid into the bed and closed his eyes. With a bit of luck Stark would spend the rest of the night with Thor on the couch and Loki would get his few hours of peaceful sleep.

Even that was too much to ask, because only minutes later the door slid open and Stark entered the room. In his drowsy state Loki still noticed how the mattress dipped when Stark got into the bed.
The heat radiating from him was doing a quite a good job of luring Loki to sleep. It had been ages since he had really needed sleep. Stark scooted closer, careful not to wake the other and snuggled up against Loki’s back. Even warmer. Lips were brushed over his neck and an arm slid around his waist.

Loki drifted off to sleep when Tony enlaced their fingers and Thomas smiled.
Hello everybody,

Loki and Tony get some work done... the good kind

I'm not your brother
I'm not your father
oh will you ever change your mind
I'm a gentle lover with a heart of gold
But baby you've been so unkind, oh

I want your sex II ~~ George Michael ~~

Waking up Loki was alone. He felt well rested, his head clearer than during the last hours. Now he felt again like he could do anything, one thing at a time. A look to the window told Loki that it was still dark outside. Good chance that Stark was working on his robot project. Good opportunity to make mischief.

Yawning for Jarvis Loki got out of the bed, put on a sweater that he got out of the wardrobe and then went in search of the Avenger. Until now he hadn’t seen the workshop, but he knew exactly where it had to be located. On his way there Loki actually expected Jarvis to call him back, but no such thing happened. Only when he was standing in front of a locked door Loki had to ask, breaking it down by force was sadly out of the question. “Jarvis, could you please tell Tony that I’m in front of the door?”

“Wouldn’t you prefer to just enter, Mr. Pine?”

Loki raised an eyebrow. “I thought I didn’t have access to this room?”

“Mr. Stark changed the protocol last night. You have now unlimited access to all areas of the tower.”

Foolish, little mortal. So caught up in his illusion about being in love with Thomas… and Thomas being in love with him. Loki looked at the bracelet around his wrist. So willing. “Really?”

“Indeed, sir.”

Smiling lightly Loki put his hand on the sensor next to the door and there was a soft click before it blinked in soft green light. The door opened and Loki knew that he was entering the sanctuary. A room as big as the living room, full with all kinds of technology, lights, tools. It looked so clean, almost sterile, it was without a doubt Stark’s sanctuary. Loki had no illusions about what it meant
that he was allowed to be here. The triumph mingled with the feeling of awe. Just like when he had met Jarvis for the first time.

“Hey gorgeous. You missed me?”

Stark was leaning over one of the working desks and looked up, smirking at Loki. He must have been here for a while, dressed in jeans and a dark shirt. Not still in his sleeping clothes like Loki. “Is it okay that I’m in here?”

“Jarvis let you in, so yeah.” Stark put down the tool he was working with and walked over to Loki. Show time. He didn’t have to fake looking around with interest. This place was fascinating. Letting Stark come to him, Loki didn’t move an inch. Pretending to be unsure if he was supposed to be here, if he was free to wander around.

Stark’s lips felt soft and warm when they brushed over his. “Pepper has always had access to my workshop and so does Rhodey. I figured you should be able to come in here if you want to.”

Loki nodded softly and his eyes settled on Stark. “This is… quite impressive…”

“It’s just my place to work. Okay, yeah, it’s awesome and paradise on earth and I only turned off the music, because Jarvis told me you were coming. You can come in, but it’s still… my place to hang out and to be alone.”

“I see. I can leave…”

Shaking his head Stark took his hand and pulled him along. “Nah, I wouldn’t have let you in if it wasn’t okay. It’s your first time, you get a tour. Everything you see are my little toys. I’m working my magic here.”

Loki’s eyes followed the direction Stark indicated and he saw new parts of an Iron Man suit lying on a table. Of course, Stark was probably spending most of his time working on them… when not on the robot thing. Speaking of that…

“Good lord… this looked different when you first showed it to me.”

Another table right in the center of the room. What used to be the ripped off limb of a robot now had turned into something entirely different. Stark had restored almost its entire body. Torso, second arm, head, even legs. Rebuilding it. Okay. Why? The look on Stark’s face told him almost enough. A person couldn’t be more content. “Yap, awesome, isn’t it?”

Walking around the table Loki frowned. “Why are you doing this? Rebuilding something that was supposed to kill you. Does this help you to find the one who build them? I don’t get that…”

As always Stark couldn’t let an opportunity to show off pass. “Well, whoever built them did a decent enough job. The whole composition is unique, like a signature, but Jarvis couldn’t find anything to compare it to. No way to track down the material… Somebody did an amazing job at covering their tracks. I couldn’t do a lot with the arm, no magic to work with and… Let’s say I went for another approach.”

Raising both eyebrows Loki looked intently at the robot whose design was completely different from the originals. He faked curiosity while letting his magic run over the metal. No, not even a trace of magic to be found. “I still don’t get it. Why would you build a robot? To fight them if they came back? I think your suit would be a better option.”

“Right, smarty pants. I couldn’t get the arm to work. Something was missing. This is going to
work, only a few more touches then it’ll be finished. By combing my tech with the other one’s I should finally be able to access it. At the very least it’s going to teach me a lot of things.” Stark looked proud and Loki rewarded him with a soft smile. What Stark could do was indeed impressive. It was dangerous, risky, but Loki appreciated courage and intelligence. Fury was going to have fit when he heard about this.

“I don’t know anything about this kind of technology, but this is impressive. You did all that yourself? Alone. Your suits too? I didn’t realise… I always thought… I don’t know what I thought, but you’re doing everything yourself. Look at all this stuff, you could start a war from here… and win it too. It’s… astonishing…”

Every word made Stark’s grin a little bit bigger. “Guess I should have shown you my toys a little sooner. I could get a hang of you looking at me like I’m the greatest thing ever…”

“Don’t get overexcited, Stark.”

The grin turned into a soft smile and Stark walked over to him, while Loki leaned back against one of the empty tables. Putting his hands on the left and right side of Loki’s hips, Stark more or less cornered him, only to let his lips ghost over Loki’s temple. “You know… it won’t make you any less badass if you once in a while admit that I’m cool…”

Smiling lightly Loki shrugged. “You don’t need any more confirmation in your own awesomeness, do you, Stark?”

“For some reason it never gets old, no matter how many times I hear it.” Before Loki could give any reply Stark kissed him playfully, sliding his right leg between Loki’s. “Do you know how much time you would save if you said Tony instead of Stark? A whole letter!”

What was this mortal’s awkward obsession with the short version of his name? “I told you how it works. You call me by my name and then I’ll do the same.”

“Tommy is your name.”

“It’s a nickname… and I don’t like it.” Thomas sounded nothing like Loki, but Tommy wasn’t so far of and Loki didn’t like that. It was making his skin crawl.

Stark’s smile didn’t falter the least bit, Loki felt the touch of his hands on his hips. “But you are a Tommy. In both senses of the word. Okay, you aren’t a soldier, but British.” Another kiss and that was better than this awkward discussion. So much better. They kissed for a while, lazily. Like people who had all the time in the world and Loki didn’t have any time at all. He had some important meetings coming up, a plan to work on and he needed a new strategy to deal with the mage. Banner still hadn’t called Elizabeth, that was something Loki had to get behind and Barton didn’t really think that he could send him a text message and that was it? No, today Loki would… Stark put his hands on his hips and pulled him closer. Oh. Horny bastard…

“So? How impressed are you right now with me?” A sweet murmur in between kisses on his neck.

“Oh, I was very impressed for a moment. Then I realised you’re probably the smartest person on this planet and you still got a boss who got the position, because he is big, blonde, blue eyed and can hit things really hard.” Loki grinned and Stark looked actually offended for a second, then he let out a soft laugh. “Coldhearted bastard… It’s still early, you wanna go back to bed?”

“No, I’m wide awake.”

Smiling Stark pressed his mouth on Loki’s and playfully nipped on his lower lip. “Good…” Warm
hands slid under the fabric of Loki’s sweater, fingertips grazing over his chest and it felt nice enough. Why not? “This is your workshop…”

“Yeah. It’s the place where I do my favourite things. It’s perfect…” Somehow Loki must have pushed a button, because the slow pace and the softness were suddenly gone and Stark grabbed firmly Loki’s thighs and lifted him on the table. All that while kissing him passionately. Loki felt that soft, fleeting tingle. Spontaneous and demanding lovers had always appealed to him. If they were skilled, of course. Stark was, no doubt about it.

Tangling his fingers in Stark’s hair Loki went with it and they made out, teeth almost clashing, Stark’s tongue licking into his mouth and again it was good. Better than just good and what a fantastic waste of time.

They broke apart, mostly for the lack of oxygen and for a second they just stared at each other. Loki had no idea what he looked like right now. What Thomas looked like. Most probably like Stark. Heavy breathing, flushed cheeks and his eyes bright with lust and desire. An image of debauchery. Also Stark was looking at him, really looking at him. Taking in the details of his face and not seeing anything of him.

“You’re so… gorgeous…” Stark more or less breathed the words before devouring Loki’s mouth again. Feverishly his hand tugged, pulled at Loki’s shorts, for sure wishing that he could just tear them off. Only when Loki slightly raised his hips Stark made it to push them down past Loki’s knees, from there they fell to the floor by themselves. Loki could taste all the need and the want in the kiss, but most of all the urgency. It made him fairly sure that his underwear was the only piece of clothing that was going to come off. Not that he minded, quite the opposite. The whole setting was exciting, similar to getting drunk, Stark’s almost desperate and demanding touches caused a tingle that covered his entire skin. Inflicting such immense heat underneath his sweater and yet he didn’t bother to even try to take it off.

Strong hands pulled him closer to the edge of the table and Loki gasped shakily when two fingers rubbed over his opening, then instantly pushing inside. No time for teasing. The sensation was so intense Loki had to bury his own fingers in Stark’s shoulders to stop them from shaking. After last night he was still loose enough and by now he might be wanting it as much as Stark.

Still wrapped up in the bruising kiss and Loki blindly reached for Stark’s jeans, giving them the same treatment like Stark had given his shorts. There wasn’t much left of Loki’s finesse when he finally got the button open. Stark pulled his fingers out and then they were almost fighting over who could open that damned fly quicker.

Loki didn’t see it, but Stark must have had the condom in the back pocket of his jeans, because the second his jeans were open wide enough to release his cock, he was slipping it on. With his hands on Loki’s hips he brought him in the best accessible position and pushed into him with a smooth thrust.

Gasping for air Loki grabbed the edge of the table with both of his hand to support him, while Stark rolled his hips sliding his cock as deep into him as the position would allow. Even now Loki couldn’t resist to let out a breathless laugh. “So… is this the first time you’re doing that here? I doubt that…”

“Actually… this is a first… I hope you feel special…” Grinning Stark nipped at his neck before starting a slow, yet powerful pace. Fisting one hand in Stark’s shirt Loki dragged him into a new kiss. A few weeks ago Loki wouldn’t have thought that possible, but there was actually a thing he was going to miss about Tony Stark. When he was dead Loki would probably spend a long time searching for an equally talented lover.
Loki got lost in a haze, the pleasure was making him feel dizzy, his sweat-soaked sweater was
sticking to his skin and Stark was perfectly relentless. When his thrusts were becoming more and
more sporadically Stark buried his face in Loki’s neck, biting down hard enough to leave a mark.
Loki’s magic told him to put his hand on Stark’s forehead and to melt this fascinating brain.

Would be such bad timing, wouldn’t it?

Instead Loki wrapped his arms around Stark, something to hold on to while falling apart. Stark
pretty much did the same, sucking another mark into Loki’s neck. “I want to come inside of you so
badly… without that fucking condom…”

His breath hitched. For mortals this was some kind of big deal, demanding a lot of trust, but
definitely not unusual in a steady relationship. One more thing that Loki didn’t care about. It
wasn’t like Loki could catch any mortal disease. Leaning forward Loki put his lips to Stark’s ear.
“Why don’t you? Next time.”

Surprisingly that was all it needed to push Stark over the edge. Completely breathless he kissed
Loki, hands sliding down to bring him off too and it felt so good that Loki forgot for a second who
he was.

Resting his forehead against Stark’s Loki sighed. “We gotta hit the shower…”

“Great idea… holy shit…”

Stark definitely remembered what Loki had said about the perfect partner – letting the other one do
things alone when he wanted to do them alone. After the shower Stark wanted to go back to his
work on the robot and Loki said he needed get to his newest translation anyway. So Stark went
back into the workshop while Loki was about to leave the tower. He didn’t though, because only in
the living room he ran into Banner. Well, Loki could also start with him.

“Doctor Banner… are you looking for Tony? He’s in his workshop.”

With him Loki had already done some impressive work. This was a man who hadn’t slept in days.
Quite surprising how well that had worked out. It wasn’t the first Hulk incident, Banner had
already done so much worse, but this time he was so affected. Why? Had he already thought to be
past this? To be in control? No, Banner was like Stark. Intelligent, calculating, even more so. He
wouldn’t be so foolish. Had it been the losses? There hadn’t been many, but one of them was
extraordinary. Loki wanted to click his tongue. Sentiment, in the end they were all brought down
by sentiment. No matter who strong they might be, they couldn’t eliminate this weakness. First it
would bring down Thor and then the rest of them. By now Loki honestly wondered who would
suffer more because of the death of a loved one, Thor or Stark.

His presence somehow seemed to make Banner feel uncomfortable, he was definitely avoiding his
eyes. Almost as if he was squirming. “Thank you… you’re heading out?”

“Yes, I have to get some work done. It’s still early, best time to start.” Loki shot him an
encouraging smile and Banner only shifted from one foot to another. “How do you do that?”

By the time he had finished this phrase Loki’s magic was getting ready. An attack, defense,
ilusion, simply everything. Distrust. So clearly audible in Banner’s voice and Loki sneered
inwardly. He was so close. Not now. Least of all Thomas. He was the one with the most influence
and the only piece of the puzzle that connected them all. Unpleasant, but it wasn’t the first time
Loki was confronted with this sort of thing. A lot of times he had almost been discovered, his true
identity revealed and Loki had always found a way out. This was his masterpiece, no way he would
let that fall apart.

“How do I do what?” Curious, a bit confused, but in a nice tone. As nice as Thomas was capable of.

Banner sighed softly and was still not looking at him properly. “Yesterday… all the Avengers were sitting here. Discussing conspiracy theories about a secret organisation trying to kill them. An organisation that pretty much runs the whole world and your boyfriend pissed off every important person working there. I… the other guy tore down half of New York and I’m staying here. Just like the demi-god a few levels lower. My point is that most people would freak out if half of these things happened to them. You seem… completely unbothered. How so?”

Ah… how Loki loved the perceptive ones. He had indeed worried about playing it… too cool? Why would the creator of chaos even pat an eyelid at these sorts of things? Shrugging Loki nagged on the inside of his cheek. “Well, I knew who he was before we got involved. He was building and selling weapons, a person like that receives death threats probably everyday. An Avenger? I am a lot of things, Doctor Banner, but I am not naïve. I considered these things, I don’t easily start trusting people and I’m barely giving anyone the benefit of the doubt. Dating the man that I am dating… things like these were bound to happen. Should I therefore stop living my life like I always did? No. Do I have to show everybody how I feel about this? No. I don’t know these people, my interest in getting to know most of them is very limited. I am not unbothered, I just refuse to let everybody know what I’m thinking.”

That was evidently reason enough for Banner to raise his head. “You realise that you will get involved in all of this? Whatever it is… If this threat really exists and at the moment I’m inclined to think it does… there is no way to keep you out of this. The bracelet he gave you is proof enough. Tony is worried about your safety. He is so obviously in love with you and that’s not going to remain a secret forever. Being important to Tony… an Avenger, a man in his position… is inevitably dangerous.”

Bitterness was seeping from those words and Loki’s lips were twitching, desperately wanting to smile. A reality that Banner still didn’t want to accept as his own and therefore he tried to warn Thomas. Maybe it wasn’t distrust, Banner just wondered if Thomas could really grasp the seriousness of the situation. How sweet of him to worry. Not that it would prevent Thomas from dying anyway.

“As I’ve already said. I am not naïve. I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but… I guess it’s too late anyway. Don’t tell him I said that, but… I’m into him and I don’t feel in danger when I’m around him. I just don’t. I didn’t get involved with him, because he’s an Avenger. That’s the part I care about the least. Therefore I can’t make important decisions based on that. Like leaving him.”

Slightly shaking his head Banner looked like he didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. “Listen… I feel so weird talking about this, but Tony is my friend and you are a nice guy… if something should happen to you and for some reason he won’t be there to protect you… He would never forgive himself, it would break him. I just want you to be aware of that.”

Oh, Loki was aware of that. It was quite nice to hear his own plan spelled out like that. “Are you trying to break up my relationship, Doctor Banner? Because that’s kind of strange since I only got into it because of you.”

“No, definitely not. Tony’s happy, that’s all I want for him. I just… felt obligated to let you know what you’re in for. What could happen. It’s… dangerous for people we care about.”

You’re saying it yourself. So do something about it. You know what you have to do.
Loki cocked his head, biting his lips before he cleared his throat. “Doctor Banner, are we still talking about me and Sta- Tony?”

“Who else should we be talking about?”

“I don’t know. I just… got the impression that you were… talking about something personal. Look, I can’t argue that you’re right, because you obviously are. But… I’m not just accepting things as they are. I’ll make the best out of them. There is always another way to deal with it than the obvious. Always a way to make things work. Am I scared? Yes, sometimes. I guess that’s normal, but I can’t let myself be dominated by this. Tony clearly doesn’t. Neither should you. There are a lot noble reasons to give something up that’s important to you. Fear is not one of them.” A tentative smile and Loki put on his jacket, signalling that he was about to leave. There was no reason to stay anymore, he had injected his poison and the longing look in Banner’s eyes made it clear that it was already taking its effect.

After considering his words Banner hinted at a smile, still looking rather unsure. “You’re going to work?”

“Yes.”

“You probably should… wear a scarf or something… you look like… you got very busy last night.” Seeing a grown man even flushing the least bit was amusing and Loki let out a sigh that might be a bit too frustrated. His hands quickly touched his neck. “Oh… thank you. That’s a good idea. I’ll kick Tony’s ass when I get back. Past forty and still acting like a teenager.”

The comment made it to lighten Banner’s mood up the tiniest bit. “That’s actually a major part of his personality…”

“I know, but I don’t have to like everything about him. Especially not if I have to buy me a scarf before heading to work. I really should get going now. Don’t worry too much, Doctor Banner.” A rather unusual soft smile from Thomas for Banner, then he said goodbye and got into the elevator. Should happen any minute now.

Actually Loki had to wait until he was walking down the street. His cell was ringing and of course it was Banner. Smiling contently Loki let it ring and listened to the voice mail about a minute later. “Lizzy, hey… I’m sorry that I’m only calling now. I just… I couldn’t… I know you just want to know if I’m doing fine and I’m going to say yes, because if I don’t you will insist on helping me. You can’t and you don’t have to. What happened is just… another proof that I shouldn’t be around people. I thought I figured it out how to keep the other guy away, but… that’s only me. I can’t… avoid all the other people that might want to bring him out. I want you to be safe, so it’s out of the question for us to meet up again, but… maybe… you remember when we talked about fixing it? Perhaps I can find a way to take care of Mr. Hyde. I’m so grateful that you keep worrying about me. You are a good friend, a better than I deserve and it’s definitely not good for being my friend. I’m trying to change that. I hope you have a nice day and… thank you.”

The words left the warm, tingling feeling of satisfaction and Loki put the cell away, while his other hand rubbed over his neck, letting the Stark’s marks disappear.

Today’s schedule – Stark, Banner, Barton, the Widow and then Thor. It was barely noon and Loki was already done with Stark and Banner, quite a way to start the day. First thing in the morning Stark had given Loki two things. An extraordinarily good time and the one piece information he needed to completely tear Rogers and Stark apart.

First things first. Closing his eyes Loki concentrated on the darkness, the anger, on thoughts that
were so poisoned they were astonishingly easy to find. Barton wasn’t far away and a malicious grin spread on Loki’s lips when he realised he knew the location only too well. How long has it been since he had been a cat?
The Lover

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

You know what... 40 chapters in and we're finally getting to the meat of the story. Loki thinks about the difference between love and hate, decides that he needs a break and life is getting in the way...

I know you love it when I do that, so... very important chapter, but this time it's extremely obvious why - I promise ;)

_________________________________________________

Lie awake in bed at night
And think about your life
Do you want to be different?
Try to let go of the truth
The battles of your youth
'Cause this is just a game

A beautiful lie ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

Loki let his head sway from side to side, to the rhythm of their discussion. Not that he was hearing a single word yet, but the air was filled the stench of… It was actually hard to tell. By now Barton was so engrossed in his own anger that Loki was able to track it down. It wasn’t just that. Jealousy, spite… Loki knew them all only too well. He had seen Barton’s mind, he had seen his emotions, lying out in front of him, completely unprotected and yet that wasn’t enough to ever fully understand a person.

What Loki had learned nevertheless was that Barton was a good person, but damaged. The mind control had done the rest. It was something of the most gruesome things one could imagine. Even for an average person with the most boring life. For someone like Barton… somebody with a dark past, with scars on his soul, things he would like to forget, that made him sometimes doubt his own humanity. Yet these things defined him, played a part into who he was.

Loki had looked at all these things, had been digging into it, touched on things that were never meant for eyes that weren’t Barton’s. Loki knew about desire, he knew about need, affection, admiration and he knew about love. No matter what fairy tales tried to tell kids, another person would never be able to know somebody inside out. Your closest friend in the entire universe had always to be yourself. That didn’t make affection or love any less important or real, but in the end every living being needed something for themselves. An own identity. By controlling him the way Loki had done he had taken something from Barton. Something he couldn’t get back.
If the situation were a bit different Loki would maybe even feel sorry for him, but Loki had seen him laugh, he had seen him gloat and therefore he would make him his puppet again once more.

A soft mew and the talking instantly stopped. “Let the cat in.”

“What?”

“The cat on the window sill. Let it in, Clint.”

Barton didn’t hide his surprise and his displeasure because of the change of topic, but he did as he was asked and opened the window enough for Loki to slip in. The Widow was sitting in her favourite chair, her ankles still bandaged, but she still had such an impressive presence that she didn’t look handicapped at all. Not wasting any time Loki jumped straight into her lap and let himself be petted.

“You got yourself a pet?”

“No, he got himself me.” Even, monotone, a simple statement while she was caressing Loki’s fur, right behind his ears, making him purr. So she knew that he was a male. Interesting, Loki hadn’t noticed her checking out his physiology, so maybe she was basing that idea on his behaviour? Not that it mattered anyway. A cat entering the apartment wasn’t reason enough to let the conversation end, especially not when something so important was being discussed. Barton had already forgotten about his presence, walking back up to the Widow, looking at her with dark eyes. Deep orbs filled with anger and dread and yet there was still something soft underneath it all. Wanting to get out, but Loki didn’t need to worry about that, because it was so little, fighting against more anger than most people would ever feel in a lifetime.

“Did you even listen to a single word I said?”

“I did. I just don’t understand why you would propose this now.” Loki didn’t know what kind of training the Widow had had to undergo, because she had never told Barton, but sometimes he wondered about it. Indifference was nothing new to Loki, there were few things in the universe he actually cared about and he guessed that the Widow shared this sentiment. Then again, she was only human and she had a codex. Not anyone else’s, but her very own.

Barton snorted. “Logically this is the right moment to think about getting away. I’m so done with this and I won’t let myself be killed, because Fury doesn’t want to lie in the bed he made.”

The Widow didn’t stop caressing him, but Loki felt the change in her touch. Fury, soft spot, of course. Gratitude was such a ridiculous sentiment. Useless and dangerous. “We don’t know yet what’s going on. You normally don’t jump to conclusions like Stark does.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck about what Stark thinks. Or Cap or Thor or anyone else. Nat, you’re the smartest person I know. You see what’s going on. New Jersey? Now this attack? Our job taught us that we shouldn’t believe in coincidences. If somebody wants to get rid of us, I’m not going to sit around and wait for them.”

They locked eyes, almost talking without words and Loki wished for a second he would be capable of reading minds. Reading her body helped, but the Widow’s face still gave nothing away. Her heart rate remained the same, her hands didn’t tremble, but there was this slight tension that Loki wouldn’t miss. That hurt, didn’t it? Being torn, pulled into two different directions. Quite an odd situation to be in for a person who barely had any emotional ties.

“It’s too soon to be sure about any of that. You have to admit that S.H.I.E.L.D being hacked makes
more sense than Fury turning on every single one of us. If Stark was able to do it, others are too.”

“Oh, come on, we both know Stark is the fucking smartest person on this planet, not anybody can just do what he does. We’re still talking about S.H.I.E.L.D here and Fury pretty much despises all of us. Okay, Cap is the exception to the rule and I know you think you owe him, but you don’t. You saved the world. What is there more to ask for? Nobody can actually expect from us to do more than that.” Surprisingly calm and Loki could see it again. Yes, he did have heart, but it wouldn’t be enough. Too far gone.

She was different, trained to read people and she had a gift for it. The memory of how he had learned that still pained him. Maybe Fury was too blind or too uninterested to see what Barton was going through, but the Widow couldn’t be oblivious to it. Especially not since Barton had long turned into a real danger that shouldn’t be ignored. For their sake. Loki would be fine with them ignoring him, that would only make him snap sooner.

“Clint… you’re talking about this as if I wanted to go.”

Crossing his arms in front of his chest Barton wouldn’t let it show, but she had just pushed one of his buttons. “What do you want to stay for? We’ve been in this long enough. Don’t pretend you don’t know the signs. We’ve seen how guys are getting disposed of. This is looking oddly familiar.”

“You know how S.H.I.E.L.D operates, you know how Fury gets things done. What are the odds of us still being alive if he wants us dead?”

“We aren’t just anybody, Natasha. All six of us. We have proven that. Okay, killing us at first try didn’t work. That wouldn’t be a big surprise either.”

The Widow’s eyes lay on him, cool, emotionless and Loki asked himself why she was doing that. Right now would be the perfect moment to show the tiniest bit of empathy. “Blowing up a building without making sure that we wouldn’t be able to leave? Doesn’t sound like the best plan to me. Not like something S.H.I.E.L.D would do.” She stopped caressing his head and Loki growled in response, but was ignored.

Barton finally realised that standing in front of her didn’t give him the uperground in this conversation, so he also sat down opposite of her. “But it would be a good way to make sure that it doesn’t look like S.H.I.E.L.D is doing it, right? We’re having this conversation right now, so it’s a fucking good plan. Because we don’t know what’s going on. Stark is right, pretending that your system has been hacked is a pretty good excuse, because it makes them look bad.”

They fell both silent and Loki felt bad that he couldn’t roll his eyes as a cat. This shouldn’t be taking that long. They were at odds, she wouldn’t let him closer. Barton was caught between loving her and hating her. He was already heavily leaning towards the darker side and she was cutting all the ropes.

Finally the Widow let out a sigh and shifted slightly in her seat. “Fine, let us think about it. Let’s assume you’re right about this and S.H.I.E.L.D has decided to get rid of us. Why? We’re an incredibly effective team. What would be Fury’s motivation to do that? He is not an idiot, why would he risk getting rid of us? We are still here and we are having this conversation. This couldn’t be in his interest.”

“Nat, why do you want me to spell out things that you know very well yourself? Okay, I’ll do it. Stark is getting a grip. You noticed that before everybody else, a few weeks ago he was more times drunk than sober and not even reliable in combat. Now he’s taking on the Hulk and he’s being
attentive. Normally that would be great, but we know that S.H.I.E.L.D is scared shitless of Stark. Yeah, he might be unpredictable when he’s drunk and miserable, but he is also slow and not giving a damn. Now he’s doing fine and he doesn’t like S.H.I.E.L.D one bit more than they like him. That’s Stark. I’ve decided that I will never again follow orders that I’m not completely convinced of. Fury wants us to do a lot of shit that I’m not convinced of.”

Only now the Widow showed an emotional reaction and pursed her lips. “You’re still letting Loki have such influence on your life?”

“I was a puppet, I’ll never play that part again. For nobody. Don’t tell me that you don’t know what that feels like. Fuck Loki, he’s dead, but he taught me a lesson. Other people would love to do the same what he did, they don’t have the same potential, so they’re using other ways. I’m not anyone’s puppet and I think you’re feeling the same way, Nat.” Eyes that could bore into another person and Loki would have applauded if he could. Every word contained an undeniable truth and by now it was obvious that the Widow didn’t even hope to win this conversation. She knew about all these things and yet she didn’t want to leave. For some reason.

At least the mask was now slipping a bit. A proof of how deep her relationship with Barton was. It wouldn’t happen with anybody else. She wouldn’t let it happen. “I see your point, but there’s a difference between being a puppet and abandoning everything altogether.”

“I’m not finished yet. The robots attacked Stark’s tower while we were all there and when Fury wanted us all to meet up afterwards Cap didn’t show up. The nice guy who loves nothing more than following orders didn’t show up. Yeah, I know that he was looking after his stupid friend who got hurt, but point is – Fury wanted him there and he wasn’t, because he decided not to. Fury didn’t like that and that could be enough for him to at least think about how much he can really rely on Cap. That’s me, Stark, Cap… Don’t let me even get started with Thor. He’s from Asgard, god knows what could happen if they decide one day that they’re fed up with playing Earth’s guardian. Then there’s Banner. I seriously don’t have to bring that up, do I?” His face turned to stone and the way this name rolled of his tongue said everything. Despicable.

“They’ve seen what the Hulk can do for them in a battle. You think Fury would want to miss that? Such a powerful resource?”

Did she want to make him snap? It was a possibility. Maybe this was the whole point of their conversation. She wanted to see how far he was really gone and now she was pushing his buttons, one by one. And how well it was working. Barton’s expression got so hard and unforgiving that it was hard to even imagine him being able to smile. “Yeah, a powerful resource that can’t be controlled and can do damage far beyond our imagination. Sounds a lot like Stark to me, except for the fact that not even a nuclear missile would be able to take him down. We’re still talking about the most dangerous and powerful force on Earth. That doesn’t change because you think he’s a really nice guy.”

“You should know me better than that, Clint.”

“That’s why I don’t understand why you refuse to act, but I know you’re seeing the very same thing I see. We all knew that something like that could happen. I think it’s happening right now and we should get away as long as we still can.” He didn’t even blink, his voice hard and thick with determination.

There was no way the Widow would go with him, impossible. If she even considered that possibility Loki would have to drastically change his plan. There was no way he would let them do that.
“Clint, we don’t have proof and I’m not willing to make such a decision based on two events that could be coincidental. I have trouble believing that Fury would act so carelessly.” From her point of view it made sense, but Loki couldn’t help but to feel a little bit disappointed. Really? Her?

Barton gritted his teeth. “You are too smart to trust him, Nat. He’d throw you under the bus like everybody else. You aren’t a sentimental person, so what’s going on?”

Excellent question, little Hawk. Loki wanted to know too. He didn’t like to admit it, but the Widow remained a wild card in his plans. She kept herself and her emotions a mystery. By watching her Loki had learned a lot, but it was still hard to read somebody who had perfected the art of hiding everything about themselves. So yes, if she was opening up to Barton and there was a good chance she would, Loki would find the truth or the lies in her words.

“You are right. I don’t want to leave S.H.I.E.L.D behind. It’s just a thing I don’t want to do. S.H.I.E.L.D is the first righteous thing I have ever done and I’m not keen on giving that up. Don’t doubt though that I will do it if it gets necessary. You know me, I won’t even hesitate, but do what’s necessary. I need to be sure though, because leaving S.H.I.E.L.D would mean to burn all our bridges. I can’t do that lightly.”

Two people who stared at each other, both strong, hardened by their experiences and none of them would back away. Loki closed his eyes used his magic and his senses as a cat to get into Barton’s head. Not like he had done years ago, Loki only wanted to know what he was feeling, what was going on right now.

Nothing that much different. Anger, but he hadn’t actually expected that she would just go with him. After all he knew who he was dealing with. “So what has to happen until you believe it? One of us dead and a S.H.I.E.L.D agent standing next to them with a gun in his hand?”

Why not? Loki could easily provide that.

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Loki ran through a park, chasing after a bird before deciding that it was enough and turned back into himself. Sometimes it was better to be safe and therefore Loki had stayed a cat after leaving the Widow’s apartment. Strolling through the streets until he found a secluded spot in said park. Straightening up Loki sucked in a deep breath and stretched his limbs. The petting had made him strangely tired and he wouldn’t say no to get some sleep. There were still people who had other plans for him, the messages on his phone made that quite clear.

Wanna hit some punching bags?

Smirking Loki decided that he would accept Barton’s offer, but before sending an answer he checked another message. Jane Foster. About time, Loki had almost forgotten about her. Not unexpected since she was so incredibly uninteresting. Invitation for coffee. Why not? It was all about Thor and Loki wanted an update on him. With Thor living in the tower there wasn’t much Loki could do. So coffee with the annoying brat it was.

Five minutes into the conversation Loki terribly missed Barton and the Widow. He would even prefer Rogers to that. One could have actual conversations with Rogers. Stark was entertainingly crazy and funny. If there was nothing to talk about they could fuck and Banner was incredibly intelligent. Like Stark. Yes, also in their presence Loki regularly thought about killing them, but simply everything was better than this helpless, little girl whose mind was only occupied by Thor. Just like in the good old days back in Asgard.
“I’m not used to have this much space to myself… Thor is a big guy. He takes up a lot of… space.” She felt uneasy and shifted from one end of the couch to another and Loki fought with himself to not roll his eyes. This was so hard, he wanted to go home and read a book.

“He isn’t going to stay in New York forever. I think this is nice. You have the apartment all to yourself. Invite some friends over or watch a movie you like and do whatever you like.” Loki shrugged, sipping on his wine and he realised that he had missed Lori. She gave him a lot of freedom. Yes, Thomas did to, but he was slowly being tied down by Stark. Lori didn’t have to care about anything and she wasn’t fond of Thor. What not to like about her?

Jane tried to smile at her, but eventually only released a deep breath. “Yes, it is kinda nice actually, but I don’t feel at ease when I know that he’s in New York and nobody knows what’s going there.”

That’s what you’re worried about?! You are considered an intellectual and you still can’t see what’s going on?! Do you think he chose to stay there, because he is needed? You can’t be that naïve… “No need to tell me about it. I saw it on TV, scary. Is it really that bad that he has to stay there all the time?”

Again Jane looked unsure, not knowing what to say or she had indeed no clue about Thor’s motives. “I guess. He wasn’t able to tell me what exactly was going on, because he doesn’t know himself. So he wants to stay there and… help out. It’s hard getting used to…”

Loki wasn’t even listening anymore, he thought about Shakespeare, about the human brain and its fascinating abilities, cultural differences between Egypt and Algeria and Jarvis. A world full of wonder and he was stuck with this feeble creature who had decided that her life revolved only around Thor. Reason enough to make Loki feel sick. People who refused to see something right in front of them. Something obvious and so important.

Oh fuck this, his time was precious and Loki wanted to get out of here. His patience was already running thin. By now he gave a shit about interrupting her. “How is he doing anyway? Must be hard for him too to leave you behind and to spend his time… fighting crime and… bad people?”

“Yeah… unfortunately that’s not something he is unfamiliar with. He’s doing fine.”

Did she really not see it? Or did she refuse to even acknowledge it? Fine, enough. By now Loki couldn’t believe that he saved her life. A means to an end. A means to an end. Time to get what he was here for. “Can I have another glass of wine, please?”

Jane nodded quickly and left for the kitchen to get Loki the new drink. That was as little time as Loki needed. Closing his eyes he sent his magic out, let it travel across all the rooms of this apartment, touching the walls, the floor, almost seeping into the foundation. Something was pushing him back. Rather trying to. A protection spell, definitely Asgardian. A joke, Loki wouldn’t even break a sweat if he should actually try to break it. He wouldn’t though, not necessary, because it was just here to shield Jane from harm. Thor had finally done some planning, probably growing paranoid because the robots and the nightmares. So he had called for back-up. Too bad there was no sorcerer in Asgard who could even match half of Loki’s potential. That’s why Loki hadn’t felt anything while entering the apartment. Even smaller than a mosquito bite.

So, there was a spell. Loki didn’t care, he was looking for something different. His magic slipped into the bedroom, a place where it had been so many times before and… nothing. There was nothing in there. A smile appeared on Loki’s face and he stopped what he was doing. No trace of his own magic to be found. Thor had taken the stone with him. Good, that was perfect. Loki hadn’t dared to search for it in the tower, he had to keep the magic to a minimum and he had already taken too many risks, considering Jarvis’ watchful eyes.
“Lori, do you want…”

Again Loki wasn’t listening. He faked receiving a call, muttered something about an emergency and he was gone. Teleporting into his apartment Loki strolled into the bathroom and stepped under the shower. He washed the frustration of the last hour away and also stripped off Lori’s skin. The water was hot, almost too hot to bear, but Loki liked it this way. He liked how his skin turned slightly red and how light-headed it made him feel. Today Loki didn’t want to meet up with Barton anymore, he would schedule that for tomorrow. After the meeting with Jane it was rather time to make sure that Loki wouldn’t lose his grip on Thor. The question was how to accomplish that. Loki didn’t dare to use too much magic in the tower, not with Jarvis around. Getting Thor out of the tower was an option. There was no doubt that Thomas could convince Tony of getting rid of Thor, but that would be a big interference and could cause suspicion.

No idea yet how Loki was going to solve this problem, there was no doubt that he would figure it out. It was Thor after all, he was a puppet that liked to dance to the sound of Loki’s flute. Washing his hair Loki thought about how to spend the evening and he had no desire what so ever to do that at Stark’s place. Lying on the couch and reading a good book in complete silence, with nobody talking around him. There was some Egyptian literature he wanted to look into. It couldn’t be expected from Thomas to spend every night with Stark. Loki would have to call him, but he had just decided that tonight was his day off.

Stepping out of the shower Loki dried himself off, letting the towel fall to the floor and looked at himself in the mirror. His black hair was sticking to his head and his green eyes appeared to be a little tired, but for the rest… Loki froze and took a closer look. Right there, on his neck. Letting a finger run over the bruise Loki blinked. It wasn’t supposed to be there. Not on Loki’s skin. They were Thomas’. Loki didn’t want them and it made him sick that he had to look at it now. This was his skin, his body. The only way to get rid of it was magic and only reluctantly Loki rubbed his thumb over Stark’s mark and concealed it. Unfortunately that didn’t make him forget about it. Quite the opposite, it seemed to itch.

Grumbling under his breath Loki put on some clothes and walked into the living room, settling down on the couch. The story he started to read was entertaining, but Loki couldn’t quite get into it, when he was constantly scratching his neck, trying to get rid of this nagging feeling. This was supposed to be his night off, he wanted to amuse himself and now he was only distracted by this… unfortunate mishap.

When his phone started to ring Loki huffed, but didn’t mind too much. Stark. Of course. “Hey there, gorgeous. It’s half past eight. It’s not like I am not able to entertain myself, but it would be more fun if you were here. How are you still not here?”

Closing his eyes Loki concentrated on Thomas’ voice. “I am at home and I actually would like to spend the night here.”

“Bad idea. I’m good at phone sex, but I’m better at the real thing.”

Laughing Loki shook his head. “I’m tired, I’m already lying in bed. I don’t want to get up again.”

There was a slight pause, impossible to miss. “Okay… thanks for calling and letting me know.”

Huh, was Stark seriously being offended? “I still would have called you.”

“I hope so, since you’re the person who gets totally upset and bitchy when the other one doesn’t call…”
Really? Stark wanted to fight? “I would have… I just got out of the shower.”

“There are great showers in the tower, you know?”

“Yes, I do know. I just felt like spending a night at my own place, that’s all.”

“Okay…” Another pause. “You’re sure that’s it? I didn’t piss you off some way like I usually do?”

How sweet and utterly satisfying. Stark was so far gone that he was immediately worried that he might have done something wrong. “No, I just felt like staying here tonight.”

“If that’s all I could come over…” Stark was laughing softly, making it sound like a joke, but Loki had no doubt that he would do it, if he agreed.

No, Loki wanted to have his night off, but he would have to throw Stark a bone. “How about breakfast tomorrow morning? You come over and bring some croissants.”

“You just want me to play your servant, right?”

“You mind?”

“Nah, I’m going to be a perfect slave. Sounds great. About half past eight? I’ll even be punctual and bring stuff that I can lick off your gorgeous body… I feel like talking about that.”

Shaking his head Loki rolled his eyes. “No phone sex. I will see you tomorrow morning.”

There was a loud, exaggerated sigh, but Stark agreed. “Fine, I’ll be there. Sweet dreams, Tommy. I’m going to think about all the stuff I’m going to do to you tomorrow.”

“Still some time to get inspiration. Bye, have a good night.”

“Bye, can’t wait.”

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“I’ve always thought such beauty could not be found in Asgard, only here in Vanaheim.”

“I am a master of words, I’m not easily seduced by them.”

“That is not my intention. I am merely commenting on the fact that you are always choosing lovely forms. The blonde girl at the feast. The young boy grooming the horses. The ginger who stole books from the library. Do not worry, I will not tell.”

“How could you tell?”

“You do not move like girl, nor like a young boy. Your illusions are flawless, but more is necessary to fool somebody who is paying attention. This is the loveliest form you have chosen so far and you seem to be at ease with it. Is this your true form? I think it is.”

“It is and I don’t like it that you can tell that. How? Tell me.”

“I already told you. The way you move does not fit the person you are playing. Now, it does. You are gifted, but just a little careless.”

“Nobody but my mother has ever looked straight through my illusions…”
“I am sure other people did, they just did not want to risk to offend a prince of Asgard who clearly is a gifted shapeshifter, but still young and still has to learn.”

“I am not used to people talking to me like this.”

“Am I out of line, my prince?”

“I may be a liar, but that doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate honesty. Without it I would not know what I have to work on. You are forgiven.”

“How very generous. Would you mind if I kept you company for a walk around the garden, my prince?”

“I must decline, I need to practice on the mistakes you pointed out.”

“I guess I should not have done that, I am rather fond of these emerald eyes.”

“I told you that I’m not likely to succumb to flattery.”

“I would be disappointed if you did, my prince.”

Startled Loki jerked awake, his eyes darting around in the dark room. Midgard. Still Midgard. There was still so much to do and yet his magic was pulling him away. Getting impatient. Sitting up Loki put a hand on his chest and felt his heart racing underneath. An uneasy feeling was sitting in his stomach, similar to nervousness.

Disgusted by himself Loki shook his head. Child’s play. Just a dream, a faded memory that sooner or later would completely disappear from his mind. Lying back down Loki wrapped himself up in his blanket, but not closing his eyes. Instead he was staring at his right hand. Spreading his fingers, closing them into a fist, watching the white skin that looked like it had never seen the sun.

Seconds turned into minutes and Loki had no idea what the minutes turned into. Finally the doorbell rang, announcing Stark’s arrival. Uttering a sigh Loki got out of the bed, slipping on Thomas’ skin and the bracelet. He did not even make an attempt to hide how tired he was. Quite a contrast to how Stark seemed to feel, because when Loki opened the door, he instantly felt another mouth on his own.

“Morning, sunshine… Holy shit, don’t say I woke up?” With a little too smug grin on his face Stark pushed Loki further into the room, while kicking the door shut behind him. Rubbing one hand over his eyes Loki nodded, feeling strangely drained. He had never needed much sleep, but now he was obviously getting too little of it. “Yah… I’m still tired…”

“Guess I gotta take you back to bed then.”
Hey there,

What's going on? Loki screws up and Tony likes being in a relationship :)

_________________________________________________

It's time to forget about the past
To wash away what happened last
Hide behind an empty face
Don't ask too much to say
'Cause this is just a game

A beautiful lie ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

__________________________________________________

“What made you so tired? Don’t say it was me, we only had fun in the morning. I thought you had better stamina than that.” Stark was grinning, his hands leisurely travelling over Loki’s back. In response Loki snorted, but didn’t bother to open his eyes. “I didn’t sleep well and I had a strenuous day. I would have never thought that you would show up punctually.”

Laughing Stark kissed his temple and pulled him a little bit closer. “Oh come on, I’m perfectly reliable. Change of topic, where did you get that mattress? It’s fucking comfortable.”

“I got a better question – where are my croissants?” Yawning Loki pushed Stark into a more comfortable position, onto his back, laid his head on his shoulder and an arm around his waist. Why wouldn’t Thomas be domestic every once in a while? Loki didn’t feel like getting up and their conversations in bed always turned out perfectly for Loki. Maybe the comfortable mattress would make Stark talk.

“I didn’t bring croissants, because that can’t be considered a real breakfast. As soon as you’re really awake, we’ll get out.”

“Fine. Whatever. How come you’re so awake? I was sure you would pull an all-nighter in your workshop. Building yourself your own robot army.” Loki made sure to yawn, not sounding that much interested, rather about to fall asleep.

Stark slightly bit his ear, playfully. “Robot army… I kinda already have one, but you are right. I was working all day and tonight I was ready for you coming over. You didn’t. That wasn’t nice, but I slept the whole night through, not being distracted by a hot guy lying next to me. Now I’m completely fit. Just so you know, if you suddenly decide that you aren’t tired anymore and want to fuck – I’m ready to go.”

Sighing against Stark’s neck Loki muttered “Noted…”
For a while Stark actually fell silent, content to caress Loki’s back and holding him close. Since Loki was wearing nothing but his shorts he was wondering how long Stark would actually keep his fingers to himself. Loki was in for a surprise when, instead of making another cocky remark, Stark chose a more serious topic. “You’re not a big fan of photos, aren’t you?”

“Huh?” Loki was. Yes, painted portraits and sculptures were beautiful to look at, but Loki couldn’t deny that the Midgardian tool to take pictures was a fine invention. It was quick and captured the essence of each moment. So yes, Loki liked photographs, but he knew what Stark meant. Luckily Loki had already set up an excuse.

“You don’t have any pictures in the living room, nor in the bedroom. Most people have at least one photograph on their nightstand. Parents, siblings, boyfriends or girlfriends…” Stark mumbled the words into Loki’s hair. What a cheap attempt, Loki had expected more of him. “I told you before that I don’t have a family.”

The answer didn’t please Stark, of course not. “No, you said that you decided one day that you didn’t have a family anymore. What’s the deal with that?”

“You seriously want to talk about that?”

Pulling slightly away Stark met his eyes, looking strangely serious. “Sure. This isn’t just some detail, but something major. I want to know why. What? Every three days I can act like a decent boyfriend and talk about something serious. Don’t worry, later on I’ll talk about something stupid like that Youtube video where a dog tries to… That’s not the point. So? What about your parents? What happened?”

Until now Loki hadn’t made up a backstory for Thomas and he had no urge to make up details that could come back to make problems. He would keep the story vague, Thomas wouldn’t want to talk about old stories from so long ago. “Fine… My parents were shitty parents. I got slapped every once in a while when I did something wrong. My dad wanted me to do something different with my life than becoming an interpreter, but I always knew that I wanted to work with literature. He only thought that wouldn’t make enough money, whatever. My mother was never around and not really interested in me. When I stopped letting myself being bossed around, which happened really soon, my father also lost interest. Not that I didn’t care much. One time I tried to provoke them by bringing a guy home and fooling around in the living room. They didn’t give a shit and that was it. The day I left for Oxford was the last day I was home, the last time I saw them. They don’t care about me and I don’t care about them. It’s quite simple and I’m not upset about that. That’s all.” Shrugging Loki rolled onto his back, Thomas wouldn’t want to sleep anymore after that discussion.

Stark was watching him with his big, brown eyes, not exactly pitying him, but… connecting? Loki didn’t know and he didn’t care, he had no interest in talking about a fake past. The here and now was important. “Geez, I’m sorry.”

“Why? I’m coming from a dysfunctional family. I wasn’t abused or anything.”

“You said you were slapped and a parent not caring about his kid… that’s pretty hard emotional abuse...”

Tempted to roll his eyes Loki only snorted. “Call it any way you like. I don’t care. I’m done with even thinking about this.”

One didn’t have to be an expert in reading faces to know that Stark didn’t believe him, but that didn’t matter. Stark could believe anything he wanted as long as it brought them closer together. Three, two, one… “Well, I think we both come from fucked up families...”
“We do?”

“We do?”

“Yah, I guess a slap from my father would have been a sign of affection, because… he didn’t even have enough interest in me to slap me around. Okay, that’s not entirely true. He was never content, never satisfied with me. I was a child prodigy and aced every class, but he still looked at me as if… He was constantly disappointed. Nothing I did was good enough and he constantly told me that. Pretty much the only conversations we’ve ever had. Typical business man, cold and distant. He wasn’t made to have a kid, absolutely not, but I guess he needed an heir and that’s it.”

Every word was coated with bitterness and Loki didn’t know what to think of it. Loki didn’t have a family, never had one – how should he even understand what Stark was talking about. In the end it wouldn’t matter anyway, as long as he made Thomas say the right words. “You don’t think he would be proud, seeing everything you’ve done until today? You made the company even bigger than it was and you’re doing something good with it. You created Iron Man to help other people, you saved the entire planet pretty much on your own…”

“Normally I like to take all the credit, but I didn’t do that all alone. Almost, but not entirely.”

“Yeah? I didn’t see anybody else taking care of that atomic bomb…”

Stark chuckled, but it didn’t sound honest. “Not that many people on the team can fly.”

“Nobody can fly. I never saw Thor fly. Can he fly?”

Loki felt so stupid for asking that, when even a blind man could see that Thor didn’t have a clue about flying. He was just relying on Mjolnir.

“Not really… Why are we talking about Thor now? That’s not cool…”

Definitely, Stark had a point and Loki slowly sat up. “Fine. Let’s go have breakfast. I’m hungry and you didn’t bring my croissant. You suck.”

Laughing Stark pulled him into a kiss and then pretty much jumped out of the bed. “Great. I know a place where they make fantastic waffles. You gotta get dressed first. Do it right here, that would be great.”

The only answer Loki gave was rolling his eyes before getting into the bathroom and brushing his teeth. He couldn’t spend the whole day with Stark, he had things to do. Breakfast okay, maybe they could do something after that and… Loki would think of something, he always did…

Stark was staring at him, leaning against the doorframe, watching him brushing his teeth. “Stop this… you’re creeping me out.”

“Sorry, I just thought…” Walking up to him Stark let his fingers run over Loki’s neck, causing him to shudder. How could he be so stupid? “I could have sworn I left a mark there last night…”

Shrugging it off Stark kissed his temple and Loki spit into the sink. No. No. No. He had slipped. A mistake and a major one. There was no way Loki could enter the tower today. Too much of a risk to run into Banner who had seen the marks. Jarvis also had registered everything… If Stark for some reason whatsoever was going to watch the footage Loki would be in big trouble. He needed an excuse, something. Anything, pretty much. “You did, I got rid of it.”

Clearly surprised Stark raised an eyebrow. “Huh? So many questions come to my mind. First, how on earth could you even do that? Second, why would you do that? I don’t like messing other
people with my work. Even if it’s you.”

Nothing about this story was well thought out, but it wasn’t completely unbelievable either. It was Loki’s fault. “When I got home I put ice on it. It was still fresh enough, so the ice made it fade a bit. Over the course of the day it disappeared completely.”

“Why? I thought it was hot.”

Turning around Loki shrugged. “I met some people I work with and I didn’t want to look like I got fucked a few hours prior.”

The slight confusion was shoved aside like Loki had intended, because Stark just couldn’t resist and if you knew how to do it, he was quickly distracted. “But you did get fucked. Quite thoroughly and nicely may I add…”

“Oh, shut up. I can’t run around like that.” Loki tried to walk past Stark, but he was held back. A hand was placed in the back of his neck, pulling him close. There was no way for Loki not to flinch. His guard was up, he felt burned, revealed and… disgustingly vulnerable. Of course there was no attack, Stark merely pressed his lips against Loki’s ear. “Guess I gotta find another piece of your skin that I can mark…”

Thomas’ heartbeat sped up and Stark nipped his earlobe. “I thought we were going to have breakfast?” Loki softly pushed him away and went back into the bedroom, opening his closet. A few weeks ago, when he had still had something like spare time, Loki had been shopping. Well, he had been strolling through the shops, looking at things that he liked and then he had stolen them. Yes, shopping was fun. Now Loki had a closet full of clothes, which was quite nice and wouldn’t cause any suspicion. Grabbing a pair of jeans, a white T-shirt and a black jacket Loki got dressed, finishing by wrapping a green scarf around his neck. Behind him Stark whistled softly. “Guess who’s going to show off with you.”

“Less talking, more leaving. I’m too hungry to talk to you.”

Stark didn’t mind that and so they left. Said place did indeed serve great waffles and maybe Loki wouldn’t kill him today for not bringing him breakfast.

“I heard about a great jazz club, I thought we could check it out tonight.”

Jazz was good. Jazz club was even better. Spending the whole with Stark was not so good. Loki needed an excuse and he needed it fast. Work. Midgardians were always working, weren’t they? No, today was Saturday. The concept of weekends could only be loathed. Was Stark even supposed to have time to spend it with him? “I’d like to, but… are you not going to lock yourself away again in your workshop?”

Stark looked at him like that was the weirdest thing Loki had ever said. Damn. “Nope, my little project is almost finished. Jarvis is working on the last details. I can’t be hanging out at home all the time, everybody knows that they can find me there. I got all the time in the world.”

Yes, they both wanted their independence, Loki had made that quite clear from the very beginning, but he couldn’t just use that excuse over and over again. Especially not when he had said the night before that he wanted to be alone, if he repeated that, Stark would become suspicious. Thinking that something was wrong or that Loki wanted to avoid him. That meant Loki had another date tonight. He should be seeking out Thor or the poison would start to wear off. He needed to push the Captain further away from the others. Barton was in a perfect spot to mangle his mind and Loki had about 1000 things to do, but Stark wanted to play a happy little couple.
Loki had no choice, but to go along with it.

***

An entire day. From getting out of bed until coming home from a night in the jazz club. Every single second of this day Stark was by his side, touching him, kissing him, talking to him and after a few hours Loki saw potential weapons everywhere. Endless opportunities to kill him or to make him shut up. Luckily the musicians playing jazz were amazingly talented and Loki enjoyed the music.

Loki had manners, so of course his phone was silenced, but during the first song he could already feel the soft vibrations against his leg. He could excuse himself, slipping outside to have a conversation, but no matter who it was… it wouldn’t be short conversation. There was simply no time to do it. Biting his lip Loki waited until the vibrations subsided and Stark leaned over, pressing a kiss on his cheek.

Another six songs later there was a new call and Loki balled his hand into a fist, pressing his nails into his own skin out of pure frustration. Stark had no idea what was going on and Loki’s blood was boiling. Only when they got into the car to drive home Loki pulled out his phone and checked who had called him. The Captain. Damn, that probably was important and Loki couldn’t call back even now. Better writing a text than doing nothing.

*Sorry, I’m working tonight, can’t answer my phone. Something wrong?*

“Something important?” Stark stole a quick glance of him before turning his attention back to the road.

“Just a friend who called…”

“Do I have to be jealous? Those ‘just a friend’ guys are always to be treated with care.” Stark was smirking, in such a good mood and Loki was simply dying to know what the Captain wanted to tell him. “I’m not into blondes, so no worries.”

That earned him a chuckle, but Stark wouldn’t let it go. “What does he say about us dating? Did you tell him?”

“Nah, we’re not that close. Most people that I really consider my friends don’t live around here.”

“Should have known. You only trust other Brits.”

“This has nothing to do with nationality, but who I do find interesting.”

A grin spread on Stark’s lips. “I’m so lucky then.”

So if they were already talking, Loki could start digging. Stark was in a good mood, so it was about time. “What about you? You can’t have many friends.”

Most persons would have thought of this remark as an insult, but Stark only raised an eyebrow. “Because I’m a jerk?”

“No, because you’re rich. You have too much to give and people quickly get used to taking. It’s so much easier than giving. I don’t doubt that you know a lot of people, but that’s different.”

Again Stark quickly turned to him, kind of surprised at how serious Loki was. “Now that’s just sad.”
“It’s the truth.”

“And how do you fit into this?”

Loki shrugged. “I come from a wealthy family myself, I know how that works. You meet so many people, it’s hard to see the ones who are worth your attention. I’ve had lots of friends when I was younger, I barely liked any of them.”

Stark laughed at that. “Tommy, you don’t like anyone but dead poets.”

No, that wasn’t true, but Loki had to admit that these dead poets were probably his most favourite people. “That’s not true, I like Doctor Banner.” Strangely enough that wasn’t a lie. Chewing on the inside of his cheek Loki realised that he had entirely stopped to look at the Beast and Banner as the same. Well, Loki could live with that, it didn’t change anything about how he would get his revenge. Yes, Banner would also go rack and ruin, but that was collateral damage.

“Yeah, sure, because he’s awesome. You missed someone else though.”

Rolling his eyes Loki shifted in his seat to get more comfortable. “We’re in a relationship, Stark. I do must feel some affection for you.”

Frigga had been a strange woman. She had always encouraged Loki’s talent for illusions, but scowled him when she caught him lying. What a contradiction.

“Awww, that’s the sweetest thing you’ve ever said. You should start calling me Tony though, otherwise people will think it’s weird.” Stark winked at him and Loki snorted. “I don’t care about people think.”

Again Stark smiled at him, content with what Loki had said. This time he didn’t even ask where to go, but drove them right to Loki’s place. Wonderful, Stark would stay over night and Loki’s schedule was just falling apart. He could always get away when Stark was sleeping, but that was incredibly dangerous. Loki had to figure something out and until then he had to ask nice. Maybe fucking Stark to sleep was an option.

They must have shared the same thought, because was already kissing him when Loki closed the door behind them. Giving in Loki returned the kiss for some time before he softly pushed Stark away. “Sit down, I’ll get us something to drink.”

Stark pulled a face, but did as he was told. “Hurry up, this couch is incredible comfortable. I have a lot of ideas of what to do on it.”

Loki smiled, went into the kitchen and got a bottle of his favourite wine, because he needed it. Even he could get away during the night, how was he supposed to do anything to Thor in the tower? Jarvis would register his voice and Loki would be trapped. Loki had to get him out of the tower. He was also starting to neglect Banner and he definitely couldn’t afford that. Time to get reorganized.

Before that Loki had to get rid of Stark. He would think of something, he always did. Grabbing the two glasses of wine Loki walked back into the living room and stopped dead in tracks. His whole body went instantly into alert mode. Stark wasn’t sitting on the couch anymore, he was standing in front of Loki’s book shelf and just slipping his phone into the pocket of his jeans. Loki had become familiar with Midgardian technology, he knew how phones worked, he owned one himself and he knew that Stark hadn’t been checking his messages. Now, he had been taking photographs.

Thomas was perfect, he was smart, cold and credible. No, Loki hadn’t made any mistakes, he was
sure of that. Not with Thomas. The attack? The bullet? Had his attempt to fool Jarvis taken too long? Was Banner more distrusting than he had let show? Had he talked to Stark? Was it completely harmless? There were enough possibilities…

A millisecond to make a decision and Loki did just that.

“What are you doing?”

Turning around Stark sheepishly smiled at him, way too cool. “Hey, waiting for you. Oh, you brought the booze, perfect!”

Stark was quickly stalking towards him, but Loki wouldn’t let that go. This was too important and Loki wouldn’t allow him to ruin his plans. It wouldn’t be very satisfying to get rid of him right now, but Loki would do it if necessary. Without Jarvis around his other covers were safe.

“No, seriously what where you just doing?”

Stark cocked his head, pursing his lips. “Playing snake?”

Loki didn’t understand that, so he guessed it was a joke. He was not having any of this right now. “Stark, what were you doing?!”

Sighing Stark shrugged and took one of the wine glasses. “Can’t we agree on that you didn’t see me taking a photograph?”

Thomas’ cover wasn’t in danger, Loki could tell by Stark’s reaction. He wasn’t that good of an actor and the little wrinkles around his eyes were very telling. “Look, I wouldn’t even hesitate to leave you for Edward Snowden, so if you’re going all NSA on me, forget it. You wanted my thumbprints, you gave me a bracelet that can locate me wherever I am and now you’re taking photographs of my apartment. You gotta give me a real good explanation, right now.”

His face made it clear that he wouldn’t accept any excuse and Stark surprisingly quickly gave in. Perfect. “Good lord, don’t release hell upon me! I wasn’t taking pictures of the apartment, but of your bookshelf. I wanted a list of all your books, because I didn’t want to get you a copy of something you already have. That’s all. Wow, Snowden? Where did that come from?”

Loki narrowed his eyes, taking a sip from his wine. “I’m a distrustful person. Don’t think I don’t value the bracelet, I know what kind of gift this is. I know that you gave it to me, because you care and I appreciate that. Yet it demands a lot of trust from me. I hope you see that. If you want to take pictures, do it when I’m here. Otherwise it feels weird.”

The only answer Loki got was a kiss and he knew that it wasn’t a big deal. “You know… it’s kind of reassuring that you’re that attentive.”

“Shut up and sit down. I’ll tell you which books I want to have and you don’t have to feel obligated to wait until my birthday to give them to me.”

Although it turned out to be nothing, Loki’s mood couldn’t be saved. He hid it from Stark, but was having a hard time to play his kind of loving boyfriend. Sleeping with him was the easiest part of the day. This was the part where Stark always delivered. It didn’t get Loki to stop thinking though. He would slip out and…

Slitting his throat was suddenly so tempting. By the Nines, why was Stark starting now wanting to cuddle? Not really, all he did was putting an arm around Loki’s waist while dozing off, but that was enough. Loki was trapped. Teleporting was still possible, but it would wake Stark up.
Something so simple and Loki couldn’t do anything about it. Why not killing him? Showing him that he shouldn’t even dare to touch Loki. Sadly that would deny Loki the satisfaction to watch the Captain and Stark ripping each other to shreds. Fine, he was going to lie here all night, imaging breaking Jane Foster’s neck and making Thor watch.

When Loki woke up Stark had rolled slightly away from him and the sun was already creeping into the room. Good, Stark was still asleep, so Loki had at least a few minutes to get some work done. Sneaking out of the room Loki grabbed his phone, left a written note on the kitchen table and teleported away. After he had sat down on a park bench Loki called the Captain and was pleased when the call got answered immediately. Good boy, an early riser.

“Will, hey… I didn’t trouble you yesterday, didn’t I?”

Always the same, so selfless. Stupid, little boy. “No, of course not. Sorry I couldn’t answer my phone. What’s up? Everything’s alright, isn’t it? There was nothing on TV…”

The Captain let out a laugh and Loki gritted his teeth. Why was he sounding happy? He shouldn’t be…

“No, sometimes I might just actually call, because good things are happening.”


“I think I met someone.”
Hello everybody,

Loki makes a mistake. It's as simple as that

Hope you have fun :)

_________________________________________________

I want to know your secrets and your sins
I want to feel you breathing out and in
I want to know, I want to know

Who would you die for? ~~ Bon Jovi ~~

_________________________________________________

Pathetic. Downright cruel even. Something Loki would do. Something he was actually doing. Loki hadn’t needed more than a quick glance and he knew that she was a fake. Even more so, she was an agent. S.H.I.E.L.D did realise that they should take care of the Captain. Too little, too late and Loki would use it to break the bond between them. On the one hand they were doing him a favour, they were handing him the necessary tools, but then again, they made him lose time. Now he had to get rid of that woman and he needed William to do it. That way the Captain would realise that William was the only person he could trust, the only one he could rely on. The only one who actually gave a damn about him. Unfortunately William was in D.C. Loki would have to find a solution for that.

After having that little conversation with the Captain Loki had had to get rid of Stark, which had taken ages. Fortunately Banner had called and Stark had left, making Loki promise that he would come to the tower tonight. Then Loki finally had had the opportunity to get away. The Captain had given him all the necessary information. Since he had been staying in New York for so long now, he had rented a little apartment. A nice woman was living next to him. Yes, very nice.

Loki turned into a little girl with ponytails and knocked at her door, pretending to sell her cookies. The thing about mortals – they thought they were great liars, but in truth they were far from it. They were out of character way too quickly when they weren’t talking anymore with the person they were trying to fool. Little things, but painfully obvious. How she checked out the corridor before even really looking at the little girl. Definitely not an average woman, but somebody trained to observe their surroundings. She had S.H.I.E.L.D agent written all over her.

So Loki followed her around for three hours and by then he knew everything. S.H.I.E.L.D had realised that the Captain was having trouble fitting in and this was their way to deal with it. Having somebody who was constantly surveilling him, who was supposed to get close to him, influence him. How cruel and they totally stole that idea from Loki. Yes, he had to admit that he was
surprised that S.H.I.E.L.D would go as far as manipulating the Captain in a romantic involvement. Not that Loki would even let it get that far.

During their conversation William had been pleasantly surprised, even told Rogers to pursue this blooming relationship. William was a good friend who wanted Rogers to enjoy his life, he would do that.

Letting the pencil scratch across the paper Loki pondered what he should do. The woman had to go, naturally. He didn’t want S.H.I.E.L.D’s influence on the Captain and for sure not a person who made him feel good about himself. Then again, a fall out with S.H.I.E.L.D could bring Rogers and Stark closer together. That would be fatal. Loki couldn’t have her sticking around too long, but he didn’t have to get rid of her today. This needed planning. It was time to do some sketches, Loki needed to get back on track with everybody.

Thomas – Thomas was doing perfectly fine. Stark was in love with him, trusted him and let him closer and closer into his life.

Elizabeth – Yes, Banner had left a message on her voicemail. The effect had already been perfect, all Loki had to do was a little bit of adjusting.

Henry – Uhm, yes… Loki had missed a few opportunities with him. Barton was so ready for a little push, especially after the conversation with the Widow. A conversation was in order.

Lori – Well, Loki hadn’t put on a good performance the last time, but he couldn’t help himself. Jane Foster was getting under his skin and in not the good way. She seemed pretty much useless at the moment anyway. Loki couldn’t just talk her into leaving Thor, but he could manipulate Thor into losing his mind and she would do it on her own. Which brought Loki back to the problem, that he couldn’t do anything without getting Thor out of the tower. So how was he going to do it? Jane Foster seemed to be the only way to achieve this. How do you get a person to see their lover if they willingly spend time away from them? Thomas and Stark could invite him over and play the happy couple, that could upset him enough to seek her out. Thor was a simple character and he had simple needs which could easily get the better of him. Pathetic.

Right now Loki didn’t have a better idea, so why not try just that. Putting the paper away Loki looked around the room and felt the urge to leave. Yes, this was the only home he’d had in over two years, but today the walls were closing in on him. Also Stark’s scent was lingering everywhere, especially between the sheets of his bed. Another one of his apartments? No, Loki hadn’t visited Australia yet.

The blink of an eye later Loki was strolling through Sidney, enjoying the fresh air and the sights. He didn’t have a day off though, quite the opposite though. Typing in Banner’s number Loki let it ring for half a minute and then he ended up on voicemail. Nothing he hadn’t expected.

“Bruce, hey, this is Elizabeth. Listen, I got your message and I’m pretty sure that you just decided to ignore my call. I can’t force you to talk to me, but… I would really like to talk to you. What are you doing? I didn’t understand everything you tried to say… I know we talked about trying to get rid of the Hulk, but… you said it maybe isn’t even possible to do that. I know what happened was… gruesome, but it’s not your fault and you shouldn’t be hiding from me or anybody else because of that. It’s just not right. If you want to find a way out, that’s totally okay. Just be careful, please. I… can’t we talk about it? Please? You can’t just decide that you don’t want to see me again or… Well, you can and I have to accept that, but we can still talk. I’m worried… I will not be harassing your voicemail now. Give me a call, anytime.”

Hanging up Loki crossed Banner off the list. Barton was up next. Loki could use a workout
anyway. He made a quick call and of course Barton was okay with meeting up an hour later. Good boy, at least he wasn’t giving Loki a hard time to schedule his day.

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“How is work going?”

Huh, now that was interesting. Barton was starting the conversation, that was new. Just a cheap way to stop Loki from asking questions? Whatever, it wasn’t like that made any difference. Yawning Loki shrugged. “The usual. I’m doing all the work and get paid too little. Story of my life.”

Barton nodded shortly and Loki could see the wheels turning. A question forming. “And your colleague? The one who pissed you off so bad and fucked up your project.”

Oh, Stark. How sweet. “Still distracting, still annoying and is constantly fucking up my schedule. Doesn’t matter though, I’ll get him fired.”

Good, now Loki definitely had his attention, he could tell by the way Barton raised his eyebrows. “You’re going to get him fired? Just like that?”

“Nah, I’m just going to take advantage of his mistakes. Point them out to some other people. That’s his own fault. Don’t make mistakes, then nobody can exploit them. I told you before, I’m not good at working with other people.” Loki took a sip from his beer, missing the taste of wine.

“Most people would think that makes you sound like an asshole.”

“Most people?” Loki smirked softly and Barton sighed. “Nah, I’m not judging. If you know how things need to be done and he doesn’t… I don’t care, it’s not like I don’t know how it is to work with people who are... not doing a good job. Or making your life a living hell, because they’re not getting the point.”

Completely disconnected from the others, Loki was content, but there also wasn’t much to do for him now. The right moment hadn’t come yet, Loki needed the robot Stark had built, the Captain at odds with the Iron Man and the Widow. Oh, not to forget Thomas. The central piece.

Then again the whole thing wouldn’t work if Loki wasn’t making any progression with Thor. “Living hell? That’s kind of harsh, don’t you think?”

“No, it’s fitting. I really don’t think that lot of other guys have to deal with as much shit in their job as I do and it stopped a long time ago to be fun.”

Now that was really sad, what was your life worth if you didn’t enjoy yourself? Not that sad though, since Loki would gladly end Barton’s life. Instantly. “You know… it’s not very reassuring when the person who is supposed to save the world every now and then complains about their job.” Putting on a grin Loki continued his little manipulation. “Nah, I get it. Why don’t you stop if you’ve had enough? It’s not like you’re the only person who is doing that. Why don’t you let Tony Stark hunt down bad guys, he seems into it. Or the Hulk… he could smash them… when he isn’t busy smashing the entire city. Who is paying for that anyway? Damn, he must have a good lawyer…”

“No, just a dumb billionaire with a thirst for destruction and a love for chaos that he will gladly pay for any skyscraper that the Hulk knocks over. What a life, you are a danger to every single person who comes close to you, but nobody seems to ever hold a grudge. Quite the opposite you get pampered and all the pity in the world. You are the greatest force ever known to exist, unstoppable
and impossible to tame… poor you. Can we help you somehow? Make you feel better? Want me to hold your hand?” Barton snarled and it absolutely wasn’t necessary for Loki to add any venom. The sceptre had done a great job of destroying all empathy and trust that Barton had been able to feel. Loki wouldn’t let himself go to feel sympathy for him, but it wasn’t like Loki couldn’t see what had happened and what it meant for a person. Being controlled by something like love, ambition, hatred or even illness was bad enough, but an entire person took everything away that made you feel like yourself… Nobody else would ever be able to understand what Barton had gone through. He had been broken and you would always see the cracks, they just refused to look at them.

Same with the Captain. Such a small and fragile boy. You give him a magic potion that makes him big and strong and think that it will also make him stop feeling like the little boy. How deliciously naïve.

“You don’t like that guy too much, don’t you?” Loki curiously looked at him, taking another sip from his beer and watched Barton’s face. Fine lines, dark eyes. His features were nice, Loki liked them enough. Maybe he would use Barton’s face when all this was over as one of his disguises.

“I don’t like how things are working out right now. You remember what I told you the last time we talked?”

Wonderful. “The talk about your bosses trying to kill you off? Yes. Not a thing that’s quickly forgotten. Actually I’ve been thinking about that the whole time, but I didn’t quite know how to bring that up…”

“Nothing new on that part.” No sign of emotion, no the tiniest bit. It was so simple, Barton didn’t care. He liked talking to Henry, because they usually shared an opinion and he didn’t have somebody to agree with him. But they weren’t friends. Barton was not even thinking about what it meant telling somebody that there might be somebody out there, trying to kill you. The effect this could have on Henry was something he didn’t consider. Yes, Barton liked him well enough, but he could instantly walk away just like this, never see him again and it wouldn’t be really upsetting. “I’m not planning on giving them a chance to get rid of me or to fuck things up even worse. I’m done with this whole thing. I’m out.”

A strong, determined tone. The voice of a man who had made a decision and who would stand by it. Loki could respect that and yet he had to suppress a grin, because it was again everything he wanted. What would be the appropriate reaction? Worry? Approving? “Wow… okay, you were talking about it and I’m sure as hell won’t talk you out of it… but… are you sure? That’s not some minor decision to take lightly.”

“You’ve said it yourself. I’ve talked about this before, it’s nothing new. I am not going to take this anymore. Whoever else wants to deal with this shit can gladly do it. I’m out. Or I’d like to be out, but I can’t leave yet.” Regret, real honest regret and Loki was tempted to lick his lips. Oh, he wanted to bathe in it, suck up every drop and it would never be enough. Not really. Feeble emotions, it didn’t matter if they were Asgardian or human. Loki could use them as his tools and it was fun. Love and devotion like with Thor were simple, but nice enough. With Barton it was so much more, hatred, affection, love, trust, suspicion… all mingled together and it was perfect. As much as Loki loathed the Widow, he would forever remain grateful for this opportunity.

So let’s ask the question, make you spell it out, little archer. You know and I know, but things are so much easier to accept when they are spoken out. It will only hurt a bit.

“If you are fed up with it, what is still keeping you?”
Barton looked at him, searching his eyes and Loki could have had the sceptre right in his hand, it wouldn’t have been any different. “Unfinished business.”

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How frustrating that must be. Loki could feel the little mage scanning the city, over and over and over again. Now that Loki had doubled his protection spell and worked on his shield the little mage had no clue how to find him. Not one of his disguises and not Loki himself. Have fun trying. Loki would just kill him if it was worth his time, which it wasn’t. His schedule was still packed with the Avengers and to work out an idea how to get Thor out of the tower. There was still the possibility to simply ask Stark to clear the tower, but that would make Thomas look bad and Loki didn’t want that. He needed…

Of course, why didn’t he think of that sooner. It was painfully obvious. Well, Loki didn’t like thinking about Jane Foster in general. Okay, he would get Jane Foster to make Thor move back to London. There was a risk that Thor might invite her over and then Loki had even more worries and less influence on them. No mistakes allowed. Loki had a soft spot for Lori, but he would prefer anything to seeking out Jane Foster. Right now there was not much to do, time difference be blessed.

Barton and Banner had been taken care of. The Widow was doing fine on her own and there was nothing Loki could do about Thor right now. Why not working on Stark and the robot for a bit? He would call Tony and… No, William. He needed William and he needed him here. How? The Captain would never allow that when he thought that New York wasn’t a safe place. Thomas would have to go, home, London, Europe, whatever. That wasn’t the problem. William couldn’t just show up without making it look suspicious. He had met the Avengers he had been there during that first attack and he couldn’t afford to draw anymore attention to him. He needed to… Loki needed to think. Clear his head, a moment to relax.

Loki needed his friend.

Again Loki felt the calm of nature seeping into him. The fresh air made him realise how polluted those human cities were. Asgardian air had been so pure, nights so clear and cool. Nothing compared to Vanaheim though. There were still other worlds, so many things to explore and Loki was still stuck. Sitting on the ground, leaning against a tree Loki closed his eyes and listened to his surroundings. Most animals were hiding from him, but the wolf was coming closer. Loki wasn’t in a rush. His best ideas always came as a surprise, when he wasn’t entirely concentrating. William would tell him what to do.

A smile crept onto Loki’s face when he felt something heavy yet soft on his thigh. Blindly he was reaching out, letting his fingers run over the fur and he felt the appreciation. Something entirely different and yet so alike. Relaxing Loki started to think, to relax, imagining himself some place else. Another world, another realm, free from his binds and from these feeble creatures that were occupying his mind. Free from his disguises.

The wolf licked his hand and Loki sighed softly. So many different threads and he had to bring them all together. A question of timing, he would have to let the robot loose so very soon and now there was this agent which was slowing him down…

Shaking his head Loki tried to let go, he needed to figure this out and therefore he couldn’t keep going over the same things over and over again. What he needed was to find another angle. A new perspective. Loki had to look at this as himself. Not as William or Thomas or anyone else. So Loki rid himself of them or he tried. It would not work completely. By now he was so used to them, they were sticking on his skin and roaming around in his head. The soft growling of the wolf made Loki
smile again and he nodded. “You’re right… missing the obvious…”

Re-closing his eyes Loki let his magic flow, looked into his own insides and concentrated on his core. Yes, this was him. Now he could think. William was a student, universities did work together, didn’t they? Some exchange…

*Brother, you have made yourself hard to find during the last days.*

*I had better things to do than spend time with you or the Warriors Three.*

*Who are you spending all your time with?*

*I am sorry, dear brother, but this is none of your business.*

*If somebody has succeeded in capturing my brother’s eye, I insist on meeting them*

The idea seemed a bit odd and very ordinary, but why not? It was believable and maybe that was all that was needed. William would want to meet her, he could come and visit or vice-versa. Less likely, because the Captain was never rushing things. Especially not with a girl. All William needed was a look, a simple ‘I don’t like her’ and then the Captain would do the rest. Loki had been overcomplicating things. By now there were so many threads, Loki was in danger of getting tangled in them. That just reminded him of taking his time, it wasn’t worth the rush. Patience was a virtue and Loki’s wasn’t running thin any time soon. Releasing a long deep breath Loki broke the intense connection with his magic and opened his eyes. The sun was slowly setting and the wolf made purring noises when Loki started scratching his head. His fingertips started to tingle when he let his magic seep into the gracious animal. Not much, just enough to renew the protection spell and to shield it from any possible harm. Again the wet, soft tongue licked his fingers and those eyes looked at him. Knowingly. Loki couldn’t deny that it was nice to have somebody… seeing him.

“Be gone… go and eat some sheep.”

Watching the wolf disappear between the dark trees Loki felt that part inside of him that was howling. Wanting to run, wanting to play with others of his kind under the shine of the full moon. The memory of wet grass beneath his paws, four legs that carried him so much faster than he would ever be able to run…

Shaking his head Loki stopped listening, ignoring the wolf inside of him. It was getting late and Loki had to get to the Stark Tower eventually. Getting up Loki did a few steps and… something. Lurking in the shadows. Abruptly Loki turned around, his eyes making out nothing of importance. But there was… Startled Loki jumped to the side when something brushed against his arm. There was nothing to be seen, but he could feel it and his magic was creating a barrier to shield him from magical attacks. Something behind him. Here. Gone. Above him. Gone.

So fast, but it was just playing. Trying to distract him from something else. Not moving Loki concentrated on the energy around him. Come closer if you want to get burned. Dodging a wave of energy Loki lashed out, scaring the force away. It merely pulled back, but was still there. Waiting. Loki’s eyes darted around, not seeing anything, but he felt it so clearly. How it was hovering in the air, drawing circles around him and… trying to distract him. The second force rushed towards him with an incredible, unmatched speed and Loki realised it just this millisecond to late to relocate his force field. Instead he turned his body to the side, bundling energy in his hands, flinging it at the force.

It was enough, bursting into little pieces, raining down on him. Making a step back Loki winced.
Reaching down he felt a little cut in his jeans. Loki revealed the skin underneath and Loki narrowed his eyes in anger. It was barely visible, but it hadn’t just pierced the fabric of his clothes. This cut was even smaller, the other force had only grazed his skin. The smallest trickle of blood. Red. Only visible for seconds, then the skin was already pulling itself back together, every trace of a wound fading away, but not to be forgotten. Quickly Loki put his hand on his calf, focusing on the skin, the blood running through his veins and the magic in all of it. Nothing to be found, it was everything like it was supposed to be. No spell, no enchantment, no poison. As if he had been cut with an ordinary knife. Which didn’t make any sense. Only if…

A shudder ran down Loki’s spine and he cursed himself for his stupidity. He had let his guard down while connecting with his magic and therefore the little mage had been able to find him. His energy, his magic, but he hadn’t been able to see him. What did that matter anyway? He had what he wanted. Loki’s blood. His essence. If there was one thing you should be aware of it was a sorcerer with a blood sample.

Loki had been inattentive and now he was paying the price.
Hello everybody,

Yes, Loki screwed up, now he's picking up the pieces and Thor tells Tony that his boyfriend reminds him of a certain person... what the hell?

Ya no tengo que explicar
Ya no tengo quien me juzgue
Ya no tengo a quien pedirle una opinión sobre mi vida
Ya no siento el alma ciega
Ya no siento el alma muerta
Ya no siento que mi vida valga menos que tu ausencia

Nada ~~ Juanes ~~

(I have nothing to explain
I have nobody who might judge me
I don't have anyone left who I could ask for an opinion on my life
I don't feel the blind soul anymore
I don't feel the dead soul anymore
I don't feel anymore like my life is worth less than your absene)

Gritting his teeth Loki put the blade against his palm and took a second before he sliced the skin open. The pain was racing through his hand, up his arm and spread across his entire body, but Loki ignored it with determined demeanour. He had no time for pain or suffering, every second was precious. His first reflex had been to seek out the little mage and to rip him apart, but reason had won the fight against anger.

His blood was in the hands of a sorcerer, Loki needed protection and he couldn’t afford waiting. Casting the dagger away Loki put his right hand over the wound and began to mumble the enchantment. All his concentration was needed and this would probably take an hour if not longer. He had to get this done before the little mage got to set his plan into action. There were so many things you could do with somebody’s blood. Loki’s biggest concerns were tracking him down and curses. He doubted that the little mage was good enough to fabricate a curse to immobilise Loki, but his arrogance had led him exactly to this dilemma.

In a state of such high concentration time faded away and there was nothing left, but Loki’s magic and his blood which were the same. Loki created different layers, making the spell as strong as possible. Every drop was slowly seeping in to the wound and Loki felt his powers slipping away.
The cellphone in his jeans pocket was buzzing and Loki squeezed his eyes shut to stay focused. He was almost done. Just a little bit more. A warm, tingling sensation spread through his entire body and it made him sleepy. Done. Groaning softly Loki raised his hand and took a look at the cut. Big, long and ugly. It would heal at a slow pace due to the enchanted blade Loki had used. To cover it up with an illusion would not be a problem, but Loki would still feel the pain. Pain and fatigue. There was still enough strength left to clad himself in a new skin, but that was all. Loki needed to recover, to sleep, then he would be himself again.

The cellphone started to ring again and Loki sighed softly. Sliding into Thomas’ skin Loki answered the call. “Hey Stark.”

“Tommy, what’s going on? You’re letting me wait, sweet cheeks. I’m yearning to see your gorgeous body spread out on my bed and you’re one hour late. You didn’t start without me, did you?”

Loki swallowed an insult. “I’m sorry, I got caught up. I am on my way.”

“Perfect, how do you feel about Chinese for dinner?”

“Fine. See you in a few.”

Hanging up Loki got up from his chair and instantly had to steady himself for moving too fast. He was dizzy and tired, but he had no choice. If he hadn’t been fast enough and the little mage would find him now, Loki was vulnerable and he couldn’t risk a fight. The Stark Tower was the safest place for him right now. Slipping on a jacket and the bracelet Loki left the apartment, heading for the subway. How he loathed that public transport system.

It took him ages to get to the tower and by then he only wanted to sleep, but he had to deal with Stark first. This was going to get really annoying.

“Hey there, gorgeous. Get over here, I’ve got a… Are you alright?” Stark’s welcoming smile immediately faded away and his hand was on Loki’s arm. Eyes full of worry were looking at him and Loki cursed the little mage.

“Sure, I’m alright. Just a little dizzy.”

“Your face is white as chalk. Come on, you gotta sit down.” Gently Stark led him to the couch and made Loki sit down. Then he was gone for a few seconds, before bringing Loki a glass of water.

“Now cut the bullshit. How are you doing?”

To delay the answer Loki drank half of the glass. Why not being honest? Stark wanted to take care of his boyfriend and Loki liked the irony to it. More important so, Loki just wanted to relax and regain his strength. Also he needed protection. It would be easier like this. “I feel a little crappy. Dizzy and my stomach is… not in the best condition. It’s not that bad, but… I’ve been better.”

Stark reached out, his hand running through Thomas’ short hair. “Poor baby…”

“Don’t think I can’t walk out of here…”

“Sorry, sorry. You get the first class treatment, I promise. Nurse Tony is going to be awesome.” Stark was grinning at him and he instantly started pampering Loki. With two extra pillows, a blanket, a cup of delicious green tea and a bowl of yoghurt with little chopped up pieces of banana and papaya. According to Jarvis these were the things you should eat when your stomach was giving you problems. Loki shoved a full spoon of it into his mouth and savoured the taste of it. “This is weird…’
Sitting down next to him Stark raised an eyebrow. “What are you talking about?”

“This. You taking care of me. That’s not really your style.”

For some reason this was something that Stark was taking seriously. No cocky smile, no silly joke, he just reached out and squeezed Loki’s shoulder. “Hey, I know I’m not the most sensitive person in the world, but… you know that I care about you, right? I want you to feel good, to… I don’t like sick people, I don’t like it when they’re sneezing and all that gross stuff, but you’re my boyfriend. When you’re feeling bad, it’s my job to make you feel better. That’s what I’m doing. Or I’m trying.”

Thomas smiled and Tony leaned over to kiss him. “Thanks then.”

Now the grin was back on his face and Stark grabbed on of Loki’s feet, putting it into his lap. “Don’t mistake me for an altruist. I expect you to repay me for all of this. With lots of sex.”

“Thanks for letting me know.”

Winking at him Stark started to rub Loki’s foot and this was almost too funny to take. Loki would have laughed if he wasn’t feeling so beaten. “This is nice…”

“Sure it is, my hands are working miracles. You want to watch a movie? Or go to bed early?”

Loki was already opening his mouth to tell him that he just wanted to sleep, but then another thought came to his mind and this was so much better. He might be sleepy and drained, but his mind was still working perfectly. This was a wonderful set-up. A beautiful and nice picture of a functioning, loving relationship. Comfort, care and maybe a glimpse of love. It would be a bit out of character for Thomas, but he was sick, so Loki had a bit of leeway. “Are Doctor Banner and Thor still around?”

A bit confused Stark nodded. “Yup. Why? You wanna have an evening among dudes?”

Letting out a pleasant sigh due to Stark’s hands on his foot Loki shrugged. “I’m not the best company tonight… and I guess a few people around would distract me enough.”

“You are a weird guy. You generally hate most people, but when you’re sick you suddenly want company?”

Another shrug from Loki. “I’ve never been alone when I was sick before. It’s just what I’m used to…”

Was that too much? Too out of character to believe? Stark obviously didn’t think so and let out a soft laugh. “Fine, we’re having a little party. Jarvis, tell Bruce and Thor that they can come up if they want. We’re going to have a movie night.”

Thor and Banner both arrived only a minute later. The first was all smiles and Loki felt worse than before. Banner seemed more or less lost in thought, wearing the look of a man who had been working all day, who was tired, but couldn’t stop thinking about his work. At least that was good.

“Thomas. A pleasure to see you here. Are you well? You look…” Thor was probably looking for a nice way to say that Loki was looking terrible, but Stark was saving the day. “Tommy couldn’t take all of my incredible awesomeness, so you guys are here to even that out.”

Banner sat down next to Loki, smiling tiredly. “Hey… you sure, you are okay? You look a bit pale.”
“I’m fine. Thank you for asking. Just tired and slightly dizzy. That’s all. Stark is turning out to be quite a useful nurse.”

“I have so many talents…” Stark winked at him before turning to the others. “So gentlemen, you wanna watch a movie? Something filled with action and violence? Something purely male?”

Yawning quietly Loki shook his head. “You are such a child.”


“No way, Tony. Can’t we just… talk for a while?”

“Stark always talks anyway…” Loki yawned and jerked his foot out of Stark’s grip when he pinched him. “Ouch!”

Grinning at him Stark grabbed his other foot. “You never badmouth the guy who is giving you a footrub.”

He was lucky that Loki wasn’t kicking him. He definitely felt like it. “You never stop talking. That’s a fact. Give someone else a chance.”

“I thought you were sick. You’re still throwing punches… Okay, Thor, you know a lot of stories. Share some with us. But you are not allowed to mention a battle or a great feast after a battle. So, go on.” A new grin spread on Stark’s face and Loki was almost amused. What could Thor possibly have to tell if he couldn’t talk about his heroic deeds? Which Loki did not care about, he had been there, he had been saving Thor’s ass for centuries. Now he was even starting to think like Stark, just great…

“A story? What do you want to hear?” Of course Thor seemed clueless and Loki was glad that everybody thought he was sick, this way he could just fall asleep while Thor was talking. If he could have done that centuries ago. Till then he would fake interest and lay out some traps. “You are from Asgard… That all alone is probably more interesting than anything we guys could tell. You have a title or something? I doubt that you are a god like in the myths.”

Thor shook his head, like Odin would have done. Always the same. Like Father, like son. Had Thor ever had a thought of his own? Loki doubted it. What did Thor know of gods? He was too weak, too feeble. “No, Asgardians are definitely no gods. We are just different from humans. Our bodies are stronger and more resistant that also allows us to live longer.”

Right, this was all that separated Thor from the mortals. A stronger body. His mind wasn’t better than theirs.

“How much longer?” Loki’s voice turned into a sigh when Stark pressed his thumbs against the heel of his foot. This was nice.

“I guess the average life expectancy for an Asgardian in Midgardian years would be… 5000 years.”

Bruce blinked in confusion and Stark’s fingers stopped moving for a second. “What? You guys never asked him that? What are you even talking about?”

“Well, Tony makes us watch a lot of movies… the rest of the time we are saving the world and I have anger management classes.” Banner shrugged and Stark responded with a smirk. “A joke from you. Nice. Okay, since Tommy has already started the discussion – how old are you, Thor?”
“Slightly over a thousand. We do not count the years in Asgard and we don’t celebrate our birthdays like you do here on Midgard. I would not know the exact number.”

“What?! No birthday parties?! Are you guys insane!? Those are the best parties!”

Loki covered his ears with his hands to indicate Stark to not speak so loudly, but of course he didn’t get it. “Hey! We gotta throw you a huge birthday party! When is your birthday anyway?”

“You googled me and already don’t remember my birthday? Greatest boyfriend ever…”

“Right, I totally do… 8th…”

“9th…”

“That’s what I’m saying. July, right?”

“February. Good lord, Stark, stop talking. But keep rubbing my foot.” Turning back to Thor Loki frowned. “You are over a thousand years old and… you will live another 4000 years. Unbelievable… We must seem like flies to you. Our life expectancy is under 100 years. Must be the blink of an eye.”

It was. Their lives were slipping away while they were sitting here. Their bodies broke so easily and their minds weren’t even advanced enough to understand magic. The human race was useless and Thor refused to see that. So what? Loki was after something else tonight. Hopefully he would get as far, Stark’s touches were lulling him to sleep.

His words hit home anyway and Thor looked clearly uncomfortable. For a second, then he chose to ignore it and play the happy guy who never thought about those kinds of things. Even Thor couldn’t be that stupid to ignore the fact that he and his lover belonged to a different race. “I think there is great value in human lives. They may be short of time, but therefore you are forced to live life to the fullest. You see things differently than we do. Our long lives often make us… we get used to things and grow tired of them. There are so many more wonders to find when your time is limited.”

Naïve and romantic talk, without reason or truth. The whole universe was filled with miracles and wonders. Even this ridiculous little realm had its charms. You had to live your life with your eyes open. For Loki 5000 years wouldn’t be enough. “Okay, but it must be strange, right? Spending time with people who will be dead in a few years and to you… that must be minutes.”

Loki didn’t miss the look Banner and Stark shared. Yes, they were thinking about Jane Foster and they should be. Being with a mortal, there were no words to describe Thor’s stupidity.

“Minutes are a bit of an overstatement… your lives are short, yes. But that makes the time I spend with you even more valuable.”

“But…” Loki had barely opened his mouth when Stark once again pressed his thumbs against the heel of his foot. This time a lot stronger. “Tommy, I think you should shut your gorgeous mouth.”

“Why? Did I say something wrong?” Loki raised an eyebrow and was then surprised to see Thor smile softly. It was making him sick. “They fear you might have upset me, because of my relationship with Jane Foster. A mortal like you.”

You should be upset, you fool. Thankfully Thomas was about to beat some sense into all of them.

“You are… You have a girlfriend here… Wow. That’s… You are right, I’ll keep my mouth shut.
Just this once. Just one time.” Yawning Loki let his eyes slid closed and waited. They were all pawns and Loki was playing with them. “Hey, you are not going to fall asleep now, are you?”

Opening his eyes again Loki shook his head. “You’re right, I can’t… How can you have a mortal girlfriend? That doesn’t make any kind of sense.”

Now Banner and Stark both winced and Loki wanted to roll his eyes. Why were mortals so desperately trying to avoid difficult conversations? Their lives were so short they shouldn’t be doing anything else than having these conversations. Thor blinked, like he couldn’t believe that somebody was actually calling him out. What? Had nobody dared to do that yet? Not even the great Iron Man?

“What do you mean, Thomas? I am not sure I can follow you.”

Of course, he couldn’t. He was an idiot after all. Stark was starting to squeeze, like he wanted to stop Loki from talking. Good luck with that. “No offense, Thor… but you are over a thousand years old. She is what… in her mid-, late twenties? You’re from Asgard, she’s from… here. There is no way you have shared experiences, similar beliefs or… You are going to be 5000 years old. What will it be like in 20 years? To our standards she will be a middle aged woman and you will be… you will feel like five minutes have passed. Cultural differences kill a lot of relationships… you are not even from this planet and then there’s the age difference. Hell, I think the age difference between me and Stark is already quite big. It’s a thousand years for you guys… I have no idea how you’re doing that…”

“Wait, a second. Age difference? How old do you think I am?!” Stark sounded downright offended and Loki didn’t care. “You are more than ten years older than me. That’s a lot.”

“Not when you’re so incredibly in shape like me..”

“This conversation isn’t about us, Stark. I am sorry if I went too far, but… I was merely curious why Thor would get himself a girlfriend on earth. Okay, you can never plan love, that would be stupid. Still… you have to admit that it would be easier if you were in a relationship with someone from Asgard?”

Someone had to say it while Banner was busy studying the floor and Stark was biting on his lower lip. Fools.

“I guess it must seem so, but…” Thor’s head had to be hurting from all the thinking. An entirely new experience for him. “This woman has all my devotion, I love her and I want to be with the person I love. You understand that for sure… you’re feeling the same for each other.” A smile was dancing on Thor’s lips and Loki wanted to wipe it off his face. Forever.

Yet he brought up an interesting point. Love. Between Thomas and Stark. Sooner or later Loki would have started talking about this himself, in a believable way, but if Thor was doing it for him – fine. It all came down to his reaction. Blinking, a bit of surprise, the corners of his mouth twitching and his eyes were darting to Stark. The mortal was openly staring at him and his face had grown the tiniest bit pale. Like expected, a man like Stark would never openly use those words, even less so in front of others. When he realised that Loki’s eyes were on him, he quickly turned away, gaping at Thor. “Hey, point break! You can’t just start tossing the L-word around. You know how many antique books I have to buy him so he will forget about that? Shower your girl with that stupid romantic talk, but let my perfect relationship out of it.”

Loki raised an eyebrow and decided to go for a condescending smile. “Wow, he scared you big time there…”
“Oh, shut up. Aren’t you supposed to be sick and half asleep?”

Laughing softly Loki closed his eyes again. “Greatest boyfriend ever…”

After this conversation being completely ruined they still ended up watching a movie. Pretty much everybody except Loki. He had a role to play and his eyes were actually hurting right now. Sleep was vital now, time to recharge his batteries. He was save here, with these three around there was nothing to worry about. Sweet irony. Even that was useful to his plan.

The pleasant footrub came to an end and Loki sat up, right next to Stark and pretended falling asleep. Slowly, little by little he was getting closer to the other one, his head finally resting on his shoulder. Such a nice little play. His body language was perfect, even the little details. Awake he kept a small distance, but asleep he would let his guard down and seek Stark’s closeness.

An arm slid around his shoulders, softly pulling him closer.

Inwardly Loki marvelled at his own brilliance. Warmth was radiating from Stark’s body, lulling him to sleep. Almost.

“Is he asleep?”

“Positive… Isn’t he cute like this? Almost looks like a nice person.” Stark was whispering, but the words were spoken closely to his ear. Loki could almost feel them. “Uhm, sorry Thor about his little… speech. He’s… honest and says whatever the fuck is on his mind. Makes him awesome, but some people might think it’s not the most charming personality trait. Bullshit, he’s awesome, but still sorry…”

“Do not worry, Stark. He has a sharp tongue which is not something I dislike. He reminds me of my brother…”

Everything at once. His magic was screaming. In anger, in pain, in agony, in joy. Every possible sensation melted together, making it impossible to tell it apart and how was he supposed to lie still when his very being, his very core was shaken. As if Thor had crawled inside of him and had dragged something to the surface. Out in the open and Loki wanted… to run, to move, to tear down walls, entire cities, let his rage devour planet.

Mistakes weren’t in his nature. Loki had spent centuries to perfect his illusions. He had tricked everyone. Even his mother who had known him like nobody else. When he was in somebody else’s skin nobody had been able to tell that it was him. Not even…

How could Thor see the similarities now? Yes, Loki knew that Thomas was the most like him, because of that he was Loki’s favourite, but… had he gone too far? Had he been too careless?

“Uhm, Thor, I know you come from another culture, but comparing my boyfriend to a homicidal maniac is not a compliment.”

“Tony…”

“This is not what I have meant. He has a sharp mind, he says what he thinks. Like my brother used to…”

“Seriously, Thor, stop it.” Stark was snarling, his grip on Loki growing tighter. As if he was trying to protect him. “You brother was a crazed-out son of a…”

“Tony!” Banner cut him off, his voice almost threatening. Loki would have liked to smirk at the
thought that he could still make them fight. Too bad that Thomas was still asleep. “Loki is dead, okay? He was Thor’s brother… None of us liked him for obvious reasons, but show some respect.”

“It’s not me who is disrespectful! He is comparing Tommy to a guy with not a single good quality, but who planned on enslaving the planet and who wanted to kill me! Do I need to say more?”

Sweet pain. There had to be a way. Loki had to make it possible. Somehow he had to let Stark know who he was before killing him. Right now that idea completely interfered with his plan, but this setting was just too great to not take advantage of it. Time to get creative. How protective he was of Thomas. That was enough to make Loki care very little about the insults.

There was Thor’s voice. Quiet, soft, so unusual for him. “My brother was not always like that. When he was young, he… was kind and happy. Pensive, he liked to be for himself, but he would help anyone if they just asked him to. The person you met wasn’t my brother anymore. Something happened to him and… I couldn’t stop it from happening…” Thor trailed off and Stark snorted. “Who the fuck cares…”

Obviously Banner did. “What happened, Thor?”

There was no answer and Loki could hear somebody getting up from the couch. Thor was leaving.

His heart was racing in his chest. The effects of his little illusion hadn’t been wearing off. Thor was in the exact spot where Loki wanted him to be. Even better. Now he had stopped keeping his guilt to himself. Soon enough the others would start asking questions and then… It took so much effort to stop his lips from curling into a smile.

A kiss was pressed on his temple and Loki heard him grumble.

***

“Prince Loki, what a sight for my sore eyes. Such joy to see you.”

“I beg your pardon, my lord?”

“Do you still want to continue playing after being caught? It is no use.”

“I am growing awfully quickly tired of this. Tell me, what was it? I practiced, I worked on the way I walk. Nobody did even guess.”

“You do walk like a young maiden, but you are way too eager to fool me. You kept looking at me from the second you entered the hall.”

“Why couldn’t an ordinary maiden be looking at you?”

“Not like that, you were hiding it well enough. It was a single gesture. You were brushing your hair back behind your ear.”

“So?”

“I saw Prince Loki doing that before and I recognized it.”

“If I were to play this maiden on Midgard or any other realm, nobody would be able to tell.”

“That might be the truth, my prince. Yet it was still Loki who brushed back his hair, not this maiden.”
“Thank you for your honesty, my lord.”

“You are leaving, my prince?”

“I just realised that I have still a lot of work to do.”

“I see. A pity. The next time we meet I hope to see the prince’s face.”

When Loki startled awake the voices were only slowly fading away and it took him three seconds to realise that he was still on Midgard. Stark’s tower. What?

Why was he…

Turning his head Loki could tell that he was still in the living room. He must have fallen asleep on the couch. A blanket was spread out over him. Slow, swallow breathing. Stark was lying right next to him. An arm around Loki’s waist.


Closing his eyes again Loki shoved all thoughts away, trying to fall back asleep. He felt even more tired than before.
Hello everybody,

Tony and Thomas have an emotional moment and Loki goes a step further to ruin a life

__________________________________________________

It's a beautiful lie
It's a perfect denial
Such a beautiful lie to believe in
So beautiful, beautiful it makes me…

A beautiful lie ~ 30 seconds to mars

__________________________________________________

When he woke up for the second time Loki felt better. His head was slightly dizzy and his skin was itching, but that was due to the veil and could happen from time to time. Stark was still in slumberland and Loki sighed before getting up. Balling his hand into a fist Loki felt his magic running through his veins, completely restored. Good, he felt good. The protection spell was in place, his invisibility intact, he was fine. Bad for the mage, now he had joined the list of people who were definitely going to die. After the Avengers.

Wandering into the kitchen Loki prepared breakfast, making scrambled eggs and tried to remember all parts of yesterday’s conversation. It had been about him. And Thomas. Both of them.

Thor thought them to be similar. He wasn’t wrong, but Loki knew he had to be careful now. A comparison had been made. His and Thomas name had been uttered in the same sentence. One time was enough. Now he couldn’t afford any slip-up anymore. He wanted to send Thomas off on holiday anyway. William needed to make an appearance soon to get rid of the little brat that thought she could be worthy of the attention of Captain America. With a small tray Loki returned to the couch where Stark had sprawled out, now taking up all the space. Typical.

Loki nudged him with his foot. “Morning. Breakfast’s ready. Give me some space, then I might give you something to eat.”

Growling Stark rolled over, his eyes sliding open and he was instantly smiling at Loki. Sentimental fool. “Morning… you’re feeling better?”

“Yeah… you didn’t have to sleep on the couch, because of me. You could have woken me up.”

“You’re feeling sick. I was glad you fell asleep at all. You already made breakfast? God, get your fabulous ass on that couch.”

What a sophisticated choice of words. They had breakfast on the couch, almost entirely in silence. Kind of refreshing. “Did I miss something after falling asleep?”
For a second Loki saw the corners of Stark’s mouth twitching. Interesting. “Nah, nothing of importance. The movie was dull and Thor’s stories about Asgard didn’t get any better. Listen, I was thinking about staying at home today. You’re feeling better, but I still think it’d be a good idea to just… hang out.”

Loki didn’t have the time to hang out, but no choice but to agree. “Sure… I don’t feel like doing much anyway.”

“Cool, you know what’s a good idea? To start a day with doing nothing. Taking a long, nice bath.” Stark wiggled his eyebrows at him and Loki had to admit that it had been quite a long time since he had been lying in a bathtub. “Do I get another footrub?”

“I was more thinking about a backrub… Come on.” Getting up, Stark grabbed Loki’s hand and more or less dragged him along. Maybe he should bring the Captain in today, let him see the robot and break them apart. That wouldn’t be Stark’s idea of hanging out though. Like pretty much everything else in the tower the bathtub was pure luxury and simply huge. While Stark was opening faucet to fill the tub with water Loki unceremoniously stripped naked.

“Well, hello there. Aren’t you gorgeous?”

“Stop creeping, Stark. Get undressed.”

“I love it when you’re bossy.”

They got in the tub together, Loki leaning with his back against Stark’s chest who wrapped his arms around him. “I was thinking about…” Stark mumbled the words against his neck, his nose brushing Thomas’ short hair. “…how about if you move some of your stuff into the penthouse? I don’t mind buying you hot and ridiculously tight clothes everyday, but it would be a bit easier if you had some of your own stuff here.”

Loki let a content sigh pass his lips. He had Stark eating out of his hand, almost making it too easy. “I hope this is you asking me to bring a toothbrush and a pair of trousers. Not you asking me to move in.”

Fingers were wandering down his chest, leaving a wet trail. Stark pressed a kiss on the back of his neck. “No, I’m not. I want you to feel at home when you’re here. If you want to, you can bring your books. Whatever you want.”

Tilting his head to the side Loki gave Stark more space and hummed contently. “Alright, I’ll bring some stuff, but I’m not going to spend all of my nights here. Just to be clear.”

“How can you be so unromantic when we’re in the tub and all wet? And I didn’t even say anything yet about wanting to fuck.”

Chuckling softly Loki turned his head, pressing a kiss on Stark’s lips. “You always want to fuck.”

“Guilty as charged. Your own fault for being so incredibly hot. Especially since you promised me I could come in your perfect, tight ass the next time…”

“I can’t remember promising you anything.”

“Hey, I don’t forget that kind of thing…” Stark sounded playfully offended, his arm around Loki’s waist pulled him tighter against his body. Loki felt actual surprise when he heard Stark’s voice getting a more serious tone. “No, honestly… the sex is great, you’re hot and you know what you want and you don’t get all shy… So yeah, fucking you is always the best part of my day. Still I
would like to get rid of the condoms. If that’s okay for you. What do you say?”

Talking about cultural differences. Loki understood the reasoning behind this question and why it needed to be discussed between a couple, but that still didn’t change the awkward nature of it. Stark was asking him to dispose of something that he only ever used with him and the idea of sexually transmitted diseases still made Loki crack up. You had to know that you’re part of a feeble and worthless race when even the act of reproduction can kill you.

The only thing Asgardians had to worry about was creating a bastard. Even that wasn’t a big problem. They had incredibly long lives, but conception wasn’t that easy. For most married couples it takes years to conceive and the average Asgardian woman doesn’t give birth to more than two children during her whole life. Moreover magic was a bullet-proof method of contraception. All these things didn’t matter anyway, because both of them were male. From Loki’s point of view there was no problem, but since he was playing a mortal…

“I’m fine with it.” Short and simple.

Stark’s fingers stroked along his side and Loki could feel him slightly faltering. “Really? Just like that?”

“What? You expect me to give a speech about the pros and cons?”

“No, but you weren’t shy about the fact that you thought I was sleeping around a lot. It would only be… natural if you had some concerns. I could totally dismiss them, but I could see where you’re coming from.”

Right, having sexual relationships with a lot of different partners increased the risk of getting such a disease. Puny mortals. Sighing softly Loki turned his head to look at Stark. “Are you okay? I mean… is there something I should worry about? If not, then we don’t have to discuss all the tarts you slept with.”

Again Stark’s face was like an open book. Brown eyes so full amazement, trust and want. Not the mention the surprised features. “That would be enough for you? Me telling you that I am clean? Hell, I took you for the person who would never agree to that without getting tested at least five times… and maybe bleaching my veins.”

Loki suppressed a grin. “You know, Stark… I never took myself for the person who would ever sleep with you. Regardless of a condom. Guess I was wrong about that. I said I was having trouble trusting you, but until now you didn’t do anything to… make me regret my decision to be with you.” Oh, this was getting good. A bit of reassurance could never hurt. Love was already blossoming, that much was sure. It might be an ambitious task, but Loki started thinking about making Thomas the one great love of Stark’s life. Yes, he needed Stark’s cooperation, but he was definitely able to keep the flame burning. It would only hurt more later on. Eating him up alive.

“You gave me the most unique thing about yourself to protect me. Which is probably the biggest thing anyone has ever done for me. I know you care, I know you want me safe. It’s only rational to think that you wouldn’t take a risk if it could end up hurting me. So, yeah. I believe you when you say that there is nothing to worry about.”

Stark only gave him a look and for a second Loki was torn between feeling sorry for him and hating him even more for being so weak. How desperately he wanted to be loved by this person who didn’t even really exist. The way his eyes were beaming just by looking at him. Almost disappointing how easily such a smart, strong and reckless man made another person his priority. Letting himself be ruled by sentiment. Loki would feel disgusted by it if it wasn’t so useful.
His process of thought came to a sudden halt when Stark kissed him. Passionately, but not demanding. Was grateful too much of a word? “I know I am most probably the most obnoxious person in the world to hang out with and chances are that one day you’ll curse yourself for even spending time with me, but… Fuck, I’m so bad at this bullshit. Okay… just in case if I tend to fuck this whole thing up, because I have a history of fucking things up… don’t doubt that you’re my priority. Because you are.”

“Stark…”

“It’s Tony. We’re having an emotional moment here, we’re in the fucking bathtub and I’m handing you over the small black thing that I call my heart.”

Smiling softly Loki turned his upper body to the side and let his hand hover above the arc reactor, but not touching it. “I came to believe that this was your heart.”

Not even a wince or a frown. Stark wasn’t scared, not even worried. “Fine… then it’s my blue, glowing heart. Doesn’t matter, we’re having a moment. Be nice for once, then you can go back to being that awesome cold-hearted bastard.”

Alright, whatever Stark wanted to make him believe this little lie even more.

“Stark… stop talking. You really aren’t good at this bullshit. You are terrible at it and… me too. So don’t make me feel like I have to say something deep and profound that makes me feel uncomfortable.”

“You’re a literature freak, quote some Shakespeare.”

Loki thought about it for a second, before finding just the right thing to say. One simply had to love Shakespeare. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” How tragically ironic.

At first Stark only blinked at him, as if he needed a moment to figure out what he had been saying, then it was just another kiss full of longing. “Let’s get out of here. I need you sprawled out on a bed in exactly three seconds.”

“Hey, I’m quite enjoying this bath so far…”

“You’ll also be enjoying everything I’m planning on doing to you.”

“Your timing is also terrible, you know. This is now going to make me look like a complete arsehole…”

“Yah? What’s going on?”

Letting out a sigh Loki grabbed Stark’s hand, playing with his fingers. “An old friend of mine called. We haven’t seen each other in over two years. I thought about visiting him. For a week or so. In London.”

“Now that’s typical. I’m getting all emotional and shit and you are leaving the country.”

A playful note in his voice, but a little bit of truth was also in there. Careful. “Hey, I would have brought that up anyway… this has nothing to do with you or this conversation. I just wanted to have this out in the open, because I don’t want to tell you two days before I’m leaving…”

Stark was actually pouting and Loki wanted to slap him, but Thomas was reaching out and kissed
him. Languidly, just like a man wanted to be kissed when the other was trying to make something up to him. “How about we get out of the tub and you get to do all the things you want to do to me. Maybe even some other things…”

“Okay, you won.”

After getting out of the tub, they quickly dried off, but when Loki was pushed down onto Stark’s bed his hair was still soaking wet. Not that it mattered with Stark’s hot mouth on his skin. “I’m going to make you scream my name and you’re going to love it…”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep…” Loki smirked, pulling Stark back down, kissing him aggressively. They were already naked, their skin heated from the warm water and the excitement was pretty much seeping from Stark. There was no way that Loki would never going to understand what was really going on in this situation, why this was such a great deal.

At least Stark was doing a great job of making him think of something else or nothing at all. A hand wrapping around his cock, a thumb rubbing over the tip and Loki definitely wasn’t in the mood for teasing. Instead he tightly wrapped one leg around Stark’s hip and quickly rolled them over. Stark liked marking people, didn’t he? Well, Loki could do that too. What else should he use his wicked mouth for? Going straight to Stark’s stomach Loki dipped his tongue into his belly button, before biting softly the skin right beneath it. A little gasp told Loki that he was doing something right, but he wasn’t especially known for his patience. Putting both of his hands on Stark’s thighs, Loki pushed them slightly up to give himself some space.

“Fuck Tommy!” Stark let out a yelp when Loki sucked hard on the inside of his thigh. So easy. The other one must already be feeling like on top of the world and Loki was determined to make it even better. All Stark should be able to think about was how incredibly perfect every moment with Thomas was. There was such an easy way to accomplish this. Leaning forward Loki released a soft sigh and he could instantly feel Stark shivering underneath his hands. “You fucking tease…”

Stark tried to push his hips up, but Loki held him down, smirking dirtily. “Patience is a virtue…”

“I’m not a very virtuous man…”

After laughing lightly Loki licked his lips, just because he could and then finally let his tongue dart out against Stark’s cock. What had Stark called him? A crazy son of a bitch? Didn’t stop him from moaning loudly and bucking up into Loki’s mouth when he closed his lips around his cock. If he only knew.

“Tommy…”

A hand tried to reach for his hair, but Loki batted it away. This was his game, his rules. Flattening out his tongue Loki pressed it teasingly against the tip before swirling it around. He marvelled at another gasp and then let more of Stark slide into his mouth, hollowing his cheeks to increase the friction.

“Tommy, fuck… yes…”

Why not just ruining his future sex life completely? Loki covered his teeth, taking all of him inside. Again Stark was reaching out, but he knew better and only fisted his hands in the sheets. As a reward Loki started his rhythm, going slow but all the way, flipping his tongue just the way he knew would make Stark scream. Loki had had all of them screaming.

“Good lord… keep doing that… Fuck, you’re good…”
Never shutting up, never and Loki was sick of him talking. Thankfully there was a sufficient way to change that. Loki sucked harder, felt how the other one was trying not trash and squirm. Then he looked up. Of course Stark was watching him, staring at him and that gaze was enough.

“Tommy!”

Who was screaming whose name now?

***

Stark was humming a silent tune while working on his sketch for some new machine and Loki was engrossed in a huge book about the history of Portuguese literature. Their silent co-existence was working out surprisingly well. Obviously the only time when Stark could indeed shut up was after getting the best blowjob of his life. Loki was fine with that, he was turning the page of his book and concentrated on Thor’s presence. Still in the tower. The second he left, Loki would know.

Except for that, he was really enjoying the book and until now the day had been indeed relaxing. Loki’s magic was rested and restored. He was ready to go out and have some fun. The mage still wasn’t his priority, but Loki had to do something. Just to let him know that playing with Loki was dangerous. His first idea had been destroying the castle, but that would attract attention. How could Loki ever forget that magic barely existed in this vast and empty realm? A fight between two sorcerers, didn’t matter that one was far superior over the other, wouldn’t go by unnoticed. That was the only thing Loki couldn’t afford, the Avengers realising that somebody else was out there. His first idea of just killing him had been stupid, but he also wasn’t fond of the mage interfering with his plans. Yes, he would kill him anyway, but until then he had to do something to make him pay. For even daring to attack him, to steal his blood. He wouldn’t know what had hit him.

Loki would have to think about that some other time, more interesting things were happening right now. Thor was gone. Closing his eyes Loki concentrated on his aura, where it was going to. The ocean. Chances were high that he was leaving for London. Where else should he go to? Perfect. If he spent the night there, Loki was back in the game. The nightmares would only occur when Thor was close to Jane Foster, something he hadn’t considered yet, but it was working out perfectly.

“So… when you’re going to London?”

Lowering his book Loki saw Stark smiling at him and the sweet silence was gone. “Not sure yet. I thought about next week. I won’t be staying there long. About five days.”

“I see. That’s your first trip home since when?”

“About half a year.”

Stark nodded, playing with the pencil in his hand and Loki wasn’t entirely sure where this conversation was heading to. Or if he was going to like it. “You’re just visiting an old friend? Not your family.”

“I’ve already told you about my family.”

“Yeah, but I’m not just talking about your parents. Uncle? Aunt? I don’t know. There’s still gotta be someone you don’t totally despise.” Stark shrugged and Loki raised an eyebrow. This wasn’t what Stark was really interested in. “Not really. I’m not coming from a big family. I told you the rest. I’m going to visit a friend and probably a few others.”

Finally Stark was admitting what this was all about. “So… a friend to drink beers and watch a soccer game with or… ex-boyfriend…ish.”
Loki let Thomas frown and show a little bit of annoyance. “Jealousy is a very unattractive trait, Stark.”

“Hey, I am not jealous! Look at me, how could I be jealous? I am hot, fucking rich and a superhero. You’ve reached the top, darling. You can’t get any better.” Stark winked at him, wearing a grin on his face. “I’m just asking. We’ve never talked about our history. I know you had this dumb girlfriend that made you go to the shrink, but I don’t know about any former boyfriends. You gotta have had some. There is no way somebody is that good at giving head without having a lot of time to practice… and that came out completely wrong. Sorry, I’m stupid, a very stupid man, I’m going to lick your boots if you let me of the hook. Are you into that, because that… No, no, I’ll shut up I promise. You know me. Brain, mouth. Absolutely not connected, not at all. Because you are gorgeous, hot, snobbish, picky and would never just let anyone… Probably, you’re just a natural at…”

“Bloody hell, Stark, just shut up. Your babbling is giving me a headache. If you’re asking if I ever sucked my friend’s dick the answer is no. No, I did not and I’m not going to. He is a friend. No sexual favours involved.”

“I didn’t mean that. I’m not the jealous type. I’m just curious. How long have you known each other? What’s his name? Is he a snob like you? I can’t imagine what your best friend would be like.” Stark tried to win him over with a grin, but Loki wanted to smack him anyway for making him make up a story. “His name is Charles, we met in Oxford and of course he is a snob. Would I talk with a person who isn’t? There is not much to tell, we are friends. He thinks I’m crazy for moving to the US. He’s probably right.”

Letting out a soft laugh Stark put his notepad away and joined Loki on his side of the couch. “Okay, I got it. You sure you can just leave? I might do something stupid when you’re gone. Like getting drunk and blowing up the tower?”

“Everything you do would be my fault, huh?”

“Exactly.” Stark kissed him playfully, putting an arm around his shoulders and pulling him closer. Done with the silence. Playing the game Loki shifted closer to him, running one hand through Stark’s hair. “I still feel incredibly hurt that you are going to leave the country after I suggested that you should bring some of your stuff here. You have to make that up to me.”

This was actually amusing. Stark was having fun, not having a problem with Thomas living his own life and still trying to use everything to his advantage. “I do? What are you thinking about?”

“Doing nothing else but having sex till you get on that plane to leave? Otherwise I’m not going to survive these five days. I’m already feeling terrified by just thinking about it.”

Loki shut him up by kissing him, a safe way to stop this stupid talk. The response was eager and Stark was already pushing him back against the sofa cushions, pressing their bodies closer together. “But… seriously…” Words muttered against his lips in between kisses. “… how many… boyfriends?”

Groaning Loki fisted his hand in Stark’s shirt and pushed him slightly away. “Seriously? You hear me asking about your exes?”

“No, but let’s be honest, it would pretty much fuck up our relationship if we ever talked about the people I fucked.”

“You mean how many.”
“See, you’re smart. Therefore we’re not talking about that. What about you?” Stark left a lingering kiss on Loki’s lips and then nibbled softly on his earlobe. Couldn’t they just fuck instead of talking? Loki was stalling anyway. It wasn’t late enough to go to London and until then Loki had to pass some time. “Depends on your definition of the word. I’m not a whore, I’m no saint. Flings, affairs, adventures, liaisons… I’ve had my share of guys. I’ve only had one boyfriend. A great guy. You want me to keep talking about him or would you rather try to convince me that you are even better.” Raising an eyebrow suggestively at Stark Loki hoped that he was going to fall for such a weak try to distract him.

Stark did fall for it and a second later they were making out again. This wasn’t going to lead anywhere, but it was a nice way to pass time. For some reason though Stark was in a talkative mood. Loki’s own fault, the trip to London had actually made him want to know more about Thomas’ past. “Your ex-boyfriend wasn’t hotter than me, right?”

“Are you serious? I never would have thought you to be a guy with inferiority complexes. You hear me comparing myself to the 1000 guys you’ve had before me.”

“Hey, it weren’t a 1000!”

“Are you sure?” Loki was mocking him and it was pure distraction. Having Stark talking about himself was a nice way to not have to talk about Thomas.

“Of course, I’m sure. It’s not like I’m having a list, but I know when a number is too high and it’s too high.”

Smiling amusedly, Loki crossed his arms behind his head. “Really? So what about your boyfriends?”

Now Stark looked at him like he had to think really hard. “I guess I didn’t even have one. Unlike you.”

“Ha.”

“Don’t ha me. In my twenties, I’ve had a longer fling with a guy in college. He was in college, I was already a genius and running a company. That’s as close to a relationship as you get. And that wasn’t a relationship. I guess my only real relationship was with Pepper.” Stark shrugged and Loki let out a dry laugh. “Well, that worked out perfectly.”

Stark let his fingers run over Thomas’ short hair and gave him a soft smile. “Yeah, but we kind of met, because we suck at relationships with women. Didn’t we?”

Yes, they did, but Loki hadn’t planned for them to become a couple. “You do. I just know what I want and I’m not going to accept anything less.”

“God, I love it when you’re bossy.”

Generally it was a pleasant afternoon, Loki’s urges to murder Stark at any second were in check and when the moment had finally come Loki was still excited to leave. “How about you finish that sketch of yours… whatever it is and I go and get us some food.”

This suggestion seemed to be confusing Stark, but Loki was prepared and there was no way he wasn’t going to leave anyway. “Go? We can just order in like we always do.”

“I know and that’s why we’re not gong to do it. I know a great Argentine place and they don’t deliver, but they have take-away. I want Argentine food tonight, so I’m going to get some.”
“Darling, you just say Stark Tower into your phone and every place has take-away.” Stark winked at him and Loki sighed. “I don’t need to be pampered 24/7.”

“You don’t mind that when I’m buying you books.”

“Books are the exception to everything.” Loki smirked, getting up from the couch. “I want to get some fresh air anyway and you’ve been staring at this sketch for nearly half an hour. Get this done and focus back on me. I’ll come back with some food and then we can… We’ll think of something to do.” Letting his lips brush over Stark’s Loki only gave him something like the taste of a kiss. Again the poor fool was falling for it, so wrapped up in his feelings for Thomas and whatever else he was designing there that he didn’t even ask twice about his motives. “Okay, you go and you better be back in half an hour. I have a few more ideas to work on with you.”

The second Loki had brought enough distance between him and the tower and hidden the bracelet in another layer of this dimension, he teleported away, straight to where he wanted and needed to be. London smelled so good and Loki felt the sting of regret that he couldn’t stay here longer and enjoy it. Instead he just strolled through the dark apartment, almost yawning at the ridiculous try of the protection spell to keep him out. Loki leaned against the doorframe and watched the couple there lying in bed, wrapped around each other, sound asleep and thinking that they were safe. Just as infuriating as endearing. Not to mention stupid. Thor should know better than this. Even him.

There was no point in pondering about his stupidity and losing time. So Loki walked over, his feet gliding soundlessly over the floor. Thor’s face was turned away from the window, his nose brushing Jane Foster’s hair. Sleeping this close to another person seemed impossible to Loki, he would feel like suffocating… That actually gave him a nice idea. This time it would be worse, this time it would be enough to wake him up.

The invisibility washed over Loki’s body and he leaned over the bed, towering over the two vulnerable, helpless figures. Not that he cared in any way for Jane Foster. Closing his eyes Loki thought of darkness, nothingness and… coldness. There had been fear and gut wrenching desperation. Now he would be dying. Almost.

“I know he will come for me… he saw me falling… Thor will come for me…” Loki made a pause, letting his own voice sound so thin and broken was surprisingly strenuous. Like there was barely anything left of him. Fading away, dissolving into nothingness. Yet still desperately clinging to a glimpse of hope like a madman. “He wouldn’t leave me out here… he is my brother, he is searching for me…” With a little gesture of his hand Loki made sure that Jane Foster’s slumber wouldn’t be disrupted by what was about to follow. First the fear, then the pleading, followed by the pain and it would all end with the realisation that his brother wouldn’t come. “No, please… No. Not again. Please… Stop it! Don’t! No, no, no… no!” Even the weakest voice could utter a jarring scream if there was enough pain involved. Loki screamed, sobbed and finally whimpered. Brokenly. “He will come for me… He’s my brother, he saw how I fell. He is looking for me… Thor will take me away from here…. he will come for me, I know he will come for me…he won’t let me die here…”

Loki had a mere second to move back, Thor woke with a start, instantly sitting up straight. He was breathing heavily, tiny sweat drops were running down his forehead and his eyes stared right into nowhere.

The sweet taste of satisfaction filled Loki’s mouth and his lips formed a sly grin. Pain was etching on Thor’s face and Loki wanted more of it. He wanted him to feel it all, to choke on it and die a slow and atrocious death. The last days had been filled with inconveniences, so Loki relished this success even more.
“Thor, are you alright?” Jane Foster put her hand on Thor’s shoulder, watching him with these clueless eyes, full of worry.

The mighty Thor didn’t even turn his head to look at her. He kept staring into pace and whispered a single word. “Loki…”

His work was done and there would be other times to relish his success.

Right now Loki wasn’t teleporting back to New York, but to the little island where he had had his last conversation with the little mage. He had to send some kind of message after all. Still in his castle, of course. Loki sent out his magic, not inviting him for a talk, but pretty much attacking him. From this distance Loki couldn’t do much more than causing a terrible, sudden headache that would only last a few seconds. Enough to gain his attention though. Good, now they could have a conversation.

“When this is done, I will have so much blood on my hands that adding yours won’t matter. I will tear you apart. I will rip every single limp of your body.”

How funny that you talk about blood…

Was this courage or pure stupidity? “You will regret this. I will erase your castle from the ground and there will be nothing left of you. Not even a faded memory.”

I must admit this prospect is rather unsatisfying. I would rather have some more time to let your blood tell me stories about you. It’s telling me so much…

“You are not even capable of using it somehow against me.”

I am not trying to use it against you. I’m analysing. It is fascinating. I have always known that you are something else. Definitely not human, not even close, but I have never seen anything like this. After a while it even lost its red colour and it’s cold, freezing. Is that why you are constantly changing your form? To hide that you are some kind of monster? With ice ruining through its veins?

Loki was sure the mage was screaming in agony while his magic was lashing out as strongly as he could and when he couldn’t reach him anymore without going there, Loki let the island go up in flames.

If he wanted a monster, a monster he would get. Loki would send the Avengers after him, letting them do the dirty work, but the final stroke would be his. And it wouldn’t be quick nor painless.
Hello everybody,

Loki snaps... yeah, that's pretty much it...

_________________________________________________
Honest to god I will break your heart
Tear you to pieces and rip you apart
The Night of the Hunter ~~ 30 seconds to mars
__________________________________________________

“You were completely right, this is delicious! This steak is just perfect.” Stark’s face was pure proof of joy while he was munching on a piece of meat and Loki was slowly moving his fingers in a distinct rhythm. His magic was pulsing underneath his skin, his palm almost glowing with heat. All he needed now was one touch. His hand on Stark’s cheek and his half of his face would be disfigured, burned away and he would drop dead. Screaming in pain.

Loki had been holding on to this picture for a while now and such anger was raging inside of him, there was a good chance he might give into it.

“Tommy? Hey, you lost your voice while you were getting this little piece of heaven?”

Just one touch. One.

“I’m enjoying a meal. No reason to talk.” To prove a point Loki took a sip from his wine and hoped Stark would stop talking. An impossible task. “Yeah sure, what’s up? I’m not blind. You’re fucking beautiful, so it’s stands out when you’re pulling a face. What is it? You were gone for half an hour. My absence driving you crazy?”

Snarling Loki put his glass away. “Very funny, Stark.”

That was enough for Stark to put his fork away. “Okay. What’s going on?”

Gritting his teeth Loki told himself to calm down. Loki was furious, Loki wanted to set this city on fire, he wanted to grab Stark at his collar and toss him against the wall, smashing his skull. Thomas had been perfectly fine when he had left the tower. Time to get a grip, to be Thomas. Sighing softly Loki showed a tiny smile, but made sure that it didn’t look forced. “I’m sorry. I ran into someone on my way to the restaurant. An acquaintance… we're not on good terms. Kinda did upset me a little bit. I’m sorry, you weren’t even supposed to notice.”

“Oh, okay. How did he piss you off?” Stark looked genuinely interested and Loki cringed. More backstory. “I don’t even know him really. We met through friends, were at odds and… he made me
look bad. I don’t want to go into detail. Maybe some other time. Just let it go, I’ll do the same. It just ruined my mood to see him. That’s not fair, so I’ll put that aside now. Okay?”

Stark mirrored his smile and reached out to touch Loki’s hand that was lying on the table. Thankfully all of his magic was concentrated in the other one. Time to stop focussing on it, because touching him would sooner or later inevitable. “You know… all I need to ruin someone’s life completely is their social security number…”

Laughing lightly Loki shook his head. “Don’t act like the big rich, white man who likes to step on people. It doesn’t suit you.”

“Well, I wanted to let you know. What you do with that knowledge is your business.” Stark winked at him and Loki was content, at least one problem avoided. They continued the dinner in a relaxed mood, at least Stark thought so. Loki’s anger hadn’t subsided a bit. After dinner they watched a movie, Stark wrapped his arm around Loki’s shoulders and the closeness was almost unbearable. Such a weak limb, easy to rip off.

At least the movie was fun and Stark was completely okay with going to bed afterwards. It would probably be a good idea to sleep with him, discard Stark’s doubts that something was wrong. Only Loki didn’t want his hands on him tonight. Or ever again. He wanted to watch this whole planet go up in flames, hear the Avengers scream in agony before slowly dying one after another.

Stark instantly kissed him softly when they slid under the covers. So much about that. Loki decided to run with it. Saying no now would only raise suspicions. Closing his arms around Stark Loki accepted the kiss, let Stark roll on top of him. The mortal framed Loki’s face with his hands, pressing several small kisses to his lips before letting his mouth brush along the curve of Loki’s neck. Loki let him hear a soft sigh, making him believe he was enjoying it. Well, physically it was a pleasant feeling, but it didn’t anything to make Loki’s anger die off. Angry and rough sex would maybe help, unfortunately it was obvious that Stark was still influenced by their emotional talk this morning. His touches were gentle, careful and so clearly meant to rather give Loki pleasure than Stark himself.

Warm hands ran over his chest, followed by a hot mouth which was pretty much worshipping his body. Stark let his breath ghost over Loki’s skin before kissing it lovingly. Loki hated himself for the gasp that escaped his lips, but he found solace in the fact that Stark was making a statement here. Proving his affection for Thomas which would be his downfall.

Reaching up Loki grabbed the hem of Stark’s shirt, who reluctantly pulled away so Loki could discard of his shirt. Soft blow light filled the area and Loki couldn’t stop staring at it. His greatest power and weakness in the very same spot. Something that was able to resist magic. But it wouldn’t be able to resist Loki’s brute force.

His idea came to a halt when Stark leaned down and caught him in a gentle kiss. Tilting his head up Loki made the position more comfortable for himself. Loki sighed into the kiss when he felt one of Stark’s hands sliding across his stomach, then to his shorts to tug them down. Raising his hips Loki helped him doing that.

A soft whisper directly at his ear. “Turn around, gorgeous.”

By the second Stark had finished the phrase Loki’s magic roared up and urged him to kill him. “Why?”

“Because I want to make you feel good and maybe scream a little…”
Biting his lip Loki did another thing that he didn’t really want and rolled over onto his stomach. If Stark just thought about taking him like this, Loki would definitely burn his face off. Fingers massaging his shoulders eased the tension a little bit and Loki uttered a soft groan when Stark kissed the back of his neck. This was the place where Stark had decided to start, kisses followed all over his back, while a hand slid between his legs, gently pushing them apart.

Have your fun with Thomas as long as you can, Stark. Loki thought about the veil and how he would get back at Stark for this.

The soft caresses continued and eventually Loki felt two moist fingers rubbing over his entrance. Stark gently pushed them inside and Loki fisted his hands in a pillow. “Stark…”

“It’s Tony…” A kiss was pressed to lower back, the fingers slipped a bit deeper and Loki’s body jerked from the sudden wave of pleasure. By the Nornes, he wanted to squeeze the life out of him. The fingers continued to work him open and Loki bit the inside of his cheek, feeling his whole body tingling.

“Your skin… is getting all warm.” Stark rubbed his cheek against Loki’s back and his head was swimming.

When Stark pulled his fingers back, he gently urged Loki to turn back around. Good for him. Suddenly Loki had to face Tony’s eyes, full of warmth and devotion. He was kissed again in this sweet way and Stark slid between his spread legs. Loki felt the tip of his cock nudging at his opening. There was a short hesitation and Stark’s eyes locked with his. “Are you sure you’re okay with this?”

It wasn’t a big deal. “Yeah, I am. Are you?”

There was no direct answer, Stark kissed him tenderly and pushed inside of him. It felt like all air was being pressed out of Loki’s lungs and he wanted… it was disgusting, useless and beneath him. Not worth it.

Stark shifted slightly, getting deeper into him and Loki heard the soft groan escaping his lips and it made him sick. Not the most inventive way, but Loki rammed his nails into Stark’s back, making him feel the pain. It didn’t seem to bother him though, all Stark did was kissing him and he started to move. So different from the other times before, Stark was going slow but deep, taking his time. All his movements were fluid and gentle, he was trying to make love to Loki and all he did was making him hate him more.

These eyes that looked at him, full of lust and also love and he simply wouldn’t stop. Loki moaned because of a perfectly placed thrust and his whole body bucked into Stark’s movements. Stark stared at him, his face illuminated by soft blue light and Loki’s fingers twitched. Wasn’t Stark trying to give him his heart? Why not just taking it? Ripping it out, showing him his face and then holding him down while he was dying in agony. Naked and in bed with a person he loathed.

Stark rolled his hips, swallowing Loki’s gasp in a kiss. A hand grabbed Loki’s, laced their fingers together, pressing it against the mattress. Pulling slightly back Stark looked at him, open and vulnerable. “Fuck… you’re so… beautiful…”

Loki’s magic was reaching for the arc reactor, being instantly pushed back, nullified. The blue light was dancing in front of him and all Loki wanted to do was to end it. To hold him close and feel life slipping out of him. Drawing his last painful death.
Raising his free hand Loki let himself be sucked in by the blue light and gave into it. The rhythm of Stark’s thrusts faltered when Loki put his hand directly on the arc reactor. So much power, so much life, coming to an end. Loki curled his fingers, ready to pull when the wolf inside of him starting howling and a familiar voice resounded far away in the distance. Don’t please. A jerk went through Loki’s entire arm and his hand quickly slid up Stark’s chest to rest on his shoulders.

“Tony…” Thomas’ whisper was barely audible when he reached up, pulling him into an intense kiss.

Loki tried to understand, catch his breath, anything, but Stark held on to him, thrusting harder into him, whispering soft words. Pleasure was highlighting and dimming Loki’s senses at the same time, he thought about the veil, about the gardens of Vanaheim and bit his own tongue when he came without Stark even touching him.

His vision was clouded, his perception slowed down, yet Loki watched the man on top of him falling apart. Stark practically whimpered when he buried himself deep and Loki felt the warmth spreading, Stark coming inside of him.

Sometimes, when Loki was waking up from a dream, he felt like this. Still caught between illusion and reality, not able to distinguish between the two. Stark collapsed on to top of him and kept lying there, still inside of him. Pressing soft kisses to Loki’s neck Stark uttered a happy sigh. “Fuck being tough and cool… I’m in love with you…”

It couldn’t be. It hadn’t been long enough and Loki had been switching. It wasn’t possible, Loki had always been in control. The voice had been so far away, so Loki could be wrong. Maybe it had been Stark and the arc reaction had been messing with his magic…

“Tommy?”

Blinking Loki became aware of Stark looking at him, frowning softly. He had to react, he had to say something… “Are you okay? Too soon? I freaked you out, didn’t I?”

“No, you…”

“Fuck, I didn’t hurt you, right?”

Shut your damned mouth, mortal! Loki was trying to think, to grasp what was happening to him. Getting a grip Loki forced himself to smile. “Stop babbling, Stark… I’m perfectly fine… just… overwhelmed.”

After brushing his lips over Loki’s Stark pulled out, causing Loki to hiss. “Shit, sorry…”

“It’s okay…” Letting himself be pulled into Stark’s arms Loki closed his eyes for a second. He needed to calm down, his heart was still hammering against his chest. “This was… amazing… I’ve known from the first time that you’re an amazing lay, but… we should absolutely do that again. Right now.”

Faking a laugh Loki stroked with the back of his head over Stark’s cheek. “I should totally get cleaned up.” Kissing him quickly Loki untangled himself from Stark and rushed into the bathroom. Thomas’ face stared back at him from the mirror and Loki quickly closed his eyes. Letting his magic run all over his body Loki couldn’t find anything and he didn’t dare to let it flow freely to look inside. The mage would find him if he did. If there was something, anything, then it had to be small, tiny and Loki wouldn’t let it interfere with his plans. It would still be a good idea to let Thomas leave for England as soon as possible. Just in case, having him gone for some days would
be a relief and give Loki space to breathe. In the end Thomas was only a glamour, an illusion and
Loki was the master of illusions. Nothing else was of importance.

Being done with getting cleaned up Loki returned to the bedroom, Stark instantly pulling him back
under the covers. “Hey… are you sure that everything’s alright?” A bit of worry in Stark’s voice,
not hidden at all and Loki didn’t want to have this conversation. “Sure.”

“It’s just… I know I brought up a lot of stuff today and I’m normally not like that… If I’m scaring
you off, please say it, I’ll gladly hit the breaks. I’m kinda staring myself off…” This babbling was
driving Loki crazy.

He couldn’t push him away though. Stark had already admitted being in love with Thomas, so Loki
had to make him feel good about this. “It’s okay… I’m not used to this, alright? You aren’t either.
We don’t have to spell everything out. We’ll just go from here and… I think this might actually
work out.” Not caring to look at Stark’s face Loki put an arm over his chest and rested his head
against Stark’s shoulder. “I’m sorry… for touching it… I won’t do it again…”

“Okay… okay… Good night…”

Stark held him tight, his hold on him almost protective and Loki had never felt so exposed or in
trouble during his time on Midgard. His mind was racing without finding an answer, making him
so dizzy that Loki welcomed sleep gratefully.

***

“My lord, may a humble servant dare to ask a question?”

“Feel free to do so.”

“The king ordered me to bring a message to the Asgardian prince, but I cannot find him and I have
already been taking so long…”

“I see, do not worry. It is late morning. He is an early riser and first thing he does is going for a
ride. He likes watching the sun rising above the trees of the forest. By now he has to be back and
you will most likely find him in one of the libraries.”

“One of the libraries? The whole time the prince has been here he has never seemed to be keen on
books…”

“What? He is constantly… Oh, you are talking about Thor.”

“Of course I am. I am sorry, I should have made that clear, my lord.”

“No harm done. Prince Thor has gone hunting with some of the guards. They will be back soon.”

“Thank you, my lord. I will wait then.”

“You are welcome. Will you excuse me, I have to go looking for a prince myself.”

“Of course, my lord. May I say though… He is not in one of the libraries.”

“Excuse me… what?”

“Prince Loki of Asgard is busy practising his shapeshifting skills and he is very content with his
progress.”
Fading away into nothingness and there was only the deep. Only darkness, no matter how wide
Loki opened his eyes, there was nothing to see. He was stumbling, losing his balance, there was no
ground, just the deep and it continued endlessly. Loki needed to see, endless darkness wasn’t
possible. It wasn’t.

Holding out his hands Loki wanted to summon fire, create light to help him see, but there was
nothing he could do. There was nothing warm about him. Connecting with his magic Loki
screamed, his skin was being eaten away by frostbite. The coldness was coming from inside of
him. Where his blood was supposed to be there was only ice. No wolf howling, no voices calling.
No emerald eyes. Only ice.

Loki’s couldn’t hear his own screams, his vocal codes were frozen.

***

“Tommy! Hey, it’s okay!”

Loki gasped and immediately squeezed his eyes shut, being blinded by the light. He wasn’t falling.
He was lying on a soft surface. Cushions, blankets. Another person, was holding him. Taking a
deep breath Loki reached for his magic and his heart did a leap when it responded. Vividly,
passionate and burning with fire.

Still Midgard. Stark was talking to him. Thinking he was his mortal boyfriend Thomas. Loki had
been asleep, he had been dreaming. An illusion.

Opening his eyes Loki released a long breath. “Did I wake you up?”

A frown was prominent on Stark’s face and Loki had to make that worry disappear. He was
supposed to leave him alone soon. People who were worried called more often and they were
likely to not want to leave their loved ones alone. “You were trashing around… bad dream?”

“Yes… god, this is embarrassing.”

“What?”

Shrugging Loki ran a hand through his hair. “I’m a grown man and I wake up my boyfriend,
because I’m having a nightmare. That’s… embarrassing.”

This was the first step and Stark already seemed a bit relieved. “So what? Nightmares can be a
bitch. What was it about?”

Loki suppressed a shudder. “Nothing concrete. Mostly colours, noises… Just a scary
environment… Weird. I guess… I got scared. Don’t comment on it, I feel stupid enough.”

“Bullshit. That happens…” Stark pressed a soft kiss on his mouth and pulled him close. “It’s not
because of me, isn’t it?”

Good lord, this mortal was really trying to make the whole world turn around him. “No… don’t be
silly. I was dreaming… that happens and has nothing to do with you. Come here, take my mind of
it.” Loki was being serious, right now he was pretty much okay with everything to distract him
from the stupid dream that didn’t mean anything. Moreover it would help to distract Stark too.
“That’s something I can do…” Their lips melted together in a soft kiss and Stark’s hand was running through Thomas’ short hair, almost reassuringly. Whatever he thought was necessary. Gentle touches were bestowed all over his body and Loki sighed silently. First thing in the morning Loki would call the Captain. He needed William and he definitely needed a break from Thomas. He had his up-sides though, like this hot mouth wrapped around his cock.

***

“Hey, Bruce! You realised that you’re allowed to leave the lab? Good for you!” Stark was munching on his waffles, talking with his mouth full and Loki screwed his face up in disgust. “Bloody hell, act like a decent human being and close your mouth.” Turning to Banner Loki smiled softly. “Good morning. You want some breakfast? We have way too much for only two persons.”

Banner, as usual, smiled shyly and joined them at the table. “No, thank you. A coffee will do. You don’t mind that I join you?”

“How could he talk so much?

“You guys have anything planed for today?”

Loki took a bite from his bread and shook his head. “Unfortunately I’m not a billionaire who can sit around all day. I have some work to do.”

“Quit your job. I’ll buy your publisher and make you the boss. No, I’ll be the boss and you’ll keep the job. I’ll change your duties. All you’ll have to do is make me happy. “

Shaking his head Loki mumbled a “Shut up, Stark” before leaning over and kissing him. “I actually like going to work. Or working at home. I like what I’m doing. That’s why I’m leaving now. I’ll be back around six. You want to go out for dinner? I’m in the mood for Italian.”

Stark nodded in agreement. “Sure, sounds good. Just one thing before you go…” Just like that Stark grabbed him at the collar of his shirt and pulled him into a messy kiss.

“Tony, I know this is your tower and you can do whatever you want, but there are other people present. Me.”

Laughing Loki shoved Stark gently away and rolled his eyes. “Bye. Don’t blow up the tower while I’m gone. Goodbye, Bruce. Have a nice day both of you.”

In the elevator the urge to scratch himself was almost overwhelming. Thomas’ skin was itching, but Loki would shed it in a few minutes. Out on the street Loki walked for a few blocks before disappearing in an alley. Teleporting home Loki dropped the glamour and let his hands run over his face, tracing his sharp nose. Better.

Sitting down on his couch Loki grabbed his cellphone and called the Captain. What a lovely change from Stark. “Will, hello. How are you doing?”

Loki had no idea, he was clueless. “Good, thank you. I’m calling, because I’m nosy. My life is
boring. How are things going with Sharon?” You figured out yet that she’s a fake or do I have to do that for you? I will anyway.

“Come on, you know it isn’t like that…” He was ashamed, at least a bit. How childish.

“Okay, so tell me what it is like. I’m not going to talk about anything else until you do. That’s finally something normal happening. Not the world ending.”

Rogers laughed lightly. “I don’t know what to tell you. We had coffee the other day and…”

“Good lord, you really need to step up your game. Forget about coffee. It’s all about dinner. Invite her over, it’s easier to talk over dinner than over coffee. You can go out, you can stay at home. Whatever. Lots of possibilities.”

“You make it sound like I desperately need a girlfriend.”

“I do? Not my intention, because I don’t think you need one. But you said you met a girl that you think is nice and therefore you should meet up and find out if she’s really nice.” Good, that was a good first step.

The Captain seemed amused, none the wiser. “If you say so, I’m trying to see the whole thing pretty relaxed. I don’t know her that well anyway and it’s not like I have time for…”

“Yeah, yeah. Stop that. I’m starting to feel like a broken record. You have time for everything you want to do. Nothing’s stopping you. Except from me maybe. Listen, there is something I wanted to talk to you about.”

“I’m all ears.”

Time to put on a show. “I was thinking about getting out of D.C for a few days, because I’m seriously bored to death. Moreover I’m really interested in your girl. How about you I come around for a visit?”

Of course there was a pause and the Captain most probably had trouble believing him. “You want to come to New York? With everything that’s going on here?”

“Hey, I’m not coming to an Avengers party, don’t worry. You are in New York. Millions of other people are in New York and that city is crazy anyway. You don’t tell all the other people in New York to leave the city, do you?” Having a point Loki waited for Rogers to find some excuse.

“Well… it’s a big city. You can’t just evacuate it without an impending reason…”

Letting out a soft sigh Loki smiled, knowing it would be audible in his voice. “Steve, do you really think that I’m instantly doomed if I ever set another foot into New York? I just wanna stand on top of the Empire State Building, eat some local food and meet up with my best friend. If you tell me that I shouldn’t do that… that pretty much would mean that New York is a fatal death trap and everybody there is doomed to die.”

“It’s not like that. You got hurt the last time I invited you…” Guilt, nothing but guilt and Loki wanted to laugh in his face.

“I didn’t even need stitches, it wasn’t that bad. Like I said, I’m not going to an Avengers party. Ever again. How about this… I come to the city and we’ll hang out for an evening and if the world doesn’t end, we could do it a second time. Seriously, I just want to get out of here for a bit and we haven’t seen each other in weeks. How about that?”
“It would be nice to see you again…”

There, done. Have a nice trip to England, Thomas.
Hello everybody,

Loki makes Thor pay and it isn’t pretty

_________________________________________________

No matter how many deaths that I die I will never forget
No matter how many lies that I live I will never regret
There is a fire inside that has started a riot about to explode into flames

Hurricane ~~ 30 seconds to mars ~~

_________________________________________________

“Why won’t you talk to me? I can’t help you if I don’t know what happened. Listen, I don’t know
about Asgard, but this is what people in a relationship do. They talk. You help me all the time, you
saved my life a few times and now I want to be there for you. I was there when it happened,
remember? I saw how Loki died and…”

“Don’t.”

“Hear me out. I was there and I know how much that hurt you. I’m sorry that…”

“No, you are not.”

“What?”

“Nobody is sorry that he died. Nobody here knew him. They all saw a shell, what he had turned
into…”

“Thor, believe me, I am sorry that you lost your brother, I really am. You are suffering and that’s
also hurting me.”

“So it is only my pain you feel sorry for. Of course… you did not know him. You hated him for
what he did and I can understand that, although it is wrong.”

“Then explain it to me. What happened?”

“He fell and I did not search for him.”

“He fell? What do you mean he fell? How…”

“I do not wish to talk about this.”

“But Thor…”
Loki let the conversation play over and over again in his mind. It had turned out beautifully and almost better than Loki had imagined. For a moment he had actually feared that Thor would leave London instantly, but luckily that wasn’t the case. Jane Foster kept trying to make him talk, but in vain and the both finally remained silent. Something that wasn’t unusual in a relationship. Not that Loki cared much, he needed another night, not more. Another dream and Thor would take care of the rest. He had told Jane Foster that it had been his fault. After a little bit of Loki’s help he would go into way more detail. It would be such a horrible story. Who would be able to trust a man who betrayed his own family? And who was now losing his mind over it, because the guilt was lying too heavy on his shoulders.

During the last three hours Loki had made himself comfortable on the couch, thinking about his plan, about William and when would be the best moment for Stark to use the little robot he had built. It could only be helpful if the Captain wasn’t in a good mood, so after Loki had got rid of the girl.

Nighttime had fallen and it had been over an hour since Thor and Jane Foster had disappeared in the bedroom. Today he’d go a step further, so Loki had to be careful. He couldn’t leave the tiniest trace of his magic, just in case Thor would seek help from Asgard. The stone was prepared and since Thor was a fool he had brought it with him. It was always nice to have something you could count on.

While slipping into the room Loki noticed that they were now lying even further apart. Good and no matter how bad Thor felt, he was still able to instantly feel asleep. Couldn’t have that. Getting into his usual position Loki closed his eyes, concentrating. The stone was placed on the nightstand and Loki felt the enchantment pulsing inside of it, ready to serve Loki’s will. To create an image, not an ordinary illusion for everyone like Thomas or Lori. No, something only for Thor and nobody else would be able to see it. Especially not Jane Foster.

Taking a deep breath Loki thought of what Thor was about to see and let his voice do the rest. “No! Stop it, please! I can’t! Thor! Please!”

More wasn’t necessary for Thor’s eyes to fly open. Loki only watched him and smiled. Such a quick reaction was just another proof that Loki had him where he wanted him. Just a little step further. Opening his hand Loki made a little gesture and activated the stone. He had spent an entire day sketching his illusion and Loki had no doubt about its perfection. Too sad that Thor was the only person to see it. Loki was able to create images in other people’s minds, but it demanded a lot of effort, concentration and magic. He didn’t dare to do that here and he didn’t need to. The stone was filled with everything that was necessary.

All Loki saw was Thor, but his so called brother was staring into a dark corner of the room, his face contorted by disbelief and shock. A detailed, well thought out illusion was more than enough to drive somebody to insanity. An illusion clad in a memory was a work of art and Loki almost envied Thor for seeing the beauty of it.

Not that Thor looked like he was enjoying it. Slowly turning his head, taking in his surroundings. Shock and maybe a hint of panic when he recognized the depressing, grey wasteland around him as Svartalfheim. A smirk appeared on Loki’s face, highlighting his grim satisfaction when Thor’s expression made it clear that he had spotted him. How odd pure horror looked on that handsome face of a prince who had never had a single reason to feel bad about anything. Loki decided that he loved it.

“Loki…”

Quiet, low, like he wasn’t sure yet if he could believe it. Perfect.
This time he didn’t see him dying. Now Thor would be confronted with the consequences of his actions and he would have right in front of him the proof that time didn’t heal all wounds. Quite the opposite. The white, bale skin Thor probably remembered, when he even bothered to think about it, was gone. It had been replaced by a sickish, repulsing grey, covered with black stains. Yellow, broken, bloody fingernails on top of fingers that were nothing else but bones covered with a gauzy layer of something that used to be skin. It looked brittle, touching it would cause it to fall apart and reveal the cold bone beneath it.

The shining armour was unrecognizable, covered in dirt and stains of a strange colour that could only be dried blood. There were cuts and tears everywhere, nothing left of the dignity and glamour it was supposed to symbolize. Loki could only guess, but the dread in Thor’s eyes made him believe that he was looking at the gaping hole in Loki’s chest. No more blood, just rotting flesh and blank, white bone. Almost shining.

“No…”

The left side of Loki’s face was black, the remaining skin on his cheek was withering. His lips had turned grey with a shade of blue. Where his nose had been was now only a black hole in the middle of decomposing flesh.

Thor was staring at a rotting corpse that wasn’t a person anymore. Except for when he opened his eyes.

“Loki!”

Even the green of summer leaves had turned into rust, lifeless and cold.

Letting the monologue play out in his head Loki watched Thor, biting his lips to keep his excitement quiet, because this was the moment he had been longing for. After centuries of undeserved adoration, luck and looking the other way Thor finally got what he deserved. Consequences. Suffering. Pain.

The voice leaving these dead lips barely resembled Loki’s. It sounded like metal pieces rubbing against each other. “I died for you, Thor.”

“No, Loki… this cannot…” Not able to utter an entire phrase the great Thor seemed to be frozen in shock and fear. Loki held his breath to not miss a single moment.

“I could have handed you over to the dark elves. I could have walked away and live and be free. I did not do it. I stayed and I died for you. I saved your mortal’s life, I almost died for her and then you let me die. You abandoned me again.”

Thor was feverishly shaking his head, finally finding his voice and Jane Foster stirred next to him. “No, I didn’t. Loki, I would never…”

“You let me fall. I fell into darkness and you did not look for me. You did not even think about it. You let me die and when I came back you let me die a second time. I had my body slit opened by a blade that burned my flesh and you let my lie in the dirt. You did not even cover my corpse or brought it to safety from the storm. Even the second time you did not mourn, you went to Midgard with your mortal. When Odin sent them to get what was left of my body, you did not come. You abandoned me when I had been screaming for help in the darkness and you abandoned me when I was dying for you.”

“No, I didn’t mean to! I couldn’t… Please, Loki, I would have never…”
Loki made a gesture, making sure that the illusion would go on, while tearing his eyes off Thor to see Jane Foster sitting up, still sleepy and confused.

Dead eyes were looking straight at Thor, stating a single reproach. “You killed me, Thor and when once was not enough, you did it a second time.”

Thor was screaming, “No! Brother, please, I didn’t know! I love you! I did not know! I would have come for you! I would have never let you alone in the darkness! Loki, please!”

“Thor, what is wrong?!” Jane Foster grabbed his shoulder, her face not quite as horror stricken as his and Loki felt warm, cosy as if he was taking a long bath. Lazily weaving his fingers Loki pulled the power from the stone and let the illusion collapse, exactly at the second Jane Foster touched Thor.

Like waking up from a dream, Thor flinched, startled and moved away from her. “What…?”

“It’s okay…” She raised her hands as if trying to show him that he meant no harm. “What happened? Were you having a dream?”

“No, I…” Thor did a look around, breathing hard as if had been fighting a foe out of flesh and blood and not just his bad conscience. His eyes also landed on Loki for a moment, but he couldn’t see him. Because Loki wasn’t even here, he had been left behind in the Dark World by the man who claimed to be his brother. “I did not know. I did not know!”

He was shouting at her and she was scared. Finally. “Thor…”

“I would have… I saw him fall… he fell… I did not know…. He let go and I thought… he was gone.”

Letting go. Falling. Being tossed into a black abyss. These were just words, easy to mix up and Loki would whisper the right ones in Thor’s ear. For now it was enough and Loki left with a silent tune on his lips. He starting humming as soon as he had left the apartment and was tempted to start singing when he reached the tower.

“What put you in such a good mood, gorgeous?” Stark greeted him with a kiss and put a glass of wine in his hand. How thoughtful, Loki loved to celebrate with wine. He hadn’t been looking forward to play Thomas today, but since he had been so successful, he could also enjoy himself. “I had a very pleasant day…”

That was all Loki said before leaning in and kissing Stark playfully. The other one seemed a bit surprised, then quickly loosely circling his arms around Loki’s waist. “You did? Anything I can do to make your day even… better?” The last word was punctuated by a kiss on Loki’s neck.

“Yes, indeed… you could give me long footrub while I’m enjoying this delicious glass of wine.”

“Consider it done.”

So thirty seconds later Loki was lying on the couch, his feet propped up in Stark’s lap, sipping on his wine. “So… what made your day so pleasant?”

Driving an idiot to insanity. “The usual. I didn’t have a single red light the whole day, I made great progress on my script and I heard some very concrete arguments that I am going to get a raise… I have no complaints whatsoever.”

“Cool. Not surprising though, you’re awesome, you should own the place. I’ve got a question
that’s completely related to this conversation – any chance that this footrub is turning you on?”

“You are a horny bastard.”

Stark smirked and shrugged casually. “Everybody has to have a vice.”

“Your vice is drinking… and being totally full of yourself. For the rest… I’m in a good mood and going to pretend that you’re only such a horny bastard because of me.” Leaning back Loki took a sip from his wine and enjoyed how Stark was massaging his foot.

“God, you really are into me…” Grinning Stark pressed his thumbs against Loki’s heel and this felt really good. “You’ve got some vices too. You want me to name them?”

Loki yawned and shook his head. “No, I don’t.”

“Okay, first of all you always think you’re right and you never change your opinion on anything, because you think you’re always right.”

“I changed my opinion about dating you.”

“Yeah, I’m the exception from the rule. Makes me awesome. Listen, if you’re in such a good mood, you wanna go out and have a couple of drinks?”

“I’ve got a glass of wine in my hand.”

Stark waved him off. “But if I go out we could use my brand new Jaguar.”

Oh right, Midgardian men were obsessed with the vehicles they used for transportation. Loki had no idea why and he didn’t care. “What do you need a Jaguar for? Your garage is full of cars that cost more than most people make in their entire life.”

“It’s a really cool car!”

Laughing softly Loki shrugged. “Fine. Let’s go, but I’m driving.”

God, you’re so cute. You really think I would let you behind the wheel.”

To his surprise Loki found out that driving around in such a fast car was quite entertaining, especially when Stark was ignoring all existing speeding limits. Instead of going for a drink they drove out of the city, Loki only half listening to Stark who was raving about the car. “Yeah, the car is great. I got it. Can I drive now?”

“Oh, I gotta have something in return.”

“God, I’m going to sleep with you tonight anyway, no need to be pushy about it.”

That was enough for them to switch and Loki could finally use these skills he had developed. Driving a car was incredibly simple, almost primitive, but he had to admit that it could be fun. At the same time Loki missed riding a horse, a living, breathing animal was something different than this metal machine. For a moment Loki worried that Stark might notice that he barely had any practice using such a vehicle, but it was a simple process and Loki was a natural.

“So what’s the verdict? It is perfect or just perfectly awesome?” Stark grinned widely while Loki slowed the car down while getting closer to a curve. “It’s nice and quite fast, but the seats are uncomfortable.”
“You gotta be kidding me… This is Italian leather. It doesn’t get any better. Your pampered British ass doesn’t know what’s good.”

“Ah, that’s why I’m dating you?”

Stark’s grin faded away and he let out a dry laugh. “Very funny. Now come on, you like it.”

Now Loki shrugged and let his grin turn into a smile. “Yeah, it’s cool. I like it, but I would prefer a car with a little bit more space.”

“Hmm… I think there is more than enough space… I’ll prove it to you.” Stark had a playful tone in his voice, almost as if he was singing. Loki had no idea what the other one had in mind, but did as he was told, noticing that Stark was unbuckling his seat belt. “So what are you…”

Not giving Loki the chance to finish the phrase Stark leaned over and pressed his mouth to Loki’s. This was a very bad way to prove to him that this car was spacious, making out would be pretty uncomfortable. Still Loki went with it, thinking about the fact that he would tell Stark tonight that he was going to leave for England in two days. Stark put his hand on Loki’s thigh and he couldn’t even really turn towards him because of the steering wheel. “When was the last time you did it in a car?”

An easy one, never. “Why should I have sex in a car? I can’t image something more uncomfortable.”

His refusal didn’t make it to impress Stark. “Because it’s totally hot… Okay, it would be better if there was a backseat, then I would fuck you right here… Well, no backseat, but you’re so lucky that you have a very creative boyfriend…”

Stark kissed him again, playfully, but with a lot of passion. His teeth grazed over Loki’s lower lip, biting him softly and his hand ran up his Loki’s thigh. To keep his other hand occupied Stark unfastened Loki’s seatbelt and Loki didn’t want any of this. The thought of what happened the last time made his skin crawl. No, they couldn’t do this in here, but Loki wouldn’t get away with not sleeping with him before leaving for London. Well, better to just get it over with and Loki had to be attentive. What happened last time wasn’t going to repeat itself, not ever.

Shifting in his seat Loki put an arm around Stark’s neck, moving his head into the kiss, opening up beneath him. Stark crawled closer, kissing him deeper, his fingers digging into Loki’s thigh.

The whole setting was atrocious and Loki thought about pushing him back and to suck him off to just get over with it. No, there had to be kisses, gentle touches and Stark was breathing against his skin. When fingers were finally reaching for the fly of his jeans Loki was almost sighing in relief, his thoughts already being three days in the future.

When they were done Loki brushed a hand through his hair, breathing hard and only reluctantly returned Stark’s kiss. “We should get going… we’ve been standing here for quite a while… someone might notice.”

“When did you become so shy?” Stark smirked at him and Loki thought about grabbing his head and smashing it against the windshield. “There is a difference between being shy and being an exhibitionist.”

Letting out another laugh Stark pressed a little peck on his cheek. “Then start driving.”

Loki did just that, telling himself that he was going to take a break from this soon and when he got back it was about time to let Stark and Rogers devour each other. And he would let them know that
the god on their side wasn’t the person they thought he was. No more waiting, Loki wanted it to finally happen. To be done with them.

“I booked a flight to London today. I’ll be leaving the day after tomorrow and stay for five days. You wanna pick me up from the airport when I get back?” Loki smiled sweetly at him and Stark blinked in surprise. “Already? Wow, alright. Sure. Just give me the exact dates and I’ll be there.”

Perfect, this way there would be no questions if Thomas really had been in England or not. Now all he needed to do was take some photographs and make sure that the bracelet would stay in London all the time.

“Look, I was thinking about…” Stark was absently running his fingers over Loki’s arm. “… you’re going on a trip the day after tomorrow and you have your job and things like that have to be planed, but my life as a billionaire is so fucking hard and strenuous that I need to go on a nice vacation with my hot boyfriend. What do you say?”

A horrible idea that would be keeping Loki from doing his work, but in the end it wasn’t a problem, because they wouldn’t be together long enough anymore to go on vacation. Therefore it was easy to smile and to nod. “Sure, that’d be great… if I get a say in where we go to and there better be a beach and lots of sun. That’s all I care about…”

“You’re reading my mind. The only reason I propose this is having sex on the beach.”

Inwardly Loki rolled his eyes and didn’t reply. 45 minutes later they were back at the tower and because it was already past midnight both of them headed to the bedroom. Loki pretended being especially tried, rolling to his side and instantly closing his eyes. Actually he was thinking about what might be happening in London right now. In which state Thor might be and how Jane Foster tried to cope with it. Now she was probably regretting not having asked the right questions. Her own fault, ignoring such an important part of someone’s life had to have consequences. Sadly enough Loki wouldn’t be able to be present all the time to watch how Jane Foster was witnessing Thor’s descent into madness. He would be there though when Thor was going to reveal to the Avengers what he had done or what he had thought he had done. Jane Foster would leave him, the Avengers would turn against him, but by this time they would already be tearing each other apart. Loki was curious who would walk away from it. Whoever that might be, Loki would take care of them personally and…

“You’re quite cute when you’re sleepy.” An arm was slid around his waist and he felt Stark’s breath against the back of his neck. “You just want to piss me off to score some angry sex. I’m not so easy to fool. Go to sleep.”

He could hear the other’s soft laugh and hoped that would be it, but Stark’s ability to never stop talking hadn’t let him down yet. “Just for the record… I’m going to miss you when you’re in England. Five whole days without anybody telling me to shut up and rolling their eyes at my awesome ideas. I will be so lost…”

Stark’s voice turned into a yawn and Loki thanked the Norns that this was the last thing he said that night. Closing his eyes Loki thought of Thor and the desperate look on his face when Loki had showed him what he was responsible for. Loki was falling asleep with a smile on his lips.

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“Prince Loki, I have been hoping to find you here.”
“You found me. What now?”

“I am going to lament my suffering.”

“I do not think I am interested in hearing that.”

“But it is your fault, my prince.”

“How so?”

“Because my thoughts will not stop wandering to you. Every maiden that passes me in the halls, every servant, every child... I am constantly asking myself if the prince’s beautiful face could be hidden underneath that glamour. That’s all I’ve been thinking about the whole day. That beautiful face of yours.”

“I have a lot of beautiful faces.”

“I am talking about your face, my prince. Not about one of your illusions. Yours. These emerald eyes that none of your illusions can match.”

“I told you before that I will not succumb to flattery.”

“You told me that even a liar can appreciate honesty. I am honest now. I have never seen such beauty.”

When Loki opened his eyes he didn’t know what had woken up, but the first thing he felt was dark, heavy and bitter regret. Sitting inside of his chest and clawing at his insides. Shaking it off Loki blinked sleep away and sat up, Stark had rolled away from him during the night. The voice faded into the distance and Loki released a deep breath, instantly feeling better, lighter. It was then when he realised what had pulled him from his memory.

“Sir, Mr. Odinson has just returned to the tower.”
Hey everybody,

I shouldn't post this since I haven't finished chapter 50 yet, but I can't wait and you guys are waiting for shit to go down... There, here it is. Shit is going down

_________________________________________________

There's a whole lot of kisses
Waiting out there
And the world you've been missing
That don't play fair

Let me offer you comfort
And show you how much I care
There's a whole lot of lonely
Waiting out there

Lonely ~~ Bon Jovi ~~

__________________________________________________

“All I’m saying is that I think it’s weird. He came back a day ago and he doesn’t say anything, he doesn’t even show up when I’m inviting him for breakfast. That’s weird. Thor never says no to food.” Stark shoved a spoon full of cereal into his mouth and Banner uttered a soft sigh. “Okay, yes, it’s a little bit strange, but maybe he had a fight with Jane and now he’s sulking. I don’t know... he could be in a bad mood, that’s all.”

It was probably the first time ever that Loki enjoyed that the conversation revolved around Thor. He actually loved it. Stark was full of distrust, wondering what was going on with Thor and Loki was loving his pancakes. “Let the man spend time by himself if he wants to. Hell, even I sometimes don’t want to spend time with you. Thor is free to do what he wants.”

“Yeah, but if he likes staying at my tower so much, he could at least say hello.” Stark pulled a face and Banner looked at Loki, telling him with his eyes to just ignore the other one.

“Feel free to talk a little less about Thor. I’m leaving in an hour for the airport. You remember me?”

After cracking up a smile Stark blew him a kiss. “How could I ever forget? I have no idea how to survive five entire days without sex…”

“Tony, please. I’m trying to eat here.”
Raising an eyebrow Loki pretended to be offended. “How is this supposed to make me feel?”

Blushing lightly Banner shook his head. “Nothing against you, but I don’t want to think about Tony having sex with anyone.”

“Well, good for you, because I’m not going to have sex with anyone for about five days. The withdrawal symptoms are already kicking in.”

Turning his back to Stark Loki looked at Banner. “Let’s just ignore him. He’ll eventually feel stupid talking when nobody listens.”

“Oh, you’re underestimating me, darling.”

Banner sighed and Loki rolled his eyes. He was so looking forward to getting out of here. “You know… I could just stay in London if I feel like it.”

A kiss was pressed to his cheek. “Nah, you wouldn’t get anymore books and you wouldn’t be able to take that.”

Loki would have all the books he wanted before leaving this planet for good. “I love how our relationship is based on sex and on your money.”

“You guys are a freak show. Disturbing.” Banner smiled softly, shaking his head.

Laughing softly Loki shrugged and returned the smile. “We aim to please… Anyway I should get going. Traffic’s probably going to be hell.”

“I can still take you to the airport.” Stark had suggested that before, but Loki had declined, because that would only lose him time. He had a lot of stuff scheduled for today. “Nah, no need. I still gotta head home, get my bags and talk my neighbour. I’m counting on you to pick me when I get back. I’ll call you when I’m there. Try to not start the Third World War or get killed while I’m gone.” Putting one arm around Stark’s shoulders Loki kissed him and the other one instantly deepened it, pulling him closer.

Smirking Loki pushed him away. “Get a grip.”

Raising both hands Stark laughed. “Come on. I’m trying to give a proper goodbye.”

“Not in front of an audience. Sorry, Bruce.”

Again Banner only smiled. “No, thank you. I don’t need to see any of that. I hope you have a nice trip.”

“Thank you. Don’t let Stark annoy you too much while I’m gone.”

Said person was grabbing Loki’s hand and pulled him out of the kitchen, right to the elevator. “There, alone, proper goodbye. Gotta make sure that you’re going to miss me.” So he was kissed a second time, a little bit roughly and thoroughly. Loki let him, thinking about getting away from this for almost a week.

“Okay, that was indeed a nice goodbye. Like I said, take care.”

“Yeah, you do too. Call me when you got there.”

“I will. Bye…”
Smiling softly at Loki Stark said goodbye and Loki finally got into the elevator. When the door closed he held in a sigh of relief, because Jarvis’ eyes never missed anything. Leaving the tower Loki hummed a happy tune and shed Thomas’ skin the second he was out of sight. Finally. Taking of the bracelet, sent it into another layer of this reality and on its way. Just in case if Stark wanted to check on Thomas, being a complete bastard and invade his privacy.

Done. Loki could now take a deep breath and take care of the Captain’s little shadow. Before that he would prepare something else though. The little mage wasn’t the only one who could set up traps.

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Spreading his wings Loki continued to draw circles over the castle. There were no changes visible, but Loki could feel them. The whole essence had changed, Loki could feel it in the air, in the soil, it was everywhere. He couldn’t quite tell what it was, but the knowledge that the mage had his blood was weighing him down, like a brick on his shoulders. Loki first thought had naturally been that it served the purpose to hurt him, but maybe it was the opposite.

Protection.

That would be a smart move. The mage wasn’t completely stupid, he knew about Loki’s power and he had probably figured out that Loki knew exactly where he was hiding. Therefore he had stolen Loki’s blood to protect himself. Only one way to find out. Loki wouldn’t show himself or use another human form. He had to be careful, no more surprises. His arrogance wouldn’t get the better of him. All he needed to do was finding a way inside. When the time had come he would have to be able to enter this castle quickly, kill him and be gone again. Landing on the branch of a small tree Loki let his eyes wander across the castle, from the big tower to the gate. Complete silence. If the castle wasn’t in such a good state one might think it was abandoned.

Turning into a fox Loki elegantly jumped of the tree and slowly approached the castle. He remembered exactly where the magical barrier had been. Loki looked at it, the eyes of a fox seeing nothing special, but he could feel the magic lingering in the atmosphere. Something was different than before, Loki took a deep breath. The easiest way to analyze it would be touching it. Not the safest way though, but Loki didn’t want to risk attracting attention by using magic himself. Just a little step forward, his paw was touching the force field and Loki felt himself being pushed back.

Letting out a whine Loki backed off, his instincts wanted him to lick the wound, to cool the skin, but this was superficial. Whatever the little mage had added to the barrier, it was especially designed to keep him out. Loki’s blood must have been worked into it somehow. Just like he had expected. Now it would be a lot harder to break, but Loki would be able to do it. Breaking the barrier and a weapon, Loki didn’t need anything else. He just needed to be ready any second. No way he was going to get fooled again like the first time. Nothing like that was going to happen again.

Taking another glance of the castle Loki turned around and let his legs carry him away. The Captain would be eager to see him and the little mage could have his illusion of safety a little longer.

***

“Hey! There you are.” Rogers’ face was all smiles when he saw Loki and there was this awkward moment when he first offered his hand, but the same second he decided against it and pulled him into a hug. “So good to see you.”
“Steve! How are you doing?” Loki wrapped his arms around him, realising that this was the first time they touched this way. Pure strength, that was it. There was nothing soft about him, hard muscles, almost like stone. Beneath it though there was only a little boy with naïve, feeble beliefs, only too easy to be crushed.

“I’m doing great, thank you. Even better now that I see you.” Pulling back Rogers looked him up and down, as if to make sure it was really him.

“That’s good. Come on, let’s get going.”

As far as Rogers knew William had arrived in New York earlier this morning, they had agreed to meet up during the afternoon to check out Times Square, because William had never been there before. Playing tourist was entertaining.

“How was your flight?”

The teleportation had been quick and utterly boring. “Okay, I’m not too keen on flying. But it’s exciting to be here. Now tell me, what’s been going on? I know we talk on the phone all the time, but we haven’t seen each other in weeks. Shoot.”

“I told you pretty much all there is on the phone. I found a great Italian place where we can have dinner tonight.”

How sweet, the Captain had been planning ahead. “Cool, sounds great. You took the whole day off for me?”

“As long as no crazy super villain tries to take over the world or the city… I have plenty of time.”

Perfect.

It was quite easy to fall back into a routine with Rogers. They were talking, making jokes, wandering through the streets and Loki was extremely content with the Captain’s good mood. If it was indeed due to him. If it was because of that woman… Well, Loki would take care of her tomorrow anyway. There was honest joy in the Captain’s eyes to see him and that was more than enough. It was such a nice change to what Loki was usually doing by now. The whole afternoon Loki did nothing else, but having fun with the Captain, reminding him of what a good friend he was… and Loki was a great friend.

“What are you going to do tomorrow?” When they were sitting in said restaurant Rogers was still smiling and Loki knew that the next day would crush him, it was downright perfect. Time to bring up Stark.

“Typical sightseeing. I wanna go up the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty. The usual. Will you have some time for me?” Loki played William with ease. A lot more smiles than with Thomas, sweeter, but with a rough edge.

Rogers’ cheeks became slightly red and Loki knew only too well what that meant. “Yeah, uhm… would you like to come over tomorrow evening? I’m going to cook, if you’re okay with that.”

Oh, Captain, that would be so wonderful. “If you let me help you this time. Yeah, I’d love to. Is Sharon going to come too?”

“Ohm…”

Be a man, for God’s sake. It was just a woman. Loki would take a look at her and discard of her.
“Come on, Steve, I want to see her. You think I would come to New York to only see you?” Loki smirked playfully at the Captain, even added a little wink and it helped to put him at ease a little bit. “It’s not like she’s my girlfriend or anything…”

“I know that, but you like her and I’m curious. It’s just dinner among friends. She’s your neighbour, right? Invite her over, it’s gonna be fun.” A soft smile, encouraging and the shade of red on the Captain’s cheek got a little bit darker. How pathetic. “Okay, I’ll ask her if she’s got time.”

Of course she would have time and it would be the last time they would see each other. “Great, I’m looking forward to it… Anyway… any news on the end of the world channel? I guess nothing or I wouldn’t be here.”

Now the Captain’s face fell a little bit, but he didn’t hesitate to answer the question. “No, nothing which is good news… I hope. It’s hard to believe that someone would just stop after such an attack. Two attacks. Until now everything’s been really calm and I hope it stays that way.”

It won’t, dear Captain. It won’t, but it’s nice too see how desperately you’re holding on to your little illusion. “I’m sure everybody does. It’s good to have people like you around, Captain America, but we’re secretly all hoping that we don’t need you.”

And there it was, the glimmer in these baby blue eyes. Little remains of innocence, of a man who shouldn’t even exist anymore in this time and age. “Yeah, I’m also hoping that.”

The waitress brought them their pasta and there was a short moment of silence, Loki let it linger before getting to the point. Tomorrow Sharon would be gone and Rogers would realise that William was his anchor and only wanted the best for him. Then he would whisper in his ear about this reckless, dangerous madman Tony Stark who had built a robot based on the technology of their enemy. Captain America couldn’t let something like that happen, right?

“Steve…” A little hesitation, making him believe he was feeling uncomfortable. “What about the other thing you were talking about… Stark’s assumption that… somebody in your own ranks is going after you? Any news on that? I still believe that man is crazy, but… can’t help but wondering about such a thing once it’s mentioned.”

Loki’s mouth twitched when he saw Rogers flinching. Soft spot. Good. “I don’t think it was a good idea telling you this. I really don’t want you to worry about nothing.”

“So there is nothing to worry about? Because that would be awesome.”

“Nothing happened, nothing suspicious, nothing weird. I have no reason whatsoever to worry.”

Loki almost felt sorry for him. Being ignorant could be a blessing, but in the Captain’s case it was a curse, because it would kill him. Hopefully he would get some blood on his hands before being torn apart himself.

Their dinner turned out to be quite long, the Captain enjoyed his company so evidently and Loki had almost forgotten how well they got along. Again Loki was impressed with his own personas. Rogers even accompanied him to his hotel. Before saying goodbye Rogers hugged him again and Loki’s magic started to move Loki’s fingers. They were calling for his dagger, a weapon made of pure magic. One quick move and he could plant it right into the back of the Captain’s neck. It didn’t matter if he was made of stone, at this distance and with the enchanted blade it wouldn’t make any difference. Not yet though. A body made of stone was such a good killer and Loki wanted to use him.
No dagger, a smile that would cut just as deep and they parted ways.

The second Loki closed the door to his hotel room behind him, he let his magic pull him away straight to another hotel room. Weaving his fingers Loki pulled the bracelet back from the different layer of reality and carelessly threw it onto the bed. Getting out his phone Loki called Stark and he barely had to wait a few seconds.

“Tommy, how are the fish and chips doing?” Such a happy tune in his voice. Loki was starting to feel annoyed by all these happy Avengers. Then again, it would hurt so much more if they were happy. “This is the first thing you associate England with? No Union Jack? Churchill? Big Ben? Prince Harry?”

“When I’m thinking of the greatest English export ever, I’m thinking of my boyfriend. Glad to hear from you. How was your flight?”

Why were mortals always asking that? If a plane hadn’t crashed, it must have been a good flight. “Okay, pretty normal. Although I might have bad news for you…”

“Aha? Shoot.”

“I felt at home right when I got out of the plane. London even smells good. I’m here for about an hour and I’m thinking about not coming back.”

“Cool, we’re moving to London. I’m going to buy the whole place immediately. Anything else?”

“Nah, I’m tired and going to fall asleep any second although it’s early morning here. I just wanted to let you know that I’m fine and… I hope you haven’t already burned the place down.”

There was a soft laugh at the other end of the line. “No, not yet. Bruce and I have been busy in the lab and Thor finally decided to show up. Guy definitely needs to catch up on some sleep. Nope, everything’s fine. I hope you have fun in London… just don’t look at any other guys, because then I would have to fly over there and kill them.”

“You had to make it weird.”

“Just making sure you’ll miss me even more. Tell your friend I said hi and I’ll call you tomorrow. Okay?”

Short and simple, Loki liked that. “Great… Sorry for calling you at this time.”

“Are you crazy? Best part of my day. Bye, sleep tight.”

“Bye, Stark.” Hanging up Loki stretched a little bit and decided to make the best of his situation. He was in London, time to have some fun.

***

Loki stopped in front of a framed picture in the hallway, watching his reflection. With a simple gesture he brushed his blonde curls out of his forehead and smirked. He looked good, trustworthy, average and so friendly. Such a person wouldn’t lie, would they? Feeling plenty of anticipation Loki continued his way right to the door of the Captain’s apartment. Putting on a sweet smile Loki knocked and tried to not let his excitement show. The door was opened and again there was the Captain, beaming at him. “There you are. I was worried you would have trouble finding the place.”

“No, wasn’t a problem. I brought some wine.” Loki handed him the bottle he brought from Italy
and Rogers let him inside. Showtime then. The apartment was small, they were pretty much already standing in the kitchen. She was sitting at the table, playing her part, smiling warmly at him and Loki wanted to slice her stomach open. “Will, this is Sharon. Sharon, this is William, my best friend.”

Your only friend, you’ll see that soon.

The amateur got up from her seat and shook his hand. “Hello, nice to meet you. Steve already told me a lot about you.”

“My pleasure. I can say the same.”

Only now, face to face with her, Loki realised that he hadn’t really thought this through. Sure, it was an easy task, spend an evening, be nice, ask the right questions and raise an eyebrow every now and then, there wasn’t more to it. Yet he hadn’t thought about how angry she was going to make him by her mere presence. She had no idea what she was doing, her character wasn’t fleshed out, she was only focusing on the goal she wanted to reach. In his heart Loki could find so much respect for liars and their tales, if they were well worked out and if they knew how to play the part.

The Widow knew how to do that and although Loki despised her, he had to admire her for it. Concerning Sharon… Loki wasn’t able to figure out why S.H.I.E.L.D had chosen her. Anyway, Loki had not the time to get angry at her, she would be gone for good instantly.

“So… what’s up for dinner and how can I help?”

Rogers gave him a little shove and made him sit down on one of the chairs. “You can help by being a normal guest. Just sit here, have a glass of wine and do nothing. I’ll take care of dinner.”

“It’s useless to argue. I tried. He won’t even let us lift a little finger.” Sharon smiled at him and at least she had understood that she had to get William’s approval to win the Captain over. Well, good luck with that. “Come on, give us at least something to cut… onions? Vegetables? Anything?”

Instead of handing him a knife the Captain placed to glasses on the table. “You’re not going to do any work. You’re my guests.”

Sighing in defeat Loki nodded. “Fine. I guess we’ll be able to live with that.” Loki poured them both a glass of wine and got to work. “Cheers. While he’s working… what do you do for a living?”

Inwardly Loki was yawning while Sharon started listing her uncreative lies. This was boring, but necessary. Not to forget obvious. When she started asking questions, she was trying to gain information. Probably had to report to S.H.I.E.L.D. Not that it mattered, unlike them Loki knew how to create a fake person. For now Loki decided that he would go for it when they were eating, he needed the Captain’s full attention. Until then Loki nicely responded to Sharon’s questions about this studies, life in Washington and some other unimportant details that everybody would ask. Too bad that she had no idea how to separate the lie from the truth.

When the Captain was done cooking and joined them for dinner a slight tingle went through Loki’s body. A mixture of contentment and relief.

“Oh my God, Steve, this looks amazing.” Sharon smiled, a little too much teeth, too brightly and if she didn’t stop that soon, Loki would do more than simply pointing out who she was.

“You should wait until you tasted it before making me compliments.” Again this shy expression his face. Who would believe that this little man was able to break bones? The first bite of the chicken though told Loki that it was alright to compliment the Captain, it was delicious. “No, she
is right, Steve. It’s really good.”

“Who would have thought that Captain America can cook.” How desperately she tried, wrapping her words up in this sweet tone, with a hopeful, innocent smile. First mistake and Loki was taking notes. He would use it all against her.

“Glad you guys like it.”

No matter how good the chicken might be, Loki was going to enjoy the second course way more. “I know Steve just moved in here. How about you? Are you from around here?”

She lied the way she always did, telling a story, but she didn’t know which parts were important. “I’m from Virginia, came here only a few months ago. Actually I moved in two weeks before Steve. Couldn’t quite believe that… Captain America living just next door. Like a normal person.”

Now her focus was on Rogers, trying to show affection, making him believe she was sincere. Trying way too hard. He would have figured it out by now if he didn’t believe that all people were of good nature. They weren’t.

It was all about details now, making a point and proving that this friendship was real, unlike her. This was the difference between the god of lies and an amateur. Loki made sure to start with a frown, little lines on his forehead that were more a sign of confusion than distrust. “How is Steve not a normal person?”

The first cracks in her smile and Loki was disgusted by how easy it was to throw her off her game. “Oh, I didn’t mean it like that… it’s just… not everybody lives door to door with Captain America.”

Loki was tempted to go one step further, but it was too soon, too direct. Rogers would start thinking that he was trying to find a reason not to like her. So Loki remained silent, but his face said everything that needed to be said. It was hard to disguise his joy when the Captain supported him without realising it. “Everybody gotta live somewhere.”

There, half way done.

The dinner continued rather ordinarily, talking about unimportant things, like the food or movies. Sharon didn’t dare to step on another mine. “Is this your first time in New York, Will?”

Small talk… such a waste of time. Loki could be talking about art with the Captain, but no, S.H.I.E.L.D had to annoy him with an agent. “No, I’ve been here before… to visit Steve. Didn’t end up that nicely though…”

Within a second the Captain’s face fell, this feeling of guilt would probably never leave him completely. Even Sharon noticed that and she stepped up her game. At least she tried to. “What happened?”

Making it sound like he was feeling uncomfortable Loki shifted around on his chair. “I got… I ended up in some Avengers’ business. Not the good kind.”

“He got hurt and I’m still sorry for that.”

“It was barely a scratch and it wasn’t your fault. It was nobody’s fault. These things happen… because there are crazy people out there.” And they are sitting at this table.

The change of atmosphere was all too obvious and Sharon gave a slight nod, her expression serious. “That’s why it’s good thing that there are people like Captain America.” Her eyes darted to
Steve, again with that little gleam of adoration and she was digging her own grave.

Now all Loki had to do was pushing her into it. “It would be better if there were no more people like this… then Steve wouldn’t have to take care of us, because we aren’t able to do that on our own.”

Loki didn’t turn his head, he knew well enough that Rogers was looking at him. His work for now was done.

About two hours later Sharon said goodbye, kissing them of both on the cheek, she had to go to work to tomorrow. Too bad Loki wouldn’t be able to see her face when she tried to listen to their conversation, back in her apartment. The bug she had installed here had stopped working about an hour ago. How strange…

For now Loki had no intention to leave and Rogers definitely didn’t want him to, he was handing him a beer, sitting down next to him. “Any plans for tomorrow? I feel like taking a day off. We could do something together if you want to?”

“Sure, why do you think I am here?” Grinning at him Loki took a sip from the beer, wishing it would be wine.

Of course Rogers was delighted by this. “Great. You wanna go check out Chinatown?”

That was something Loki was actually interested in. He hadn’t had the opportunity yet and it would be fascinating to learn the differences between Chinese culture here and in Asia. “I’d like that. You know by any chance a good place to have breakfast?”

“Yah, I do. It’s the only place I know, but they have wonderful apple pie.”

“That’s the only thing that matters to you. Apple pie.”

Rogers laughed at that and shrugged. “Sure…” He paused, taking another sip from his beer and his features made clear that he was pondering. Finally, it had to be him who said it, otherwise it wouldn’t have the same effect. “So… uhm… what do you think… about Sharon?”

Loki knew a few hundred things to say about Sharon, but William wouldn’t do that. “I think she’s nice…”

It was all about pronunciation. The Captain responded with a frown and thankfully he wouldn’t let it go. “Nice? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. She’s a nice girl. You like her, I like her. It’s not up to me to…”

“Come on, Will, I can tell that something is bothering you and you’ve always been honest with me. Maybe I won’t like what you say, but I’ll appreciate you being honest.” That smile, so much trust and Loki had him in the palm of his hand.

Taking a deep breath Loki nodded. “I think she is a very nice person, easy to be around, but… there’s something about her that doesn’t feel just right. It’s… the whole evening she spent a lot of time talking about Captain America… not about Steve Rogers. Which is a shame, because I think that Steve Rogers is way more interesting than Captain America.”

A moment of silence, but Loki didn’t need a sign of agreement to know what Rogers was thinking. It wasn’t even a lie and sometimes the truth could hurt so much more. “You think that she doesn’t like me, but the fact that I’m Captain America?”
“No, she likes you. How could she not? You are a great guy… I’m just worried that… she might… like the fact that you are Captain America a bit more… I’m sorry, I could be wrong. It’s only a first impression, you know her better than I do and in the end it doesn’t matter what I think if you’re…”

“No, it does. It does matter what you think. It does… Thank you for being honest.”

Nothing else was said, but it wasn’t necessary. Loki knew that Sharon was history and if she wasn’t, he would expose her. Another hour later Loki left, although Rogers offered him to stay for the night, it was already late after all. Instead they agreed on Rogers picking him up for breakfast at the hotel.

Walking down the street Loki whistled a little tune. Chinatown tomorrow, he had to bring up Stark, but he already had a plan for that. It was also about time to remind Banner of Elizabeth, the poor girl must be desperate by now. What else? He needed a fight, a moment to show everybody how far Thor was gone. Could be easily combined with the robot. Though Thor breaking down could distract the Captain and Stark from ripping each other apart. Or the chaos would be perfect for them to get completely lost in it. Loki was going to take the chance, there was nothing he enjoyed more than…

The loud scream of his magic was tearing Loki’s ears apart, his senses were suddenly over stimulated. Everything hurt, needles piercing through his eyes from the inside, his skin suddenly too tight for his bones and the world was shaking. It came too sudden, too strong. Not a curse, a simple straightforward attack. Within seconds it was cast away, the spell in Loki’s blood was glowing, shielding him off, but nothing would be strong enough to contain Loki’s rage.

How did he even dare?! How could he have come up with a spell that was actually able to find Loki?! By the Nornes, what had he been doing with his blood? What part had Loki missed?! Enough of the games. He had dared to reach out for him, maybe he didn’t even realise how much more powerful Loki was. Oh, he would let him know it. Loki would tear down that barrier, suck every little bit of magic from his veins and then he would cut him up. Little by little, piece by piece. He would…

No. This was a trap. The entire purpose of this was to enrage him, to make him do something stupid. Loki wasn’t Thor. He wouldn’t be outsmarted by some cheap trick. Still, enough was enough. Tonight this was going to end and they would play by Loki’s rules. The little mage wanted him to come to him, not going to happen.

Straightening up Loki let his magic pull him away, not far though. Into the woods where the mage had tried to seek him out for the first time. Now they could have a conversation. “Fine, we shall play this game if you want to. I am here and I’m not moving. You want to kill me, go get me. You are not the first to try and you will not be last.”

Always keep talking, it distracted them from what your hands were doing or in Loki’s case, his magic. It was dripping from his finger tips, into the soil, weaving a net, setting traps. The second the little mage would set foot here, Loki would have him paralyzed. “What? Are you too much of a coward to face me? Sitting in your castle, behind bricks. Throwing stones at me.”

You really like to talk, don’t you?

There was no need to look up, Loki knew exactly where the robot was and his blast of energy hit it the second it had finished talking. Or the second it had finished playing the audio. Metal pieces and sparks were flying everywhere, hitting the ground and Loki smirked at them. “You were saying?”

One of the others would be answering, he was sure. That was the only reason he let them close in
on him. If the little mage was smart enough, he wouldn’t let them set one foot on the ground.

*I said you liked to hear yourself talk. That’s all you do. Talk*

They fired at him from two sides at once, but Loki just blinked, teleported away, reappeared behind one of the robots, taking its head off before dropping back to the ground. “Seems we have something in common then. You only sent your toys. Do I have to destroy every single one of them until you show your face?”

Ten, all around him. Loki was dodging their attacks with elegance, not even breaking a sweat. Even if one of the energy blasts hit him, it wouldn’t do much damage. No need to get his armour or let William disappear.

Four formed a circle right above him, four landed. Probably trying to attack him from all sides at once, but Loki could only laugh. His net lashed out from the ground, green strings of magic that ripped the metal apart like it was nothing.

*Funny you talk about faces, because you aren’t showing your real one either*

Enough. Loki switched from defence to attack, throwing a wave of energy at them to which they responded with blasts of their own. When the two forces connected the night suddenly turned bright for a few seconds. Two of the robots had crumbled to dust and Loki discarded of the other two. Spreading his arms he walked in a circle, his eyes scanning his surroundings, his magic doing the same thing. There were still a few out there, not in sight yet. “So this is it? That’s what you do with my blood? Giving me a headache?”

*Look behind you, goldilocks*

Loki didn’t need to, he knew what was behind him. The robot fired at him, Loki drew aside, summoned his dagger and stabbed it in the neck. Sparkles danced in the air and then they went all for it. There was no time to think, Loki only reacted to every single attack while they were raining down on him. Energy blasts, blades, bullets and although Loki still didn’t feel threatened, he was starting to feel the strain of the fight. Finally Loki felt a sharp pain in his arms when he got hit by an energy blast. His fit of rage caused another wave of magic that wrecked the robots next to him. Only three left. Loki destroyed them with a combination of physical fighting and magic and when he saw the black, burned metal lying discarded on the ground, he allowed himself to take a breath.

One second. That was all it took.

Metal fingers wrapped around his arm, where the last robot had hit him and Loki immediately knew that this one was different. He hadn’t felt its presence. No magic was attached to it. Why would…

*Show me your face, goldilocks*

Its hand started to glow and Loki’s instincts acted before he could even raise his own hand. His magic tore the metallic figure apart with an atrocious sound and then there was silence. Loki heard nothing but his own ragged breathing. A soft breeze came up, leaves were rustling and a sudden dizziness caused Loki to stumble two steps forward before he could steady himself. What…

The unbearable pain in his arm pulled a scream from Loki’s lips that filled the darkness around him. It started right above his elbow and spread within seconds across his whole body. All warmth was leaving him, being forcefully pulled out, being replaced by… cold. Freezing. Too cold to ever touch. Too cold to be alive.
“No...” Groaning in pain Loki dropped to his knees, gasping for air. This couldn’t be. No, not now, not ever. Staring at his hands Loki’s unfocused vision could still make out how his nails were turning black. Locked in a state of shock Loki could do nothing but watch in horror how his skin was being eaten away and replaced by a dark, sickening blue. Like a disease it spread, travelling up his arms and Loki couldn’t stop screaming. William had been forcefully torn off him and now the cold was destroying him, bit by bit.

In despair Loki tried to reach for his magic despite the pain, but there was nothing but ice. No, Loki was fire, it was burning underneath his skin... Skin. His skin that was brutally taken away from him, replaced by ice. All fire gone, everything about Loki was being attacked and mercilessly murdered. Even in his veins he could feel it. His blood cooling down before freezing. The monster was devouring him and Loki tossed and turned in agony, trying to get away from the pain, from the cold.

Only when a shadow fell over him Loki noticed that he was lying on the ground. It almost seemed warm, because Loki himself had turned into ice. Rolling onto his back Loki sucked in all the air he could, wanting at least the pain to subside, but there was only cold. Ice. Almost nothing left of Loki.

Something touched him, nudged him against his rips. A foot. Somebody was standing next to him. Loki could see nothing but a dark cloak. How long would he be able to see before his eyes would have also turned into ice?

*There you are... fascinating... So this is what you are trying to hide. This is so much better than a few drops of blood... Why don’t we get going?*

A hand was reaching for him and Loki tried to scramble away in panic. His action was rewarded with a raspy, metallic laugh. Again fingers closed around his arm and Loki tried so hard to reach for his magic. Why was there only ice? Only cold...

Whoever was having a hold on him, they hissed in pain and stumbled backwards. Traces of blue magic vanishing and Loki felt a slight tingle. It was still there. Cold. Loki needed to get away, he needed to get to safety, away from the cold. Just this once, one single time, never again. Loki gave into the cold, letting it devour him and he screamed throughout it while this other kind of magic... took him away.
The Skin

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Loki is breaking down and somebody is there to witness it...

Hope you enjoy :)

_________________________________________________

Rescue me
In the middle of the ocean
Crashing down, it's always hard to breathe
Some say it's hard to make the changes
Rescue me and I'll never be the same

Rescue me
In the middle of my darkest hour
Time will tell
I never really had the power
Some say it's easier to give up on it
I say it's time to rescue me

Rescue me ~~ Daughtry ~~

__________________________________________________

His body or what used to be his body was uncontrollably shaken by the convulsions running through it. Loki’s tongue seemed to be bound, while his muscles were painfully contracting. Agonizing pain was paralyzing his limbs, making the convulsions hurt even more. How could it be so painful when this wasn’t even his own body? His face was rubbing against the carpet, so hard he felt the skin tearing apart…

Skin…

Panting Loki tried to get at least some oxygen into his lungs. Breathing. Regularly. It would help him to calm down. To stop him from panicking. Air. Not thinking about the cold. The ice inside of him. How were monsters supposed to breathe if their lungs were made of ice? No, no, no.

Fisting his hands in the carpet Loki tried to stop himself from shaking, but he felt the carpet beneath his fingers turning to ice. Jerking back Loki finally managed to let out a choked up scream of horror.

The voice he heard was so familiar. It was his own. So there was still something left of Loki. This was the thing Loki held onto. Loki was still there. He was still there. Pressing his eyes shut, he
concentrated on his voice, mumbling his name over and over again. “Loki. Loki. Loki. Loki…”

A mantra that after a seemingly endless amount of time had a calming effect on him, slowing down his heartbeat. Or what used to be a heart. Listening to his voice and his breath Loki felt his body coming to rest. The convulsions came to a halt and Loki could relax his arms and his legs. He remained lying motionlessly on the floor, letting the pain subside.

Accessing his fading strength Loki sat back up, leaning against the bed. He needed to look, he needed to do something. Reluctantly Loki opened his eyes and the blue tone of his skin made it hard to make out his hands in the darkness. “No!”

He had felt it, that unbearable pain when they had torn his skin off, piece by piece, replaced it with something else. With… this…

Getting up on his feet Loki stumbled into the bathroom, turning on the light and stopped dead in his tracks. They hadn’t stopped at his face. Even this they had taken away from him. Mirrors were supposed to be honest, to tell nothing but the truth and this one didn’t realise that it was being lied to. The monster that had haunted Loki’s nightmares when he had been a child stared back at him. Looking scared, weak and despicable.

No, none of this was true. Only an illusion, nothing more, Loki remembered so many words. So many of them.

*These green eyes will haunt me forever…*

Not able to stand the sight of it any longer Loki smashed his fists against the mirror. It needed to be destroyed, to be gone, erased from existence. Ice melted away by smoldering fire. The flames should devour it all.

Shards of glass were scattered all over the floor, stained with something that couldn’t be his blood and still all Loki saw was blue. Blue. Taunting him after having been locked away for so long. Locked away, but not gone. Never gone.

Black lines on blue skin and they didn’t belong there. Carved into it like scars. Taking his skin away hadn’t been enough, they had had to scar him. No, not him. Accessing his magic Loki let it run over his body, mumbling spells, curses, chants, but nothing would make it go away. There had to be something else. Loki knew all the words, all the magic in the Nine Realms, he had to find something. No matter how deep he had to dig. He had to. Had to. Had to.

Blue. Dark. Ice and so cold. Had killed all the fire burning inside of him.

“No!”

Dropping to his knees Loki grabbed one of the shards. Even more blood. The reflection showed blue, a distorted, blurred figure. More blood. If he couldn’t make it disappear, Loki would cut it out. All of it. Every single piece. Placing the shard at his elbow Loki pressed it into the skin and it didn’t hurt. Not his skin, not his body. It couldn’t hurt. Carelessly Loki dragged it down, slicing his arm open. Blood surged from the wound and it wasn’t Loki’s. It wasn’t red.

Panic took a hold of him and Loki moved the shard along the edges of the first cut. So many new ones followed, but it didn’t help. There was enough blood to cover the blue skin, but how was that supposed to help when it wasn’t red.

No, he had to...
Blood. His arm. The robot had… Throwing the shard away Loki put his hand on the superficial wound on his other arm and pulled. Whatever magic that was still left in his body. Everything was put into this single gesture. There it was. Little, dark, twisted, a curse buried in his flesh. Loki yanked it out, screamed at the pain before collapsing on the floor.

Please, please. It must have worked…

Blinking Loki looked at his arm that lay outstretched next to his head. A sob that didn’t resemble Loki at all escaped his lips, filled the room when pure, impeccable white spread from the tips of his fingers across the whole limb. White as snow, sparkled with red stains.

Finally he was able to breathe, his body was becoming his own again. The ice was melting and Loki felt the spark of fire inside of him. Growing stronger every second and Loki needed to see it. His face.

Reaching out Loki grabbed another shard, his hand shaking when he brought it up to his face. Green terrified eyes looked back at him, filled with tears. There was nothing he could do about it, Loki cried. This time his body was shaking with sobs and not for a second he took his eyes off his own reflection. His face, eyes, nose, lips, hair.

I thought I would never be able to sleep again. Last night I fell asleep and I dreamt of your face

Loki was afraid. Afraid to blink. Afraid to look away. Something could change if he wasn’t looking. It couldn’t, never again. There was nothing else but him and the silence in this room. All he did was looking at himself, not even bothering to brush the tears away.

By the time a strange noise broke the silence Loki still wasn’t able to look away. He didn’t move a muscle. The noise resounded again. Similar to a knock. Loki stared at his nose, memorizing every detail of it. Again.

“Will?”

Who?

“Will? Are you there?”

The Captain? How? Loki was in the hotel room. Rogers wanted to meet William.

“Hello?”

Feeling dizzy Loki sat up and he didn’t have the time to regret it. The pain was racing through his hands and his arms, red blood covering them. He was so drained, his healing couldn’t even start doing its work. No way to hold back the scream.

“Will?! What’s going on? Open the door!”

No. He couldn’t. There wasn’t enough magic left to teleport away. Maybe there was enough to… No. Not another skin. Just thinking about it was unbearable. Loki still needed the shard, he needed to look at himself, he needed to see his face. Feel his skin, feel the fire…

“Oh, I’m breaking down the door!”

Please, no. Loki couldn’t. Desperately staring at his reflection, Loki took it all in before putting the last bit of his strength into the glamour. There wasn’t enough left to cover all his wounds, only the long cut across his arm wouldn’t be visible. It also couldn’t hide his tears or the fact that he was
shivering. He was defenceless, vulnerable.

He never heard the door being opened or broken, but then… “Will? Will… Oh my god!”

Hands were on his arms. The last time somebody had touched him, they had taken his skin away. In panic Loki scrambled back, staring wide-eyed at the man in front of him. “Get away from me!”

“Will, it’s okay. It’s me. What happened? You’re bleeding…”

Yes, he was bleeding, he was hurting and his blood was red. He wouldn’t let anyone change that. Why wasn’t he leaving? Loki needed to look at himself, had to shed this glamour. He needed… “Go away! I swear if you don’t leave, I will…” Now even his own voice left him and Loki’s body wouldn’t stop shaking. “I can’t… go away!” He was screaming, but the other one wasn’t listening, nor leaving.

Instead he was coming closer.

“No!” Loki wanted to struggle, to fight. A dagger, plant it in the other one’s forehead. He needed his body, his skin… he couldn’t…

Two arms were closing themselves around his shaking frame, pulling him against another body. “Will, listen… it’s okay. It’s me, Steve. It’s alright…” Words spoken so softly and Loki fought him, pushing against the other one who only held him tighter. “I’m not going to leave. You have to breathe… slowly. That will help you. Slowly.”

“Stop touching me…” Every push and every shove was answered with another gentle word, a soothing touch and Loki wanted to rip him apart, then the glamour. He was Loki. Loki. Loki with skin paler than he had ever seen before. Loki with those emerald eyes that wouldn’t let him find sleep at night…

“Easy… just breathe… it’s okay…”

Too tired to fight Loki gave up, his body going limp and accepting the embrace. The sobs weren’t subsiding and Loki wanted to scream.

“I got you… I’m here. I won’t let you alone. It’s okay. You are okay.” The mumbling wouldn’t stop, nor the hand that was caressing his back. Endless patience. His body was radiating with warmth and Loki was seeking more of it, pressing himself against the other one who instantly accepted it. Warm… Rogers was warm and he wasn’t shying away from Loki’s touch. That meant Loki wasn’t cold. Maybe Rogers was right, maybe he was alright.

So they were just sitting there, the Captain was holding him and Loki held on to him. He was warm…

When Rogers pulled slightly away Loki almost wouldn’t let him. “Will, what happened? You’re… Your hands. I gotta take care of that, okay?”

Loki wasn’t listening. Suddenly the warmth was gone and Loki wrapped his arms around himself. White and red. He was about to collapse under the weight of the veil, it had never been so heavy. Not in a thousand years. Maybe Thomas would have been lighter. No, he would want to call Tony…

Why was he feeling so cold again? No, this was his body. His body under the veil. Nobody would take it away from him again. Never.
Fingers touched his arm and Loki jerked back, staring in shock at the Captain who instantly raised his hands, almost offered them to him. Nobody would take his skin away. “Will, it’s okay. I won’t hurt you. I would never hurt you in any way. You are bleeding. We have to badge you up. Please, just let me help you. We don’t even have to talk. Please, let me help you.”

That wasn’t his name. His name was Loki. Loki. No surname, because he didn’t have a family or a home. All he needed was Loki… he couldn’t lose him.

“Please…”

Not moving the Captain was waiting for something. Slowly Loki tore his eyes off his hands, searching the other’s face. It was one of Loki greatest abilities to read emotions, eyes, lips, hands, they gave all away without ever uttering a word. Why was it suddenly so hard? The Captain… seemed frozen, his features dominated by pain and concern at the same time. There was something gentle about it and Loki remembered him. His desire to help, to give himself away, not expecting anything in return. Rogers wasn’t lying, he wouldn’t hurt Loki.

Hesitantly Loki held out his hands and he thought to see a smile spreading across Rogers’ face. Loki had no idea where Rogers had gotten the bandages from, but he didn’t care anyway. All he did was watching Rogers’ fingers how he was carefully bandaging his hands. White fabric on white skin.

When Rogers was done he didn’t let go, instead he took one of Loki’s hands into his own. The gentle gesture became even odder by Rogers running his thumb across the back of his hand. “You are still shaking…”

Was he? Loki felt a sting of shame when this was pointed out. Which was the first positive feeling he’s had in hours. Yet the Captain was right, he was shaking. “I’m so cold…” Nothing but a whisper and although it was his voice, now is sounded nothing like him. “I’m freezing and I can’t feel warm again…”

“Let’s get you off the floor…” The Captain pulled at his hand, a touch so delicate it seemed almost impossible to come from such a strong, big man. It would be easier to just go along and Loki didn’t have to power to argue. So he was led back into the main room where the Captain made him sit down on the bed, wrapping the blanket around Loki. “Better?”

No, the fire was there, but it was weak. So Loki shook his head.

Normally his magic would have screamed, lashed out, risen up the second the Captain put his arms around him and pulled him close. Well, it did tingle, but its protest was too feeble to be of any importance. Still, it was there. Disgust, anger and hatred. Covered with ice and the Captain’s body was radiating with heat. It was all about survival, about finding himself, finding Loki. Warmth could cast the last bit of ice away and heat would stop it from ever returning again. Pulling his knees up Loki made himself small, leaning into the Captain’s embrace.

Loki felt like in a cocoon, wrapped up in a blanket and the arms of a hero that he wanted to kill. A corpse would be cold though and Loki depended on his warmth, he wanted all of it. More than the air he was breathing. Rogers rubbed his arms, his back, in the most gentle way and finally the shivers would stop running through Loki’s body. His skin was slowly heatening up, but for Loki it wasn’t fast enough. Without thinking about it Loki tilted his head up and he buried his face in the Captain’s neck. He could feel his heartbeat and Loki’s desire to stop it was overshadowed with his desire for the heat.

Time went by, so slowly or fast, Loki couldn’t tell. The only thing of importance was that the fire
was burning now, little flames, growing stronger. With them Loki returned and his awareness of the situation he was in became way less and less clouded. Captain America was holding him. Not because Loki had planed it, not because William had asked him to, but because of Loki’s own weakness. Loki had been bleeding, not William. Not matter how much Loki wanted it to be different, there was no way around it, the Captain was holding him. Not William.

His magic was coming to life again, wanted to push him away, but Loki held back. Too weak and he would have to explain this. Somehow.

“We should get you to a doctor… to take a look at your hands…” Rogers’ fingers softly ran over his back. By now he must have gotten the impression that it was okay to talk. It wasn’t though. “I don’t need a doctor, I’m fine.”

Not letting go of him Rogers pulled back, just enough to look at him. “You told me that I should stand up for myself and speak up… I’m sorry to say this, but you are not fine. Nothing about this…” With incredible care Rogers took a hold of his hand. “… is fine. What happened?”

“You said that I wouldn’t have to talk.”

“I can’t force you, I’m asking. I’m worried, scared even. When I came in here and saw you like this… it looked like you’ve had a fight with someone… or as if you had slit your wrists. You don’t want to talk about it, but… I’ll be honest. You just had a complete emotional breakdown… that lasted several hours…. I’m not going to leave before I’m sure you’re fine.”

Damn him for caring about his friend. “I broke the mirror and cut myself… that’s all there’s to it.”

Damn him for almost looking hurt now. “You don’t have to tell me, but don’t lie to me.”

Loki brought his hand up to rub his eyes and only ended up staring at the bandage. White. He had to say something, explain… be the god of lies.

“I’m not… I… I saw something in the mirror. I wanted it to go away… so I destroyed the mirror.” Not a lie yet, but Loki would get to it soon enough.

“You… Are you talking about… your reflection?” The Captain sounded unsure, getting in over his head. As if he had any idea how to deal with this.

“No… it was… a memory… just a memory.”

Rogers let his fingers run over Loki’s lower arm. “Do you… want to tell me about it? You don’t have to, but…”

Loki’s mind was racing and it still felt way too slow. William was strong, he was smart. He wasn’t that kind of person. Now he had to work with what he had. “No, I don’t want to talk about it… I’m sorry, Steve.”

He could hear a little sigh. Was the Captain relieved that Loki didn’t want to talk about it or that he had said his name. “Okay… has something like this happened before?”

“Only twice… years ago… it… has never been this bad.”

“Have you ever… talked about it with someone?”

“No.”
“Will… that’s not… you know that I’m here for you? No matter what. You’re my best friend and… honestly, I’m scared for you.”

Loki took a deep breath and squeezed his eyes shut. He needed to think. “Something happened… when I was a child… something bad. 364 days a year I am perfectly able to deal with that. Today I wasn’t, but that isn’t going to happen again…”

The god of lies was speaking the truth. Never again and he would make sure by skinning the little mage alive. An eye for an eye. Skin for skin.

“Have you ever… talked about what happened? Or about… what happened today?” Softly squeezing Loki’s shoulder the Captain was still trying to get some information out of him. Not to use it against him, this was everything but an interrogation. A pathetic try to help him.

“I just told you that I didn’t…”

“You really should do that. I think it would help you…”

Mortals and their desire to talk… “Did you talk about what it meant for you to be trapped in the ice for 70 years and what that did really mean?”

It was supposed to throw him off, but the effect was the complete opposite – the Captain started smiling. Why would he do that? “Yes, I talked about it with you…”

A bitter taste filled Loki’s mouth and he pulled the blanket tighter around himself. He wouldn’t get out of this. The line between Loki and William had been crossed and this moment here would always stay one of the Captain’s most present memories. Although his magic and every little part of Loki refused to use what had happened… there was no way around it. Loki had to give the Captain something, something to hold on to, then he would leave, Loki would be able to slip back into his own skin and he would kill the mage. “I can’t talk about it, Steve. Not yet… maybe I will sometime, but right now… I can’t. But I’m fine. Something like this will not happen again. I promise. I don’t want you to worry about me.”

The look on Rogers’ face showed clearly enough that he wasn’t fully convinced, but he finally nodded. “Okay…” Taking a deep breath he brushed one of Loki’s curls back. “Look, I came here, because we wanted to go have breakfast… You should eat something. Maybe we shouldn’t go out, but we could order something in. Does this place have room service?”

Loki didn’t want food, he wanted his skin, his face in the mirror.

“I would rather sleep. I didn’t have much chance to…”

The Captain nodded, smiling gently. “Sure thing. You get some sleep, we skip breakfast and just have lunch afterwards.”

No, he had to leave, to go away.

“You don’t have to stay…” Loki didn’t continue, the look on the Captain’s face told him clearly enough that he wasn’t going to leave him alone anytime soon. There was nothing Loki could do. “Okay…” Pulling completely away from Rogers Loki lay down, wrapping the blanket as tightly around him as possible. Little flames were dancing beneath his fingertips. Pressing his eyes shut Loki tried to breathe evenly, to ignore the veil draped across his form and the hand that was awkwardly caressing his back in soothing circles. For the first time in centuries Loki tried to remember. All the words that had been said bore nothing of importance. Except for one.
“Loki...”
Hello everybody,

Loki still isn't feeling fine and Steve simply won't leave him alone - a bad combination :)

Hope you're having fun with it

I don't remember a moment I tried to forget
I lost myself, is it better not said
Now I'm closer to the edge

Closer to the edge ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

“My liege, if I may…”

“Of course, what is it that you wish to talk about?”

“I do not wish to talk. I am searching your brother and I cannot find him. I was hoping you would know where he was.”

“Loki greatly enjoys the library of this palace. He is most likely…”

“I fear he is not in the library.”

“This is indeed odd. Probably he is practicing his magic abilities. When he is busy doing that Loki is like a fly on the wall. There is no use in looking for him. He will come back when he is finished.”

“I see. I thank you. I will not disturb you any more…”

“Why are you looking for my brother?”

“I wish to talk to him. I suppose you know that I consider the prince my friend.”

“Yes, but are spending a lot of time with him… Some of the guards told me you were seen together, taking a walk in the gardens.”

“Is it the guards’ business who a prince of Asgard spends his time with?”

“No, but it is my business and duty to look out for my little brother.”

“With all due respect, but the prince is very capable of looking out for himself and he can spend his time with anyone he likes.”
“What do you wish to gain? What is it that you are interested in?”

“A smile on his lips. His green eyes sparkling with joy…”

“…”

“Prince Thor? Have I said something to upset you?”

“Oh, you are brilliant.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“How could you tell? What gave me away? Again a gesture of my hand? The way I walk? Or did I not talk the way my brother would?”

“My prince?”

“Do not pretend. Letting me believe you would not look through my illusion. Telling me what you think I might want to hear, so I would have no trouble believing it. A smart plan and so… manipulative.”

“My prince, I swear… I had no idea it was you.”

“What a pity. I like smart and manipulative.”

“So you would prefer it that I tricked you instead telling you the truth? Because it is the truth, I wish to see a smile on your lips, my prince. Especially when you look at me… without an illusion.”

When sleep was releasing Loki from his soft arms he didn’t want to open his eyes. He could almost see him in the shadows, but with every passing second Loki felt more awake and it was so hard to remember his face. Impossible. Covered by illusions, so many of them, thousands of faces, mingling into one and eventually Loki didn’t know anymore what his dream had been about.

Judging by the way he was feeling it couldn’t have been unpleasant. Because Loki had been caught in a nightmare before going to sleep. For a few moments he had escaped… and now… magic was running through his veins. Feeling warm, being one with the fire that was burning inside of him. Sighing in relief Loki opened his eyes, rubbing one hand over them to cast away the sleepiness. He felt blonde curls brushing over his hand and the desire to get rid of William was almost unbearable.

It wasn’t possible though, Loki felt the presence next to him all too well. Turning around Loki looked at Rogers who was sitting there, leaning against the headboard, the tiny block with the hotel’s logo on it in his hands. “What are you drawing?”


“Better… we should head out and have breakfast now.”

“You’re sure you want to go out? We can also stay here…”

“No, I’d like to go out… just maybe let me brush my teeth… and take a shower… It’s not breakfast anymore, isn’t it?”

Rogers laughed softly and nodded. “Lunch. Take your time, we’re not in a hurry.”
Slowly getting out of the bed Loki walked towards the bathroom and instantly noticed that all the shards were gone, not a trace of blood on the floor. The Captain must have cleaned up. Stopping in the doorframe Loki took a little breath, but he didn’t turn around. “Steve?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

Closing the door behind him Loki reached for the doorlock and cursed inwardly when he saw that it was broken. No way that this wasn’t the Captain’s doing. Even now he stopped Loki from slipping back into his own skin, he couldn’t risk having Rogers step into the room and seeing him without the veil.

Nothing to do about it now. Leaning against the door to make sure Rogers wouldn’t come in right now, Loki took the bandages off his left hand. The cuts were gone and Loki felt that underneath the illusion the big wound on his lower arm had also closed up. All of his magic was restored, he was rested, feeling fine. The Captain wasn’t allowed to see that though.

Undressing slowly Loki was glad that there was no mirror, he also avoided looking down at himself. William’s whole stature was so different. After having a short shower and brushing his teeth Loki made sure that the bandages were in place so that the Captain wouldn’t suspect anything. There was already a knock at the door. “Will? Are you alright in there?”

Foolish little mortal, always worried and still had no idea what was going on. “Yeah, just a second… I need to get dressed.”

“Okay…”

Unfortunately there were no clothes in this room and Loki cursed this realm for knowing nothing about magic. Good thing he had thought ahead and actually brought some stuff, otherwise this would be really hard to explain. Wrapping a towel around his hips Loki opened the door and found Rogers standing right in front of it. So worried, pathetic. “Sorry, I forgot that my travel bag is in here.” A little smile, shy and he walked past Rogers who seemed a little bit uncomfortable because of his appearance. “Right…” Loki felt his eyes on him while he was getting jeans and a T-shirt out of the bag placed next to the bed. From now on the Captain would be nothing but attentive every single second they were together and Loki couldn’t immediately go back to normal. William was now a tainted character and Loki could never forget that.

Straightening up Loki smiled shyly and walked back into the bathroom. He put on his T-shirt and the jeans, checking once again the bandages on his hands. Everything was in place. This was going to work out. When he came back into the main room he found the Captain sitting on the bed, waiting patiently like a good little boy. “Ready?”

“Yes. Any idea where we are going to eat?”

“I saw a Taiwanese place just around the corner. Does that sound good to you?”

“It does.”

Naturally it was awkward. The Captain didn’t know what to talk about and Loki didn’t want to act like everything was alright. For now he was simply glad to get some fresh air and leave that damned hotel room. Until they were sitting in this restaurant with food on their table it was hard to start a conversation. “This looks good. I’ve never had Taiwanese before…”

“It’s good. Really good. I prefer Korean though… Sorry, this is weird. I don’t really know… how
I’m supposed to act now. After what happened this morning.”

Now he really made Loki lose time over this. “Normal. If you start thinking now that I’m a different person than before, then…”

Immediately the Captain shook his head. “No. I would never think that. I just… This wasn’t an everyday situation…”

“Everybody has their demons… those were mine. You got yours too.”

“Yes, but I told you about mine…”

Loki scowled. “You did, but I didn’t ask you to. You did that when you wanted to do that, when you felt ready to. I would have never pressured you into telling me about your friend’s death. Or anything that you don’t want to talk about.”

That was enough to make Rogers feel guilty. Biting his lip he slowly nodded. “Right, I’m sorry, but there’s a difference. I might not sleep well sometimes or have bad dreams… but I didn’t break a mirror with my bare hands, because I couldn’t stand what I was seeing in there…”

As much as Loki hated to admit it, the Captain had a point. The whole scene had been too abrupt, too out of place, too scary. Loki had to give him some context, anything. “It wasn’t just the mirror. I saw something on my way back to the hotel, then I lay down, I closed my eyes and I saw it again. I couldn’t stop seeing it and it threw me back… That has always been there. For years. It was already there when you met me. I’m dealing with it and what happened last night… won’t happen again. If I ever want to talk about… what happened when I was a child… I will talk about it with you.”

“Okay… You probably know that yourself, but… nothing you say is going to stop me from worrying about you. You’re my friend, that’s pretty much my job. But I have to accept that you don’t want to talk about it… but you can… whenever you want to.”

Why was he doing this? Couldn’t he help himself? No person could constantly be like this. Trying to help everybody, deciding to put himself last. It was against nature, oneself had to always come first or your life would sooner or later fall apart. Because everybody else also put themselves first. “I know that, Steve… thanks.”

“So… we’re going to check out Chinatown… Anything special you wanna do tonight?”

Yes, be alone and look into the mirror. “You don’t have to babysit me, Steve.”

“Nonsense. You are my best friend. You’re only in town for a few days, I want to spend time with you. There’s something you want to do?”

Yes, be alone! Create fire and flames, burn something to the ground and ravel at the ashes that would be left behind. And a mirror. Loki wanted a mirror. “I don’t know… maybe we could visit some club, a nice lounge, something with live music. Something you would like?”

Finally a genuine smile appeared on the Captain’s face and he nodded. “Yes, that sounds good. Can I taste your dish? It looks great.”

“Be my guest.”

The rest of their lunch went surprisingly well and the Captain seemed reassured enough to not mention the events of last night again. They almost fell back in their usual pattern, easy
conversations, smiles and Loki would have been able to relax if he hadn’t been trapped in a skin that wasn’t his. He wanted his own.

Chinatown was able to distract him a little bit, but William’s skin began itching terribly and Loki had to bite his lip to stop himself from scratching his arms. If Rogers caught any of that, he would have a major problem. There was no way Loki could spend the whole day like this, he couldn’t. Need and desire were burning inside of him.

“I’ve never been to Asia, that’s quite… Sorry. Just a second.” Interestedly Loki watched Rogers pulling his phone out of his pocket. After taking a look at the display Rogers uttered a loud sigh and Loki knew what that meant. “Hello Tony. What’s going on?”

Loki smiled lightly when Rogers made an apologetic gesture. He didn’t mind some Avengers stuff, it was a welcomed distraction.

“Now? No, a friend is visiting me, I don’t have time. How bad? You’re sure? And you think I could help? Can’t that wait until tomorrow?”

Raising an eyebrow Loki listened carefully and hoped desperately that Stark was referring to Thor.

“Fine… give me a moment. I will call you back.”

“What’s going on?

Releasing a long deep breath Rogers didn’t stop himself from showing Loki that he was clearly feeling uncomfortable. “That was Tony… he wants me to show up at the tower. Thor isn’t doing too well and he wants me to talk to him.”

Oh joy, how wonderful. “Okay… Are you going?”

“No. We are checking out Chinatown.”

“Steve… if one of your friends isn’t doing well and you want to check on them, I’m not going to stop you from it. I’m doing fine.”

Of course that wasn’t enough to convince Rogers, but he offered the perfect solution himself. “He offered that you could come along, but going to the tower is out of the question, so I’m going to go there tomorrow. Come on, let’s…”

Shaking his head Loki crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Steve, don’t do that. I’m not a little kid you have to watch and I’m not going to have a breakdown if I’m alone for a few hours. I know you’re worried and if you… Fine, I’ll come with you.”

Taken aback Rogers stared at him. “You want to go to the tower? Despite what happened the last time?”

“That’s highly unlikely to repeat itself, right? Is there a party going on? Then I’m not coming. If not… it’s not going to take forever, isn’t it?” Loki shrugged casually and Rogers still seemed sceptical. “Okay… Fine. Are you sure? I mean…”

“Yap, I’m fine. Let’s go…”

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“And then… Oh, looks like Tony is redecorating.”
When the doors of the elevators opened they revealed three craftsmen buzzing around in Stark’s penthouse. Thomas would be furious, he loved the penthouse. “You are sure you were supposed to come here? Looks like they’re pretty busy.”

“Nah, Tony had an idea and couldn’t wait a single second to go through with it. You know him.” Banner was walking up to them, a tired smile on his lips.

“Hello Bruce. You remember William?”

“Of course. It’s been a while. How are you doing?”

Loki was barely holding on, feeling the overwhelming urge to claw his skin off. “I’m good, thank you. Nice to see you again.”

No way to miss the subtle way Banner flinched. Thank god, Loki really couldn’t have him getting comfortable around other people. Where was Stark anyway? Thomas was still gone, so Loki could finally give him some shit.

“So where is Thor? And Tony?” Rogers asked the same questions, good.

“His majesty is still sulking. Slowly starting to lose his charm.” There he was and Loki hadn’t missed him a bit. “Oh hey, I saved your life once, didn’t I?”

No, you didn’t, but I’m going to end yours. Or I’ll have the soldier right next to me do it. He would do anything I asked him to. “Yes, you did. Thank you again, Mr. Stark.” As much as William’s skin was disgusting him by now, Loki found some comfort in the bitterness of his voice. He wasn’t Stark’s boyfriend, he didn’t have to pretend to like him. Rogers was already getting impatient, probably wanting to get William out of here as quickly as possible. “Tony, you called me to talk to Thor, so…”

“Uhm, right, I think we should talk about that beforehand… Should we go to the kitchen? Where nobody is redecorating the room?” Bruce looked expectantly at Stark who shrugged. “They’re just installing some new shelves, but fine. We don’t have to make this a public discussion.”

“I can wait here if you…”

“Nah.” Stark immediately declined, not giving a damn about William’s presence. “My boyfriend gets to hear all of the Avengers’ business, so Cap’s can hear it too.”

“Tony…” The Captain was actually grumbling and there was finally a light at the end of the tunnel. “Steve, let it go…”

Banner served them all coffee in the kitchen and Loki reminded himself to look around, to not act like he had been here before. Like he and Stark hadn’t been desperately making out against the counter over there.

“So what is going on? I don’t quite understand why I’m here…” Rogers’ fingers were curled around his cup of coffee and Loki’s eyes darted from one person to another. Again, so many Avengers in one place, maybe Thor would show up to. He would be able to get so much information out of this if he was able to think about something else than this skin suffocating him.

“Thor is going fucking crazy, that’s what’s going on.” Stark snorted and Banner glared at him. “That’s not true, Tony. Stop saying these things.”

Rolling his eyes Stark leaned back in his chair. “Fine, then you do the talking…”
Crazy. Loki liked the word. It rolled easily off the tongue when he wasn’t the one who was described by it.

“Well… two days ago Thor came back from London. Tony says he’s been a little weird before…”

“He was having trouble sleeping… He didn’t want to dream… something like that. I didn’t give it much thought. He still seemed normal…”

“Anyway… Tony’s boyfriend is gone for a week and I thought it would be a nice idea to have some drinks and watch a movie. Nothing special… we tried to call Thor, but Jarvis said he didn’t react, so we went to his floor to check on him and… it wasn’t pretty.”

Tell me more. I want to hear every word. I want to drink them from your lips.

“What happened?” The Captain, unlike Loki didn’t sound eager to hear it.

“He was…” Banner looked at Stark, searching for help. Stupid idea. “He looked like shit. Like he hadn’t slept in days. Which is weird because I thought gods didn’t have to sleep and he was acting pissy. Told us to leave him the fuck alone. Doesn’t sound much like Thor, does it?” By now Stark seemed the least bit worried and Loki’s lips twitched. A smile that desperately wanted to show itself.

“No, it doesn’t. He mumbled something about… He can’t sleep, because he sees him die and he can’t save him. He let him… die.” Banner lowered his eyes, his voice sounding strangely thin and inwardly Loki was screaming. Let him die? Let him die?! Thor killed him and Loki wouldn’t settle for anything less. Sure, anyone would distrust a madman. But a madman who also happened to kill his own brother… different story.

Rogers’ face was stoic, but Loki could see the worry in his eyes. “Loki?”

“Guess so.” Stark shrugged. “He’s been talking about him lately. About what a nice guy Loki was. Like I said, crazy.”

“Stop using that word… but you are right. There was some Loki talk and… I have no idea why this is coming up now. Thor seemed to be dealing with this perfectly… now he’s… I don’t want to jump to conclusions, but the timing is odd and… I don’t think that this is normal mourning… he won’t talk to us and… you are better friends with Thor than we are… maybe you could talk to him.”

“You are that worried that you call me to talk to him?”

“Yeah, you didn’t fucking see him. It’s fucking scary. Don’t pull a face, this is my house, I can say fuck as much as I like. Seriously though, an insomniac Thor is not funny.” Stark took a sip from his coffee and Loki reached out squeezed Rogers’ arm. “You are good at talking to people who are going through a crappy situation.”

Ignoring Stark’s snarl Rogers smiled lightly. “Fine, I’ll see what I can do. You’re okay with waiting here?”

“Sure. Just go…” Loki returned the smile and wished he could go with him and see the state Thor was in. No, he wasn’t broken yet, but that was only a question of time. The nightmares were done, the next time Thor would be very awake.

“See you in a few.” Getting up from his chair Rogers let his hand run over Loki’s shoulder before leaving the room. Stark commented on the scene with a soft chuckle. “Not Captain America’s
boyfriend… yeah, sure.”

Oh, perfect. “Just because you are unable to obtain a friendship with another male without turning it into something sexual that doesn’t mean that other people can’t do that.”

Banner didn’t try to hide his smirk at that and Stark only rolled his eyes. “Whatever. I…”

“Sir, I’m sorry to interrupt you, but the delivery you’ve been waiting for just arrived.”

Loki did a look around to keep up appearances, but nobody cared anyway. “Cool!”

And he was gone. Loki frowned and Banner shot him an apologetic smile. “I wish I could say something different, but that’s totally normal. Sorry, but I have to check this out.”

By now Loki was interested too and followed Banner who followed Stark. In the living room the handymen had already installed a huge shelf. Even bigger than the one Loki had in his own apartment. Why would Stark need this? He wasn’t even looking at it, but crouching over a big box that obviously had just been delivered. Ripping it open Stark broke out in a grin. “Perfect! I’m going to get so much sex for this!”

What the hell? Was this supposed to be about Thomas?

“Tony, this is going to bite you in the ass. If he loves it, all he’s going to do is read. How do you get any sex out of it then?” Banner was strangely amused and Loki took a step closer, intrigued by the possible content of the box. Possible? It had to be books.

“His eyes will get tired and sooner or later he will want to show how grateful he is…” Pulling out a book Stark let his fingers run over it. “I had to spend some money, but this Shakespeare collection is going to make every English literature scholar jealous. When he gets back and sees that I get a hell lot of bonus points…”

Loki’s fingers were no itching for a completely different reason. “You got your boyfriend a Shakespeare collection?”

“He’s British… and I didn’t get him a Shakespeare collection. I got him pretty much every book of every ‘100 best books ever written’ list ever.” Stark wasn’t even looking at him, just going through the books in the box and Loki felt the urge to shove him away to look inside. Why not? They were for him anyway.

“He’s going to kick your ass for that, Tony. He’s going to think it’s weird… It’s too much. It smells like manipulating him into moving him.” Banner slowly shook his head, but his reproachful glare was completely ignored by Stark. “Let’s ask an outsider. If Cap was going to buy you 100 articles of your most favourite thing ever, wouldn’t you think that he is the best boyfriend ever?”

Scowling Loki crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Steve is not my boyfriend and I don’t see why you would use such a relationship to make fun of him if you have a boyfriend yourself?”

“Yeah… you guys would be perfect for each other… you’re equally annoying. Jarvis, how is Cap doing? Please tell me he and Thor got everything sorted out.”

“Sir, I fear they are still talking.”

Again Loki raised his head to look around and Banner took mercy on him. “It’s a computer… sort of. Look, why don’t we finish that cup of coffee while Tony takes a look at the books.”
They did just that, left Stark alone who couldn’t be happier about it. Not fair, those were Loki’s books. “I’m sorry… Tony doesn’t easily get… He’s bad with people, especially with people he doesn’t know… and it doesn’t get easier when he gets to know them.”

How sweet, Banner was trying to make peace.

“Don’t worry, I don’t like him much either. That’s an understatement, I can’t stand him and I hate the way he talks with Steve. It’s disrespectful…” It felt good to let these things out, although he didn’t give a damn about how Stark talked about the Captain or not.

“Steve and him are at odds… they always were… if the Avengers were a school class… they would part ways instantly after graduating and they would never see each other again. Unfortunately this isn’t school… they are stuck with each other, but they deal with it. We are all adults… It’s not like they have to like each other…”

What an innocent thought. As if it was that easy. It wasn’t about liking each other or not. It was about hatred, loathing, disgust, distrust and murder. This was how it was going to end and until then Loki would drink his cup of coffee and wait for Rogers to come back. Or for Thor to break down completely. Would be too soon anyway. So Loki had coffee with Banner, wondering if the latter was maybe doing too well. It was a relief anyway when Rogers showed up and Thor wasn’t with him.

“Hey… you could do something?”

“I don’t know… really. He’s… upset and he doesn’t want to talk about it. Maybe we should accept that. He’s mourning… I don’t know what triggered it, but that seems to be it. I know it seems weird, because it’s been quite a while, but… I guess there are no rules to it when it hits you… He’s feeling guilty for not being able to help him…”

Fine, so Loki had to make it clear to them that Thor had killed him and that he was dangerous. Wouldn’t be a problem, Loki knew exactly how to make them witness all of it.

“Okay… I tried to call Jane Foster by the way, but I couldn’t reach her. Maybe she should talk to him or… what do you think, Steve, should we just leave him alone?”

Whatever they felt like doing, it wouldn’t make a difference. Loki would take care of it, as soon as he was able to. When he wasn’t stuck in a skin that seemed to tight for his body, that wasn’t his own. How badly he wanted to scratch all of it off.

“Will? Are you ready to go?” Rogers’ hand was on his shoulder, he was smiling at him and Loki blinked. “Yeah, sure… It was nice seeing you again, Doctor Banner.”

Finally they would get out of here and Loki would use the first possibility to sneak away, a restroom, anything to get out of this skin for just a minute. Loki couldn’t even hear what Banner said, his mind was already out of here and… “Tony, what are you doing?”

Back in the main room Stark wasn’t busy with the books anymore, but used holographic screens to scan through some data. Loki couldn’t be more disinterested. “Just my daily check-up… gotta know what S.H.I.E.L.D is hiding from me today.”

So much about getting out of here.

“What?! You are still hacking into S.H.I.E.L.D data!” Why was the Captain so outraged? Had Stark ever given the impression that he would stop doing that? Normally Loki would have loved this little confrontation, but he needed to get out. Or he needed a knife.
“Sure. If they decide to kill me I want to be the first to know about it… Well, look at that.” Stark hesitated and Loki needed to shed it, tear it to shreds. “Last night they registered an unknown source of energy just outside the city… Smells like magic and nobody thought about informing us about it.”

Despite the fire Loki’s blood turned told and for a moment he forgot about the fact that he was suffocating.

“You can’t continue doing this! Rules also apply to you. You have no right to…”

“Yeah, yeah, just go on complaining. I’ll check this out myself. Magic popped up on their radar and they didn’t tell us about it. Captain Boyscout clearly doesn’t see what’s wrong with that. Jarvis, I’m going for a walk.” The nonchalance with which Stark was ignoring Rogers would have been amusing, but Loki’s mind was racing. An energy signature. They had fought, but Loki’s protections and shields had all been intact. He was untraceable… until… There had been this moment when Loki had not been in control. Not enough though to leave a trace that would lead to him. It had to be the mage… Loki’s life would be forfeit if they only found the slightest hint that another sorcerer had been present. Any little doubt about Loki’s death would crush his plans completely.

“Tony, there for sure is a reason why…”

“Can’t hear you, too busy doing something else than letting other people walk right over me.” That was all Stark said before heading out on the roof-deck, getting into his suit and flying off.

By now Loki had already gone through all of his options. There was nothing to be done. If they found something related to him, Loki would have to give up on the revenge he craved for so desperately. No games, no crushing of their souls, just a dagger into the heart. It wouldn’t be as satisfying, but…

“Will, I…” The Captain was looking at him, so guilt-ridden. Almost disgusting. “I really think I should check this out… I…”

Yes, please. Just go away and leave me alone. “Sure… I don’t understand what’s going on, but… we can meet up later.”

Rogers’ eyes told him that this wasn’t going to happen and Loki needed the knife. “You’re okay with just waiting here with Bruce? I’ll be back in an hour. Please?”

An hour being watched by Jarvis. An hour without any chance of taking a breath and there was no guarantee that Rogers would only be gone for an hour. And there was no way he could refuse. “If that’s okay…?”

“Sure, the guy who owns the tower just took off and I’m sure he doesn’t give a damn…” Banner smiled and Loki was choking. They wouldn’t let him breathe. This skin was the equivalent of a string around his neck. Tighter and tighter. “Okay then… take care and please don’t let Stark drag you into something stupid or dangerous.”

The Captain left, reluctantly, but he was nevertheless gone, leaving Loki and Banner behind. A gentle expression was displayed on his face, making Loki almost hate him more than this skin. “Everything’s going to be fine. They’re just checking out some place. Most probably it’s nothing.”

Or everything.

“Listen, I know we don’t know each other, but it’s impolite to stare all the time, so I’m just going
to ask. What happened to your hands?"

Loki had almost forgotten about the bandages. So pointless. “I… had… I broke a mirror.”

What would Loki give for the shards… Now all he could do was pressing his own fingernails into his skin, so hard that they would draw blood. One hour. Just one hour. Then he would come up with anything that was necessary to get away. Or he’d kill all of them.
Hey everybody,

Yeah, I know I should be writing on Delirious, but this is so much more fun now :D Loki is still in trouble and things just won't get better... or will Cap save him again? :)

OMG - just watched the Civil War Trailer. Looks like Marvel and I are thinking alike. There's a scene in there, very similar to what's going to happen in this story :D

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Cuando nadie me ve
Puedo ser o no ser
Cuando nadie me ve
Pongo el mundo del revés
Cuando nadie me ve no me limita la piel
Cuando nadie me ve
Puedo ser o no ser
Cuando nadie me ve

Cuando nadie me ve ~~ Alejandro Sanz

(When nobody sees me
I can be or not be
When nobody sees me
I turn the world upside down
When nobody sees me, my skin doesn’t restrict me
When nobody sees me
I can be or not be
When nobody sees me)

---

“Here, you should drink something. You’re a little pale.”

I’m always pale. Someone once told me that they had never seen skin as pale as mine. They thought it was beautiful.

“Thank you…” Loki took a sip from the water Banner had handed him and desperately tried to not think about going back into the kitchen, getting a pair of scissors and cutting off every single blonde curl.

Banner smiled at him and Loki was feeling sick. “I’m sorry, I was out of line. It’s none of my business.”
No, it wasn’t. “It’s okay, I would ask that too… it’s nothing. Steve is already worried enough. He’s always worrying…”

“Yeah, he is… He’s Captain America. It’s pretty much his job to do so. You gotta know, I think you might know him better than I do.”

Loki knew all of them better than they knew themselves. They all had no idea. They had no idea what was coming. “He’s my best friend, but I rarely see him. I guess you guys meet each other more often than Steve and I do.”

Again that smile on Banner’s face and all Loki needed was a knife. He had cut open his arm before, he could easily do it again.

“You can meet somebody every single day without ever getting to know them. You’re right, we spend a lot of time with each other, but… I wouldn’t say that I know that much about Steve. What I do know is that he needed a person… who has nothing to do with all the crazy stuff that is going on in his life and it’s good that he has somebody like that in you.”

Stop pointing out obvious things, mortal.

“Right… sometimes he forgets that life is more than this… saving the world or whatever stuff you do. No offense.”

Again Banner wouldn’t let him see him that he was hurting, that his words were hitting home. “No, you’re right… there is more to it. There should be more to it.”

This was something Loki should react to, he should use it, exploit it, push him into darkness, but Loki was suffocating himself. He wanted to get one of the books, smell it, run his fingers over it, do anything…

“Now that was a gigantic waste of time!”

The heart in his chest did a little jump and Loki looked up. How long had Stark been gone? Loki had lost the track of time. What did it matter anyway when Loki was only thinking about shards of glass? Stark stalked back into the room, not wearing the suit and Loki couldn’t even tell where he had come from?

“Nothing?”

“Less than nothing. Bunch of S.H.I.E.L.D guys hanging around, lab guys. They don’t know shit, I did my own scans and took off again. Not even Fury was there to piss off. Whatever, by now Cap surely tracked him down and is ranting about me. Annoying as fuck.”

“Right now you seem to be the one who’s ranting…” Loki mumbled and took a sip from his water. He needed to shut himself up, he couldn’t risk a confrontation when he was dancing on a rope. Loki knew he was going to fall.

Stark raised an eyebrow when he took in Loki’s sight. “Ah, you’re still here? How are doing when you can’t lick Cap’s boot for a second?”

“Tony!” Banner hissed at him, but Stark didn’t make the slightest effort to hide his annoyance. “What? This is my tower! If someone in it has a problem with me, they can very well leave! I didn’t even want Cap around!”

Loki had to remain silent, this wasn’t his but William’s problem. He didn’t want to have anything
to do with William, but he wanted to fight with Stark. Yell, hiss, scream. “Yet you called him to talk with your friend, because you weren’t able to do it…”

Rolling his eyes Stark looked like he was about to bark a response, but then he simply shook his head. “I’m going to work. When Cap comes back, feel free to get out of here instantly…”

Stark headed for the lab and Loki let out a sigh. “I’m sorry… I’m a guest here. I was way out of line…”

Banner didn’t seem to hold it against him. “Tony doesn’t make it easy on everybody and you’re right… we called Steve, because he’s better with people than Tony. He’s a caretaker.”

Like so often Banner was right. The Captain was always trying to take care of people and this would kill him. A soldier should know better than to wrap his arms around an enemy when he was helpless and about to fade away. Mistake. Horrible mistake. But he had been so warm and Loki had needed…

“He is. Too much so even. I try to tell him all the time to finally start being a little bit selfish, but he just hasn’t it in him…” Loki forced himself to smile and felt like gasping for air.

Excusing himself Loki headed for the bathroom, he needed a second to breathe, to be alone, away from all of them. Closing the door behind him Loki leaned against it and closed his eyes. The silence only made things worse. With no distraction the veil was cutting off his air, it felt unnatural, too tight and simply disgusting. Right in front of him there was a mirror and Loki couldn’t risk opening his eyes. He would also smash this one. As soon as the Captain would be back, Loki would drag him out of here. Away from the tower and some place where Loki could be alone for a moment to drop the glamour. He was dying to do it right now, but Jarvis was watching and everything would be over. This was risky enough, he was obviously in distress, but with a little luck Jarvis would ignore that. Would this day never end? Probably not.

Outside. Air. A mirror. Green eyes. Skin so pale that…

Turning around Loki quickly made his way over to the toilet and threw up. When he was done Loki screwed his face up in disgust and loathed himself even more. Whoever this person was, it wasn’t Loki. He would never crouch on the floor, because he was feeling sick. Only someone weak would do something like that.

William maybe, he was mortal and feeble.

Not Loki. Loki was a god, Loki was beautiful and strong. He would get through this day and then he would do whatever was necessary. Whatever was necessary. After flushing the toilet Loki got back on his feet and splashed his face with some water from the sink. Again not looking into the mirror Loki turned around and left the room. He would get through this.

There was Thor.

Banner and Thor standing right in the middle of the living room and Loki would only need one try. One single attempt. He was good, he was better than anyone else when he had his dagger. With the element of surprise he could take care of both of them. Then he would get rid of William.

“Hello?”

Banner turned to him, smiling softly. “Hey… Thor, this is William. A friend of Steve. I guess you haven’t met before?”
“Not really, no.” Loki forced himself to smile, but it was too late already. No chance that Banner would stop being this gentle, considerate person and most of all observant. A character trait that Loki despised… most of the time. “Are you feeling okay? Your face is white as chalk.”

“I’m okay. Not my best day though.” Loki shrugged it off, his eyes settling on Thor. “Hello… like Bruce just said, I’m William.”

Thor watched him and finally Loki felt a little bit like himself. Blue eyes, dark rings beneath them and he didn’t bother to smile at him. This man was feeling bad and Loki didn’t feel sorry for him. “A pleasure to meet you.”

Nothing more was said and Loki wanted to actually smile.

Banner looked from one person to the other, clearly feeling quite weird to be in the middle of this. Two people who looked like they couldn’t be in a worse state and he had no idea how to deal with them. At least one good thing about Thor, he hated it when other people tried to help him, he simply refused it. Why would the great Thor ever need help?

“Guys, wanna…”

“Where’s Tony?”

Jarvis really had to start announcing the people before the entered the room. Not that Loki cared. The Captain had returned, which meant he could finally get out of here. Leave. Take a breath.

“How did you get back this quickly?”

“Quin-jet… Where’s Tony? He just left and… Thor. Good to see you up here.” For like a second a smile appeared on the Captain’s face, but as soon as his eyes fell on William, it disappeared again. Just like his original intention to search for Stark. “Will, are you okay? You don’t look…”

“I’m fine. I just need some fresh air…” And my face. Banner carefully put his hand on Loki’s arm and he was fighting down a wave of panic. “Come, I’ll show you the balcony.”

There was no reason to argue, Loki just wanted to get out. When he was finally able to suck some fresh air into his lungs Loki felt his head clearing a little bit, but he was still suffocating. Trapped, locked in. His fingers curled around the balustrade and he let his head drop between his shoulders.

“You’re feeling better? Seriously, you look like you are about to faint any second. Maybe it would be better if you lay down for a while?”

It would be better if you all were dead. It would be better if I were in some other realm, surrounded by magic. It would be better if I were Loki. Everything would be better if I was in the gardens of Vanaheim. With my skin as white as snow.

“No… I feel like sitting down would be the worst idea ever. The cool air helps. I haven’t felt good the whole day. That happens. It’ll pass.”

Banner sounded genuinely concerned and why would he ever bother. He didn’t know him. “It’s none of my business, but… even a blind man could see how worried Steve is about you… it doesn’t help him either if you tell him that you’re alright when you clearly aren’t.”

It was impossible to survive a fall from this height. Even Loki’s bones would be crushed. Banner
had no idea how close he was to being thrown off the tower. “You are right… you don’t know me and it’s none of your business.”

“Right… sorry. I was out of line…”

Not listening anymore Loki took another deep breath and closed his eyes for a moment. Just a few more moments, then he would get out off here and he would get some time for himself. First he had to get a grip through. Straightening up again Loki told himself to focus, to not forget who he was.

“Will, hey… you wanna get going? We should get you home…” A hand was placed on his shoulder and Loki forced himself to not flinch. Yes, please, he needed to get out of here. Turning around he nodded softly. “If you’re ready to go… If there’s still something you gotta…”

The Captain shook his head. “No, nothing that can’t wait. I shouldn’t have left in the first place… Let’s go.”

There was so much Loki was supposed to say, to do, but he couldn’t. So he just nodded. “Okay. Goodbye, Doctor Banner.”

“Bye, take care.”

Loki was grateful that nothing was said until Rogers and him were in the elevator. “We should really get you back to the hotel. You don’t look very good.”

No, no chance in Hel. If they went back to the hotel Rogers would stay with him and Loki would still be sitting in the same trap. Something he couldn’t afford. “No, I don’t want to go back. Maybe we could go and have some coffee. Don’t look at me like that. Okay. I’ll admit, that’s not my best day. It’s a pretty fucked up day, but it’s not going to get better if I lie in bed and do nothing. Let’s go, have coffee, we’ll go to that club and listen to some music… and stop looking at me like that. I’m not suddenly going to break in half or… I’m not sick.”

The Captain didn’t stop giving him that worried, even pitiful look, but at least he agreed to not going back to the hotel. “We shouldn’t have come here in the first place. I’m sorry about that. It was a waste of time and I left you alone.”

“I’m a grown man, Steve, I can handle that. If you managed to help a friend, then it wasn’t a waste of time.”

“I don’t think I did a good job there. He’s a lot like you. He doesn’t want to share his feelings either.”

No matter which skin Loki was wearing, his hatred for this man called Thor always reminded him of who he was. The mere comparison caused him to raise his hand and he barely held back. He was still in the tower and he was still weak, shedding the Captain’s blood now would do him no good. “Are you holding that against me?”

Quickly Rogers shook his head. “No, of course not. I didn’t mean it like that. Thor’s just… normally he’s loud and very open about pretty much everything. Now he suddenly won’t open his mouth. You do that too…. voicing every thought you have. I’m sorry… I’m shutting up. Let’s go get some coffee.”

They didn’t go far, for the simple reason that Loki was about to lose his mind. The second they entered the coffee shop Loki excused himself and headed for the restroom. He was lucky enough to find it unoccupied. Immediately Loki dropped glamour and the rope that seemed to be wrapped
around his throat slowly disappeared. Air was filling his lungs and the constant dizziness wasecoming more bearable. Green eyes looked back at him and Loki recognized himself although he
had never seen himself that way. So tired, worn out. Lines around his eyes, the white skin tainted
by a shade of grey, but it was his face. Loki’s and nobody else’s.

Opening his eyes as wide as he could Loki tried not to blink, to take it in, to hold on to his sanity.
Touching his cheek Loki savoured the warm feeling. There was nothing cold about him, even
without a glamour Loki was anything, but he wasn’t made of ice. Putting his other hand on his
chest Loki concentrated on the rhythmic beating underneath his rips. There was a heart. A heart
that was pumping red, warm blood through his veins. A sign that he was alive. His blood would
only be cold if Death had taken a hold of him. That wasn’t the case. He was warm, he was alive
and he was Loki.

With a finger Loki traced his cheekbones, smiling lightly when he felt how sharp they were.
Something Frigga had liked to comment on. She had told Loki to be careful, a face like this could
get him easily into trouble. It had taken Loki centuries to understand what she had meant by that.
Trailing his finger along his nose Loki took a breath and he knew that he couldn’t look at himself
any longer. He had an Avenger waiting for him.

Turning around Loki slipped back into the glamour and the fire was still burning. He still didn’t
feel completely comfortable with the veil, but he would be able to wear it a few hours and that was
all he needed. For now his only goal was to convince the Captain to leave him alone tonight.

Quite a task, given the fact that Rogers wouldn’t stop looking at him with these blue eyes that only
wanted him to feel better. Even if Stark let go of the robot right now, to send it against innocent
people, Rogers wouldn’t care less. William was that important.

“I was thinking about going back home to D.C.”

A surprising statement, but Loki could deal with it. “Oh? Why that? I thought you couldn’t leave
before these attacks were… done? Or you caught whoever was responsible.”

Rogers looked clearly uncomfortable and he slowly shook his head. “Nothing has happened for a
while now and I can’t stay here forever. I used to love New York, but it’s not the same city I grew
up in. Moreover I got a nice place in D.C. Didn’t you say that I shouldn’t let them push me around?
I feel like going home. Shouldn’t I do that?”

“If that’s what you want, of course you should do it. You’ll make me feel proud if you start
standing up for yourself.” Loki smiled at him and Rogers hesitated before doing the same.
“Somebody’s gotta do that, right?”

Talking seemed easier after that and Loki kept his breathing even. Somehow they made it to avoid
all the dangerous topics and Rogers obviously thought that he was doing well enough for them to
go to the music club. He couldn’t stop annoying him though. All these little glances. The constant
worry. Something that Loki had to live with now, there was no way he would ever be able to make
the Captain forget about what he had seen. Never. Backstory. He needed backstory. The few things
he had already established were pointing in a single direction. Loki just needed to decide how far
he wanted to go with it.

He had said something had happened when he had been a child. Mortals would assume one
specific thing if they heard something like that. Loki could use that. Something so delicate and
horrific stopped people from asking further questions, it made them feel uncomfortable. Then
again, William himself wouldn’t want to talk about it. Would it make him look weak or even
stronger? Would that even matter? Not for the Captain, that much was for sure.
“Steve… I know I’ve already said it, but… thank you. I know I didn’t make it easy today. I really
didn’t. I know it isn’t really fair that I’m not talking about it, but… that doesn’t mean that I don’t
appreciate what you did. I do. I am grateful and I know it upsets you that I’m not talking about it. I
just have to ask you to respect that and… maybe I will someday. I just don’t want you to worry
because of me. I know what happened looked scary and… I am sorry.”

Would the Captain ever stop looking at him like this? No pity, just concern, maybe even more
than that. “You don’t have to feel sorry… Everybody has their… baggage. That’s nothing to
apologize for. I just want you to be okay… That’s all.”

“I am. I know it doesn’t look like it, but… I am.”

No, he didn’t believe him yet, of course not, but Loki could see that the determination in his voice
gave the Captain some reassurance. A step in the right direction, Loki would get out of this.
Tomorrow he would have found himself again, tomorrow he would be Loki and he would make
them all pay.

They spent a few hours in this club, listening to music, talking about things that didn’t matter and
slowly William’s skin was growing too tight again. It wasn’t as urgent, Loki didn’t feel like he was
losing his mind, but it was about time that he got away. Luckily Rogers wasn’t objecting when
Loki brought that up. The most important part was still coming though.

“I don’t feel good about leaving you alone tonight. I really don’t.”

I will lose my mind or rip you apart if you don’t leave me alone.

“I wouldn’t feel good about you staying at my hotel, because you are worried about me. I really
don’t want that. I don’t have a babysitter to look out for me when I’m at home either…”

Not enough yet, but Loki had to stop this from happening at any cost. He wouldn’t be able to take
another night in this skin.

“Well… there’s a good chance I’m going to lie awake all night, because I’m going to worry
anyway.” Rogers smiled tentatively and Loki felt his fingers twitch. “I don’t think this is a good
idea… Listen, if you are worried… I can send you a text the second I’m back at the hotel. I’ll send
you one when I’m going to bed and when I’ll wake up. How does that sound?”

“Good, but… just promise me you’ll call me immediately if you’re feeling bad. Or if anything
happens… Promise me that and I’ll do just fine. You gotta mean it though.”

Perfect.

“I promise.”

Rogers still brought him back to the hotel, but then he left Loki alone and he hadn’t felt this much
relief in ages. Loki dropped the glamour even before he was back in his room. Closing the door
behind him Loki leaned against it and slid down to the floor. Every muscle in his body ached, felt
like he had been awake and fighting for centuries. Perhaps not that long, but it had cost him dearly.
His eyelids were heavy, but nothing could be further from Loki’s mind than sleep. There was so
much work to do. Raising his hands Loki looked at them, his eyes following every line, taking all
the time that was necessary. White as snow. Like they had always been.

They were his hands. Loki could tell from their colour and from the familiar feeling of magic
running through his fingers. It felt like being alive. Like being Loki. Over the course of the day
Loki’s magic had completely restored itself, more than he needed. Mumbling a few words Loki
created a circle around himself. Made of mirrors.

There was Loki. Looking back at him was Loki. A tall, lean man with bright green eyes, black hair and skin as white as snow. The sight of him evened out his heartbeat and Loki rested his head against the door, finally relaxing and feeling at ease. For a moment Loki just looked at himself, slightly moving his fingers and a smile spread across his lips when his reflection mimicked the gesture. This was him.

When he felt sure enough that he could tear his eyes off himself Loki stripped off his shirt. More white skin was revealed, so white it had probably never seen the sun. Letting his fingers run up his rips up to his shoulder where he stopped. A little black spot that had been there as long as Loki remembered. Barely visible, but it was there. The skin around it felt warm beneath his touch, the fire underneath was flaring, only waiting to destroy anything or anyone that should oppose him. Hot, blazing…

That was him, there was nothing cold about him except his dagger and his determination.

He would need this night, every second of it and every mirror. Then he would let his wrath devour them all. There was no coming back from this. They would all be burned alive and Loki would cherish their screams.
The Comeback

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

A little change in the tags... am I the only one who is suddenly getting a Steve / Loki vibe from the story? And I am the author, I should know that :D I know I'm mean :D

Loki is feeling better... you guys know what that means... Bad things are about to happen

_________________________________________________

I will brush of all the dirt
And I will pretend it didn't hurt
You are a black and heavy weight
And I will not participate

Battle for the sun ~~ Placebo

__________________________________________________

Stepping out of the shower Loki rubbed himself off in front of the repaired mirror and brushed his long black hair behind his ears. For a second his thoughts drifted off to the German fairy tale he had read some time ago. White skin, dark hair… well, his lips weren’t exactly red, but he could see it now. There was a slight resemblance. Physically. Nothing else.

Loki dropped the towel, grabbed his T-shirt and slipped it on. After getting fully dressed Loki looked himself up and down, adjusting the collar of his shirt. He looked good, rested and his eyes were attentive and full of life. Half an hour ago he had felt strong enough to turn away from the mirrors. Burning magic was running through his veins, waiting to be used and Loki was finally thinking clearly enough to figure out what had happened to him and how to crush everybody who would step in his way.

Yesterday seemed like a blur now. Pain, fear, nausea, constant fighting for air and holding on to his sanity… everything mingled together and Loki had to sort it out. He hadn’t been able to take care of anything. Like calling Stark. Or making sure that the female agent was out of the picture. He hadn’t checked on the Widow in ages and… the little mage had done something to him. Loki didn’t know how he did it and that made him sick to his stomach. The only way from stopping him from doing it again was to understand how he had done it. Absently Loki brushed his fingers over his arm, but the wounds were long gone. They had vanished with his magic returning.

When Loki had yanked the curse out it had all been about survival, about keeping his sanity and making the cold disappear. There had been no time to analyze it. Something that Loki regretted deeply now, but he knew very well that there hadn’t been any possibility to do so. He was now dealing with a day filled with a lot of work.
Getting back into the main room Loki sat down on his bed and grabbed his phone. His stomach clenched when he saw that he had over 10 new messages. Seriously, did they have to call when he was about to lose his mind?

Jane Foster, Barton, Rogers, Stark and even Banner. Banner, of all people! Who had been ignoring him for weeks? Why now? That didn’t make a lot of sense. Rogers, that was fairly obvious, Loki had sent him a message and Rogers had responded, being happy that he was feeling fine and telling him that he would be here around 8 o’clock in the morning. Still plenty of time to take care of a lot of things.

It was probably for the best to start with Stark. He had called him two times and written a message. Had they agreed on calling each other everyday? Loki couldn’t remember, but he couldn’t afford having Stark getting stupid ideas. No need to teleport to London to have a phone conversation, the bracelet was there, that was enough.

Putting a hand on his throat Loki was searching for Thomas’ voice and called Stark. It only took a few seconds before Stark answered the call. “Gorgeous, it’s five in the morning! You didn’t call the whole fucking day and now you’re waking me up!”

“It’s five in the morning. I’m pretty sure that you weren’t asleep.”

Stark let out a laugh, sounding way happier than the last time Loki had seen him. Of course. “Damn, you got me. You’re not here to force me to go to sleep. Now seriously, I’ve been calling you. You were too busy with your British snobs to call me?”

Better to admit a little mistake, then nobody would be looking for a big one. “Sorry, I was out the whole day. I should have called you, but there was always something happening. I just got back to the hotel, so I’m calling you now. How are you doing? How’s Bruce?”

“Everybody’s doing perfectly fine... Well, not everybody, but you don’t want to hear about that. Bruce’s fine, I pissed off S.H.I.E.L.D and Captain America. So, I’m doing fantastic.”

Loki grinned at that before shaking his head. “Guess I really can’t leave you alone for a few days without you doing something stupid.”

“Hey, last time I checked you thought it was awesome that I was pissing Cap off! He was asking for a favour and he was acting like a jerk about it. Not that he was much of a help anyway. Nothing interesting. I missed you, I need more smart people around and I need sex. What did you do? Partying with blackjack and hookers?”

And this conversation was already annoying Loki. “No, we were having lunch, visiting a gallery, hanging out, complaining about all the tourists around Westminster. The usual. Charles insisted I get you something from London. Seems like people are doing that when they’re going on vacation, they bring gifts for their boyfriend. What do you want? You have the choice between a minature Big Ben and a Sherlock Holmes hat? What’s your cup of tea?”

“You’re from London. You can’t get more creative? I want two things.”

“Yeah? What?”

“A T-Shirt that says ‘I love London’ and you getting naked right now.” Loki could hear Stark’s leer and he rolled his eyes. “I’ll get you the T-shirt and my clothes already are off, because I’m going to bed right now. I’ll call you tomorrow and there will be no phone sex either. I think celibacy for a few days will do you good.”
“Why are you so mean to me?” Stark was whining and Loki rolled his eyes again. “Because I can and it’s five in the morning. At least for you. Just get into bed and get some sleep. Staying awake all night isn’t healthy. I want to still be able to walk on two legs when I get back.” So I can break your legs.

Again Stark was laughing softly. “Fine, you’re already starting to sound like Bruce. I’ll go to bed. You’ll call me tomorrow and I’ll try to talk you into phone sex then?”

“Consider it a date.”

“Awesome! Good night then and don’t dream of other British guys. You know they have nothing on me.”

“If you say so. Good night, take care and really do get some sleep.” Hanging up Loki sighed heavily and rubbed his forehead. This hadn’t been a problem, Stark hadn’t been concerned nor worried. What about Barton? That could probably wait. Banner couldn’t and Jane Foster for the first time had really caught his interest. Why not starting wit the tough one for once? Loki was already dialling Banner’s number when he stopped. This wasn’t a good idea. He had just called Stark and they were both in the tower. Jarvis would notice that the second call came in about thirty second after the first and that might look a bit weird. So Barton then. A decent person wouldn’t call at five o’clock in the morning, but they could still write texts.

_Sorry I missed your call. You wanna meet up?_

It was midnight in London. Too late to call, so Loki wrote another text. _Sorry I missed your call. Gonna call you back tomorrow morning_

Done. Later this day he would both call Banner and Jane Foster, until then he still had to figure out what exactly to tell the Captain to make him believe William was fine or how to use this to his advantage. Whispering a heart-wrenching story into the Captain’s ear, proving his trust, would deeply touch him. Never a bad idea…

The phone in his hand started ringing and Loki raised an eyebrow. Now this was a rude time to call someone. Even for Jane Foster. Licking his lips Loki searched for Lori’s voice and answered the call. How sweet would it be for Jane Foster to tell him about Thor’s suffering and hopefully finally starting to distrust him.

“Hello Lori. No, no… I don’t really feel like sleeping.”

The mere sound of her voice erased all doubt. He was Loki. A feeling of grim satisfaction filled him and brought a sneer to his lips. She was in distress. Worried. Confused. Not knowing what to make of the things that had just happened to her. Thor really had it in him to ruin lives, didn’t he?

“Oh… okay. What’s going on? Gotta be something on your mind if you call me just around midnight?” Leaning back Loki crossed his legs and this was what he needed. Something to lighten up his mood. A stupid mortal telling him about Thor’s suffering and hopefully finally starting to distrust him.

Jane Foster started with a sigh and Loki was already having a blast. “I didn’t tell that Thor came back to London, didn’t I?”

“No, you didn’t.”

“Uhm… he’s already gone again. I… I’ll better start at the beginning. Okay… he came back, telling me that he missed me and that there was no immediate business to attend in New York…”
“How romantic….”

“Well, that’s not the problem… It was nice. To have him around again. I have to travel a lot because of my job and… so I really appreciate it if my partner is around most of the time. Still I had the feeling that something was wrong. Maybe not something to worry about, but… You’ve met Thor, he is such a loud and happy guy. You can’t help but notice it when he isn’t smiling all the time…” There was a little pause, enough for Loki to jump at the opportunity. “You’ve already mentioned that before. You said that he was… upset about something, but you didn’t know what? Did that get worse?”

Tell me, little mortal…

Hesitation and Loki could hear her breathing. “I just have no idea how to make him talk. He’s completely shutting me out and I can’t help him… or… I desperately want to know what’s going on. I know it’s something about his brother and… he doesn’t want to talk about it.”

Time to remind her of her stupidity. “You know what I think about this, Jane…”

“Yes, but… I haven’t told you yet what happened two days ago. Even before that… He was having nightmares. I only realised, because he seemed tired and wasn’t sleeping well, but then he woke up in the middle of the night. He said the name of his brother and then refused to talk about it… then… two days ago… I woke up, because he was talking. I guess he had been dreaming and was still caught up in his dream and… he was saying over and over that he was sorry. That it was his fault. That he loved his brother and… that he didn’t want that to happen. Whatever ‘that’ means…”

Jane Foster trialled off and Loki was about to click his tongue at how wonderful this sounded. Not only had Thor scared her, he had said enough to make her wonder. Fine, Lori could make those doubts disappear, couldn’t she?

“Wow… that’s… You told me that his brother died, right? I guess it’s normal to feel very… strongly about that…”

Again that short moment of hesitation and Loki smirked. “I know… I thought so too, but… I was there when his brother died and… I don’t think he’s referencing his death. God, this must all sound terrible… he talked about… his brother falling and… I don’t know, Lori. It was all very confusing and weird, but it was obvious that he was feeling guilty…”

“Wait a second… I don’t know any details… but… this is clearly bothering you. It’s already affecting your relationship, so… you probably should get to the bottom of this. I really don’t want to make any assumptions, because it’s none of my business and I don’t have any information, but it’s clearly upsetting you. It’s upsetting you so much that you want to talk about it in the middle of the night. I guess you want my advice? Get him to talk about it. I don’t know how, but I think you need that.” Oh, he was good. Perfect.

“I know… I know and I tried, but… he left the very same night. Not even giving me an explanation. Pretending it never happened. Just running away.”

Say it, mortal. Just say it. He was running away, like a criminal, fleeing the scene of his crime.

“Sometimes it’s hard to talk about things. Especially when you’re not ready, but… it’s not only about him. It’s also about you and if this isn’t going to give you any peace… you have to take care of yourself. If you are only going to feel better if you know what this is about… tell him and demand answers. It’s the least he can do. That’s just my opinion…” A little bit of compassion, but most of all it was determination. Not beating around the bush, Lori wasn’t afraid to call the things at their names.
He couldn’t help to feel a little bit surprised when Jane Foster answered and there was no doubt it, she was grateful. Had Loki just voiced her thoughts? Had she only called to talk to somebody who would say what she wanted to hear? Now that was even better. “Thank you… I guess I will try that. Thanks for listening and… I’m sorry for calling so late…”

“Don’t worry, I’m still awake, right? I’ll just call you some time in the middle of the time to tell you about my love life… if I ever find a guy interesting enough to spend more than one night with.”

Jane Foster laughed lightly, a bit forced and Loki would love to memorize every single word of this conversation, because it was pure perfection. “I wouldn’t mind that. Just give me a call. Anything you want to talk about?”

“No really. Life is boring as usual. If there isn’t anything else on your mind, I would like to go to sleep…”

“Oh, sorry. Sure. Good night and thank you again…”

“You’re welcome. Good night.” Ending the call Loki took a minute to savour his triumph, this had been wonderful. Bless Thor for never shutting his mouth. The words he had uttered were coming back to hunt him. Soon.

The Avengers were done. Now Loki could turn his entire attention to the little mage. Only the thought of him made Loki’s fingers curl into a fist. Blood. All of it. He wanted all of it. Why not drowning the little mage in it? There was no time for blind rage. It had cost Loki dearly. This time he would be smart.

There was no way Loki could risk that a certain event would ever repeat itself. Loki didn’t know if he was able to overcome it a second time. How had the mage even managed to do it? If Loki could figure this out, it wouldn’t be this difficult to stop him from doing it again. The little mage was Midgardian, it would be only natural for him to have a completely different approach on magic than Loki. This could have allowed him to look at things differently and find a way to… When it came down to it, Loki didn’t care. He wouldn’t face the mage personally. Should somebody else get their hands dirty.

Another fairy tale came to his mind and he mumbled its famous phrase, forming his plan “Seven at one Blow”. Revenge was a dish best served cold and Loki had waited long enough. Thomas wasn’t here, not perfect, but Loki wouldn’t have the mage walking around any longer. Stark and Rogers were at odds, Thor’s behaviour was getting noticed. It was the perfect time. Loki had held back so often and where had it led him?

First thing was the robot, the trickiest part. The Captain had to be engaged too, so Loki had to get to it immediately. It wasn’t going to be his masterpiece, absolutely not, but sitting around wasn’t working out anymore. He had dared to take Loki’s skin away, so Loki would let the others rip him apart.

Every single thought was greeted enthusiastically by his magic, pulsing underneath his skin. Trying to convince him of a decision he had already made. Checking his shields, his protection, Loki made sure that he would be untraceable. Good, time to pay his boyfriend a visit.

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His steps were light, not making a sound and Loki smirked when he stood in front of the door to the lab. He wouldn’t even need magic to enter, Stark had given him permission. Not that this was
an option right now, but Loki couldn’t ignore the sweet irony. Teleporting into the lab Loki took a look around. It seemed like Stark had listened to Thomas and had gone to bed. The tower was dark, asleep and Loki had entered its heart. Without setting off a single alarm. Another thing he’d like to tell Stark, but he couldn’t. The thing he was about to do wasn’t bad either.

Not much had changed around here, at least as far Loki could tell. Another thing that didn’t really matter. He was only interested in one single thing. Lying right here on this table in front of him. A fully functioning robot. Not quite resembling the other models anymore, Stark had used a lot of his personal touch. Now Loki would add some of his own. Carefully though. If Jarvis noticed that the magic impulse was coming from an outside source Loki would get into trouble. He would make sure that it couldn’t be traced back to him.

Now this process would take a little bit of time, Loki should get started, because in this tower you could always get interrupted. Putting both hands on the robot’s torso Loki closed his eyes to concentrate. Slowly he let his magic sip into the metal shell, thinking that it was almost a waste of his abilities, but it would pay off.

The irony of it was sweet. Loki wasn’t able to control flesh, he wasn’t able to control iron, but this thing beneath his fingers wasn’t just made of iron. There had been magic inside of it, vanished by now, but if you were magic yourself you could always find its traces. Another thing that Thor didn’t understand. Something that none of them understood. Loki knew and therefore he had spend centuries working on the perfect shield, on how to cover his own tracks. Others weren’t as good as him and the little mage probably didn’t even know how to do that.

Without much trouble Loki found the holes that the magical presence had left behind and filled them. A pity that he couldn’t do that to a robot when it was controlled by the mage. Not that it mattered anymore.

Stepping back Loki took a look at his work.

Perfect. Anything less wasn’t acceptable. Humming a soft tune Loki wiggled his fingers and the eyes of the robot began to glow. Interesting. Manipulating machinery was something entirely new, but it was brilliant. Nobody would ever be able to trace this back to him.

Stepping back Loki waited and of course barely a minute passed until Stark and Banner rushed into the room. Loki loved Jarvis.

“… simply isn’t…. Oh, fuck me. You were right! How the hell...”

Better to keep things moving fast. They shouldn’t even know what was happening to them. Curling his fingers into a fist Loki smirked and the robot sat up, placing his feet on the floor. Their reaction was marvellous. Face to face with this threat that they hadn’t expected they both stumbled back. Wide eyes, pale faces and evidently in utter shock. “Tony, shut it off!”

“I didn’t switch it on in the first place! Jarvis!”

“I am sorry, sir, I cannot interfere. Something is keeping me out off its interface.”

No better moment to get serious. Loki raised his right arm, spread his fingers and the robot mimicked his action. Better run little mortals.

“Fuck! Jarvis! Suit, now!”

A little late. Loki grinned and gave a little nod. Like a good little puppet the robot fired. Both jumped to the side and Loki hadn’t aimed very well anyway. It wasn’t like he wanted them to die
from this. Waving his hand Loki gave the robot the order to disappear and it instantly turned around, heading towards the next window, crashing right through it and flying off.

Too bad that Loki couldn’t compliment Stark on his work, the energy blast had done quite some damage. Loki wouldn’t have miscalculated?

“Shit… Bruce, not going green on me, are you?”

“No, I’m fine.” Banner was getting up from the floor, rushing over to Stark who was only now sitting up, groaning while doing so. Well, sometimes you couldn’t avoid some collateral damage. “Tony, you’re bleeding. Don’t move.”

Unceremoniously Stark shoved Banner away. “Just a scratch on my fucking leg. It’s nothing. Jarvis, I need my fucking suit! I have to take that fucker down!”

Phase 1 – done. Loki teleported away, right across the city, to the top of a random skyscraper. Within the next few seconds the robot would fly past him and Loki wanted to give the Captain a pretty good reason to turn against Stark. Though too much destruction and death wouldn’t be a good idea, the Avengers would choose to clean up the mess and save people in peril and wouldn’t concentrate on what Loki wanted them to. Right next to him there was an office building, too soon for anybody to be at work. As good as any.

With a little gesture Loki slowed the robot down and had him firing at said building. Again some windows exploded, but Loki barely looked. Just one attack wouldn’t seem very believable. So Loki had it fire some more. That had to be enough to catch the attention of all the Avengers.

Fly, fly, little robot.

This was the interesting part. Loki didn’t have too much information about the capabilities of Stark’s technology, but he was sure that he was going to give him a run for his money. Stark had partly created this robot, so Loki was sure that it could fly at incredible speed, but it was unlikely that the Iron Man armour wouldn’t be able to catch up. Hopefully Stark would be smart enough to realise that he should follow the robot instead of destroying it. Loki would be very angry and not to mention disappointed. He was leaving a trace of breadcrumbs and Stark better follow it. Right until Europe. By now the robot had already reached the ocean and Loki seriously wondered how long it would take. The sea was pretty much the only place where Loki couldn’t follow. A pity that he wasn’t able to fly. He had to rely on Stark’s wit.

Ah, the phone call, even earlier than expected.

“Steve, I appreciate that you want to look out for me, but I was still sleeping…”

“Will, I am so sorry, but I can’t show up for breakfast. There was an incident and I’d feel better if you don’t leave the hotel till I call you.”

So scared and so guilty.

“Oh… alright. Something bad?”

“I don’t know yet. I will call you as soon as I know. I am sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’ll hang out here and you call me as soon as you are done and… please, take care.”

“Yes, you do too. I am sorry…”
Smiling contently Loki hung up. So he got all Avengers on the case. They would do his dirty work and if they didn’t succeed the first time, at least they would stir things up. Loki would make sure that none of them got hurt too badly in the process. After all they were still his and not the little mage’s. People would get hurt though and it would be Thor’s fault. How sick did a person have to be to start talking with their dead brother during a fight?
Hey everybody,

Loki is having some fun, but he's the only one who's having fun... everybody else is suffering...

______________________________

_A maniac Messiah_
_Destruction is his game_
_A beautiful liar_
_Love for him is pain_

_End of all days ~~ 30 seconds to Mars_

______________________________

“Come with me and you'll be in a world of pure imagination. Take a look and you'll see into your imagination. We'll begin with a spin. Travelling in a world of my creation. What you'll see will defy explanation…” While singing softly to this pleasant tune Loki was weaving a net between his fingers. Glowing strings of green magic were wrapped around his fingers and Loki felt them pulsing with power. Looking between the loops Loki could see himself, another version of him, staring back with dead eyes. No green, just grey. Grinning Loki cocked his head. “You’re going to do me some good work. Aren’t you?”

Of course there was no response and Loki continued to elegantly twiddle his fingers, letting the net grow, feeding it with power and making sure that it wouldn’t be able to be broken unless Loki wanted to.

“If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it. Anything you want to, do it…” Loki stopped singing when his phone started ringing again. Bad timing, bad Avenger. Shouldn’t you be busy chasing after a robot? Most probably the Captain was still overreacting. Letting the web disappear Loki reached for the phone and his eyebrows went up in surprise when he read the name ‘Banner’ on the display. Now that was unexpected and not planned. Why not? Loki’s influence on him had been vanishing anyway. Who was he to refuse an opportunity when it presented itself?

Clearing his throat and feeling his vocal chords change beneath his skin Loki answered the call. “Bruce, I’m so glad you…”

No time to talk, he was instantly cut off. “Lizzy, listen. If you are in New York, don’t go out, just stay at home. Just stay at home during the noon. Most probably there is nothing going to happen. Please, just stay at home for a couple of hours.”

How cute. “What? Bruce, what is going…”
“Lizzy, please. Just stay at home. Just in case.”

And he just hung up. Now that was rude. Loki still smiled and ravished this feeling. Everything was working like it was supposed to. And Banner hadn’t forgotten about his friend, that was a good sign. Especially since Loki had pretty much neglected him. Yes, he was sure that Banner was trying to work something out to make the Hulk disappear, but Loki hadn’t been checking on his progress. Even if Banner wanted to keep Elizabeth out of this, Loki could still use Thomas.

That was something for another day though.

Concentrating on the robot Loki smirked. Still on its way. That meant Stark was smart enough to realise that they should follow the robot. Maybe he also thought that it was a trap, but Loki didn’t care. He just needed them to show up and then he would pull some strings, throw out his net. Before that he would knock at the door though.

Loki teleported away and watched the castle. Time to create a little distraction. After all Loki would want the Avengers to feel welcomed.

“You want to change the world. There’s nothing to it…” Creating an energy ball in his hand Loki watched it. Child’s play. Loki couldn’t afford using too much of his power, he would only risk the Avengers noticing his presence. No, this was a simple story. Stark playing with something dangerous, something that he didn’t understand. The robot attacked them and returned to its original master. Almost too simple, but very effective. If the mage was good and he had already spotted the robot, then there was not much Loki could do, he would be prepared. Whatever, Loki would make sure that this fight would end a certain way.

Seconds. Not much more. Loki really had to compliment Stark on his creation. It was indeed fast, but Loki was still faster. About to start the welcome party. Taking another look at the energy ball Loki thought about the mage and how he would rip off his limbs, crush his rips and watch him drown in his own blood. No more waiting. Loki threw the energy ball at the barrier and watched the impact. Child’s play, but still enough to cause a not very subtle explosion. It caused the ground to shake, but Loki’s own powers had stopped to impress him long ago. He watched the fire wall, created by two connecting forces and suppressed a yawn.

Come out, little mage. The Avengers are knocking at your door.

It all happened just like in the piece of theatre that Loki had written in his mind while planning this. The robot arrived, Stark wasn’t to be seen yet, but the little mage released his robots from the castle. How many did he have of those? Maybe the castle was just a façade to hide an entire factory that was only dedicated to create robots. What a waste of magic.

A red lighting flashed across the sky and now Loki could lean back and enjoy his status as a watcher. Not quite yet. Slowing the robot down with a gesture of his hand Loki let it turn and fire at Stark. He was the god of chaos after all. Stark responded with fire and that was enough for the mage to let his little army loose. What a nice picture of explosions, fire and melted metal. Today the Avengers finally proved that some of them possessed the tiniest bit of intelligence. Stark was alone for about 25 seconds, then the rest of them showed up. Four of them in a plane, one was riding thunder and lightning.

Loki’s heart did a leap in excitement and his magic was screaming. Soon. He had to watch a little bit first. Today no mistakes were being made.

How delightful, they even brought the Hulk. If Banner was okay with that, it meant he also really wanted these robots gone. Not really a problem now, quite the opposite if he was about to tear
down the walls of the castle. Loki needed something from inside.

The battle in front of him wasn’t like something Loki had never seen before, but he felt entertained. Thor wasn’t at the top of his game, but he was still effective. Using his hammer the crush the metal bodies or the lightning to paralyze them. Still, anybody who had seen Thor fighting before couldn’t miss that his punches weren’t delivered with the same accuracy as usual. A lot of robots actually made it close to him before he was able to neutralize them. Loki couldn’t wait to throw his net.

One thing before that though. Stark’s robot hadn’t been destroyed yet and that was good, Loki knew just the right person to do that. A little gesture and the robot went for the Captain who was having none of it. Loki let the robot put up a little fight, but not that much. Rogers should take it apart and remember that one of Stark’s creations had tried to kill him. When the Captain’s shield connected the robot’s neck, almost taking its head of, Loki didn’t miss the look in Rogers’ eyes. The disdain. So, this was it. No coming back from this.

Humming the tune of this marvellous British actor Loki walked through the battlefield, every now and then dodging an attack that wasn’t meant for him anyway. It wasn’t difficult to get close to Thor, not in the least bit. The tricky part was just seconds away. Loki felt the web in hand, strings forming loops between his fingertips. Thor was right in front of him, swinging Mjolnir to destroy a robot that he had brought down to the ground. Magic that barely could be contained was running through Loki’s veins and it was nothing in comparison to the hatred he was feeling. Their was only one thing that mattered now, making Thor feel the pain he had put Loki through. If that was even possible. A weak character like Thor wasn’t able to take it and Loki would gleefully watch him breaking underneath the weight of it.

Bending over Thor brought the hammer down and Loki didn’t need more than this mere second of Thor standing still. Loki was right next to him, more magic than most sorcerers could ever dream of having in his hand. Not hesitating a second Loki carefully released his web, a work of art, letting it wrap itself around Thor’s tiny little mind.

The deed was done and Loki stepped back. Now all Loki had to do was to watch and savouring every moment of it. He was almost feeling proud, something he had created doing such marvellous work. Thor was straightening up, stumbling already. Yes, this was something to be proud of.

Thor took a step back, wavering softly, bringing a hand up to his face as if he was trying to shake off the vertigo he was feeling. Good luck with that. Shaking his head Thor tightened his grip around Mjolnir and most probably thought that he could fight any foe with it. Naïve fool.

“Everything alright, big guy?” The Widow noticed even earlier that something was wrong than Loki had expected, but this was a good thing.

Of course Thor didn’t hear her, how could he when his eyes were still adapting to the change of scenery? Right now everything had to be quite fuzzy, the castle and the trees melting together with the rocks and dead plains of the Dark World. And it would stay that way. Terribly confusing wasn’t it? Impossible to separate reality from illusion. Or the here and now from a ghost of the past who was hunting him. Loki would be quoting Macbeth if somebody would be able to hear him.

Loki only had to follow Thor’s gaze to figure out where the ghost was standing. Not looking any different from the last time, a rotting corpse, with dead eyes and a hole in his chest.

“What…”

“Look at the mighty Thor… how he is trying to save the lives of the innocent… yet he killed his own brother…”
Judging by the look on Thor’s face everything was going as planned. The robots, the fight, the other Avengers? Completely forgotten. What else was there to pay attention to when there was his dead brother accusing him of killing him. And rightly so.

“Loki…”

“You run across this tiny world, because of people you do not know. People who did not ask for your help. Yet you come for them instantly.” A voice so dark and raspy, it could only come from a dead, decomposing tongue. “I’ve been screaming for help. Calling, yelling at the top of my lungs. I kept screaming for you. Screaming till I could no more. I am Loki. The lies smith. They used to say that words were my weapons and I screamed for you until I didn’t have any more words. You did not come. Not for me. For anyone else, but not for me.”

“No, I would… I would have…” Thor made a step towards him, but reality caught up with him. A robot launched an attack at him and of course the oaf took a hit. How amusing. Loki used the opportunity to take a look around. Nothing to worry about. None of the Avengers was in serious trouble and the little mage hadn’t shown himself yet. Their real foe was among them anyway. About to reveal his ugly face.

Despite his confusion Thor managed to take out the two robots which were giving him trouble and Loki could feel the satisfaction spread inside of him. He was having trouble with it. Lacking sleep and accuracy. Moreover his eyes were constantly darting to something else.

Loki was about to show him a memory. The truth of what had happened and Thor would have to live with it. Or even better – die because of it. The beauty of his web couldn’t be matched. It was almost a waste that only Thor could see it.

See him. Only moments before what had been supposed to be Thor’s coronation. Smiling. With green eyes full of life. “You are my brother and my friend. I may sometimes be envious of you, but never doubt that I love you.”

By the time he had finished this sentence this version of Loki had vanished and Thor was already falling apart. “No, brother! Don’t leave!”

Oh, he wasn’t leaving. He wasn’t going anywhere. Not until they had all seen it.

For barely a second the Man or Iron was hovering in the air, not doing anything, just looking down before engaging in another fight. With a little bit of luck he had already been watching Thor. How could anyone miss this look of desperation on his face while staring into nowhere? Isn’t this what people call madness?

Loki was licking his lips, convincing himself to not get any closer, just because he didn’t want to miss any of Thor’s reactions. His presence had to go by unnoticed.

“No… No!”

The shadows formed something new. An abyss that opened itself up right in front of Thor, filled with darkness and fear. Loki was clinging to the edge, about to fall, to be swallowed by the shadows and he was afraid. “Thor, please! Please, help me!”

There was a simple reason why Thor wasn’t rushing towards the illusion now. He was already there. Standing right in front of Loki and all he had to do to save him from demise was reaching out. But he didn’t. Such a simple gesture, yet too much to ask for.

“Brother, please!”
Not even a word. No excuse. No curse. Thor turned away and Loki fell into darkness.

A tantalizing scream resounded across the battlefield. Now all of their eyes had to be on Thor. Running towards something that nobody could see and it disappeared before he could reach it. Nothing to worry about when Loki clearly wasn’t done yet.

He loved the finale.

Thor turned around, his eyes unfocused, because once again there was no way for him to make out what was real and what not. Especially now that the world was sinking into darkness. Just a little taste. Not that Thor would ever have the lightest idea what it had been like in the abyss. How deep and endless darkness could really get.

“They are killing me…”

Quiet and faint. Still enough for Thor to spin around and there was Loki. What was still left from him. His armour was torn, his skin frail, dark rings beneath his eyes and a trickle of blood was running from his mouth. Lying on his side Loki didn’t move, more dead than alive. “The shadows… they are pulling me in… Please, I don’t want to… I can’t… Thor will come for me… He won’t let them kill me…”

“Loki!” Thor called out for him and the web was closing in on him. A dark figure stepped out of the shadows right behind Loki, grabbing a fistful of his dark hair, roughly pulling him up. “No! Please!”

A blade forged from shadows was pressed against his throat and with a grim, sinister smile on his lips Loki watched how Thor let out a furious roar and stormed towards the illusion, swinging Mjolnir. “Leave him be or I will crush your skull!!”

What could possibly stop the god of thunder when his heart and mind were clouded by rage and fury? Without the slightest hesitation Thor brought his hammer down on the person who was threatening his brother’s life. So caught up in the lie Loki had created for him Thor didn’t hear the voice behind the shadows.

“Thor, what are you doing?! Stop it! Thor!”

Just because something had happened before didn’t mean that it couldn’t be as satisfying the second time. No, it was even better. Watching Captain America trying to avoid Thor’s punches and swings without putting up real resistance was a delight. It made all these hours playing nice so much easier in hindsight.

“Thor! It’s me! Stop! It’s me, Cap!”

Not a single word was reaching Thor’s ears, he was still fighting the shadow. “You will not touch him! I will not fail to protect him another time!”

Again Thor raised his hammer and now Rogers had decided that he wasn’t going to take this anymore, Avenger or not. When Mjolnir connected with the Captain’s shield both were thrown back and Loki took a look around. The robot situation seemed almost under control, due to the Beast, supported by the two killers. They weren’t oblivious to the Captain’s dilemma though. An only too familiar flash of red rushed towards them, knocking Thor over. Loki hoped it hurt. Unfortunately not enough, since Thor was instantly back on his feet, smashing Mjolnir against Stark’s breastplate.

“Shit! Pointbreak, what the fuck?!”
Stark fired his beams and the Captain threw his shield. They were at loss, having no idea how to act that one of their own had suddenly turned against them. “He doesn’t seem to recognize us!”

“Thor! Get a fucking grip and…!”

No such thing, Thor raised his hammer to summon lightning and Stark had enough. “Fine, you asked for it!”

Loki had full trust in Stark and Rogers, they would be able to handle this. There was still other business Loki had to attend to. When they were going to breach the castle, Loki would follow them and therefore he still had to break a certain barrier. Shouldn’t take that long. Humming that lovely song Loki brought more distance between him and the fight, until he could put his hands on the barrier. “There is no life I know to compare with pure imagination. Living there you’ll be free if you truly wish to be.”

He felt the magic pulsing beneath his fingers and started pushing. This wasn’t fine art or great skill like his web. Pure power, almost brutal, creating little cracks and pushing through them. Behind him Loki could hear the thunder, the sizzling of energy and lasers, metal connecting and most of all the voices. Right now they didn’t matter. Nobody was going to die or kill another person. Not yet, but when it happened Loki definitely would turn around to witness it.

A minute actually passed until Loki had created a big enough fissure. The barrier wasn’t able to stand the pressure anymore and it collapsed. Useless attempt to keep him out. Now he would…

When the shiver ran through Loki’s body he hated himself for it. They were his pawns, little toys to play with. He was in control, he knew about their fears and he used them against them. This was his role in this game. Nothing they could do would cause the tiniest spark of fear in his heart. Not even the roar of the Beast. Who had broken his bones.

That hideous sound was followed by silence and Loki frowned. So fast?

Turning back around Loki was faced with an entirely new scene. Scattered parts of robots lying everywhere. Two Midgardians who looked badly beaten up, breathing heavily. The Hawk was pressing a hand on his right rips, covering a wound for sure. Next to him the Widow was wiping blood of her face. Another thing Loki didn’t care about. His eyes lingered on the person lying motionless on the ground. Loki swallowed a laugh and he knew he would hold on to this sight forever. The great Thor lying unconscious on the ground, knocked out by the combined forces of the green Beast, the Captain and the Man of Iron.

Would you all please step aside? I have a dagger that would like to finish the job.

“What the hell happened here?!”

“I don’t know, he went crazy! He fucking tried to kill Cap!”

Even now the Captain was trying to keep a cool head. Damn him. “We will deal with this later. We still have to seek out the guy responsible for the robots… Tony, Clint, you stay with Thor in case he wakes up. The rest goes in there.”

Come on, Stark, don’t disappoint me now.

“Fuck, no. If the robot guys is indeed in there, you need me there and not out here. We wouldn’t even be here without me!”

The Captain’s face turned to stone and Loki knew he was barely keeping it together. “You’re right,
Stark. We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you. You stay here.”

“Good luck with that! The Hulk smashed his head against your shield. He’s out cold! I’m going in there.”

Stark’s demeanour couldn’t make it any more obvious how much he loathed Rogers and the way he wanted to order him around. How could Fury have ever put them on the same time? They were a combination that was doomed to fail from the very beginning. For Loki they were a match made in heaven like the mortals would say. smiling contently Loki watched how Stark took off, flying towards the highest tower of the castle, entering through a window after blowing it up.

Thank you for opening the door, Man of Iron.

“God…” Loki heard the Captain muttering under his breath, but didn’t give it another thought. He had things to do. Letting his magic take him away Loki took in surroundings. A simple room, furnished in the style you would expect from a castle. It had a slight Middle Age flair, Thor would love it.

Taking a deep breath Loki let the oxygen fill his lungs and he tasted the remains of magic on his lips. Long gone. What a coward. Running away from some mortals. Then again, it wasn’t like Loki had expected anything else. Now that the mage had fled Loki would destroy this place and with it all the potential evidence of his presence in this feeble world. Better hurry up, Stark was already searching the place and the others were trying to get in this very second. Unlike Loki they had no idea what they should be looking for. Closing his eyes Loki let his head sway from one side to the other, trying to grasp whatever magic was still lingering in the rooms. Where was it? Where was he hiding it? The most powerful thing to be found inside of these walls? So much more powerful than they would ever be able to understand. Loki would them never let find out its secrets. Nobody should ever know about it.

A soft tingle in his fingertips, not feeling pleasant. It could be compared to the faintest sting of a needle. Still more than enough to not go unnoticed. Loki could make it out and it was his for the taking. It only belonged to him.

While Stark and the others were still wandering blindly, running here and there into another robot Loki was standing the very centre of it all. A huge room filled with equipment that didn’t seem entirely unfamiliar. It reminded Loki of Stark’s lab. Technology. Interesting yet primitive. Loki wondered between the devices, barely glancing at them. Advancing further Loki couldn’t suppress a smile when he found something that would seem rather odd if you were looking at this with Midgardian eyes. A table stocked with potions, amulets, artefacts, stones and crystals. As observant as ever Loki noticed that they were was no logic to it. These things seemed to have been blindly thrown together by a man who had no idea what each of them could do. Not finishing the thought Loki reminded himself to not be arrogant. It had gotten him into trouble before. There were a lot of reasons to gather things that didn’t fit together at first glance. Experiments or a desperate search for a fitting ingredient for a spell. Maybe it was just a completely different approach on magic than Loki’s. The mage had been forced to flee, perhaps before he could have brought order to this. Better to take a look at it later. A casual gesture sent them into the layer of this dimension where Loki liked to hide the bracelet. This was all nice and well, but Loki needed something else and his time was very limited. Where would he put it? The most precious thing that nobody was allowed to find? A vault? Or did he think that this castle was security enough? Unlikely.

A loud bang resounded, not from far away and Loki frowned. Coming closer. So there was still resistance. He had to find it. If they found it and someone intelligent like Banner would get their hands on it, they might just be able to trace it back to him.
Fine, if traditional searching wasn’t working out... It was taking a risk, but Thor was knocked out and nobody else was close who would understand what was going on. The mage was gone, so why bother. Loki sent out his magic, into every corner of this room, letting it seep into the walls, the cracks, between the bricks. Looking for something wasn’t a hard task when you knew what you were looking for. Loki was looking for a part of himself.

His magic began pulling. Strongly and Loki followed its lead. Past all these tables full of equipment towards a wall. Really? Now this was being a cliché, Loki had read enough Midgardian novels to know that. What else to expect from somebody who didn’t know what magic could actually do? Raising his hand Loki let it hover right above the bricks and felt how he was being pushed back. Enough of these games.

Another explosion, even closer.

Loki put his hands together, slowly rubbing them against each other, letting his fingers brush over the others, feeling the warmth rippling through it. Bright green flames were dancing on his fingertips and they were begging Loki to give them something to devour. He wouldn’t disappoint them. First he gave them the tables, the screens and computer, then the walls. Smirking and with sweet satisfaction Loki watched as his fire ate up the barrier, how it burned it down. The way it should be. Nothing was able to resist Loki’s fire.

When the last defence crumbled Loki tore out the bricks like they were nothing. What he found behind it was a little vial. At first glance it seemed to be empty. Loki knew better. There, at the very bottom of it was a trace of a revolting, blue substance. For nobody’s eyes to see. The fire in Loki’s hand was burning so hot that the vial melted before he even touched it. Erased from existence. Now he would do the same with the rest of this place. Giving it all to the flames. This is what you get.

It took mere second for the fire to spread across the whole room and Loki savoured the sight of it. Everything was being swallowed by it and it was only fair. He had tried doing this to Loki and this is what he got in return. What they all would get.

“... fire! This place is on fire! Get the fuck out off here!”

Stark. As eloquent as always. For once Loki would do as he was told, since his work was already done here.

After teleporting outside Loki walked up to the Quin-jet, a smile and a song on his lips. He would take the traditional way home. There would be a lot of interesting conversation that he didn’t want to miss.
The Rupture

Well there’s three versions of this story
Mine and yours and then the truth

Now we can put it down to circumstance
Our childhood, then our youth

Shame ~~ Gary Barlow & Robbie Williams ~~

“Is this real life, is this just fantasy? Caught in a landside, no escape from reality. Open your eyes, look up to the skies and see.” There was a very good chance that Loki had spent too much time with Stark. He was thinking about getting himself one of these devices that let you listen to music whatever you were doing.

Stopping to sing Loki mingled with the shadows and slipped into the Quin-jet. The Widow was still outside, waiting for the others, so Loki knew what he had to expect. It turned out to be even better though. Banner had turned back into himself and was monitoring Thor, still knocked out. Now Loki had to keep his mouth shut, but his magic was singing anyway. Sometimes actions showed more than words. They had put him into handcuffs. Loki didn’t need anything else to know that he had won. One definite sign of distrust was enough. They should know that they weren’t going to be able to hold him like that. Then again their life insurance was standing right next to Thor.

Loki approached the stretcher they had put Thor on, carefully not to brush Banner or to make a sound. Dead people didn’t leave any traces and Loki didn’t either. He pulled the web from Thor’s mind and let it seep back into his own blood.

Waiting then. Hopefully they wouldn’t lose a lot of time trying to find something in this castle. Loki would be very disappointed if Stark and the Captain started killing each other without him in the first row. That would be terrible.

The time that passed couldn’t be more than a minute, but Loki was impatient, so he almost muttered a “Finally” when they all came in at once. Lovely. Instantly the Hawk took a seat, blood dripping from the hand that covered his wound. Loki hoped that it hurt. Stark wasn’t wearing the helmet of his armour, nor holding it in his hands. It was gone. A trail of blood was running down the side of his face. Besides the helmet there were also other parts of the armour missing. Loki was fairly sure to see a wound on his thigh… Good chance that this had been him. Judging by his appearance the Captain seemed to be fine. The usual scratches and he was out of breath. Oh and so angry. Please, close the door and get it on. Loki had been waiting for this for weeks.

“Are you crazy?! What on earth were you thinking?! Have you lost your mind?!"

Rage was such a rewarding sentiment, especially when it came from the one person who always tried to keep themselves in check. No need for that, Captain.

At least one could always rely on Stark in this department. “What the hell?! Am I crazy?! You got
hit on the head or why did you already forget that Thor was trying to kill you?!” Stark didn’t back up, there were these sparks dancing in his eyes, clearly showing that he was yearning for this confrontation. That he was begging the Captain to give him a reason. To let it all go straight to hell. “I saved your ass!”

“Innocent people died today, because of you! Because you played with something you know nothing about! Something that you can’t control!” The Captain was growling and Loki saw his hand twitch. Yes. Please. Strike him. Use your strength against him. You know he is dangerous, reckless, out of control. Stark will take the lives of so many if you don’t stop him.

“Boys, this is a discussion you should have later.”

Kill her! Rip her throat out! How many other things does she have to destroy with her words before it was enough!

“The press is already rolling in and we have an unconscious god lying here. He’s going to wake up soon and we need to figure out what to do if he still feels like murdering Steve… I’m going to get us out of here. Bruce, can you take a look at Clint?”

Banner hastily nodded and made his way over to Barton who scowled, but didn’t say anything.

The whole plane was a bomb just waiting to blow up. The Hawk, the Captain and Stark. All of them were practically vibrating with anger and the need to lash out. Why not just do it? Wouldn’t it feel so good?

Loki’s eager hope was killed off by the Captain who just wouldn’t let go. Always had to be in control. “Okay… right… anyone an idea what happened with Thor?”

Stark crossed his arms in front of his chest, his lips forming a sneer. “He’s crazy and the last time I pointed that out, I was told to shut up.”

The others ignored him and Rogers tried to keep his cool. By now the Widow had taken the seat of the pilot and was working on getting them away from the castle. “He was unfocused during the fight. Clearly confused. Even before he started attacking Cap. Stark, what do you mean you said before that he’s crazy?”

Typical Thor, he ruined every possibility for Loki to have some fun.

“He’s not sleeping. He’s… talking confusing stuff… We thought that it was because… he was mourning for… Loki. I guess we knew that he wasn’t doing fine, but… there was no reason to believe he would… attack me.” The Captain muttered under his breath and it wasn’t enough. Loki needed more.

“Loki…”

Don’t you dare to say my name!

All of them, except for the Widow, turned around to look at Thor. His eyelids were fluttering and Loki cursed his own impatience. This was what he had been waiting for, what he had worked for. It was happening right now and he should be enjoying it.

The signs were there. Stark was still in his suit, the Captain held his shield high and the handcuffs. Distrust was all too obvious. Once a seed, now a growing tree. “Thor? Can you hear me?”

Thor’s face was contorted, his lips parted and Loki was sure nobody envied him for his headache.
“Loki…”

Just a rasp and it made Loki’s skin crawl.

Rogers looked around, searching for help, but Stark of course only sneered. Barton’s face darkened and Banner avoided his eyes. How responsive they were. Nothing more was necessary. Mentioning his name.

“Thor, listen. It’s Steve. “

A hint of blue, but not even the open eyes could betray the fact that he wasn’t really there.

“Do you remember what happened?”

Excellent question.

“I could hear him scream… He screamed so loudly for help… I didn’t help him…”

Stark’s eyebrows went up in mild confusion and the Captain blinked. All Loki did was smile. Even better than he had imagined it, all coming together. Thor had never been blessed with words. Now he was going to slice his own throat with them.

Frowning the Captain asked the next question although everybody already knew the answer.

“Who? Who did you hear scream?”

“Loki…” Thor turned his head, staring up at the ceiling. “My brother fell… he was standing at the edge of a dark abyss and he fell. I did not help him. I pushed him. Then he was screaming for help, for me. I did not come and they killed him. They killed whatever was left of my little brother.”

No, they didn’t. You did.

“Okay, what the fuck are you talking about?! At least Stark was having just as little patience as Loki. “You tried to kill Cap! That’s something I would do but not you! So stop talking bullshit and…”

“Tony!” Banner hissed, glaring at Stark. By now he had finished treating Barton’s wound, he was straightening up, walking over to the rest of them. Unlike the rest of them he really knew how to sound gentle and confident at the same time. “Thor… who killed him?”

“The shadows… they devoured him and I let them. He begged me to help him and I did not. I let them have him… I have my brother’s blood on my hands.”

In disbelief the Avengers stared at one of their own, even the Widow looked over her shoulder and then not a word was uttered for over an hour.

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“Are you alright?”

“Wow… You had to go fighting crime and evil and now you’re asking me how I’m doing? I’m fine! I’m sitting in a hotel room, trying to read and dying from worry! Where are you? Are you okay? What’s going on?” Loki’s voice was wavering, but not too much. Perfect as usual. Everybody would think he was honestly concerned. In truth he was bored and desperately wanted them to arrive wherever they were heading to, so they would start talking again.

Rogers was mumbling quietly into his phone. Most probably not wanting the others to hear what
he was saying. Hopefully something interested, Loki had had to teleport back to New York to take the call. “I’m fine, everything’s okay. I’m on a plane to get back to New York.”

Letting out a deep breath Loki checked his watch. “Thank god. You’re not hurt or anything?”

“Yes, I’m okay. I just… This whole thing is still going to take some time. I… don’t think I’ll be able to see you before this evening… Is that okay? Are you… alright?”

Why wouldn’t he just stop? “I’m okay, I told you. Just hanging around and waiting for you to call. You’re alright, so don’t worry. Come back when you can, I’ll just keep hanging around here. You can tell me what happened?”

“Honestly… I don’t know yet, but… there’s something I gotta do. Something important. I’ll try to be done with this as soon as I can.”

So, you just want to throw Stark off the team and leave a second later? Either he was naïve or he cared so much for William that he couldn’t even stop thinking about his wellbeing while fighting Iron Man. Interesting.

“Good… you’ll still take care though. You can tell me what happened then. Until then… just be careful.”

“Promise. I’ll call you again before I come back. Glad you’re doing fine.”

Loki smiled, mumbling some other nice words, a goodbye and hung up. This was taking way too long for his taste. The Avengers refused to have this impending conversation next to Thor and so they would wait until they got back to the tower. The Captain had obviously decided to clear up the situation with Thor first and he would face off with Stark later. Loki couldn’t wait for that to happen. Curse these stupid Midgardian planes for being so slow.

Having lived through several centuries Loki shouldn’t consider a few hours a long time, but they just wouldn’t end. Also he was so excited about what was about to happen that he couldn’t even gloat about having burned down the castle.

Even when they finally got back to the tower things were happening very slowly. Loki didn’t like the fact that they had already gotten rid of the handcuffs. Banner escorted Thor to his floor of the tower while the rest of them waited in Stark’s penthouse. Nobody saying a word and Loki wanted to yell at them. Stark had taken off the suit, Loki could see him slightly limping. A smirk in the darkness when he realised that this had been him. Rogers was carefully watching Stark, making it all too clear that the last bit of trust had been broken and there wasn’t even the intention to repair it. The room was about to burst with tension and Loki was craving for the words that needed to be said. Couldn’t they at least discuss the fact that they found the mage’s hideout? No? Loki was tempted to teleport outside, turn into the Thomas, call Stark and tell him to open his god damned mouth. Usually he wasn’t able to close it anyway.

Only under these circumstances it was possible for Loki to feel relief and excitement when the elevator doors opened and Banner stepped outside. He was looking way too good anyway after having turned into the Hulk. Loki needed to work on that.

“How is he doing?”


Banner sighed, wearing the look of a man who was trying to take on a task for all the noble motives in the world, but who also already knew that his failure was inevitable. “Since he’s a god
you can never be sure, but... he's suffering from sleep deprivation and he's dehydrated. Which is very concerning since... you know, god. He’s... in bad shape.”

“He’s a risk. He attacked Cap.”

Thank you, Barton. I’m probably still going to kill you first.

The thing about personalities was that they didn’t change. Never. Even if you tried. Rogers would never stop being the guy who was always searching for the best in people. Who was so good and so pure that he couldn’t even imagine to not find something good in every living person. “He didn’t seem to realise that it was me... You guys saw it. He was talking incomprehensible stuff.”

“I think he was pretty clear.” The Widow’s expression was as stern as ever and Loki really needed her to die. Scared, desperate and alone. “It all makes sense if you take in consideration what he said on the plane. While attacking Cap he talked about trying to protect somebody. We all heard what he said later on. It’s about Loki. Tony, you mentioned that something like that happened before. We’d liked to be filled in.”

There was no way to overhear the reproach in her voice and Loki leaned back in his seat, crossing his legs. He was in for a treat.

Stark wasn’t too pleased about her demand. Perhaps he felt like being interrogated. Didn’t stop him from getting himself a drink. “Oh, the usual. He showed up complaining about getting too little sleep, because he was having bad dreams. He didn’t say anything else about them. Okay, there was some talk about Loki, that he used to be a nice guy. Fuck that shit. It isn’t like Thor has’t tried to protect him before.”

Loki would love to object to that statement, but he was just here to watch. Also Banner was stepping in anyway. “Yes, but not... like that. He said that Loki had been another kind of person and that something had happened to him and that it... had changed him. He wouldn’t go into specifics, but he was clearly upset. Honestly I didn’t think too much about it... he went to London and when he came back, he... he avoided us, he was in a bad mood and we started to get worried, because he was acting... unlike Thor.”

The Widow raised one of her eyebrows. “And you didn’t think to notify us about that?”

“Hey, you don’t call me either when you’re grumpy!” Taking a sip from his drink Stark rolled his eyes. “Also we did call Cap to talk with him. Didn’t help either. We thought he was freaking out about Loki’s death, but none of us was really worried he would do something like... that.”

Not surprising at all that the Captain looked ashamed because of that. “It did seem strange that he was upset about Loki’s death... months after it happened, but... none of us expected this to happen. He’s blaming himself for Loki’s death and... I don’t know what happened today. It seemed like he couldn’t tell anyone who I am.”

“Fine, if we’re trying to do some psychology here... I don’t care what the fuck triggered that or what the stuff meant he was saying. How do we get him to stop doing it?” Stark took a look around and made sure that the Captain would now hate him even the tiniest bit more.

“It won’t be possible to help him if we don’t know what is happening to him. I do want to know what he meant. He said that Loki fell... that he pushed him... it didn’t make a whole lot of sense.”

“Well...” Banner took off his glasses, rubbing his forehead as if that would help him think. “He said he fell into darkness and that he didn’t help him, pushed him. I guess what he means by that
is… Loki’s decent into madness? He feels bad about not being able to help him? The shadows devoured it and he became another person…”

How cute and exactly what Loki did not need. Did nobody here possess some common sense?

“A nice metaphor, but do you really think that in his state Thor could use such pretty words?”

Everyone’s head turned to Barton and Loki felt a strange tingle. This was intriguing, fascinating and could end up extremely satisfying. Especially because of the Widow’s confusion. “What are you implying?”

Barton shrugged, his face a pokerface that even Loki was jealous of. “Sometimes people mean what they say. Sometimes an abyss is an actual abyss. Sometimes pushing someone means that they pushed someone.”

Only one question asked itself now. Was Loki supposed to be prouder of Henry or of himself? Tremendous work had been done.

“Oh, fuck off.” Stark snorted. “You of all people? Remember Loki? The son of a bitch that poked around in your brain?”

Now Barton shrugged for a second time and Loki believed that he did not give a damn about any of this. Yet the most important thing was that he didn’t trust them, nor Thor. “Even a son of a bitch can be pushed into an abyss. You should know, Stark. You’ve been tossed out off a window.”

“Fuck you.”

“What I’m trying to say is… we don’t know anything and the guy who poked around in my head was fucking mad. He was burning with rage against Thor. Yeah, he was an asshole and a maniac, but there could be a reason why he was so pissed off at Thor. Or not. We don’t know. Except for the fact that Thor once thought that Loki was dead until he showed up in New York. Abyss. Pushing. Killing. His choice of words. Not mine.”

Yes. Loki had known that he would be useful. He had been counting on him to spread darkness among them, but this… even better.

Of course they would protest. Refusing to believe, using arguments filled with logic and sentiment, but first there was silence. Silence telling more than words.

“Let’s not lose focus here. We gotta take a look at the facts…”

Obviously the Captain was taking Thor’s side which caused Stark to change his opinion. Childish, but reliable. Delicious. “Okay, first fact. Thor has bad dreams that won’t let him sleep. Second fact, he seems to be strangely nostalgic about his little brother. Third fact, he has always refused talking about Loki. Forth fact, he tries to smash Cap’s head in a fight. Fifth fact, he said ‘I killed him’ and ‘They killed him’. Some shady shit is going on, but do we really care about what happened to Loki? He’s dead.”

“It does matter if it’s causing Thor to attack one of us. He didn’t stop at Cap. He attacked you too when you tried to help. Right now we’re just making assumptions. We need to get the timeline straight.” The Widow was trying to smooth things over. “What did Thor tell us about Loki? Things that happened before the New Mexico incident.”

Another moment of silence. Do you see it now, mortals? Do you realise that you never asked who you were dealing with? No, you just decided to worship him as a god.
To Loki’s surprise it was Banner who spoke up. “Barely anything. It wasn’t like we were keen on
talking about Loki. But there was… Only last week he told Tony and me that Loki had been
different until something happened. I remember… months ago he made an allusion to… Loki
trying to kill himself. That’s why he thought he was dead until he showed up with the help of the
Tesseract.”

“Fuck, I wish that wouldn’t make sense.” After downing the rest of his drink Stark let out a groan.

“What do you mean?”

“How can you be sure that somebody is dead and then they show up again? Especially when they
killed themselves? There would have to be a body. Clearly there wasn’t. Guess he didn’t slit his
wrist or anything like that. I don’t know about Asgardian landscape, but falling into an abyss
sounds like a more likely option…”

“Wait. Have we already established that we’re talking about a real abyss? Because if we are… We
can’t ignore the fact that he said that he had pushed him…” Banner’s face darkened and Loki’s
heart was racing. By now he was almost starting to feel dizzy. From excitement.

Incredible that Barton of all people was on his side. He had pretty much expected Stark to go for it,
Banner was tempted, but the Captain simply had to refuse. “He’s Thor, he’s our friend. We can’t
just jump to conclusions…”

“No, but we can ask somebody who knows more about it. Jarvis, call Jane Foster.” Stark waltzed
past him and Loki quickly pulled his feet up. This would be definitely the worst moment to draw
attention to him. Now that they were talking about his demise.

Nobody commented on Stark’s idea, so Loki took it as silent agreement and Jarvis was establishing
a connection. Everyone gathered around the hologram as soon as it appeared and Loki rolled his
eyes, because they were blocking his view.

“Mr. Stark… Hello, did something happen? Where’s Thor?”

Well, what do you think, mortal?

“Hey, Doctor Foster. Little fight, we kicked a lot of ass. We might have a tiny, little problem with
Thor though…”

Biting his lips Loki swallowed a laugh and he even closed his eyes. What did he need to look at
them anyway? Right now he would just sit here and enjoy listening.

“Is he alright? Did he get hurt?”

“No, he’s okay. He’s just… Ah, fuck it. He lost it during the fight, he seemed confused and… he
hasn’t slept in days, so Bruce gave him some meds to help him sleep. Now, we’re a little worried,
because he said some rather weird things that… don’t really make sense.”

Oh, Stark. Everything made perfect sense, you’re just not able to see it yet.

Like so often Jane Foster hesitated and Loki swore to himself he would kill her personally today if
she was going to ruin this.

“About Loki, right?”

Good girl, be of some use finally.
“Exactly. Can you… tell us what is going on? So we can help.”

Noble Captain. You’ll soon realise that a lot of people are too far gone to be saved.

“I don’t know. He won’t talk about it. Is he really okay?”

“For now he’s okay, but we have to know what is going on.”

Tell them. Do it.

“I honestly can’t tell you, because I don’t know. I wish I knew. I tried to get him to talk to me, but he completely refused to. But I’ve known for quite some time that… something is weighing heavily on his mind. He’s been suffering from nightmares and… he woke up several times, talking in his sleep. When I asked him about it, he didn’t say anything, but it was… unsettling.”

It had taken so long, but finally Loki wasn’t annoyed by her voice or her speech. Finally she was using the right words.

“What did he say about Loki?” The Widow wasn’t giving any information away, trying to not influence her. It didn’t matter anyway as long as she was telling the truth. Slowly, reluctantly and with a tremble in her voice. “Thor said that… he… he kept saying over and over again that he was sorry, that it was his fault. I don’t know what he meant by that, but… he said that he saw Loki falling and that he didn’t want that to happen. When I tried to get him to talk about it, he completely shut me out. But it was obvious that he was beating himself up about something. I have no idea, but I was scared… I woke up and he was saying over and over again that he was sorry and that it was his fault.” Jane Foster’s voice slowly faded away and Loki took in the silence. Not even a single breath to be heard. Let it sink in. Think about it. The consequences… are you scared yet?

“Thank you, Jane…” The Captain paused for a second. “Maybe you should come here. I don’t think we’re really able to help him with… whatever is going on. He’s in a bad state and we think he needs someone to talk to…”

“I’ll take the next flight…”

What followed were another few awkward words and statement before they ended the call and Loki got up from the couch to get a little bit closer. Now was the moment. It had to be now. So who was going to be the one? Who was going to do Loki this favour?

“I want him out of the tower.”

Banner even flinched at Stark’s determined and harsh tone. Surprise etched on the Captain’s face, close to shock and one of the assassins tried to act like she didn’t care. The other one didn’t care at all. “Tony…”

“No!” Instantly Stark shook his head, his eyes suddenly so attentive and sharp. There wasn’t going to be a discussion and Loki couldn’t stop marvelling at the picture he had drawn. The web he had woven. So beautiful. “I don’t want him here! Yeah, we still don’t fucking know what happened, but it fucking looks like Thor did something bad to Loki. He freaked out and attacked Cap! In a few days my boyfriend is going to come back from London. My boyfriend who reminds Thor of his dead brother! So yeah, I want him out of here. Instantly.”

“You can’t be serious. Yes, something is off here, but we don’t know…”

“I don’t care if we don’t know! Thor blames himself for some shit that happened to Loki and he loses his mind over it. I don’t care if he did something or if it’s all in his head. He said Tommy
reminded him of Loki. I’m not going to take the risk of having Thor around Tommy. No chance in hell.”

With unwavering fascination Loki watched Stark and this enormous feeling of satisfaction almost made him forget about his suffering during the last two days. Hard to believe that it would get even better. The Captain wouldn’t disappoint Loki.

“Now you’re not taking the risk. Now that it concerns you and a person you care about.” Still composed, but Rogers was barely holding on and the glare Stark shot him would only fuel the bad blood between them. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“You really don’t know? You took parts of the robots and built a new one with it! A robot that went rogue!”

“Oh, shut up!” Stark had no trouble directing all his rage at the Captain. His favourite target. “What did you think I was doing when I told you I was working on the robots? The robot I built brought us to the guy who built them! Now we can finally figure out who he is!”

“At what price!? The robot wasn’t under your control! It attacked several buildings! People got hurt! We don’t know yet how many died and this could have all been avoiding if you hadn’t played with something this dangerous! You don’t know anything about magic!”

“There was no magic involved! It was a robot, nothing more! Nobody could have known that something like this could happen!”

“You could have known if you had thought about it for a single second! But you didn’t! You never do!”

They had already moved closer to each other, daring each other with their eyes. Loki had never seen the Captain so angry and all he need was a shove. A push. Anything. All they had worked for would be forfeit if only one of them raised his hand against the other.

“Both of you, calm down!” Another time the Widow’s stern demeanour would have brought them to shy away, but not now. “Cap has a point. You built this robot without letting anybody know about it. You went a step too far with that.”

“Oh, what are you going to do now? Tell Fury and Shield? You think they are telling us everything? They fucking tried to ki… I don’t have to report to anybody. Yesterday we still had no idea who has been attacking New York. Now we have found this castle, Jarvis is going to find out everything about it and by the end of the day we’ll know who we are up against. This is a success! Don’t go crazy on my ass when Thor tried to fucking kill you!”

“It’s because of these things that Shield doesn’t trust you! You can’t be trusted, because you’re reckless and dangerous and you don’t even realise it!”

Stark raised his head, looking up to the Captain and his expression made it clear that he wasn’t the least bit bothered by their height difference. So much repugnance burning in his eyes, anger that was only waiting to dull his senses and blind him. “Out. All of you. If you’re trusting Shield more than me, then fine. Go to Shield, take orders and make an even bigger idiot out of yourself. This is my tower and I want you out! Take Thor with you and get the fuck out! Before I’ll make you leave!”

They had gotten it all wrong. Not Loki was standing at the edge of an abyss and it also wasn’t him who was falling.
Hello everybody,

Loki is happy, still manipulating people and... a lot of this chapter takes place in bed :)

_________________________________________________

Soy el comandante de tus pasos elegantes,
   el general de tus destinos,
      de tu boca el capitán

Camino de rosas ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~
(I am the commander of your elegant steps
The general of your destiny
The Captain of your mouth)

_________________________________________________

“Tonight I'm gonna have myself a real good time. I feel alive and the world, it's turning it inside out. Yeah. And floating around in ecstasy. So don't stop me now don't stop me. 'Cause I'm having a good time having a good time…”

The pure variety of Midgardian songs was pleasing Loki immensely. They had something fitting for every moment. Humming and singing Loki played with his phone in his hand. Only waiting for the call. Who would be the first? Stark, Loki was pretty sure it would be Stark. Not so much time for him to do so. Only three minutes ago Stark had thrown out the Avengers. Well, except for Banner. Loki hadn’t stayed to check out how they would take care of a sedated Thor and they didn’t care where they would go to. Who was he kidding, he knew that they were heading for S.H.I.E.L.D. Most of them.

The Captain would go to William. So there was only a limited time for a potential conversation between Thomas and Stark.

There it was. Stopping Loki took a look at the display and Stark had won. Video call. Huh. Fine. Why not? Teleporting into the hotel room Loki snipped his fingers, creating an illusion that would make it look way more elegant and expensive. Another little magic trick and his clothes were off. Slipping under the covers Loki ran a hand through his hair, tousling it. Had to be good enough. The lights were off, except for the lamp on the nightstand.

“Stark… have you any idea how late it is?” Yawning Loki sat up, rubbing his eyes and he couldn’t possibly paint a clearer picture.

“Hey…” Five minutes ago Stark had been screaming, yelling, so full of rage and passion. All of this had been sucked out off him. He tried to cover it up with a smile, but it didn’t reach his eyes
like it usually would. “Sorry, I just wanted to talk to you. I didn’t even think about the time difference.”

After blinking a few times Loki showed that he was clearly awake now. And concerned. “Okay, what is going on?”

“Nothing, really. I just… may have kicked myself off the team. You know… had a little argument with Cap and… wasn’t pretty.”

Loki didn’t have time for the whole story, the Captain was already on his way. “You can’t help it, right? The second I leave, you get yourself in trouble.”

“I didn’t. I saved the fucking day. I saved Cap’s ass and what do I get? Another speech about what a reckless moron I am. I didn’t want to take it, so I threw them all out.” Yes, he had done that, quite impressively. Now Stark was sounding tired, rubbing his temple. It couldn’t be that easy to push his so called friends away.

“You threw them out? It’s your tower, you’ve got every right to do that. From what I’ve seen from Captain America, I’m surprised you didn’t do that before.” Loki hinted at a smile before turning serious. “Honestly… are you okay? You saved his ass, so you were out having fight. You’re doing fine, right?” A hint of worry, focusing on something else than what Stark had just told him. They would get to that as soon as Thomas was back home.

Stark quickly nodded, a bit too quick. “Yeah, sure. I’m Iron Man. What could possibly hurt me?”

An energy blast of a robot that directly hit your leg?

“Damn it, Stark, how bad is it?”

The response was an almost soft smile. “Wow, ever listened to yourself when you’re genuinely worried? It’s kind of sweet…”

“Don’t think I wouldn’t be stubborn enough to stay pissed at you until I am back home and kick your ass! Now tell me what’s wrong. Instantly.”

This was fun, unfortunately the Captain would get here soon. Loki had to make this quick.

“I’m alright. Barton needed a few stitches and Thor got knocked out, but we got the job done and I’m completely okay. I’m just… so angry, I’m really pissed off and a little sad. I’m on a fucking emotional rollercoaster.”

What? How so? Was he kidding, trying to distract Loki from his actual wound? “Sad? You’re sad because you fought with Captain America?”

Stark pulled a face and Loki was somehow surprised by how bothered he seemed. “It’s not like I actually enjoy fighting with Steve.”

“Are you kidding me? You even said it turned you on when I was annoying him.”

“Yeah, because it’s fun to annoy him, but not like this. I’m right, why can’t he see that? The Avengers could be something great, doing something good, but this stupid alliance to S.H.I.E.L.D and acting like there is a way to never get your hands dirty. Makes me look like the bad guy while I’m just being realistic about the fucking world we live in. I’m not the bad guy, but he looks at me like I’m the one blowing up buildings… He’s a good guy, but stubborn and blind that’s so frustrating.”
Where was this coming from? Loki had been betting on anger, he had planned on it and now Stark was polluting the air with this disgusting sentiment? Loki needed to slap him in the face, remind him of his place.

“You want me to come home sooner?”

No. That was the wrong thing to say. Thomas was supposed to push Stark into a certain direction and not give into this childish sentiment.

“What? No, do I sound that bad? That would be horrible… I’m going to figure this out… Cap’s probably going to run straight to S.H.I.E.L.D and bitch about me, but I don’t give a shit. Good news is that the tower is now Avengers free. We can fuck on every floor you like.”

“You still believe that I’m this easily distracted? I have a proposal. You go to bed, get some sleep and we’ll talk tomorrow when you’re finally making some sense? You’re freaking me out right now and I just woke up… Is that alright? Because right now I don’t understand a word you’re saying and… like I just said, you’re freaking me out.” And somebody is going to knock on this door any second.

For some strange reason the prospect of not talking about this caused Stark’s face to light up a little bit. Loki was at loss. “Right… sorry, I must sound crazy… Can we agree on the fact that I just called because I miss you. I do, you know…”

“Okay, now I’m really worried.”

“Hey, I can have my emotional moments too… I’m still freaking you out. I will call you again in the morning. I’m sorry for waking you…”

“Don’t be sorry, just get some rest and we’ll figure all of this out when you’re got some sleep. Take care of yourself…” Loki let his voice drop to a whisper and Stark smiled softly. “Yeah, you too. I… I’ll call you in a few hours.”

“Good and Stark… please, get some sleep, don’t just stay away all night and work on the robot or something. You look like you’re about to faint…” That was good, honest concern and confusion. Loki had to buy some time, since Stark refused to give into his rage. Nothing Loki couldn’t take care of, but it would be so much easier to do it if they were in the same room.

Stark was still trying to keep up the smile, pathetic. “Fine, I promise. Go back to sleep, we’ll talk in a few hours… Good night.”

“Good night…” Loki let Stark hang up first and immediately started thinking about this conversation. It hadn’t turned out the way he had hoped for, but Stark was upset and that was enough for now. At least it had been a good opportunity to establish once more that Thomas felt strong affection for Stark, although he didn’t show it all the time. Now this was a good idea… Loki would let Stark see all of it, he would give him a moment of pure emotion and it’s only purpose would be to make Stark break completely with the Captain.

Speaking of Rogers, Loki should get ready. Doing a little gesture Loki let the illusion that covered the room disappear and exchanged Thomas for William. This shouldn’t take much longer. Indeed Loki had to wait for another few minutes until there was a knock at the door. Rogers hadn’t even called before showing up. Getting up Loki rushed towards the door and yanked it open. “Hey…”

“Hello Will. I’m sorry, I know I said that I would call…”

“Oh, forget about that! Are you alright? I know you said that you were okay, but… I couldn’t stop
worrying.”

Now Rogers and Stark were showing a similar trait, both smiled at him to calm him down although they didn’t believe that it would work. “I’m doing fine… but a lot of things happened and I’m pretty beat.”

“Sorry, come in. Sit down. You want something to drink? I only got water, but…”

“That would be perfect.”

Nodding Loki turned around and took the bottle of water from the table opposite of the bed. The Captain had sat down on the edge of the bed and was taking a look at the book about the history of the Vatican. Loki did really have a hand for the little details. “Here.” Handing him the bottle Loki sat down cross-legged next to him. “Now tell me. We got time and I’d like to understand what happened. I know you wouldn’t have stayed away the whole day if something big hadn’t happened. So…?”

Before saying anything Rogers drank half of the bottle and Loki took advantage of the situation to take an intense look at the Captain. His shoulders were slumped, even his eyes seemed smaller than usual, how strange to see this strong man tired. Something that he normally wouldn’t let show, but here he was in a safe place, with his best friend, no reason to pretend.

“It was a long day and… so many things happened. I’m still trying to process all of it…”

“Okay, then let’s process it together. You look all worked up… We should talk abou…” Loki stopped abruptly, the Captain’s genuine smile was irritating him and he bit his lip. The mistake of a beginner. Well, no harm done. “Don’t say a word.”

“Come on, you refuse to talk when you’re in distress, but you insist that talking will make me feel better. You have to see the irony in this.”

“It’s a different situation. So tell me. We’ve got time… You know I’m a good listener.” Loki leaned back against the headboard and indicated the Captain to do the same. He did and let out a loud sigh, not looking at Loki, but keeping his eyes fixed on the bottle in his hands. Like I said… I still don’t know what happened. It was so much and… I think it ended badly. I can’t grasp it yet.”

Smiling encouragingly at the Captain Loki put a hand on his shoulder. “Why don’t you start at the beginning then?”

For the second time Rogers did as Loki told him to. “I got a call from Bruce this morning that there was a new robot attack. A single robot. You probably already saw that on TV. It flew off, left New York and none of them had done that before. Tony said that we shouldn’t attack it yet and look where it would lead us. It led us to Europe. We found the place where the robots were built and there were lots of them. So many. Maybe hundreds… I have no idea. Whoever built them wasn’t there, but we could gather lots of evidence and I guess we’ll soon find out who they are and we’ll be able to take them down.”

A little pause and Loki jumped at it. “But that sounds good… doesn’t it?”

After shaking his head Rogers let his head rest against the headboard and the world should see him like that. It would change their perception of him forever. A moment of sadness and the picture of a man who was tired of fighting. Again, Rogers was only letting William see him like this. Nobody else. He had come to him.

“Something happened during that fight and I can’t understand it. Thor attacked me…’”
Finally Rogers looked at him and although he was still shaken up by what happened, his first interest was to calm William down. “He didn’t mean to. I guess he didn’t even realise it was me. It was so strange… I know he wasn’t doing fine, but I thought he was mourning his brother. He wasn’t himself during that fight, he clearly wasn’t. He still isn’t… he said some things that were… unsettling about things that might have happened in the past and that we didn’t know about. Things that he might have done. He wasn’t very clear, it was confusing and Tony got really freaked out about it and he doesn’t want Thor around anymore. I don’t know how to feel about this. He’s Thor, he’s our friend. We know him, we fought side by side… he is not doing fine and perhaps something bad has indeed happened in the past, but I refuse to condemn him when I’m not knowing any details. I can’t just give up on him without knowing what it is going on.”

How sweet, but nothing to worry about. Thor would tell the Captain soon enough what he had done and then he had to let go of him. “Okay… that’s quite a lot to take… but you are right. You can’t just jump to conclusions. Since you’re so carefully avoiding telling me what he said, I’m not going to ask. But… what is he doing right now? You said he isn’t doing fine and I know you… you’re not leaving someone alone when they aren’t doing alright…”

“Bruce is with him and other people… I’m… I told you I was going to come here to today, so I came here and… I wanted to see you. I wanted to see if you’re okay.” Loki had to stop himself from flinching when Rogers reached for his hand. Fingers carefully brushing over the white bandage, almost afraid to touch. “How are you?”

They shouldn’t talk about him, but about Stark. It would come, Loki had to be patient. This was a good sign. Nothing was more important to Rogers than William. That was way more than Loki had ever expected to achieve at the beginning. Poor little boy that was so desperate to find his place.

“I’m good… Just worried. It seems like this is what we do. We worry about each other. Yesterday it was you. Today it’s me… But we’re lucky. We’re both fine.” Slowly Loki was pulling his hand away, no more touching than necessary.

“Yes, I guess so…”

While the silence settled in Loki could see how some of the tension was leaving Rogers’ shoulders, he seemed to finally arrive here, in this moment. In a place where he felt safe, where he could let go of the troubles that were on his mind.

“You probably haven’t eaten anything all day… we should order some pizza. Or Chinese… Or would you like something else?”

Smiling at him Rogers shook his head. “No, pizza sounds great. Best idea of the day.”

Pulling the phone from his pocket Loki searched the number from a place close to the hotel that delievered pizza. They had to wait half an hour, but it wasn’t like they hadn’t interesting stuff to talk about. “Do you think that robot issue is going to be dealt with soon? If you’re about to find out who is behind it…”

“I sincerely hope so. People are working on all the information we got right now. This gotta stop and I want to finally know who I am fighting… and stop him.”

You're fighting me and you'll never know that.

“You can’t save everyone, Steve.”
“No, I have to try.”

Fool

Loki showed himself patient, because he could feel the Captain’s want, his need to talk about it. To share his concern and to find someone who would agree with him. Because William would. Come on, little soldier, I am your friend. You know I will say what you want to hear.

“Will, I don’t know what to do…”

There it was and Loki had a hard time to hold back his smile. For now he dropped his hand that was holding a slice of pizza and gave the Captain a gentle look. “What do you mean?”

Rogers had beautiful eyes. Blue, but completely different than Thor’s. Loki thought that they were perfect like this. Filled with conflict and worry. “Tony built the robot…”

Beautiful.

Now these were the little moments Loki was living for. This was when the game was most fun and Loki was going to cherish every single word. You had to start with disbelief, because this was something new, something he didn’t know about. Something horrific. “What?”

One single word, more wasn’t necessary when it was said right. Loki did know how to say things right. Better than anybody else.

“No. God, no! Not what you’re thinking now.” Rogers frantically shook his head. “He got a hold of a lot of the parts… from the destroyed robots. He told us that he would be working on them, trying to figure out a way how to find whoever had built them. What he did was… rebuilding one of them. Hell, he made it even better than those we’ve fought before.”

Loki opened his mouth, closed it again and let William’s eyes do the talking. Mostly shock, a bit of anger and still… “He used parts of the robots and they… the robot got a life on his own and it went off to kill people. I… Everybody told him before to not play with things that he doesn’t understand…” The Captain hid his face behind his hands, taking a breath.

Slowly Loki put his hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry… but… I don’t know him like you do, but… he’s reckless. You know he is. He’s… the impression I got from him… he thinks he can do whatever he wants. I wish I was surprised by what you just told me. What… what did Stark say about all of that?”

The hand on Rogers’ mouth smothered his own words. “Nothing. He’s… content that we found the hideout. He doesn’t think he’s done anything wrong. Fury… my boss, he didn’t want Tony working on the robots. He thought it would be a bad idea to let him have this technology. Maybe he was right…”

This was what winning felt like and still Loki was talking with this hushed voice like he wasn’t loving every second of this. “We’ve had this conversation before. You don’t trust him.”

Rogers lowered his hand and closed his eyes for a moment. “He’s a good man. He only wants to help…”

“The worst things are done with the best intentions.”

“I’ve made mistakes too… Perhaps…”
Stop trying to save everybody. “Steve… you’d never risk hurting an innocent person. Look at you right now. You’re beating yourself up about being loyal to a friend or doing what you think is right.”

“I don’t even know what that would be.”

Smiling softly Loki shrugged, looking a bit helpless. “I don’t know. I don’t know how this works or what you even can do… but you started this whole conversation by saying… that you don’t know what to do. What can you do?”

Nagging on his lower lip Rogers took his time, not giving a reply immediately. “If I only knew… until now I didn’t do anything. Tony threw us out, he… we got into a verbal argument and it wasn’t pretty. Yeah, we fought before, but this was somehow different. He more or less said that he would do it again. He really didn’t get at all that he acted… irresponsibly. I… just can’t be sure that he won’t be doing something like that again and I’m afraid that the next time even more people could get hurt…”

“You shouldn’t have to even think about that… I’m sorry. I wasn’t there and I don’t like him. I shouldn’t talk about this.” Loki pretended to feel uncomfortable and nibbled on his slice of pizza. How long would it take? 5 seconds? At most.

“No.” Instantly the Captain shook his head, meeting his eyes, so full of trust and affection. “I brought it up, because I wanted to know what you think. You’re honest and you have a good sense for what is right and wrong. I wanna know what you’re thinking.”

Oh, I will tell you.

“Okay, I’ll be honest… We’ve talked about Stark before and I was always worried that he might get you into trouble. That’s just me. Steve, you are the most upright person on this planet. I trust your judgement and you should do the same. If you feel like you can’t trust him as your… brother in arms… you should trust that feeling. If you think you can talk this out and it won’t always stay in the back of your mind… then I guess it’s okay.”

“He’s my friend. But he’s Tony. He’s so stubborn and hot-headed. There would be no coming back from this. He wouldn’t forgive me…”

“Of course he’s stubborn. He’s Tony Stark. He can do whatever he wants, he has nobody to answer to. He’s an army of one… I know you’re going to do the right thing, Steve. You always do. Just… don’t let it get to you this much. You did nothing wrong… well, maybe except for trying to save the world and everybody who is in it.”

He did it, he made the Captain smile. Not the thing Loki was most fascinated with though. One couldn’t help but notice how Rogers avoided to give details. About what he could do if he decided that Stark was too much of a risk. S.H.I.E.L.D would only be too glad to help. Stark was a thorn in their side and William had a good point. The Iron Man was resourceful, intelligent and he could become a major problem if he ever decided so. Something that would definitely happen.

“I don’t have to make this decision right now, do I?”

“Don’t ask me… I’m not directly involved, but… I don’t think the world is going to end if you’re going to take care of this tomorrow. You had a shit day… tomorrow probably isn’t going to be much better. You should be allowed to relax for a few hours… Wait… You aren’t even supposed to be here, right? Somebody is already waiting for you to do some battle report or…”
Now the Captain even laughed at Loki’s puzzled look and the faintest blush crept onto his cheeks. “Yeah, pretty much… I called in though. Everybody else is there to tell them what happened. If I was there too, I would have to talk about Tony and I already told you that… I want to be here. Now how about… we talk about something else? Anything?” So coy and sweet. Loki knew that he wouldn’t have to say anything more. Stark and Rogers were done. Unfortunately they were both acting way more civilized than Loki had expected. Who would have thought that he would need Thomas to stir things up?

“Anything… okay… did you know that human body is constantly creating new skin cells? And it’s constantly getting rid of old ones. Your whole skin replaces itself within a month. Can you imagine that? In 30 days you’ll wear a completely new skin.”

Rogers blinked at him. “This is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say ‘anything’?”

“Something wrong with that? I read it somewhere and I think it’s fascinating.” Loki took a big bite from the pizza and let the thought sink in. Only a month and every little cell would have been replaced with a new one.

“So does this mean that I’m a different person than I was a month ago?” A little smile tugged his lips and he said it as a joke. Loki couldn’t agree. “Pretty much so.”

Laughing softly the Captain shook his head. He seemed amused and Loki was surprised, almost displeased by how easy it was to lighten up his mood. “But it’s just the outside. That doesn’t change anything about who you are at heart.”

“Heart.” Loki couldn’t help but snort. “I’ve always hated that expression. All it does is pumping blood through your veins, it has nothing to do with what kind of person you are. Memories, personality traits, emotions… it’s all up here.” Loki put a few fingers on his forehead and then shrugged. “I guess people wouldn’t think it’s as romantic to give someone your brain. Although it would make more sense than giving somebody your heart.”

“It’s just a metaphor… but you’re right. That’s a disgusting thought. Thanks for mentioning it while I’m eating.”

“My pleasure.”

There wasn’t much talking, but they had always gotten along so easily. The atmosphere was nice though, Rogers was feeling good around him and they didn’t have to waste their breath, using empty words. Loki was also pretty sure that the Captain longed for some silence, a calm environment.

“Will, could I spend the night here?”

Raising his head in surprise Loki was quick enough to see Rogers blush. “Like you said… there is some place I should be and I really don’t want to be there and I also don’t feel like going back to my place. Is it okay if I stay here?”

“Sure. Of course…” Loki considered saying something else, but it wasn’t necessary. Rogers still worried about him, but mostly he wanted to be here to be with his friend, because of his own troubles. A little bit of normality. The one thing the Captain craved most for. “You want to watch some TV?” Nothing was more normal than that.

“I’ll probably fall asleep…”

He did look tired after all and Loki had to smirk at that. “Captain America can actually get tired?”
Rogers gave him a look, the kind you only gave a friend. Warm and so calm. Like he could fall asleep, because he knew he was safe. In the presence of a friend. A person he trusted. The only person he trusted. “Sometimes this even happens to me.”

Smiling Loki shrugged and turned on the TV. He didn’t even change the channel, there was some unexciting, unknown film on. Something Stark would never watch. Loki didn’t watch a second of it. His eyes were glued to the screen, but all he concentrated on was the Captain next to him. Off guard. Just sitting there. His muscles loose, probably still aching from the fight.

In this moment he was Loki’s. Vulnerable and at his mercy. Loki could kill him this very second, but Loki didn’t even feel tempted. No torture, no pain, no despair. Nothing about it would be satisfying. Not without some blood on this hands that were supposed to protect and shelter.

The thought brought a grin to Loki’s lips and a few minutes later he looked down at the soldier, lying next to him, having drifted off into a light slumber. Sighing Loki turned off the TV and checked his phone. Nothing new yet. Most likely they were still busy trying to figure out what to do with Thor. Loki would call Banner tomorrow and Stark. Rogers couldn’t hide here forever, S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn’t allow that. The Captain’s conscience even less so. Time to call it a day. A most successful day that had worked out as Loki had planned.

Frowning Loki looked down at Rogers who seemed to be trying to get comfortable, rolling on his side, resting his forehead against Loki’s shoulder. At least the bed was big enough for two people. Loki wasn’t going to risk to slip away, so he grabbed his book and tried to read. It was difficult though to concentrate when there was a body radiating with heat lying right next to him. So distracting, but Loki couldn’t bring himself to dislike it. The memories were too present and the familiarity of it was almost soothing. The fire underneath Loki’s skin remembered it the warmth all too well.

Not that it mattered anymore. Loki had gone back to being fire and magic himself. He didn’t need another source of warmth. Not ever again.

Focusing his attention on the words on the pages in front of him Loki still wouldn’t ignore the Captain’s soft and silent breathing. Not willing to miss the slightest change. Just in case.

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“I sincerely hope that it is a coincidence that you happen to be in the gardens when I am taking a walk.”

“Is my presence upsetting you, my prince?”

“Your presence seems to be permanent.”

“I will leave instantly, my prince, if you ask me to. Do you wish for me to leave?”

“I wish for you to tell me what you seek to achieve. A prince may be a glorious conquest, but there are lots of others. As beautiful and easier to wrap around your little finger.”

“As beautiful? I’ve visited all the nine realms and I doubt there is a person as beautiful as you.”

“I have a lot of beautiful faces.”

“Illusions. I only care about this one.”

“How dare you to touch me without my permission?”
“The prince will have to turn me into a frog or vermin, because I am going to kiss him now and tonight I am going to take him to my bed. If he thinks me worthy.”

Nothing was different and yet everything. Loki felt warm. All over. A quiet moment and there was nothing but this warmth. Engulfing him completely. It came from inside of him. Beautiful. Something was missing, something that always used to be there, but now was gone. Its absence didn’t matter though. Not at all. Loki didn’t know where he was, which realm, which reality, which layer of which dimension and it wasn’t important.

Or it wouldn’t have been. His senses became sharper, recognizing the silence, the darkness, the soft mattress he was lying on. With very little detail of the world around him that he became aware of, Loki felt the warmth fading away. Abruptly and so fast. Until it was gone and Loki tried to grasp an old memory, hidden between the shadows and the mists, but it was out of reach.

He couldn’t tell what it had been. A face? A voice? Or a mere shadow? Behind his closed eyelids Loki only saw the gardens of Vanaheim.

“Will?”

No, that wasn’t right. He had never called him that way. My prince…

“Are you awake?”

Rogers, right. It was still dark, it was silent. Loki didn’t want to talk, he wanted him to be quiet, so he could think. Find the pieces in the darkness.

A soft weight was lifted from his chest. The book, Loki must have fallen asleep while reading. Then a blanket was spread out over him. Ever so carefully. Loki didn’t need to see him to make out his presence. He could feel every single movement. How the Captain held out his hand and then stopped mid-movement. Then he hesitantly pulled back and confirmed Loki’s theory that even the bravest men had their moments of cowardice.
Hello everybody,

No more dreams today, the Avengers gotta deal with Thor and Tony. Not the easiest conversation to have...

_________________________________________________

*I know it's coming and there's going to be violence*  
*I've taken as much as I'm willing to take*  
*Why do you think we should suffer in silence?*

*Tripping ~* Robbie Williams ~*

_________________________________________________

“It’s not even six o’clock in the morning. Do you really want to leave now?” Loki tried his softest glance, put just the right amount of worry into it. He didn’t have the slightest intention to stop the Captain from leaving, but he always had to pretend.

“Yeah, I shouldn’t have stayed away that long in the first place. There’re a lot of things to take care of and… some people are probably already going crazy, because I haven’t showed up.” Rogers was putting on his shoes and Loki frowned at him. “You’re not the average worker and not a slave. You don’t have to do anything…”

Ever so softly Rogers smiled. “You know that’s not true. Not after all the things that happened yesterday. I gotta take care of that.”

Nodding slowly Loki swallowed. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know yet… I guess… I’m just going to act like my conscience tells me to… and I gotta find out what’s really going on.” That look on his face. He clearly didn’t want to do it, but he knew that it was necessary and important, so there was no way he wouldn’t do it. “Do whatever you think is right. I’m sure it’ll be the right thing.”

“I wish I was as confident as you about that. I’m not sure if I’m going to do a good job. But you’re right, I’ll figure it out.” Another feeble attempt at a smile. “I’m going to call you when I’m done, but honestly… I have no idea how long this is going to take. Not at all.”

“Don’t worry. This is New York. I’ll find something to do. Don’t give me that look. I stayed inside the whole day yesterday. If the world is going to end… again… you just give me a call. And you… do what you think is the right thing to do.”

Rogers nodded, still looking uncomfortable. What else to except from such a man when he was about to throw one of his team mates underneath the bus. Because he thinks, he has to do it. For the
greater good. Fool.

“I’ll try. You take care, alright? I’ll call you.”

Then the Captain was gone and Loki had to get to work. First things first. Clearing his throat Loki searched his new voice. Yes, Stark had said that he would call, but Loki wouldn’t miss his chance to make Thomas look like he cared. He only had to wait for about five seconds, then his phone call was answered.

“Hey gorgeous…” Tired, beaten and his speech was slightly slurred. Had Stark been drinking? That would be marvellous. The actions of an alcoholic were so hard to predict and they didn’t even have to make sense. Most importantly, they were dangerous. Very much so.

“Don’t give me that. Did you even sleep? You don’t sound like you did.”

There was a pause and then a hoarse laugh. “Damn, I really miss you. My ass is already feeling weird from not getting kicked all the time. I did sleep. You can ask Jarvis. I may not have slept very long, but I did sleep.”

Perhaps about five minutes and Loki was absolutely content with that. “Okay… better than nothing, right. How are you doing now? Seriously. Without making a joke about it.”

“I love it when you’re bossy… It’s cute that you’re so worried, but I’m okay. There is a lot going on, I’m not going to sugar-coat it. I’m pretty positive that Cap is busy right now with telling S.H.I.E.L.D to drop me like a hot potato and I’ve come to the conclusion that I do not fucking care.”

Not caring wasn’t good, but Loki already knew how to make Stark fall into darkness. He didn’t need S.H.I.E.L.D to do that for him. “What did you do? I don’t have to be worried about the military picking me up from the airport, because of some shit you pulled.”

“Nope, I didn’t do anything. Except for finding a way how to find the guy who wants to kill us. Okay, it didn’t go down as planned, but if I hadn’t done anything we would still be sitting around, waiting until this guy sends out another swarm of robots and kills a bunch of people? No, thank you. I can’t sit around when I know exactly what I can do to help. I did that and now they got a problem with it, because I didn’t do it their way.” Stark croaked and Loki loved it. “Honestly… I didn’t get the whole thing in the first place. Why do you even need them? Or why you choose to work with people that have such different opinions on every matter…”

“As much as I love fucking with the government, it’s kind of tiring. Yeah, S.H.I.E.L.D is a pain in the ass, but if I didn’t play nice with them sometime… they wouldn’t give me a break. Well, looks like that is going to happen anyway now, because there is no way Cap isn’t going to make a fuss about this and he’s their golden boy. God, I’m getting more pissed off the more I’m talking about it…”

“I know you don’t like each other much and believe me, I don’t need the Captain hanging around the tower… but would he really throw you underneath the bus? He doesn’t strike me as that type of guy. He’s stupid, yes, but not an arsehole, right?”

“The problem with Steve is that he always does what his conscience tells him and his conscience is fucking stupid. If Steve was in charge, there would have never been any scientific advance, because he’s too scared to take any risks… God, can you tell me why some people refuse to see the obvious?”
I don’t know, Stark, why don’t you tell me…

Waiting for a second Loki let out a long breath. “Why don’t you tell me exactly what happened? I still feel like there’re a lot of pieces missing. Take your time, I can listen. You’re worked up about this, I want to know.”

The silence told Loki that Stark was taken aback, but that didn’t matter. All he would remember from this was Thomas’ concern and that was all that was important. For this Loki would even go through listening to this story although he already knew it by heart.

“All right, but that’s going to take a while…”

“I don’t care…”

“Fine, so Jarvis woke me up in the middle of the night and…”

***

Now that was a long conversation and Loki felt incredibly annoyed by that. When Stark had finally hung up Loki had been about to tell him to shut up. Luckily he hadn’t done that and instead he had proposed to come home sooner. Why would he do that? It made no sense and Stark had declined. Loki should thank the Norns for that.

Done with Rogers and Stark Loki thought about what he should do next. Banner. He had called him yesterday and before that there hadn’t been a lot of contact. A shame, but Loki would correct that. Men should know better than upset a smart, patient woman. Their wrath could destroy entire landscapes. Especially if that woman was Loki in disguise. Loki was already loving this.

It took quite some time, but then his call was answered and Loki was about to have some fun.

“Lizzy, listen…”

“No, I won’t listen! You are going to listen! You haven’t called in weeks and when I called you, you didn’t even pick up the phone. I don’t want to sound like an upset girlfriend, but in my book if somebody calls you, you call them back. That’s just being polite! It’s a phone call! You can’t come up with an excuse for that. It’s just a phone call!”

“I know… I am sorry…”

“Then you call me to tell me to not go outside? I see the explosions on television and… I know it’s probably none of my business and secretive, but I am not going to sit around this time waiting for you to tell me if you’re okay or not. I don’t need to know what’s going on, just tell me how you’re doing.” Today Loki was really good at acting concerned, even more so when he couldn’t care less. Banner was indestructible, nobody in their right mind should worry about him. So maybe Elizabeth wasn’t in her right mind. What did Loki care?

Banner cleared his throat, his hesitation was very audible. “You are right and I am sorry. I should have called you, but… Lizzy, it would be better if you stayed away from me. I’m dangerous to be around. Even calling me isn’t safe. The best for you would be to act as if we never met.”

Now that was desperation that tasted really sweet. Seems like all this time away from him hadn’t done any damage to Loki’s work. All he had to do was to keep Banner in this state of mind and pieces would fall perfectly into place. “Do you do this with all your friends? The second somebody starts giving a damn, you push them away? You can’t be serious about this.”

“Lizzy, this is the only way that keeps me from bringing people into danger. So yes, I am serious
about this.”

Wonderful, although a bit dramatic and still not enough. “So you choose to be completely alone? Without somebody to talk to or care about? Or is it just me? Because if you just don’t want me around, hell just say it. I am a grown woman, I can deal with that. It’s not like we were dating. Just tell me what’s going on.”

Loki pictured him biting his lip. “No, it’s just like I told you. It has nothing to do with you in particular. I am not safe to be around anybody. You know that’s the truth, it’s a rational conclusion. People who are somewhat close to me get in trouble, they end up getting hurt. I don’t want that. I called you yesterday, because I didn’t know if any more of these… explosions were about to happen. I wanted you to be alright. That was my concern, that’s why I called you. I need you to understand that… people shouldn’t be around me.”

“That’s impossible. Nobody can isolate themselves entirely from other people.”

“One can try.”

“But that’s no way of living.”

No immediate response and Loki knew he had said enough. Falling into place.

***

Infiltrating a S.H.I.E.L.D base turned out to be just as easy as the first time. Loki slid from shadow to shadow, listening to conversations, enjoying the general tension that had been building inside these walls. The average agent was barely able to hide his nervousness and yet they had no idea what was about to come. The prospect of having Thor or maybe even Asgard against them was terrifying and still – they had no idea about the implications. How should their feeble human minds even be capable of understanding what this meant? Not until cities were burning and the world sinking into chaos. If Loki wanted, it would be all too easy to lay it all to waste. They should consider themselves lucky that he only wanted the Avengers.

At least they were smart enough to bring Thor underground, into the deepest level of this facility. Loki wasn’t surprised to see they hadn’t had the guts to put Thor in a real cell. He wasn’t sure if they knew that they didn’t really have the necessary tools to contain him.

Disguising the whole operation as a medical procedure. Why not? Thor didn’t have the wits to understand what was going on and if Loki had done his job right, he wouldn’t even be in the right state of mind to grasp the urgency of his situation.

Narrowing his eyes Loki watched Thor sitting on this bench, an agent in a white coat talking to him, Banner was standing next to them, observing the situation. Interesting, but not Loki’s main concern. One, two, three, four… six cameras in this room. Licking his lips Loki took a breath, trying to concentrate. It wasn’t that hard to find them, all that worry and concern and the bitter taste of fear. Polluting the air.

Everybody was standing although there was no lack of chairs. So many screens in front of them and their eyes were glued to them. Loki’s wasn’t interested in them though. He was studying their features, pleased by what he saw there. Fury’s face was as hard as stone and the Widow mirrored his expression. Barton had perfected the art of not giving a damn and of course, there was the Captain. So conflicted. No matter how this was going to turn out, Loki was sure they would do their best to entertain him.
“I still don’t see why we should be concerned about what happened to the crazy brat that tried to enslave our planet. He got what he had coming to him. Thor is doing better by the minute and I’m sure he’ll be glad to clear this mess up.”

Loki made a mental note to gut Fury when he was done with the Avengers. Not a single person in the Nine Realms would dare to call him a brat if they knew what he could do. If they had only bothered to take a look.

“As I’ve pointed out before… judging by what we know… Thor was referring to something that happened before Loki ever got to Earth. It’s not like we are concerned about Loki’s fate, but about Thor’s credibility.” Cold as steel. At least one could count on the Widow.

“I don’t like the sound of that, but Natasha is right. We have to get to the bottom of this. Thor attacked me and Tony. He seemed to be delusional. We can only help him if we know what is going on.”

Oh Captain, it isn’t about helping him. It is about saving yourselves.

“Fine, let’s take another look at the latest footage. Perhaps it’ll tell us something different this time. I can’t stand it when Asgardian gods are causing me trouble.”

Oh dear director, if you only knew…

Leaning back against the wall Loki let the little smile play across his lips and he watched. One of the screens started to show said footage. They recorded this probably earlier this day or during the night. What lovely images, beautiful.

Thor again sitting on this bench, with his back against the wall, his feet planted on the floor. His eyes staring into nowhere, like they had done before when Loki had left. So they were finally able to see it, something that Loki had seen all his life. Thor’s weakness, his pathetic character that he tried to hide behind all that muscle and brute force. Look at him and maybe you’ll understand.

“Thor, can you tell me what happened during the fight? Why did you attack Cap?” Banner’s voice was gentle, no disdain to be found in his words. Yet.

An answer was given, but Thor’s empty eyes wouldn’t look at Banner. Still influenced by Loki’s web, but not enough to not realise what was going on around him. “I did not attack the Captain. He is a friend.”

Loki cocked his head, so he wouldn’t miss the Captain’s reaction. It was also his first time to see this. Sentiment. Once a fool, always a fool.

“Who did you attack then? We couldn’t see them, Thor. You need to tell me.” Banner was smart, cautious, he wouldn’t show his true feelings no matter what. Unfortunately Loki was fairly sure that more was necessary to convince them of Thor’s misdeeds. That was why he was here.

The darkness on Thor’s face suddenly became all the more visible. “The shadows that killed my brother. Even when I tried to stop them I couldn’t do it…”

“Did you try to fight them before?”

Sometimes so much time and even lives were lost, because somebody did ask the wrong questions. Luckily Banner knew exactly what to say.

“No, I did not.” Loki could see how Thor clenched his hand to a fist and he simply knew that there
had been thunder. “It was me who pushed him into the shadows. I heard him scream for help and I didn’t come to help him.”

The video suddenly stopped and Fury turned to the present Avengers. “Does this match what he told you after the battle?”

“I…” The Captain seemed to think when the Widow was quick to answer and Barton preferred to remain silent. “Yes. He was contradicting himself though. He basically said that Loki fell and two seconds later he insisted on having pushed him. The part about hearing him scream and not helping him, yes. He said that before.”

“Doesn’t have to be a contradiction.” Barton shrugged. “Loki could have fallen, because he had been pushed. Simple. Cause and effect.”

“Remind me again – why are you of all people on Loki’s side?” Fury spat and Barton wasn’t afraid to meet his eyes. “Because there are no sides and it doesn’t make any difference whatsoever. Loki is still going to be a dead son of a bitch. He was angry, you could almost smell it on him how pissed off he was. That would at least explain it. Being pushed off an abyss by your own brother is a pretty good reason to be angry. Most probably he did something fucked up in the first place to be pushed. I don’t care. Some people just snap when they are pushed too far.”

Beautiful… every single syllable. As if Loki had put the words in his mouth. Somehow he did. It only got even more perfect with the way Barton was looking at Fury now, almost challenging him. Yes, more of it.

“Clint… we’re still talking about Thor here. He’s our friend.” The Captain’s voice was still firm. Too much so. Only people who desperately wanted to believe in their own words sounded like this. “We have too little information to jump to conclusion. I don’t know if we even should trust his word. He is clearly confused…”

“Exactly. So confused that he couldn’t distinguish between friend and foe. Keep going…”

The video continued and Banner carefully pressed further. “When Loki fell… after Loki fell… what happened then?”

“The shadows killed him and I let them. He screamed for help, but I did not come.”

“But Loki came back from the shadows. You remember that, right? The Tesseract brought him here.” It was supposed to be comforting, a little bit of hope, of reassurance. Some life was indeed breathed back into Thor when he feverishly shook his head. “What came back from the shadows was not my brother. He died in that abyss, because I did not help him, because I pushed him. Loki never came back from the shadows… and when I saw another glimpse of him, of the man who had been my brother… I failed him again. I let him die a second time. If I had wrapped my hand around his throat, it would have been no different.”

Finally, a little wince. Barely visible but Loki didn’t miss it. Do you understand now, mortals? Do you see what he has done to me?

“Why… Can you remember why you pushed him, Thor?”

Another excellent question, but there would be no satisfying answer to it. Loki hadn’t whispered it into Thor’s ear yet.

“I do not know. I do not know.”
The video stopped and nobody dared to say a word. What are you going to do now, little mortals? Can’t you recognize madness when it shows its ugly head?

Keeping his composure the Captain made a step forward. Who else? “We should give him a day or two. To sleep. Tony and Bruce said that he didn’t get any sleep during the last couple of days. He’s not doing fine. We can’t condemn him because of some things he said when he is not… in his right state of mind.”

“I am not going to condemn him for whatever he might have done to a maniac that tried to enslave this world. But I’m going to take it very seriously when one of the Avengers tries to attack the other ones. My only concern is that he might do it again. But fine, we’ll have it your way. He seems stable now. We’ll tell him to get some rest and then we’ll talk to him again.” Fury made a dismissive gesture and Loki rolled his eyes. Nothing was going to change after getting a couple of hours of sleep.

Well, the Captain seemed appeased and that was most probably the one thing Fury tried to achieve. “Banner has to stay here though, in case Thor was another one of his little fits.”

The Widow pursed her lips and shifted slightly. Now that was a strong reaction on her part, Loki felt almost disappointed. “Stark won’t like that.”

Just mentioning this name caused Fury to snarl. “I don’t give a shit about what Stark is going to like or not. He’s the real problem we have on our hands right now.”

Everything about this was so rewarding, utterly perfect.

Well, not entirely though. Rogers still sighed, showing clearly that he wasn’t comfortable with this conversation. Was it even possible that he still hadn’t made a decision? Did Loki have to use an Iron Man suit to rip William apart?

“I am not going to defend Tony’s actions, but are we seriously considering…”

“Of course you aren’t defending his actions. All of you apparently knew that he was doing shady shit with some parts of the robots and none of you thought it was necessary to inform S.H.I.E.L.D about it. I remember giving the order that he wasn’t allowed to touch one piece of this technology.”

Loki had to leave it to him, it took a lot of courage to talk to these people that way. Every one of them could easily kill him with little to no effort at all. Barton looked like he was about to do just that. For a second Loki wondered how things would turn out if the Captain wouldn’t be in this room. “Yes, Tony said that he was working on something, but… It seemed unwise to have this technology and keeping him away from it. He’s… This is his expertise. Nobody understands technology like he does…”

“That may be the case, Captain, but you saw what he did with it. Why he cannot be trusted with these sort of things. I have enough trouble sleeping knowing that Stark has his own suits. He is an alcoholic who doesn’t care about the consequences of his actions. You all saw the results. He played with something he doesn’t understand and innocent people died because of that.”

Every single word hit home and the Captain looked away. Was it so hard to hear his own thoughts given voice? “He did not mean to…”

“No, he didn’t.” Again all emotion had vanished from the Widow’s face. “But he also keep it a secret what he was doing. He said he was working on a way to find whoever had built the robots.
Not that he was trying to copy one of them.”

“Come on, you don’t think that Tony indented to do something else with the robot…”

She shrugged. “Yesterday I wouldn’t have thought that Thor would attack you with no reason and Stark has a history of creating things that turn out to be fatal, because he wasn’t careful enough. He also didn’t show any kind of regret…”

Rogers crossed his arms in front of his chest and Loki wished he would finally stop trying to be the hero. “I know all that, but… what do you propose we do about it? Tony isn’t working for S.H.I.E.L.D. He’s…”

“An army of one. That’s what he is. And he’s angry and told us to go fuck ourselves. If you ask me, I’d say he considers himself out…” Barton could also be talking about the weather.

“That still doesn’t mean that we have to worry about him.”

“Yes, it does. He was already hard to control within the Avengers. On his own he can pretty much do as he pleases. I don’t have to remind you that this man has technology at his disposal that could take down a small country. He doesn’t care about collateral damage and like Barton just pointed out… he’s angry.”

The Captain scowled, fighting with himself. “Yet there is no reason to believe that he’ll do anything. I agree that he is reckless and we should keep an eye on him, but that’s all. He’s Tony, he’s no threat.”

Not yet, dear Captain, but he will be one. As soon as you’ve snatched the one thing he holds most dear from his grasp. That’s more than enough to drive a man to madness. An army of one that can tear down cities and nations.

It was obvious that Fury was displeased with Rogers’ point of view, but at least he wasn’t outright protesting. “Fine… we can’t do nothing after this disaster, that much is for sure. I want permanent observation on Stark. Get someone on his boyfriend too as soon as he gets back from England.”

Rogers frowned, clearly upset. “What? Now we are monitoring civilians?”

“If this civilian has significant influence on a man with dubious morals who has the weapon power to be a threat to this entire country, then yes.” Fury gave Rogers a look that told him to better not disagree with him and for once the Captain was silent.

Just like Loki, but he was having a hard time not to laugh. Wonderful. Digging their own graves. Who would have thought that Thomas would be the one who would bring them to the point where they would rip each other apart?

Well, before they could get to that Loki had to tell Thor why he had killed him. They wouldn’t be pleased about that.
The Counter Attack

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas everyone!

Here is an early / late present - depends on where you live :D

_______________________________

First they ignore you  
Then laugh at you and hate you  
Then they fight you  
Then you win  

Tripping ~~ Robbie Williams ~~

_______________________________

Turning the amulet in his hands Loki looked at it intently. It wasn’t talking to him yet. There was power in it, Loki couldn’t deny that. He felt it beneath the surface, but he couldn’t quite place it yet. Running his fingers along the emerald Loki tried to reach it, but it wouldn’t let him. Interesting. Loki would keep it and take a closer look at it later. What else? A potion. Could be pretty much anything. Red, very thick, a sour smell. It would take some time to analyze it. Strangely enough Loki seemed to have time now. Not that he liked it much. Those Midgardians were just too busy not doing anything. Not even talking, just waiting around and hoping that things would sort themselves out. Were they so naïve that they indeed thought that Thor would just feel better? He wouldn’t.

Yet they wouldn’t stop waiting and so Loki had decided to take a look at the artefacts he had stolen. Another way to pass time, but until now nothing but the amulet had caught his attention. Still Loki wasn’t entirely sure what it was and what it contained, but there was power within it. Sooner or later Loki would pick it apart and find out what the little mage had been using it for. Now he wasn’t in the mood for it. He wanted the raw emotion, the fear, the realisation that everything was falling apart. By now everything should be glass clear, feeble Midgardians still refused to see.

Quite frustrating.

After placing the objects back in the layer he had taken them from Loki returned back to the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters. They better had moved on a little bit, otherwise Loki would be forced to speed things up a little bit and they wouldn’t like it.

Teleporting back Loki had chosen a slightly different location this time. Instead of joining the Avengers and Fury Loki decided to take a good look at Thor’s cell from the inside. Although they refused to call it a cell, of course. Medical examination room. Whatever. Loki took a look around and screwed his face up when his eyes ran over the white walls and tiles. Unpleasant. Thor was
still sitting on the bench, fixing his knees. Somebody who didn’t know what was going on, would probably be wondering if he was lost in thought or apathetic. Nobody else was in here with him. Were they still hoping that Thor would catch some sleep and then everything would be like they wanted it to be. How long was it going to take until they realised that it had just been an illusion? They had never seen the real Thor or had heard the real story.

Whatever they wanted, it didn’t matter, because sleep was the last thing on Thor’s mind. Loki had made sure of that. The second he closed his eyes Thor should think about Loki, about his grey skin, the hole in his chest and his dead eyes. Staring at him reproachfully. Too bad that lack of sleep didn’t clear one’s mind. Licking his lips Loki considered his options. He would give it some time, let Thor’s guilt gnaw on him and then he would give him some new food for thought. A new web. That would make him talk, sing a song for the eager listeners and then maybe... he would give him a reason to attack. Loki wasn’t sure yet. Jane Foster would soon get here and it would be so much more fun to get her involved.

Cocking his head Loki took a look at Thor and savoured the sight. He had never seen him like that, not once. The great Thor had always held his head so high, a smile on his lips, even when it was inappropriate. Thor had never known anything else than light-heartedness. It was only fair to make him feel the pain. To make him know what it felt like. To give him a little taste. Why should only other people experience suffering and agony? Thor had tossed Loki into the abyss and now Loki was pulling him in.

A few more seconds Loki enjoyed the result of this work, then he told his magic to pull him away. Not far though. Barton had disappeared, the Widow was standing in a corner, a dark look on her face and the Captain had never looked more uncomfortable. Loki knew that demeanour. A man who was torn between what he thought was necessary and what he thought was right. So they had finally started doing something?

Agents were sitting in front of their pathetic little screens, typing feverishly and Fury was watching them carefully with his single eye. Yes, something was going on and since none of the screens was showing Thor, it had probably to do with Stark.

“Can’t we just try to call him another time? There’s gotta be a better way than…” The Captain trailed off when Fury turned around to look at him. “Fine, Captain. Since the first three times weren’t enough for you. Call Stark.”

One of the Agents was probably acting out this order, because a second later the speakers filled the room with the sound of the dial tone. Loki frowned, he wasn’t quite sure yet what they were doing, but at least something was happening. There was a silent click and then…

“This is the voice mail of Tony Stark. Fuck you, Fury. Stop calling me. You made me change my voice mail and that constant ringing is really pissing me off.”

Loki grinned and the Captain scowled.

“He’s still not answering.” Loki wasn’t quite sure that Fury made it sound as if he was almost content about this fact. Like he was enjoying it to be right, although him being right meant they were in trouble. “He is ignoring us and thinks it’s funny. Even Stark has to respect some rules… and we have to make sure that he isn’t causing any more trouble.”

Once again the Captain pulled a face, clearly torn between swallowing whatever he wanted to say and to just shout it out. Finally he decided to clear his throat. “I am sorry, director, but I think this is the wrong way to handle this.”
Fury clearly wasn’t surprised, his one eye now focused on the Captain. “If you have a better
suggestion, I’m willing to listen, but don’t just stand there and judge my methods, Captain Rogers.
You said yourself that Stark’s actions put innocent civilians in great danger. We still don’t have a
confirmed number of how many people died when his robot attacked these buildings. He’s Stark,
he’s a show-off, he can’t do small things. We can’t be sure that he hasn’t built more of these things
and if he did… we have to act.”

This time there was no reply and Loki could tell by Rogers’ eyes that he partly agreed with Fury,
but he didn’t like it. Loki still didn’t know what they were planning to do, but he doubted that it
would impress Stark in any kind of way.

“We could still ask him…”

Finally the Widow took a step forward. “Steve, he threw us out and it wasn’t like one of his usual
temper tantrums. You tried to call him, I did, S.H.I.E.L.D did. He did ignore all of our calls.”

“Bruce could try it. Tony would talk to him, I’m sure.” Rogers was grasping at straws, desperately
trying to keep the moral superiority. Completely in vain, because the Widow already had the
perfect answer to this. “Bruce has already tried to call him.”

Honest surprise was visible on the Captain’s face and a bit of hope lit up his eyes. “He did? What
did Tony say?”

Loki would like to know that too, although he already had a very precise idea. “Stark told him that
we should go fuck ourselves. Except for Bruce, of course.” The Widow shrugged nonchalantly.
Naturally, it wasn’t like Stark’s reaction hadn’t been predictable. Yet the Captain bit his lower lip,
obviously about to give up. “I still don’t have to like it.”

Fury snorted in response. “No, you don’t, but we can’t afford to not know what else Stark might
have up his sleeve. He has had enough of this technology at his disposal, he has had the
opportunity to produce lots more of this things and maybe he also built other things. If he did, we
will find some notes and data about it in his files…”

Suddenly Loki was confronted with such a hard task. How was he supposed to not burst out
laughing when Fury said something so incredibly stupid? This was ridiculous. Absolutely stupid.
They should know their enemy, right? If you were about to challenge an enemy to a duel – why
would you choose their favourite weapon? Stark’s was a genius when it came down to technology.
Loki had spent enough time with him to know that his mind outshined most others on this planet.
No matter how pathetic and empty this world was, two or three things had still managed to impress
Loki. Jarvis was one of them. He was the pure definition of brilliance and Stark had created him.

So yes, Stark was incomparable and these fools really thought themselves capable of entering his
system and to steal information from him? So much arrogance needed to be punished and Loki was
sure that Stark would take care of that. They couldn’t be so naïve. Yes, Fury had more people had
his disposal, but really? Loki was able to destroy whole armies with a little gesture of his hand and
Stark’s security shields couldn’t be broken by some S.H.I.E.L.D agents. At least this promised to
be funny.

“How are we doing?”

One of the agents replied dryly, without tearing his eyes away from the screen. Loki could hear
how he tried to not sound impressed, but he was. “Clearly one of the best firewalls I’ve ever seen,
but it shouldn’t take much longer…”
Really? Loki doubted that.

“Very good.”

Again Rogers made a feeble try to find a more peaceful solution to their problem. “We should… There is no coming back from this. Tony won’t take this lightly. He’ll consider this a personal attack and… if we do this, he’ll break all ties with us…”

“Stark hacked into our system several times. What right does he have to complain when we do the same?” Again Fury sounded cold and so awfully confident. Loki wanted to laugh into his face. Instead he kept silent and waited for their failure, like this it would be even more entertaining. He was especially looking forward to Fury’s face.

“Sir, we’re in.”

It was impossible to miss the smug smirk that appeared on Fury’s lips, barely a second, but there it was. That wasn’t going to last long anyway. Stark wouldn’t let Loki down.

“Excellent. Now find everything that…”

Nobody was going to find everything. Not in complete darkness. All lights went suddenly out. The darkness and his invisibility now both hiding Loki’s grin. Sometimes Stark knew exactly what to do to please him.

“What the hell happened?!” Fury’s voice had turned into a grim bark and Loki almost felt sorry for the chuckle that he couldn’t utter. Naïve fools. Stark’s mind might be troubled, but that didn’t make it less brilliant.

Less impressed now, more completely taken aback and clueless. “I don’t know… I… It was…”

Loki could hear a loud, frustrated sigh and he knew that the Captain already regretted that he hadn’t protested harder. “Tony happened. I don’t know a single thing about computers, but I think you got in there a little bit too easy…”

A person with a functioning brain, how refreshing.

There was a loud, buzzing noise and the lights flickered back on, yet the screens of the computers remained completely dark. Oh, Loki was loving this.

“What’s the damage?”

“We don’t know that yet, sir, but… it seems like Stark’s system let us in only to throw us back out and I fear it might have… we don’t know yet.”

“Well, then you better find out!”

The next minutes made up for all the time they had made him lose before. Loki watched them squirm, the agents tried to get their computers back online, getting more frustrated by the minute and Fury started pacing around, shouting at them to get things working again. Rogers was rubbing his temples, while the Widow didn’t react at all. The result was hilarious. Loki didn’t pretend to understand the words they were using to describe the situation, but it was obvious that Stark or Jarvis had screwed up their servers. One of them even called it a trap and immediately lowered his eyes, because Fury looked at him like he wanted to rip his throat open. A typical sign of weak leaders. They made stupid decisions and blamed it on their staff when they failed.
“So much for that.”

“Captain Rogers, I know you don’t like this, but my hands are tied!” Good, Fury could easily focus his anger on Rogers, he could take it. “Stark caused yesterday’s incident and we can’t rule it out that he’s responsible for more than that.”

Rogers blinked in surprise and Loki raised an eyebrow. Interesting line of thoughts, he was going to like this.

“More than that? I can’t follow you.” When Fury didn’t reply immediately Rogers turned to the Widow. “Natasha?” Smart boy, he was learning.

The Widow released a long breath, showing a bit of frustration. She didn’t like it to have to spell it out to the Captain. Let Loki do it. They thought Stark was the devil. Because they couldn’t control him, because he could hurt them, because he was smarter than them. They weren’t able to take that.

“We can’t be sure, but a lot of these events make a lot of more sense when you add Stark as a relevant factor.”

“What do you mean?”

Her words were like steel, cold and blunt. “Two of the robot incidents were tied to Stark. First the attack on the tower, when all the Avengers were present and a lot of S.H.I.E.L.D agents. People died and got hurt, but the tower didn’t take a lot of damage. Now one single robot that Stark built launched another attack. Yes, Stark told us that the robot went rogue and that he didn’t have any control over it, but…”

Yes, more of it. Perfect.

“Wait.” The Captain raised his hand to stop her. “This is something else. You are not trying to tell me that Tony wanted this to happen. That he never lost control over the robot.”

She only shrugged. “It’s a possibility that we can’t rule out.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Is it, Captain Rogers?” Fury smiled and there was nothing warm or nice about it. “May I remind you of two other incidents? New Jersey? The S.H.I.E.L.D attack that trigged the Hulk? Both were caused, because some outside forced managed to defy S.H.I.E.L.D’s security system and used our own network against us. Who just proved that he was capable of doing that?”

This was beyond perfection. It couldn’t have turned out any better, although the Captain was still having trouble believing that. “Why would Tony do such a thing?”

“Stark has a history of doing things, because he can do them. He is a single man with enough weapons at his disposal to start a war and he showed us yesterday that he doesn’t care too much about human life… Maybe he did once, but got corrupted by how much power he has now. Too much power for a single man.”

How cute. Loki was having so much more power in a single fingertip… but he was mad, so who would care about his opinion on this matter.

“What are you implying?”
“I am not implying anything. I just want us to be ready when Stark decides that he doesn’t want to play games anymore and yes, Captain, I am very worried about what is going to happen then.”

Loki wasn’t. He knew out it would turn out. They would kill each other and those who would be left would die from Loki’s hand.

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“Are you serious? Come one, you can’t be serious…” Again, it was so hard to not laugh, chuckle or smile. Instead Loki just put on a slightly shocked, disappointed face. William’s eyes were a bit wider than usual and that was more than enough to make Rogers feel bad about himself.

“I’m sorry, but… it’s hard to describe what’s going on here… I just… I can’t afford to stay away long. They need me and… I’m sorry, I won’t have any more time to meet up with you. I shouldn’t even be here right now.”

The confusion was slowly fading away and Loki let his eyes turn hard. Not too much though. He always had perfect control over his face. “It’s because of Stark, isn’t it?”

Rogers sighed and tried to avoid his eyes. “Will…”

“What? Every single time something is wrong, every time you tell me that you have to sort something out or that you’re in danger… it has something to do with Stark. Did you get to the bottom of the robot thing? I told you to go with your gut. What happened?”

“It’s…” Rogers hesitated and Loki wondered why he still refused to give into this. He didn’t trust Stark and he thought that it was possible that he might betray them. “The people I work for decided that he isn’t trustworthy anymore and Tony refuses to talk to any of us. Things are falling apart and I have no idea how to fix them.”

Support. Why was he still in need of support? Loki couldn’t understand it, but he knew what he had to do. A simple touch, his hand on the Captain’s arm. “Steve… you can’t fix everything. I know you want to, but it’s simply not possible. Some things can’t be repaired when they’re broken and some people don’t want you to help them. I know you like to thinks so, but you don’t carry the entire weight of the world on your shoulders. You just don’t. You don’t have to sacrifice every minute of your life to someone else…”

“That’s not what I’m doing.” How he hesitated, so weak. “I’m trying to keep a group of people who are able to do something good, who are able to help a lot of people. The Avengers are a good thing and I can’t let it… go to waste.”

But that’s what going to happen and you should finally accept it, my dear Captain.

“I understand that… I do. Please, don’t be mad at me, but right now… it doesn’t really look like that. I see you worrying all the time and how you give your all… You want to trust everybody, because you hope that they are worth it, but… some people aren’t. Okay, I’ll put my cards on the table, you said that you were worried about me, so I’ll say it too. After all you’ve told me, I’m fucking scared. For you. I’m scared that you will try to save everybody and while doing that… you’ll forget to save yourself. Because somebody won’t have your back… I’m fucking scared.”

Now it was happening. Finally Loki was getting the reaction he wanted. Rogers was speechless and Loki could see it in his eyes that he was thinking about it. Maybe for the very first time. Captain America was considering the possibility that somebody of his friends could stab him in the back. Would he be able to break their bones if they forced him to? Why would they turn on him and
what would he do if that happened?

“I will be fine. You really don’t have to…”

“You are scared for me. I can’t convince you otherwise, so don’t even try… Listen, I got it. You have to sort stuff out, important stuff. I’ll fly back to D.C. Please, just watch out for yourself… Please.”
Hey everybody,

I hope you've all had a beautiful Christmas :D

Thomas gets back to New York and his presence seems to overshadow Loki's...

_________________________________________________

When love is blind sometimes the lies can get you through the night
I'm holding on to what I need till you're too tired to fight

Lonely ~~ Bon Jovi ~~

_________________________________________________

Now this was an experience Loki could have lived without. British Airways and their service were horrendous. The flight across the Atlantic took forever and Loki had paid a little fortune. Not that it mattered, he had only snapped his fingers to make the transaction, but all of this was so unnecessary and annoying. He had to put on a show for S.H.I.E.L.D though. Them tailing him was the best thing that could have happened. Stark would go crazy over that and it would make the end of their love story all the more tragic. On the other hand Loki would be forced now to spend a lot more time as Thomas, to be more careful than ever and his clones would better be impeccable.

Loki would be pleased if the whole thing wouldn't take so much time. Walking by foot, using cars and planes. Everything was so slow, Loki felt as if he was moving backwards. Incredibly boring and so...

“Excuse me, would you mind if I might take a look at your book?”

Looking up Loki for the first time actually saw the person sitting next to him. Female. Probably about 30 years old. Business suit. Light brown curls. Her nails were perfectly done. Only light make-up, but clearly expensive. She was smiling at him, politely and not too much. Fine, Loki could talk to her. The book had been lying in his lap for quite a while now and he hadn’t looked at it for hours.

“Sure.”

He handed it to her and her smile got a little bigger. “Thank you.” She turned it in her hands, only looking at the title. “My Persian is rustier than I thought… It’s One Thousand and One Night, isn’t it?”

“It is. Your Persian can’t be that rusty.”

She seemed pleased by the compliment. “I did some classes in college, but then I didn’t have
enough time and I had to concentrate on my main studies. So I fear I forgot most of it... A pity though. Where did you learn it? I’m sorry for being direct, but you don’t look very Iranian to me.”

Loki felt tempted to pretend to be Afghan and to only talk in Farsi from now on, but he was wearing Thomas’ skin, he should be careful. He couldn’t afford to make mistakes. “I’m learning it right now. I’m not as good as I’d like to be. It’s incredibly exhausting.” It had indeed taken him longer to learn Farsi than to learn most other languages, but he had mastered it in three days.

“Oh, I see. It’s a beautiful language. I wish I hadn’t stopped studying it...” Still smiling she gave the book back and offered him her hand. “Mila Dyrdal. Nice to meet you.”

So he was in for a longer conversation. Well, she was eloquent and showed interest in education and literature, could be worse. Loki had to stay in this seat for another three hours, so why not? “My pleasure. Thomas Pine.”

“What are you doing in New York? Business or holidays?”

“Neither. I live in New York. I only visited some friends in London. What about you? You obviously heard that I’m not American and neither are you.”

Mila answered with a little laugh and nodded. “Right, I’m Norwegian. I’m working for a company that has tight business relations with the US, so I have to fly to New York once a month. It’s an impressive city, but I would never choose it over London.”

Loki wouldn’t either, this wasn’t his voice. Yet if he had to choose only one place of this planet, it would be Lisbon. He hadn’t been there in quite a while now. “I’m not going to live there for the rest of my life. For now it’s okay. Public transport is horrendous though.”

“Oh, I agree... How come you decided to learn Farsi?”

Quite talkative, but she was so easy to read. Loki knew that she wasn’t a liar, just a woman on a plane that tried to find an entertaining way to pass the time. Why not having a conversation?

“After learning Arabic it seemed like the next logical choice.”

Her eyebrows went slightly up. “Oh? Are you an interpreter or something?”

“Exactly. My field of expertise are Romance Languages, but whenever I read a new book I want to read its original edition, so I’m constantly trying to learn new languages. Not the most affective way, but I can’t help myself. There’s nothing I enjoy more than reading.”

Now her eyes started to beam. “I completely share that sentiment. I would have loved to do my studies in literature, but... that didn’t work out that way. I’ve read pretty much all the English literature there is.”

Huh. This wouldn’t turn out fun for Loki, wouldn’t it? “Yes? What’s your favourite?”

“I don’t know... the first one that comes to mind is Animal Farm... I guess.”

“Interesting. I’m not that much of a George Orwell fan though.”

“What’s yours then?”


“I adore Jane Austen!”
In the middle of their conversation about Sense and Sensibility Loki couldn’t help to wonder how odd this was. Him on a plane, talking with a mere Midgardian about Midgardian literature. An almost satisfying talk. It definitely helped to pass the time until the plane landed in New York. Mila and him only parted ways after picking up their baggage. With a charming and maybe a bit hopeful smile on her lips Mila handed him her business card “If he ever wanted to discuss literature again”. Then she headed for the exit and Loki felt the urge to just go over to the S.H.I.E.L.D agent who had just taken a picture of them. He would make him swallow that damned camera. Were they even trying to be discrete?

Slipping the card into the pocket of his jacket Loki grabbed his suitcase and left the airport. He told the taxi driver to get him to the Stark Tower and then he was waiting again. Casually Loki traced his fingers along the bracelet around his wrist.

After a horrendous long time Loki arrived at the tower and he had to smile when Jarvis greeted him as soon as he stepped into the elevator. “Mr. Pine, we’re so glad to see you back in the tower. I must admit though that we didn’t expect you today.”

“I know, Jarvis. I thought I wouldn’t call, so I could surprise Stark.”

“Quite a surprise indeed.”

Yes, Loki was sure of that. Time to get the game on.

The doors opened and there was Stark. Loki could see the toll the last days had taken on him and it was beyond perfect. Unshaven, tousled hair, the eyes of a man who was lacking sleep. Normally Loki wouldn’t even look at a person in this state. Nevertheless Stark smiled, a bit too much, trying to distract Loki from what was obviously wrong. “Gorgeous! What is your fine ass doing here? I look like shit.”

Rolling his eyes Stark grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the elevator. “Yeah, yeah. You look hot like shit and stop trying to be mean to hide the fact that you’re here, because you care.”

Loki was about to give some snappy remark, but Stark silenced him with a kiss. Right, so they were back to this now. “Seriously… why didn’t you call? I would have picked you up from the airport.”

“Yeah and you would have been prepared to act as if everything was okay. Have you even slept since I last called you?”

Stark tried to brush him off with a smirk. “You know me, I don’t need much sleep anyway.”

“Oh, don’t even start. I swear, I’ll make you regret it.” Shaking his head Loki grabbed Stark’s hand and pulled him along. “Bed. Now.”

“Damn, you really missed me, right?”

“Shut up! You’re going to sleep, then we’ll talk. God, have you never learned to take care of yourself?”

He had been about to simply drag him along when Loki noticed that Stark was having trouble moving. “What’s… You’re limping… Why the fuck are you limping?”
Because he was hurt. Loki knew that. So why did it feel like he was seeing this for the very first time? Why did it feel… strange? Not as rewarding as before.

Now Stark lowered his eyes sheepishly and Loki didn’t miss how he tried to straighten up. “It’s nothing…”

“Stark! I swear if you continue to make a fool out of me…”

“Okay, okay. Don’t go all British rage on me…” Sighing Stark shrugged softly. “I might have gotten a little bit hurt. Just a scratch.”

A scratch? The robot had fully hit his leg. Loki had seen it. Loki had made it fire. He was hurt and he was playing it down and Loki felt… It was so hard to define. Yes, he was having fun, but in the back of his mind he knew that something was wrong. His mouth was filling with a bitter taste.

“You got hurt and didn’t fucking tell me! Did you at least see a doctor? God, how can a person be so stupid?! I want to smack your stupid head against the fucking wall, because you make me so…”

The words died on Loki’s lips when Stark smiled, reaching out and cupping his face. “You know… you could stop acting tough for a moment and just say that you’re worried. Doesn’t make you any less badass. You’ll still be a bastard. Nothing bad about giving a damn about me.”

“Oh, shut up, I’m…”

“You came back two days earlier, because you’re worried. That’s cute. Nice. Sweet even. And it’s okay. Sometimes I worry about you too, you know.”

This was perfect, all that Loki had planned and maybe even more. Yet there was something wrong. What didn’t quite fit yet?

Stark was kissing him and Loki wanted to punch him. “Fine…” He released a deep breath before meeting Stark’s eyes. “Are you hurt? Just say it like it is.”

“Okay… I got hit and it hurt like a bitch. I got patched up and I’m fine. In two or three days the limping will be gone too. It’s alright.”

Nodding softly Loki took a hold of his hand again. “Now get some sleep…”

This time Stark didn’t put up a fight and let Loki pull him into the bedroom. He didn’t even make a funny remark when Loki told him to take off his clothes. As soon as the jeans dropped to the floor Loki’s eyes drifted to the bandage on Stark’s thigh. It looked professional enough. Thomas reached out, his fingers ever so softly ghosting the white garment. “It still hurts, right?”

“Only when I walk… Tommy, listen… shit is hitting the fan and I shouldn’t…”

“You’re going to sleep. Now.” Loki didn’t accept any other word and pushed Stark down onto the bed. Judging by Stark’s eyes Loki was sure that he didn’t want to sleep, not the even slightest bit, but he was also tired. Perhaps too tired to fight with a person who was even more stubborn than him.

Instead of just closing his eyes he reached out and pulled Loki down right next to him. “Stay… if your putting me to bed like a child, you gotta stay here.”

Fine, whatever. It wasn’t like Loki could do anything else with Jarvis watching him and S.H.I.E.L.D watching the tower. Therefore he let Stark wrap an arm around his waist. “How was
London?”


He knew Stark was smiling and he rolled his eyes.

“I really missed you…” Stark mumbled the words against his shoulder and his guard was down. Every word was drenched in vulnerability and honest emotion. Yes, he had indeed missed Thomas and he felt in a safe place with him. A man who had been betrayed like this, who had been through so much pain had now absolutely no trouble with lying in bed next to another person, although he was hurt, weak.

“Hush, go to sleep…” Loki let his fingers brush over Stark’s hair, just wanting him to fall asleep already. Bless the Norns, he did… Loki felt his calm, soft breath. Raising his head slightly Loki took another look at Stark’s leg, the bandage and he felt the warmth of his body, almost seeping into him. What was wrong? Something didn’t fit… something… small, but dark and so unpleasant. Familiar to… fear. Loki tried to locate it, to seek it out, to finally understand what was wrong and suddenly he was being pushed back. How? How was that even poss-

*Please don’t hurt him again*

Loki was so taken aback, so appalled that he lashed out. It was ugly, because he couldn’t quite tell where it had come from. Somewhere inside of him, between the layers. As if somebody had implanted a bad thought. Midgardians would call it a tumour. His magic was racing through his body, then his mind, getting its blades out, ready to obliterate anything that wasn’t supposed to be there. Within seconds Loki felt fine again and that bad taste seemingly had been washed out off his mouth.

“You’re okay? You just tensed up…” Stark was looking at him with big, brown eyes and Loki despised him. Everything about him. Had he ever felt such a strong desire? A hand around his neck and just a little twist. Loki wanted to pull the last breath from Stark’s lips to make that voice disappear. To do the exact opposite from what it had said. “Yeah… it was just a long flight and… I’m still angry at you.”

“Hmm… you never stay angry at me long. Remember, I’m awesome and you love me.” The grip around him tightened, holding him in place. Loki opened his mouth, without knowing what to reply yet, but Stark simply cut him off. “Don’t break your tongue. I know you do. I’m Han Solo. Now listen to yourself and go to sleep.”

Foolish mortal. The last thing Loki thought about know was sleeping. He couldn’t ignore this. Not when it had happened before. Loki had stayed away from Thomas so long and now all it had needed were a few minutes to… There was no sense to it, no logic. This had happened only once and then it had been days, almost weeks without a single pause. How could this have happened? If Loki wasn’t able to find a way to get rid of this…

Loki heard the wolf howling, reminding him of his presence.

No, he needed to think. The last time he had almost lost his mind over this, but that wouldn’t happen again. A nasty side effect that should have never been there. Now Loki had to live with it, but when it came down to it… The symptoms of an illness would fade away quickly as soon as your body became healthy again. You simply had to cut out the thing that made you sick. Loki’s tumour was right next to him, sleeping calmly. He could cut him into tiny pieces and then the voice would disappear.
Yes, that was a good thing to think about. Loki would do it now if he didn’t need Stark to bring them all down. Soon enough. Just a few more days.

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“Stop it…”

“I am your prince. You are not giving me orders.”

“I thought I was kissing the prince… not some blonde maiden.”

“I could not resist… It’s fun and you have to admit I am quite beautiful like this.”

“Change back. Now.”

“I do what I want.”

“You may be the prince, but these are my sheets and only I decide who is allowed to lie between them. Loki is. This girl is not.”

“You are no fun.”

“I want to see you. Please.”

“… alright… Are you happy now?”

“Very much so. There you are… do not change again around me, please.”

“I promise. No more illusions.”

“Thank you, my prince….”

It was a kiss. Soft and sweet. But it wasn’t real and yet it was. How? That did not make sense. Loki didn’t understand… Had somebody been talking to him? There had been a voice in the distance. Right? He couldn’t be sure.

The kiss was real though, pulling him from his sleep and Loki wasn’t sure if that was a good thing. A hand was running through his hair. “Hey there… you send me to bed, but then you sleep longer than me?”

Loki looked at Stark, honestly confused and… No, this wasn’t it. What had he been thinking about? Thomas. “Jetlag… How late is it?”

“Late afternoon. You want to get something to eat?” Stark smiled at him and Loki rubbed one hand over his eyes to cast the sleep away. “Yeah, that’s a good idea…”

After another kiss Stark climbed out of bed and Loki watched him limping away. Something was still off. Loki felt as if he hadn’t slept at all. Not that it mattered. Getting up Loki followed Stark into the living room. The mortal was standing behind the bar, pouring them both a glass of water. “What are you in the mood for? Chinese? Thai? Portuguese?”

“Chinese sounds great. Jarvis can take care of that. The both of us should sit down and talk about why you look like you refused to sleep or eat during the last two days.” Sitting down on the couch Loki looked at Stark expectantly until he joined him with the glasses of water. “I did sleep. Not
very much though. There was a lot to do…”

Loki didn’t say a thing, just raised an eyebrow and made it clear with a single gaze that he wanted an explanation.

“What do you want me to tell you? I’ve already told you what happened on the phone. Robot went crazy, I am the bad guy. End of the story.” Stark’s voice started to waver a bit and Loki hid his smirk. Anger was wonderful and it was time to come all out. “Yes, but what happened since then? I can’t believe that they would just leave you alone. Not after what you’ve told me.”

Stark rolled his eyes. “Nah, they tried into hack into my system yesterday. Can you fucking believe that? As if I was some little hacker sitting in my garage. No idea what they were looking for. Maybe date about the robot or the Iron Man suits.”

A bit of surprise, but not too much, Loki had his face under perfect control. “Okay… but that didn’t work, right?”

“You even have to ask? Of course not. Jarvis kicked them out and I sent them a little virus I created.”

First Loki reacted with a laugh, then showing some concern. “So… you’re pretty much have a cyber war going on with a government organisation… That’s… not good.”

“That’s not a cyber war, that’s me kicking their virtual asses. They won’t be able to get into my systems in a million years, that’s nothing to worry about. But they tried to… after all that talk about being a team and doing something good, they try to steal my stuff. Like they’re admitting it’s the only reason they are putting up with me. Back to the start…”

“What do you mean?”

Sighing softly Stark took a sip from his water. “You wanna know how I met Romanov? They sent her in as a spy. She was working as my… Pepper’s assistant. She was supposed to find out if Iron Man could be useful for S.H.I.E.L.D. Guess what her final statement was. Iron Man would be a great addition, but Tony Stark definitely not. Narcissist, dangerous, doesn’t play well with others…”

Loki let Thomas smile at that and it came so naturally. “Not totally untrue, but the way I say it… why should you play nice with others? You don’t need them. They needed you and they probably weren’t used to a single person… standing up to them.”

“There, you get it… they needed me and when that crazed out alien god show up with his army… that was a good enough reason to work with them. I knew all the time that they were going to regret it and they knew too. I’m a nightmare compared to Steve. Yes, he’s all honest and righteous and all this bullshit, but if you tell him a nice, little story, he is going to buy it, because he wants to think that everybody is as honest as him. Especially the government. I don’t give a flying fuck about that. Anyway… they already established that I can’t be trusted, they fucking hate my guts and now they have a pretty good reason to throw me out and to keep Iron Man. Well, I pretty much threw them out…”

Good, so they were turning serious now. “How are they supposed to do that? You built the suits and nobody has been able to copy them. I remember that Hammer disaster on television… So you think they might just take them? How? You said they can’t around Jarvis. How it be even possible for someone else to control them?”
His question brought a grin to Stark’s lips. “Oh, darling, please? Who do you think I am? No, they wouldn’t. Every suit is run by Jarvis and Jarvis only listens to me. Right, buddy.”

“Occasionally, sir.”

“There, that’s what I’m talking about. S.H.I.E.L.D is a bunch of dumbasses, but once in a while they have a good scientist of mechanic working for them and they could cause a lot of trouble if they should get their hands on my technology. I don’t think they would get it to work, but they could use it for something else. You never know… They can’t get into my system, they can’t get into the tower. Probably they’re going to come up with some other bullshit to annoy me. Hell, Thor is running around talking about having killed his brother, attacking Cap and their first thought is to hack into my system! Talk about fucking priorities here!” Stark snorted, playing with his glass in his hand and Loki took it away from him.

“I hate it when I have to boost your ego, because it really is big enough, but… if I were them, I would be more worried because of you. Yeah, Thor is quite impressive, but after what you’ve told me… emotional break down, whatever. Take some pills, go to therapy and you’ll be fine. You are fucking Tony Stark. You are one of the most influential persons in the world. You created something incredible that nobody seems to be able to duplicate and… fine, but I won’t repeat myself. You are brilliant. The things you create, your creativity… You made Jarvis, do I have to say more? I guess what they’re losing their shit over is… there are a lot of brilliant people, but they don’t have the resources to realise whatever they’re dreaming of. You do. Yeah, I get why you’re a thorn in their side.”

To Loki’s surprise there was no witty remark, no grin. Stark just nodded in agreement. Which meant that he was taking the whole thing seriously. Wonderful. “What would you do if you were them? You’re smarter than them, but let’s just pretend.”

Now this was interesting. “If I wanted your suits and you out of business?”

Stark nodded again. “Yeah. Thrill me.”

Oh, Loki could do that. Leaning back Loki pretend to think, but not for long. “Well… I guess I would try the legal way to make myself look good. Try to find an incident, or create one that would convince the general public that a single person shouldn’t have such a weapon at their disposal. Go to court, or at least pretend to go to court. I would try to make you look bad.”

A weird moment to smile, but Stark did so anyway. “That’s what I thought. Bad for them that I’m awesome and everybody loves me.”

“Are you talking about the public? Come on, you should know better. Nothing is as fickle as the way people look at you. They can go from love to hate in a few seconds. I’m reading the newspapers, I watch the news… If this whole thing was a popularity contest, you wouldn’t be number one. Hell, maybe even number three. Women really seem to like Thor.”

“Hey, you’re not seriously trying to tell me that people think the big, bulky blondes are hotter than me. That’s offensive and I don’t like it.”

“It’s not about looks. You just can’t rely on the public liking you. A lot of people think you’re just a pretentious billionaire who loves spending his time screwing at various parties.”

“Yeah, that’s what you thought.” Stark smirked at him for a second. “So you are saying that it
“I have no idea what they might or might not do, but I know that you can make everyone look bad. Especially next to Captain Sunshine.” Loki rolled his eyes and he didn’t miss how Stark winced. Nothing more was necessary than mentioning him.

Yet Stark pushed all of that away, his face suddenly so soft and he reached out to touch Loki’s shoulder. “Sorry, we gotta discuss such bullshit. I know you aren’t keen on all of this stuff and now it looks like there is a lot more coming, because I fucked up.”

Don’t try to be cute, Stark, it doesn’t suit you. “Why? Because you collected some pieces of a robot that came here to kill you? Come on, I bet they did the same, but were too stupid to figure it out. You could do it. You told me that something went wrong. That happens, there was no way for you to know. Fuck them, you don’t need them and I couldn’t care less if these people stopped hanging around here.”

Now Stark actually laughed before pressing a soft kiss to Loki’s mouth. “You are awesome. I just… I’m pretty sure they’ll start giving me a lot of shit.”

“So? I do that all the time. If I decide that this is bothering me, I’ll just leave your sorry ass and go back to London. Are we clear?”

“Like I said, you’re awesome.” Stark leaned in to kiss him again, but Loki pulled back and pointed at the new shelves at the wall. He had completely forgotten about them when he had arrived. Debutant mistake. “You did some redecorations?”

Sighing Stark shook his head, obviously displeased. “Yeah… That should have been a surprise, but all that robot shit was going down before I was done and… I got you some books, lots of books and they should be standing all lined up right over there. How does that sound? Yes, I know, I’m the greatest boyfriend ever.”

“It sounds like a cheap attempt to make me move in here.” Loki was more or less quoting Banner, but he felt like this was what Thomas would say. Stark probably must have expected the same, because he was laughing. “Cheap?! Fucking cheap! Do you have any idea how much money I spent on these?”

“How should I know that when I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

“Fine!” Stark jumped up to his feet, grabbing Loki’s hand and pulled him along. “I’ll show it to you and you’ll see how awesome I am and how lucky you are and you’ll adore me… even more.”

Loki didn’t protest, because he was indeed curious and he would very much like to see all the books Stark had got him. They were his anyway and he intended to keep them when Stark was dead. Which was going to be the case soon. Stark made him get into the elevator, but they only went down one floor. “I left it empty in case I ever wanted to make the living space of the penthouse bigger. Or if I should ever accidentally blow it up, whatever. Now its new function is storage. It doesn’t look as nice, but what the hell. There, they’re all for you.”

Three big boxes on the floor Loki raised an eyebrow before kneeling down and opening one of them. It wasn’t necessary to feign any emotion. The sweet smell alone made Loki feel light-headed. Paper, old, precious and ink. Almost out of place in this palace of technology and high-tech. Letting his eyes travel over the names Loki couldn’t help but feel amazed.

Vergil, Platon, Alighieri, More, Swift, Goethe, Rousseau, Kant, Diderot, Casanova, Dickens,
And the list went on. Those weren’t new editions. They were old, but in excellent condition. Pulling one out Loki browsed through the pages and even the paper felt perfect underneath his fingers. By now Stark had sat down next to him, looking over his shoulder. “Do you like it?”

“This is amazing…” Loki put Marx back, taking a look at Kafka. Not really realising that Stark’s fingers were running up his back. “I can’t say that I was worried that you wouldn’t like it, but… I’m still glad. Wait until you get to the box that’s entirely full of Shakespeare…”

“Which one?” Not waiting for an answer Loki scooted over to open the second box and he instantly found the promised collection. Yes, he was definitely going to keep those. Stark’s arm slid around his waist and lips brushed over the back of his neck. “See… I paid a fortune for those.”

“I didn’t ask you too, but damn…. Thank you, this is perfect. Amazing. I love it. But… it’s a fucking lot…”

Grabbing his arm Stark forced him to look at him although Loki would have preferred to continue checking out the books. Once again Stark was wearing this look on this face, like he knew that this was important, but had no idea how to handle it. “Not a big deal. You like books, I gave you some books. I just happen to have a shitload of money, so I can buy you a lot of them. I was going to put all of them on the new shelves in the living room, so you would like being around here even more. I guess that makes it quite a selfish present.”

Loki felt annoyed and content at the same time. He was still weighing the different words on his tongue when Thomas answered for him. “No, it’s the most beautiful present I’ve ever received.”

Was it? Loki wasn’t sure. He was sure of another thing though, his magic hadn’t done the job. No, Loki was the one in control, he had always been and this was nothing but a little shadow, an echo. A little push and it’d be gone.

Stark didn’t notice any of that, he only was looking at him with bright eyes, a little smile on his lips. He looked happy. Despite all the things they had talked about before. “I really missed you… I just want you to be around. All the time would be perfect, but I’ll also happily settle for as much as you like…”

Loki smiled inwardly at how far gone Stark was and how deep he would fall. As always Loki formed the most beautiful reply in his mind he would deliver it in a way that Stark definitely wouldn’t forget and that would hurt even more. Opening his mouth Loki suddenly felt himself being brutally pushed back. Loki yelped and hissed in surprise, but not a sound passed his lips, even when he started screaming furiously. How would he even dare?! Thomas ignored him, leaned forward and pressed such a delicate kiss to Stark’s lips that all Loki saw was red. His anger devoured him and Loki took it out on Thomas, he was ripping him apart, into tiny little shreds. Disgusting piece of filth.

Stark’s hand slid into his hair, he shifted closer, trying to pull him into his arms and Loki raised his hand to rip Stark’s heart out.

“Sir?”

Loki dropped his hand.

“Damn, Jarvis. Can’t you see we’re having a moment?”

“I’m sorry, but Miss Potts has just arrived. She seems very concerned and wishes to speak to you
Sighing Stark pulled away, but not without brushing his lips over Loki’s cheek. “Let’s better hope it’s about handing me some fucking files.”

Loki didn’t care. He didn’t care about anything anymore. Except for killing both of them.
Hello everybody,

Yes, you guessed it, Loki’s in trouble and it's getting worse...

_________________________________________________

_Pero, si mi boca se equivoca y_
_Al llamarla nombro a otra_
_A veces siente compasión con este loco_
_Ciego y loco corazón_

_Y si fuera ella ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~_

(But when my mouth gets it wrong
Calls her by another name
Sometimes she feels compassion
For this crazy, blind and crazy heart)

_________________________________________________

“Tony, why aren’t you answering your phone!? I’ve been talking to Jarvis all day! Hello, Mr. Pine. Sorry to interrupt, but this can’t wait.” She obviously felt uncomfortable talking to him, but there was no disdain. Just the usual uneasiness to see the new lover of her ex. Still that seemed to be the least of Miss Potts’ concerns.

Next to him Stark already seemed bored, but the gentleness with which he had acted before wasn’t gone. He was smiling. “I’m a busy bee as always. Now you’re here anyway, what is so important?”

“The press is giving me a hard time and I had S.H.I.E.L.D calling me all day. They say they want to talk to you and aren’t able to get a hold of you. I know what trouble sounds like when I hear it. What is going on? If I’m supposed to keep them away from you or the company I need to know about that.” Talking about professional things she felt more secure, but it was obvious that she was worried, a bit angry even.

Loki could only laugh at that. As if she even knew what anger was…

“Pepper, relax. Forget about S.H.I.E.L.D. I’m done with them.” Stark made it sound pretty casual, but Pepper Potts knew him, she wasn’t fooled by this. “What do you mean you’re done with them? Are you joking?”

“No, I’m not. They think I’m creating murder robots and maybe even try to take over the world. I bet they were already trying to find a reason to kick me out and this is perfect. I’m actually surprised that they found the time to call you, I thought they would be too busy trying to hack into my system.”
Pepper Potts raised one of her perfectly plucked eyebrows and Loki could see how her whole body tensed. Smart girl, she was already thinking about all these implications. “They are trying to access your servers?”

“Yap.”

“Only your personal servers?”

Stark shrugged lightly. “Until now, yeah. They’re absolutely going to try to get inside through the company though. Too bad for them that I have all the files on the suits here and Jarvis takes good care of them.”

Before he had finished the sentence Pepper Potts was already pulling out her phone. “I have to make a few calls. Nobody is going to screw with Stark Industries as long as I’m around.”

While she was talking vividly into her phone Stark slid an arm around Loki’s waist, forcing him to count inwardly to ten to distract him from the urge to rip off this limb. “Again, such an entertaining topic to discuss. I promise I’ll make it quick.”

“I don’t mind. This is important.” Loki sounded angry, he heard it himself and Stark reacted with a kiss on his cheek before letting go of him. “I’ll get us all a drink.”

Loki concentrated on balling his hand into a fist while Pepper Potts finished the phone conversation. “Okay, that is taken care of. Tony, you better start working this out quickly and…”

“Pepper, there is nothing to work out this time. What do you think they would have done if they had gotten past Jarvis? They would have taken everything, they were ready to go all the way, so they are done with me. They tried to break into my house, to steal my stuff and they think I have nothing else to do than fucking up their lives. I’m done and it seems a lot like they want a little show-down.”

Oh yes, Loki would like that too.

Unfortunately Pepper Potts was of a different opinion. Her face froze in shock and she shook her head. “You can’t be serious… Look, I won’t even try to persuade you to smooth things over, but this is still a massive organisation we’re talking about, with considerable influence. You can’t just… still think about that. You don’t have to work with them… I guess we all somehow knew that this cooperation was doomed to fail still… Can’t you just try to walk away silently? Without bad blood? Even if they try to… do you really want to be involved in such a fight?”

She was reasonable and Stark was tired, so he simply sighed. “What? Am I supposed to lean back and let them steal my stuff? Ruin my work?”

“No and we both know they aren’t capable of getting past Jarvis. Just… don’t turn the tables. I know you… You are already thinking about how to get back at them. This not a game…” She didn’t want to say much more, probably fearing that she might even be talking him into doing something stupid, although she was trying to do the complete opposite.

For now Stark just watched her, then the glass in his hand. “Fine. I’ll be a nice guy and just tell them to fuck off.” He poured three glasses of scotch and Loki slightly narrowed his eyes when Pepper Potts turned to him. She lowered her voice, the words were only meant for him. “You will watch out for him? He’s… upset even if he doesn’t want to show it. I’m worried he might do something stupid. He’s angry, because they’re his friends and he feels hurt.”

But Loki wanted him to do something stupid, he wanted him to do the stupidest thing there was.
“I’ll take care of him…” He whispered back, doing his best to sound even and calm.

“Stop talking about me, it’s not like I can’t hear you.” Stark spat and Pepper Potts instantly straightened up. “What do you want me to do about S.H.I.E.L.D? They will keep calling.”

“Tell them to stop calling and to write me a letter, so I can tear it up. Ignore them, tell them to fuck themselves. Whatever. I don’t want any of them in a building that has my name on it.”

“Okay, I’ll do my best…” She let out another little sigh, unable to hide her frustration and her eyes showed clearly that she was feeling worried, most of all. “Good night and… let me know if there is something else I can do.”

Stark nodded and raised his glass. “Thanks, Pepper. Have a blast.”

Loki could feel how she wanted to glare at him, but she didn’t. Instead she left, giving Loki a small smile. He smiled back only for the fact that her showing up had stopped him from killing Stark. Time to get a grip. He was only a few days away from his revenge, the last thing he wanted to do was to ruin it, because of… a fleeting moment of insanity. When Stark was dead, these discarded thoughts would die with him and Loki didn’t have to worry. One reason more to not destroy his own hard work, Loki deserved all of the satisfaction that he was going to receive if he waited only a little bit longer.

“This wasn’t as uncomfortable as I expected…” Mumbling quietly Loki sat down on the couch, watching Stark with careful eyes when he came over to join him. “What did you expect?”

Sitting down next to him Stark took a sip from his bourbon and his other hand was placed softly on Loki’s thigh. Inwardly Loki immediately screamed at him to take it away, but Loki wouldn’t let this stupid instinct get the better of him. “She was your girlfriend before me. I didn’t think me meeting her would go over so… smoothly.”

“Pepper is smart. She knows that our break-up has nothing to do with you. Hell, we didn’t work out at all, we were bad for each other… or I was bad for Pepper. Breaking up was better for both of us. Yeah, it was rough at the beginning, but she knows it’s for the best. Okay, she wasn’t too thrilled that we both hooked up so shortly after… but she likes you. Of course, she does. You are awesome and things between us…” Stark hesitated, but Loki simply smiled at him encouragingly and the words seemed to come naturally. “Things between us are so much better. Easier. I know I am a pain to be around, but… you’re willing to put up with me and I’m very willing to put up with you being a smartass and such a tough cookie.”

Loki screwed up his face at that and Stark just laughed, scooting closer. “There, that’s what I’m talking about. Every time emotions get mentioned, you get that look like you want to throw up. Ice-cold Brit that you are…”

“Shut up.”

“There you go! See! You’re doing it again! It’s cool, I’m not criticizing. Come here…” Stark reached out for him and Loki didn’t want him to kiss him. Not now and he would rather snap his neck or rip his throat out.

“Sir, your food just arrived.”

Now those were good news.

“Cool, I’ll go and get it.”
While Stark was doing that Loki took a breath and listened. No, he was feeling fine, he was in control, he had chased the other one away. Yes, Loki was perfectly able to do that. Both of them were as good as dead anyway.

“There you go. Jarvis seems to think we don’t get enough to eat. That’s a lot of food.” Stark placed the boxes on the couch table in front of them and Loki was still glad for the distraction. The food was good and when Stark had his mouth full, it was harder for him to talk. Unfortunately he swallowed every now and then. “So, am I allowed to ask today? How was London?”

“London was beautiful as always. It was nice to see Charles and some of my other friends. You know people who actually know how to speak English.”

“Did you show off? Having the greatest boyfriend in the world is a great conversation topic.”

Rolling his eyes Loki shook his head. “I told them that I had a boyfriend who’s a businessman. That’s all.”

For some reason Stark seemed to be taken aback. “Why? Don’t act like this isn’t one of the coolest things you’d ever happen to tell. I’m a billionaire, a genius and Iron Man. I don’t know anyone who wouldn’t think that this isn’t worth telling everybody.”

Oh, Stark… Why do you make it so easy? I didn’t think it’d be possible to make you love me even more.

“I’m not dating Iron Man. I’m dating a man who runs his own business, who is very smart, funny, interesting, egocentric and stubborn. All attributes that I appreciate. That’s what I’ve told them. I don’t care about your suit and I don’t want them to care about that either.” He said it the most casual way, like these words were just coming naturally to his mind. In reality they were calculated, every single one of them served a purpose and Loki marvel at how precisely they hit their target.

Stark’s eyes bore into his and no vocal declaration of love could be more honest or clearer. All it needed was a single gaze, honest expression, pure emotion, stripped of all pretence. This was raw and much too strong to be hidden and Loki knew that Stark wasn’t even trying.

“How?”

“How what?”

Putting his box down Stark focussed completely on him. Gone were the jokes and the playful attitude. “How can you not care about that in the slightest? It’s not like Iron Man is a small thing…”

“It’s not.” Loki shook his head, letting his voice sound soft, but still stern enough. “The suit is a proof of your brilliant mind. That’s all it is, a piece of metal that is able to do incredible things, because you built it like that. What you do with it shows what kind of person you are, but it doesn’t make you anything or anyone. I don’t know if you realise that or not, but you are a good guy even when you’re not wearing the suit. Yes, you always talk about being Tony Stark and being awesome, but… you’re giving the suit way too much credit. It didn’t make you, it was you who
made it.”

It seemed like Stark needed a second to process this, that Thomas didn’t give a damn about his money, his fame or his position as a superhero. Was it really possible that another person only liked your company, because they thought you were interesting? It wasn’t even a lie – Stark was interesting. Loki had always been of the opinion that madness was fascinating. The man in front of him was crazy, yet brilliant, sometimes he even made him laugh. How unfortunate for Stark that Loki had no problems with hating an interesting person.

“What am I supposed to say now, huh? Most of the time you make it sound like I was a complete moron and you’re barely able to stand my presence and then you say something like… that!”

“Most of the time you do act like a complete moron.”

“There! You’re doing it again! You’re… Argh! You know you suck for making me forget what I wanted to say in the first place and… Fuck.” Now Stark pounced on him, smashing their mouths together and Loki wanted to bite his tongue off. “Damn it, Stark! Give a guy a warning!”

This time Stark was having none of it, he was crawling atop of Loki, pressing him back against the couch cushions, his hands sliding impatiently underneath Loki’s shirt. His lips pressing against Loki’s mouth. “Shut up, don’t ruin it. I want you… Right now you’re fucking perfect… stay like that for a moment.”

Stark was in such a rush, he almost got tangled in Loki’s shirt. Fine, whatever. Loki wasn’t surprised and saying no now would definitely destroy the perfect scene Loki had just created. Who was he to deny a man his dying wish?

Oh, he was having the most wonderful idea.

While Stark’s hands were still wandering over his body, groping, touching, wanting to tear off all of his clothing at the same time, Loki reached out and cupped his face. A pity that nobody was here to applaud him. Touching somebody in such a gentle way when you really wanted claw their face off with your fingernails. Instead Loki let his thumbs brush over Stark’s cheekbones. “What’s the rush? I’m not going anywhere…”

Indeed Stark slowed down, his hands stopped in mid-movement and he released a deep breath. “No, you aren’t…” Leaning in Stark kissed him again, so much softer this time and a part of Loki that has long been dead felt pity for him. A little foolish mortal heart, he didn’t know any better.

Loki let him have his little illusion, he felt the affection in every single touch, the trust and the desire. This was Loki’s doing, Loki had made him so happy, but it wouldn’t be him who would destroy all of it. Stark’s friends would take care of that.

A thought so sweet, it was almost too much to bear.

All these were things Stark didn’t know anything about yet, all that mattered to him was bestowing kisses all over Loki’s body, discarding of every piece of garment between them. Again, Loki had to leave it to him, he knew how to make him feel good. By now his hands had perfectly remembered all the little spots that made Loki gasp and squirm. He just knew where to put his lips and it still seemed a little odd that a person you loathed could give you so much pleasure.

Despite Loki’s assurance that he wouldn’t leave, Stark couldn’t stop himself from rushing things. He even entered Loki a bit too quickly, making him hiss in pain.

“I’m sorry… sorry…” Whispering softly Stark nuzzled his neck, punctuating the words with little
kisses.

Oh, he would be sorry…

Loosely wrapping his arms around Stark, Loki tilted his head up, searching for a kiss. Sometimes it was best giving the other one what he craved for and Loki thought about the veil and of how little this all had to do with him. The kisses and the touches, Stark’s quick breathing and that look in brown eyes, which wouldn’t leave him alone.

Afterwards Stark held him, so tightly as if he was afraid to ever let go of him again. It was odd, but Loki let him. Should he feel secure, loved, whatever he wished for. It would all be over soon.

***

“I… want to ask you something… and I do not want you to laugh at me…”

“I only laugh at stupid questions and at Thor. What is it?”

“If you were in a female form while I was making love to you…”

“So now you suddenly are interested in one of my illusions?”

“Let me finish, my prince… I was just wondering… would it be possible to get you with child?”

“Why would you ask such a thing?”

“I have always wondered how real your illusions are. How much you really can… change?”

“It would be possible if I wanted it to happen, but…”

“But?”

“I would be forced to spend nine months in a female form… a time way too long for any shapeshifter. I would lose my mind, I would become that female and I would not be able to change back. I am not keen on losing my mind…”

“My question was mere curiosity. I didn’t want to upset you.”

“You didn’t. Sometimes I wonder if it is even possible for you to upset me…”

“My prince…”

“Stop calling me that. I am not your prince. Not like this.”

“Loki…”

His name. Yes, somebody was calling for him. So softly and… Loki wanted to answer this call. Why was it so far away and so hard to make out? Was the voice even real?

Sleep was falling from Loki’s eyes, he opened them and he wondered what had woken him up. After blinking a few times Loki sat up and realised that he was alone in this bed. This fact instantly angered him. Had he really been so fast asleep that he hadn’t heard Stark leaving? A mistake so unworthy of him.
“Jarvis…”

“Mr. Stark is in his workshop, Mr. Pine.”

“Thank you…” Quickly wrapping one of the blankets around himself, his clothes were still in the living room, Loki got out of bed and headed towards the workshop. He put his hand on the scanner which opened the door for him.

One single step and then Loki stopped dead in his tracks. His own eyes stared back at him. Green, wide… wild and mad. Three different screens and they all showed Loki. Was this it? Had Stark figured it out and this was his way of showing it? Loki’s magic immediately readied itself, to fight, to bring it all to an end.

No, this wasn’t the case. Everything was too silent, too calm.

Stark was sitting in front of these chairs, hadn’t even noticed Loki’s presence yet. The real Loki, not the one on the screens.

“Stark?”

Turning around the mortal smiled at him, a little bit surprised. “Hey… it’s still in the middle of the night. Go back to bed.”

Raising an eyebrow Loki let his gaze wander to the screens. “What are you doing?”

In response Stark left out a sigh, his arm snaking around Loki’s waist to pull him into his lap. Loki winced, he was tensed, because something was so obviously wrong. Why was Stark looking at him?

“I couldn’t sleep, because I kept thinking about S.H.I.E.L.D, then Cap, then Thor… I promised Pepper to let S.H.I.E.L.D alone… for now. So I thought about Thor and why he is losing his mind and what he said about his little brother, the jackass. I decided to check out some old footage. I don’t know why… I don’t know what I thought I would find. Of course I didn’t find anything.”

Loki blinked, staring at the footage. The few minutes he had been in Stark’s penthouse. As himself. In his beautiful armour, the sceptre in his hand. Sadly these were the only two positive things he could make out. “So this is Loki? God of mischief?”

“Yap… threw me right out of the window, but Thor now keeps rambling about how nice he was before… hell, what do I know. Half of this story doesn’t even make sense. Something about Thor throwing his brother into an abyss, killing him… I have no idea. He looks pretty alive to me.” Stark trailed off, leaning a bit forward, pulling Loki closer against himself.

“What?”

“I didn’t give it much thought back then. I had a lot of other things on my mind, but… look at him. He looks like shit…” Stark narrowed his eyes and Loki huffed. Then again, he had no right to feel offended. It was the truth. The person on the screen was a horrible appearance. Dark rings beneath green eyes. Eyes that seemed hunted, unnaturally wide. The colour of his skin didn’t look healthy, his hair was uncombed, falling down in greasy strands. His gracious armour suddenly seemed too big for his body. It had always fitted perfectly, hugged his body in all the right ways. The person Loki was looking at now… was too skinny to wear it.

Had he really looked like this? So weak and small. Sick and bruised. Mad. Hunted.
A shudder ran through Loki’s body and he fell into darkness. Endless and so cold. Once again his mind was torn apart and Loki desperately reached out to get back what they had brutally taken away from him. Loki opened his mouth to scream for him, but he couldn’t remember his name and then there was only the darkness and Loki didn’t know what he had wanted to say. There was only cold, cutting into his skin…

Warm arms pulled him against a warmer body and there was another voice. “Hey… Tommy, what’s wrong? Tommy?”

Shaking his head Loki sucked in a deep breath. He was still here and he was alright. “Sorry… I was… I’m okay. It’s just… I woke up, you weren’t there and you’re here, looking at footage of a guy who tried to kill you and to enslave mankind. That’s not how I pictured coming home…”

Going for the bad conscience was always a good idea.

Stark even nodded, instantly feeling bad. “You’re right. I’m sorry. Reindeer games can wait for another day. Come on, let’s get back to bed.”

The screens turned black and Loki felt relieved. Maybe it was time to hurry up.

After a few more hours, Loki pretending to be asleep, Stark breathing lowly next to him, they had breakfast. Stark protested when Loki wanted to go to his apartment to get some clothes and other stuff. He could send someone to do that, but Loki only hissed and told him that he wouldn’t let some employee touch his belongings. At least Stark didn’t insist on accompanying him. Good enough.

Loki left the tower and three steps later he had already made out his shadow. Perfect. Pulling out his phone he called the Captain. S.H.I.E.L.D was probably already trying to trace his phone and to listen to his conversations, but that was impossible. Fury wouldn’t be surprised, he would think it was Stark’s doing when Loki had merely enchanted the phone. Anyway, Loki needed to call Rogers.

“Will, hey. I tried to call you last night, but you didn’t answer your phone.”

“Yes, I am sorry, I was very tried after my flight home. I just wanted to let you know that I’m doing fine. I’m safe back home. Are you okay?”

“Of course, I am. I told you there was no reason to worry.” Rogers was smiling, Loki was sure of it.

“The last time we talked it looked like you were about to fight another Avenger.”

“No. God no, it would not come to that.”

Are you sure, my dear Captain? Would you bet your life on it?

Another few unimportant words, Loki didn’t care. The Captain thought William was fine and ignored his warning once more. Soon he would feel pretty stupid because of that. And so guilty.

Since Loki hated the underground, he took a taxi to his apartment. The two S.H.I.E.L.D agents following him with as much finesse as a child would have. In his apartment Loki sat down and read a short Italian novel, before getting a travel bag and was off to return to the Stark Tower. He got himself a coffee in a little café just around the corner and felt those mortal eyes lingering on his back. Could they be more obvious?
Loki walked the rest of the way by foot and as soon as he was close enough to be seen by one of
Jarvis’ cameras, he made sure to change his demeanour. Not too much. A frown. Narrowed eyes. A
glance over his shoulder.

Stark was right next to him the second Loki stepped out of the elevator. “Hey, three minutes ago I
decided that I’m sick of New York. Yeah, I know you just came back from London, but I think we
should get out of here. Two days or maybe three. My house in Malibu is feeling lonely…”

“Stark…”

“Private beach and I haven’t seen you in bathing shorts yet.”

“Stark!”

Finally the mortal shut his stupid mouth, actually looking at him. Noticing the tensed shoulders,
the troubled look in his eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“I think… no, that’s crazy.”

“Come on. I can see that something is wrong.” Stark softly touched his arm and Loki gave him a
little push into the right direction. “I think somebody was following me... from my apartment back
here…”

Brown eyes darkened, the last remains of a smile faded away and that was it. S.H.I.E.L.D had
crossed a line. No more questions asked. They had pulled Thomas into this and that was something
Stark would make them regret.
Hello everybody,

Here we go. Tony is reacting to the news. He doesn't like them...

Have fun ;)

_________________________________________________

_Darkness falls, here comes the rain to wash away the past and the names_
_Darkness falls, here comes the rain to end it all, the blood and the game_

_Vox Populi ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

Stark wasn’t a very good actor, but he still tried to put on a show for Thomas. To seem calm and collected when Loki could clearly see that he wanted to tear down walls.

“Listen… forget it. Perhaps I just imagined it. I’m not even sure.”

His sheepish remark was pretty much ignored by Stark. “Come on, Tommy. You’re smart, you aren’t some girl that feels like being stalked, because another person is walking behind her. What happened?”

“Nothing. I just… got out of the taxi and got myself a coffee from the coffee shop down the street. They have a mirror over the counter and I could see a guy hanging around the entrance. He left when I did and I don’t think he bought anything. I walked the rest of the way and… I don’t know, I felt weird. Then I saw him again in the reflection of a glass panel. I’m just realising how stupid this sounds. Forget about it.”

No way Stark was forgetting about, he was just getting started. “Jarvis, show me the security footage of the tower. Main entrance. The moment Tommy got back.”

“Stark… this is not cool. We’re both getting paranoid. Stop it, I probably just imagined the whole thing, because of all that S.H.I.E.L.D talk.” Loki sat down on the couch, rubbing his temple, pretending to be frustrated, but Stark brushed his objection off. Good boy. “If that’s so, we’ll see nothing on the footage and that’s about it. We’ll get on a plane to fly to Los Angeles and I’ll make you join the Mile High Club. Jarvis, where’s the footage.”

“Here you go, Sir,”

Now their eyes were glued to the hologram that showed Thomas walked up to the tower and again Loki inwardly applauded himself. What were these trophies for actors called? Oscars? They should give him some of those. On the other hand Loki felt kinda sick of seeing Thomas’ face. Stark
wasn’t paying any attention to him, instead he told Jarvis to stop the footage and narrowed his eyes. “Do you see him?”

Loki slowly shook his head. “No, I told you, it was nothing.”

The footage continued and Thomas disappeared in the tower and… “Fucking son of a bitch! That’s it! How can they even dare?”

There he was. One of his shadows, at the very edge of the screen, just standing there and watching. It was no proof, but you didn’t need proof when you wanted to believe it. The whole thing was so absurdly funny, because it was true. This little figure there was indeed following Thomas around.

Stark’s face was a work of art. His eyes were burning with rage and they reminded Loki of his own eyes and how mad they had looked. This was a primal feeling, the urge, need to protect somebody he cared about. Somebody he loved. Because this was it, Stark felt like Thomas was in danger. Someone he loved and said danger was S.H.I.E.L.D.

Pacing around Stark mumbled under his breath and he only waited to be unleashed. He was radiating with anger and Loki wanted to feed it, to make the flames grow, so they could devour everything and everyone.

Standing up Loki walked towards Stark, his hand softly touching his shoulder. “Stark, calm down, okay? It’s not… that much of a big deal.”

Abruptly Stark stopped dead in his tracks, staring at Loki as if he couldn’t believe that these words had just left his mouth. “What?! You are saying all the time that you don’t want to be pulled into some kind of government shit and now they’re tailing you! They have no fucking right! You’re my boyfriend, you have nothing to do with this shit! Nothing at all and there is no way in hell I will let them…”

“Please, calm down! This was just a man who watched me entering the tower and…”

Stark stared at him speechlessly for a second, then something seemed to break and there was pain. “I’m so sorry. All this shit with S.H.I.E.L.D and the Avengers that you shouldn’t have to put up with. You’re so strong, tougher than me and… now you’re scared.”

“What!? I’m not scared!”

“I know you don’t mind telling Captain America to piss off and you tell S.H.I.E.L.D agents to go fuck themselves. You’re a cold-hearted bastard and a badass, I know you aren’t scared of some assholes in dark suits.” Why was he smiling now? It was only hinted, but it was there. “I heard you talking to Pepper. I get that you’re scared that your slightly impulsive boyfriend might do something stupid. You’re worried. There’s no reason for that, I promise. I’m not going to do something stupid. I’m going to do something very smart… a bit reckless and dangerous, but it’s going to be smart.”

“For heaven’s sake, stop it!” Loki hissed, forcefully grabbing Stark’s arm to make sure his entire attention was on him. “Okay, fine! Yeah, I don’t get freaked out when two government guys tail me… even less so when they’re bloody bad at it. They want to watch me shopping groceries, whatever… but you can’t go crazy over this. No knee-jerk reactions. You told me yourself that you are angry at them, they are angry at you. Things are tense, don’t take such risk. Not being in a team anymore is something else than breaking all ties and… Yes, I know you are Tony Stark, but you are still only one man. Sit down, take a breath. It’s okay, I’m not freaking out… You do the same.”
Instead of giving an answer Stark gritted his teeth, trying to hold back the words he wanted to say. Then he slightly turned away, as if he didn’t want Loki to see his face. “This is all about me. It has nothing to do with you! They should be leaving me alone, I owe them nothing and what do they do? They sent two of their guys to…”

“Calm down! They obviously think that you’re stupid! Prove them wrong and think before you do anything… I don’t want you to…” Loki stopped, a little pause made it sound more real and gave emphasis to his words. “…I don’t want you to… get in trouble. Can’t you understand that? I want you to get out of that alright. So do me a favour and calm down.”

A game so easy to play.

Stark turned back around, putting his hand in the back of Loki’s neck, pulling him close. There was a passing moment of silence, Loki could feel him breathe against his cheek. “Tommy…” Another pause. “I know a lot of shit went down the last three days, you felt like you had to come home and… I’m sorry for that, because it wasn’t necessary. I gave you the impression that all hell is breaking loose, which is clearly not the case. Yeah, I’m at odds with a few people right now, but I’m not in trouble. They’re pulling you into this and that’s not okay. It’s fucking not okay. I’ll take care of it. I promise I’ll take care of it and I’ll be smart and perfectly nice about it. You gotta understand though that there’s no way I’ll let these guys follow you around… I’m calm. I’ll be a good boy, I promise.”

Fingers were running down his cheek and Loki almost flinched away. “I… you are… move in with me.”

For some reason, there was no logical explanation to it, Loki had no idea what to say. As if Stark had wiped his mind. “Huh?”

“I want you to move in. Yeah, I know you’ve already bitched about me trying to spend more time here. Now you can bitch about it some more, because I want you to move in. You can get an entire floor for yourself if you need a place to go to when I’m getting on your nerves. We both know I will do that and you’ll get pissed off, you’ll call me stupid and roll your eyes, you can even slam the doors, I don’t mind. Afterwards we can have angry sex or make-up sex. It’ll be amazing and… I’ll feel better if you’re here all the time… or more often than you’re now. Come on, a luxury tower, Jarvis, all the books in the world and me! It’s a great offer, isn’t it?” Stark’s babbling turned into a gentle smile, his fingertips brushing over Loki’s hair. Eyes so hopeful and vulnerable.

A strange feeling crept up Loki’s back and he couldn’t quite place it. At the same time it was familiar and completely unknown to him. It robbed him of all his thoughts and ideas, leaving him at loss. This situation was… he had been here before and yet he had no idea what was happening to him. The setting was perfect for his plan, almost lovely. What was it about this moment that suddenly left him confused?

No. What a waste of time. Loki wouldn’t spend another minute thinking about this. He had lived for centuries, he couldn’t remember every single detail… A sharp pain went through Loki’s head and the sting seemed to rip open wounds that had only barely healed anyway. The old rage welled up again and Loki wanted his dagger. Wanted to push it past Stark’s rips, right into his heart. Should he die with that expression in his eyes. He would pay for making Loki think of his scars, for reminding him of the sting of pain when… There was still this massive hole gaping and Loki would just fill it with new memories. The memory of ending this mortal’s life, to make him feel the pain.

Don’t. Leave him alone, please.
No, Loki had torn him apart just yesterday. It couldn’t be. Not in such a short amount of time. Startled, downright shocked Loki took a step back, as if that could bring even the slightest distance between him and that voice.

Then there was Stark, instantly reaching for him. “Hey… I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Don’t freak out. That’s just what I want, you don’t have to do it. Not right now anyway and I’m not saying all this, because of those S.H.I.E.L.D assholes… Sometimes I have trouble making other people understand what I want to say… you’re important.”

Loki didn’t have any time to reply, he was busy trying to locate that little traitorous voice and he would bury it deep, lock it in and then he would kill them both.

“Tommy?”

Biting his lip Loki told himself to stay focused. He couldn’t just zone out completely. “I have no intention to move in. I like having my own place, I love my own place, but…” He forced his voice to sound gentle, his features to relax. “… I do get what you’re trying to say and… I’m not going to run away. Not because of your problems with S.H.I.E.L.D or some Iron Man bullshit. Do I like all of this? No, but… I’m not going to leave. I am not. Could we now stop this… whatever this is?”

“Yeah, I guess… Come here. Don’t pull a face, I just want to kiss you. You ever looked at your mouth? It’s quite impossible to look at it for about a minute without wanting to kiss it.”

Was it so hard to ever stop talking? Loki didn’t want to hear these kinds of things. Especially when there was this little voice inside of him. Not just this voice. As long as Stark would finally shut up. Therefore Loki let him kiss him and he made it good. Sometimes you needed to make people feel like you loved them, even though you despised them. Yes, Loki could do that. Loosely wrapping his arms around Stark’s shoulders Loki turned the kiss into something gentler, giving Stark the moment he craved for. Don’t get used to this closeness. Don’t get used to him loving you or… being around.

“I should get my stuff into the bedroom… that doesn’t mean I’m going to move in…” Loki mumbled these words against Stark’s lips and these fingers were still running through his hair. “Okay… you do that. Then we’ll talk about my great idea of taking a few days off.”

Loki didn’t reply, just nodded and picked up the bag he had placed on the floor. He gave Stark a little smile before leaving the room.

Any second now Stark would pick up the phone and call Fury. Loki would love to hear that, but he had more important things to take care of. In the bedroom Loki placed the bag on the bed, taking out some things he needed to place in the bathroom. Putting his new toothbrush next to the sink Loki raised his head and his eyes met Thomas’.

Why had Loki decided to make them blue? Loki hated blue eyes. He hated the short dark hair and this mouth that Stark liked to kiss. Looking at this damned mortal’s face Loki realised that he hated his entire appearance.

Maybe I will destroy your face when I kill you. That would be incredibly satisfying

Nothing. Not even a tingle.

Good, Loki was fed up with this… unpleasant side-effect. By now Stark was already busy digging his own grave, in a few days Loki would push him into it and then the last remains of Thomas would be gone too and Loki would have most of his freedom back.
Again Loki flinched and he stared at Thomas who looked just as surprised as him. How could this little piece of dirt still dare to try to get his attention? Loki had unleashed his anger on him and he was still there. He shouldn’t have been there in the first place. He shouldn’t exist. It gnawed on Loki that he had no idea how this was even possible, there hadn’t been enough time and now there was no time to find out. Soon both of them would be dead and Loki would happily erase this memory. All of them.

*I don’t care about the others. Just leave him alone*

It was so pathetic. If his mere existence wasn’t enraging Loki so much, he would have laughed. Weak, little… mortal. Disgusting. All of it just made him want to destroy Stark all the more. To make him suffer, maybe even adding some physical torture. He could start with cutting his tongue out. Or… Loki could do the exact opposite. A minute ago he had seen what the mere possibility of Thomas being harmed did to Stark. Because he loved him, because Thomas allowed him to be the way he was, without just blindly accepting all of it or agreeing with everything he said. Stark had found something in Thomas that he cherished, that he wanted to protect, that made him feel good about himself.

Loki would make him feel even better. Loki would give him a few days so full of happiness that it would hurt immensely when it would be all taken away. Stark’s soul would be torn into shards and these wounds would be too grave to ever get a chance to heal. And Loki would make sure that Thomas’ death was going to be ugly and painful.

*No, you can’t…*

The voice was dying away and Loki’s magic rushed through his veins to cast it away, to lock it in. There, gone. Pathetic.

Turning around Loki left the bathroom and directly returned to the living room. Either Jarvis didn’t warn Stark or he just didn’t care, because Loki could hear him loud and clear. Something Loki wasn’t quite used to. Stark’s voice had been stripped of all playfulness, no cheeky remarks or funny metaphors. This was a down to business conversation. Stark was dead serious and he meant every word he said.

“… care. Let me make this perfectly clear, because I’m not going to repeat myself again. If me and my boyfriend are going to walk down the street, somebody happens to look at him and I only think it might be one of your guys… Say goodbye to all those fucking files you have on terrorists or the average Joe, because I’m going to delete all of it. I hope you fucking get this, I will send you back into the Stone Age, I’m going to erase all of your protocols, all files, all cute little programmes that help you spying on people and fly a fucking Helicarrier. You know I am capable of doing that, so if you don’t want me to put you out of business, stay the fuck away from my boyfriend!”

The call was abruptly ended and Stark carelessly dropped his phone onto the couch. He was definitely worked up, not breathing evenly. Loki wanted to click his tongue, but instead he let out a loud sigh to draw attention to himself. “So this is you not doing something stupid?”

Stark turned around, blankly looking at him. Then he answered with a shrug. “They crossed a line and they should know that there will be repercussions if they do it again. They didn’t send an undercover agent in my company or tried to hide a bug in my clothes, they went after you and… people I care about ended up in shitty situations before, because I cared about them. That’s not going to happen to you… Yeah, I know, you’re tough and strong and British and awesome and you can take care of yourself, but just let me do this! Let me take care of you…”
Yes, even Loki could admit that he hadn’t thought himself being capable of that. Turning this reckless, careless person into a man who was totally shaken up by the prospect of getting a loved one into trouble. Now Stark was standing in front of him and his only interest in the world was to protect him from harm.

Well, if somebody was giving you so much, you had to give a little back right?

Walking over to Stark Loki gave him the slightest smile and nodded. “Okay… We’ll make a deal. I’ll let you take care of me and we’ll stay right here. I have no desire whatsoever to go to California. For hell’s sake stop jumping the gun on everything. For some strange reason that I don’t understand… things have been working fine between us until now. So no need to change everything instantly.”

The corners of Stark’s mouth twitched. “You’re still wondering how you ended up here, right?”

“Constantly…” Sitting down on the couch Loki held the phone out to Stark who took it and then sat down next to Loki. “Actually I expected that there would be more shit to put up with. Or that I would murder you after a week.”

Stark laughed and it was indeed funny, because he had no idea that every person in this room was soon going to be murdered.

“And now you can’t live without my sparkling personality. That even happens to the best.”

“Shut up.”

“Gladly.” Since there were only a few things that made Stark shut his stupid mouth, Loki wasn’t surprised when Stark used this opportunity to kiss him.

Fine, Loki had made a decision, he would make Stark thoroughly happy during the next days. After all this sweet talking Loki couldn’t wait to cause some pain. To break him.

“Can we do something tonight? Go out? Have some fun. Any ideas?”

Stark looked perfectly delighted. “Sure. You wanna go dancing?”

“I was hoping you could think of something more interesting.”

A wide smirk appeared on Stark’s lips and he nipped at Loki’s neck. “How about a pub crawl?”

Loki felt tempted to throw up. “I’m from London. A pub crawl? Seriously?”

“Hey, you’ve never been on a pub crawl with yours truly, Tony Stark. I have a talent for finding the darkest, seediest places where the floor is constantly covered with peanut peels. Also they serve some amazing scotch. You’re gonna love it and I promise it will be fun.”

Okay, what the hell. “Fine, I’ll give it a try.”

“Oh, great. It’s gonna be awesome. Until then…” Stark nuzzled Loki’s neck and Loki turned out to be severely mistaken when he assumed this was going to end up in sex. “You’re going to introduce your friend to me?”

Where did that come from? “Charles? Why?”

First a shrug, then Stark slid his arm around Loki’s shoulders, pulling him close. “Because… I don’t know a single person you consider your friend. I know… you’re picky, don’t need anyone
and that’s perfectly cool, because I’m completely the same. Still I’d like to get to know another person that you actually like. You met Bruce, so it’s time I meet a person you like.”

Loki replied with a smirk. “You just want to go on a trip to London.”

“Yeah, why not? Or we’ll have a Skype date.”

“I’ll just ask that question on single time. Do you want to meet him, because you’re jealous?”

“What?! Jealous? Me? Hey, I let you fly to London without a drone following you. Also, I’m Tony Stark. I’m the most amazing boyfriend in the world, I’m hot, I’m rich and my dick is incredibly talented. Yeah, of course, I’m jealous. Please…” Stark huffed, almost sounded offended and Loki only reacted by raising an eyebrow. “What? You know it’s true! You simply gotta admit that you’re incredibly lucky to have me as your boyfriend. Remember all the books I bought you? Or how I made you scream last night?”

“I didn’t scream.”

“Oh, you did. Quite loudly and I was loving it.”

“Stark, I did not scream.”

That grin didn’t look good. “Hey, you need proof? Done. Jarvis, can you play the recording from last night to show Tommy that he was screaming quite a lot when…”

“No! Jarvis, I don’t want to hear any of that!” More of that terrible grin and Loki scowled at him. “What? I don’t want to hear us having sex. Doesn’t mean that I was screaming. Which I wasn’t.”

By now Stark was cracking up with laughter and Loki rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on. I’m great in bed and you know it. Don’t act like we’re not having the greatest sex ever. See, another reason why I don’t have to be jealous. The only thing I am right now is turned on, because all of this talk about you screaming. Just tell me that I’m going to meet your ex sometime and then I’m going to lick you from head to toe.”

What a surprise. “Okay, next time we talk, I’ll let you join in and please don’t lick me head to toe. That sounds just gross.”

Stark let out a soft, amused laugh before he brushed his lips over Loki’s. Then he trailed them down his throat, sucking softly at the skin, not enough to leave a mark. Uttering a pleased sound Loki let his eyes slide shut. “Again the couch?”

“You’re right. This is really getting old. I got a better idea.” Pulling Loki tightly against himself Stark rolled them off the couch to the floor and Loki could only yelp. “Are you mad?”

“No, I just noticed that the carpet is envious of the couch, because we’re having so much sex on it. Poor carpet feels completely left out.”

Loki had landed on top of Stark and now he could simply stare at him, because he had obviously lost his mind. Smirking at him Stark jumped at the opportunity, letting his hand running up Loki’s hips, then underneath his shirt. “You’re so fucking beautiful…”

After a moment of hesitation Loki leaned down, capturing Stark’s mouth in a passionate kiss. Loki had done filthier things than having sex on the floor and he was nice enough to grant a man his dying wish. Stark was just about to pull his shirt off when…
“Sir, Captain Rogers just arrived at the tower. He wishes to speak to you.”
The Truth

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Tony and Cap have a conversation and Loki is a really good boyfriend...

Can't believe this already Chapter 60 and I have never written anything longer than 70 chapters...

__________________________________________________________________________

It's the moment of truth and the moment to lie
The moment to live and the moment to die
The moment to fight, the moment to fight

This is war ~~ 30 seconds to mars ~~

__________________________________________________________________________

The excitement could barely be contained. Loki’s heart was hammering against his chest and how he had missed this. When all of his plans came to flourishing, mirroring in their beauty the most exquisite flowers in the gardens of Vanaheim. It was so earned to lean back and to watch the scene unfold itself. Should the puppets do their little dance. An intrigue so lovely, almost a work of art and Loki was eager to see the pawns taking their positions on the field. His two favourite ones.

Yes, this was the feeling why he was still here. Justice. They would get what they deserved and Loki would leave this desert behind. Free and he would be able to search the Nine Realms for new wonders and miracles. Things of which this world was so deprived.

Stark snarled and Loki was tempted to close his eyes, to take in all of this sound that was just the beginning. “Tell him to fuck off. I’m busy!”

Well, Loki still had a little part to play. “Stark…” Reaching up Loki touched his face, ever so softly. “You said you didn’t like to fight with him and…”

“Are you kidding? He’s the one who told me that I’m a fuck-up!”

“For fuck’s sake, Stark, be smart! He wants something, find out what it is. Maybe he’s here to apologize or… whatever, but don’t you think you should know why he is here?”

The hesitation was clearly visible, followed by a sigh. “You could be right about that, but he definitely isn’t here to apologize.”

“Well, then find out what he is here for. At least it’s Captain America and not a bunch of agents.”

“Steve can do more damage than fifty agents.” Stark mumbled under his breath and Loki wanted to
let out a scream of joy. These were the thoughts he needed.

Getting up, still grumbling, Stark ran a hand through his hair, his body was strangely vibrating. Was this fear? Tension? Loki wasn’t all that sure, but it didn’t matter, because he knew things were working out the way he wanted it. “Is he alone?”

“Positive, Sir.”

“No agents hiding behind the bushes, only waiting for me to open the doors, so they can come in? Is Steve sitting on top of a wooden horse?”

“For god’s sake, Stark. He’s Captain America, not Captain Ancient Greece.”

“Fine!” Stark threw his hands in the air and swore under his breath. “Yes, let him in and you all better hope that he has a white flag hidden underneath that fucking costume. Oh, this feels like going to the principal office, this sucks…”

What would a decent boyfriend do in such a situation? Loki should be nice, supportive… and bitchy as soon as the Captain stepped in here. Nothing would happen though, nothing major. The Captain was here, alone and he was still reluctant about seeing a threat in Stark. Loki was entirely sure that he was here to talk, so smooth things over, but it was too late for that. Fury had burned all the bridge with sending some idiots after Thomas. Stark had never been keen on working with S.H.I.E.L.D anyway and now they had completely violated every form of trust he might have ever had in them. There would be no reconciliation and Loki would need one or two words to make sure the Captain would leave even more estranged from Stark then before. Oh, the possibilities.

Unfortunately Loki still wasn’t able to show the tiniest bit of his excitement, instead he had to put on a dark face and lightly bite his lower lip. Kind of frustrating to pretend to feel tension when you were so looking forward to a special moment.

Also getting up from the floor Loki walked up to Stark and let his hand run over his arm. “It’s going to be okay and if he’s being stupid… kick him out. It’s your home.”

“I need a drink…” Turning around Stark made his way towards the bar and poured himself a scotch. Why not? Alcohol fueled poor decision making, so Stark should go for it, Loki would enjoy the play from his seat in the front row.

There was this soft sound that announced the arrival of the elevator. The curtain was opening, please take your seats and shut up. Enjoy the show.

“Hey…”

“You got 30 of my fucking seconds. Thrill me.” Stark didn’t even shoot him a single glance, just sipped on his drink. Loki was doing the exact opposite, his eyes were glued to the Captain and his every reaction. Right now everything was like Loki had expected it. How he was standing there. In his civil clothes, a somewhat sad look on his face, as if he was visiting a friend, bringing bad news. Not a surprise, but Loki was starting to get impatient. He needed to cut something out, a bad seed. Captain America, walking in here with his shield in hand, that would have helped.

“Tony, I came here so we could talk. Not just 30 seconds. A lot of things went wrong and… I’m here to find a way to make them right…”

Oh, such a vulnerable little boy who so badly wanted to do the right thing and in the end it came all down to being afraid of being alone.
“Right? Oh, you gotta be fucking kidding me. What? Next you’re going to tell me that you’re not even aware of what’s going on…” Stark trailed off, raising his head and only now he seemed to realise that Loki was standing way closer to the Captain than to him. Quickly he walked around the bar, only stopped in front of Loki, putting himself between the two men.

Loki wanted to laugh straight into Stark’s face. To tell him how stupid he was. That it was a trick, ordinary sentiment, just an illusion. This was it. A work of art, Loki’s very own creation, something to be proud of.

The man facing Stark wasn’t considered a friend. Nobody would act like that towards a friend. Friends came with their hands open and you greeted them the same way, you embraced them. Stark was doing something else. He had placed himself between Captain America and Thomas. Like a human shield. He had made a choice. The Captain wasn’t considered an immediate threat, but Stark still thought it was a good idea to put himself between Loki and Rogers.

He wanted to protect him. How sweet and completely lethal.

“How sweet and completely lethal.

“Tony, I know you’re angry and I’m… okay, I’m angry too, but we’re adults. We’re friends. We should be able to sit down and talk about this.” Rogers was trying to be sensible to even out the mistakes of somebody else, but it wasn’t going to work.

Stark’s snarl was only confirming Loki’s thoughts. “This? You want to talk about this? Would you also like to tell me what ‘this’ is? Because I have no idea what are you talking about! There are just too many things! Too many fucking things that you blame me for! I’m losing count!”

Delicious. Words as sweet as honey. They were caressing Loki’s skin like… Out of a sudden he felt slightly dizzy, his magic was shaken up, surging instantly.

“Tony, I’m not blaming you for anything. We just need to…”

“Oh, fucking brilliant! What a moment. I’m having goosebumps. Tommy, you didn’t miss this, did you? Amazing. It’s like the birth of unicorn and both of us were present! Incredible! Captain America just lied. He looked into my face and he fucking lied. Steve, I feel so special to be part of your first time. Was it as good for you as it was for me?”

Loki would be able to appreciate this sarcasm way more if he wasn’t distracted by the bright spots that were suddenly dancing in his field of vision.

The Captain slightly raised his hands, probably trying to appease Stark. One simply had to admire him, still holding on, keeping it together. Loki wanted to see him fall apart. Badly. “Tony… listen… A lot of things happened and a lot of things were said… we’ve all made mistakes and it doesn’t help us to dwell on it, we should…”

“Ah, you mean I should forget about you and S.H.I.E.L.D devouring me like wolves? How cute. You called me a long list of things and you meant them. So don’t fucking back off, because S.H.I.E.L.D fucked up and you think you have to save the day and make everyone love each other again. Not going to happen.”

What was wrong? The vertigo simply wouldn’t go away and Loki felt his knees buckle. No, not now, this wasn’t about him and he couldn’t draw attention to him. All he had to do was to cast the dizziness away.

“If you want me to answer for what I said, will you do the same? Tony, I know you’re good guy, but you just have to see that… You are my friend, but I can’t look past the fact that you endangered
lots of people. The robot attacked these buildings and people died. I know that you didn’t want any of that, but it happened and it could have been avoided. I know you feel bad about it…”

“It was not my fault!”

“I’m not saying it was. It could have been avoided though…”

“Fuck you, Steve! These are the exact same things! You know what I did? I put together some pieces of metal. I did some work as a mechanic, that’s all I did. What happened then was something that nobody could have seen coming! It shouldn’t have been possible! I used only one part of the destroyed robots, the rest came from me. Nobody should have been able to control it!”

Shouting, anger… Loki blinked, hoping his vision would get clearer, but that didn’t happen. Was this a spell? Was somebody messing with him? The little mage?

“It was magic, Tony. You didn’t know what you were dealing with.”

“Oh, shut up! I’m so sick of all this magic talk! You want to know something about magic! It fucking doesn’t exist! It’s just another way of looking at technology, inventive, creative, something unheard of and just because Thor swings his fucking hammer, everybody is freaking out and thinks Harry Potter is coming to life! It’s not! It’s fucking not!”

Loki would rip him apart for this insolence. Later. Right now he had to take a shaky step back and lean against the couch. He needed to get a grip. His body was working against him, but his magic would take care of that.

“Tony… you’re missing the point. I don’t care if it was magic or not. It blew up in your face and the consequences were severe. Doesn’t that mean anything to you?”

“You want to know if I’m sorry for those poor bastards! Of course, I am. But it was not my fault and still something good came from it. We found the hide-out, tons of data and we could very well already know who built them… If S.H.I.E.L.D wasn’t busy right now to spy on me and try to figure out how to take me out of business. Am I right or am I right?”

Of course, you are right, you moron! Would you know be so nice and destroy this comradeship forever, so I can sit down and breathe? Loki’s head was spinning and he felt his fingers twitch. Almost as if they weren't his own… Oh no…

“This is what I want to talk about! Everything is going off the rails and I want to stop it… You threw us out, not very nicely, you wanted Thor out of here when he was feeling terrible. Then you refuse to have any contact with S.H.I.E.L.D at all! What are they supposed to do after what happened?”

“I tell you what they are supposed to do! They are supposed to not hack into my systems to steal my suits!”

It was welling up inside of Loki. That ugly feeling that was suddenly everywhere, trying to take control, to put him in his place. Now it was starting to gnaw at him, trying to get the upper hand, to tear him apart like Loki had done before. Nasty little thing. It was a mere sickness and Loki had all the power in the world to cure it. No potion, no pills or medicine. Fire was the answer to everything. He was still in control and Loki’s hatred was burning as fiercely as ever. Should it consume him. Nothing would ever compare to this.

First they had pushed him into darkness. Never ending darkness. It had torn Loki’s mind apart and he could still feel the pieces missing. The scars were throbbing, leaving him constantly in pain. All
the pieces had still been shattered all over the place, Loki had tried to pick them up, but he hadn’t been able to. So many had been missing. Nobody had seen that, least of all Thor. They had humiliated him, added a broken body to an already broken mind. Something that couldn’t be forgiven.

There wasn’t a spark of pity or compassion left. Loki concentrated on the fire, his anger and the hatred. His vision got clearer, the spots started to disappear and when Loki blinked a few time, they were completely gone. Yes…

“They weren’t trying to steal from you, but trying to figure out… what you are up to.”

Very poor choice of words, my dear Captain. You should really start to enrich your vocabulary.

“And you’re perfectly okay with that, right! Since I’m reckless, don’t take responsibility and am downright dangerous!”

“Don’t you get it, I am here to try to help you! But all you do is pushing me away and twist all of my words!”

“Oh, fuck it. Do you think I am my old man? I am not your number 1 fan, I don’t buy your bullshit! You can’t stand my guts and you hate it that I don’t play by your stupid rules, because they’re stupid. Just admit that you’re here, because S.H.I.E.L.D wants you to put me at ease. Tell me that it’s alright, I can still come and play with the other kids while they’re just waiting for a possibility to fuck me over.” Stark spat, Loki only saw his back, but he could perfectly picture his face. This was another person who was being consumed by his anger. Wonderful.

There was no doubt that the Captain had come here with the best intentions, it was so fairly obvious. Now it started to dawn him that it wouldn’t happen this way. Maybe Stark was just too wrapped up in his rage to even consider reconciliation. Or perhaps he didn’t want it, because he had indeed ulterior motives. A private war? Power? Revenge? How could Rogers be sure? Loki was counting on his doubts.

“Sweet Lord, why can’t you see that I’m trying to help you!? First the robot, then you call and start directly threatening S.H.I.E.L.D… You were quite successful with that Fury does start to consider you a threat. So can we please sit down and discuss how we can work this out? I am your friend!”

Midgardians. They just never knew the right things to say. Or it was just the Captain. This was a detail he shouldn’t have shared. Said call had only happened about half an hour ago. The Captain knew about it, so S.H.I.E.L.D had given him that piece of information. What for? Only to come here and to appease Stark for the moment.

“I’m threatening them?!” Shouting. His voice bounced off the walls and Loki smiled to himself. “I said I’ve had enough and their first reaction is to hack my systems and sent agents to stalk my boyfriend! Who is threatening whom here? Do you even think about who you’re lying in bed with? Fury doesn’t care about you or me. Fury cares about the firepower of my suit and the fact that you can punch a hole into a tank. Ask Natasha, they’ve been searching a way from the very beginning to use Iron Man but without me. They wouldn’t keep you around if there was a fucking robot which could do the things you do. If they could, they would keep Bruce in a cage and only let him out whenever they want him to smash something. That’s it. They want a bunch of mindless killers who don’t care about anything. Ever wondered why Barton and Natasha fit in there so nicely?”

Finally…

Rogers’ face turned into stone, his kind eyes suddenly hard. “Careful now, Tony…”
“See? It’s not me who threatens people around here! I don’t want to be part of that. I’m out and if Fury isn’t willing to let me go in peace… Fuck him, he’ll have to deal with it. I’m done.” Firm and strong, filled with conviction and Loki could clearly see how the Captain was giving up. “And what does that mean? Being out?”

“It means I’m not going to do any fucking work for the people who tried to kill me!”

About time somebody brought this up…

“Damn it, Tony! You need to get over this stupid idea! S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t initiate these two incidents!”

“Doesn’t it hurt to be so fucking naïve!?”

Should Loki interfere now? It seemed about time, he might have remained silent for too long. So Loki quickly crossed the room and put his hand on Stark’s shoulder. “Stark, calm down. I think it’s enough. You’ve made your point!”

Against his expectation Stark pulled away from his touch, glaring at Rogers, far more interested in him than into his boyfriend. “Seriously, Steve, I don’t get it! Are you just stupid or…”

“What? I am stupid, because I don’t believe a conspiracy theory that is completely crazy? S.H.I.E.L.D has no idea who caused the New Jersey incident or who unleashed the Hulk! They are clueless, they even think that you…” The Captain stopped abruptly and his face told them that he was very aware that he had just said too much. Loki felt an immense gratitude and he loved where this was going. Especially since Stark started to frown, a bit confused, not quite able to grasp it yet. Don’t worry, little mortal, Loki is going to help you understand.

“S.H.I.E.L.D thinks that I… what?” There was this undertone in his voice, something resembling to a growl.

The Captain responded by shaking his head. “Nothing…”

Bad liars… How Loki loathed them.

“Tell me what you just wanted to say!”

Playtime. Loki looked at the Captain, with a little more disdain than usual and then pretended to suck in a breath in surprise. Thomas had just figured it out and he didn’t have any trouble believing it. Stark would eagerly listen to it. “They think he did it himself…”

Instantly Stark spun around and stared at Loki with wide eyes. Incredible, they were still able to astonish him. “What?”

Eyes still fixed on the Captain Loki repeated his words. “They think you did it.” The Captain remained silent, his jaw tensed and this was a perfect expression of guilt. “Isn’t that what you wanted to say, Captain? They think he did it himself…”

Loki felt Stark’s gaze leaving him. “Is he right? Why am I even asking? He’s smarter than the whole bunch of you and it makes fucking perfect sense, so of course he is right!”

“Tony, they’re just trying to…”

“That’s why you’re here, right? To figure out if I am an evil mastermind that only waits to conquer to the world and before that I have to kill the Avengers… Just great, thank you very much. Get
No, there would be no more talking.

"Fuck you, this is my tower and I don’t want anything related to S.H.I.E.L.D within its walls, so get the fuck out of here!"

All bets were off, this was serious. Stark was shaking, especially his hands. This was the kind of anger Loki wanted. When you couldn’t even try to hide it, because it clouded your thoughts and it was written all over you. So easy. Loki reached out, taking a hold of Stark’s hand and gave it a soft squeeze.

"Tony, you can’t…"

"Shut up! Get out! Fuck off! Before I make you leave and believe me, I will!"

There it was. Out in the open, unable to take it back and Loki subconsciously licked his lips.

A few seconds passed and the Captain stood their motionlessly, looking at Stark and it wasn’t hard to make out the sadness in his eyes. This was the moment when realisation kicked in. A thing that was broken, that couldn’t be fixed. “I really hoped that this would turn out differently…”

"Get out!"

And Rogers left, the poor little boy.

Loki could hear Stark releasing a long breath before he let go of his hand. For once Loki needed a knife not to slit his throat, but to cut the tension in the room. Every fibre of Stark’s body was still vibrating and he turned away. “Stark…”

"This calls for another drink. You also want one?"

"No…”

"Well, too bad.” Casually Stark strolled back over to the bar, poured himself a new glass of scotch. After taking one single sip something must have suddenly snapped. Not holding back the slightest Stark threw the still half full glass against the wall. Shards were scattered all over the floor and Loki had actually winced at the sound of glass shattering. Could this get any better?

Having probably already forgotten about the glass Stark began pacing around and Loki couldn’t wait to fuel the flames. Quickly making his way over to Stark Loki more or less grabbed him, staring at him intently. “Calm down, okay. You need to calm down!”

“The fuck I’m going to calm down!” Stark tried to get out of his grip, but Loki buried his fingers deeply in his shirt. “He’s gone. It’s okay! Relax! Don’t start destroying the furniture.”

“Nothing is okay! You’ve realised it before me! They’re trying to blame me for this! They’re trying to kill me, but make it look like I’m the one trying to kill people off! You saw his face? You looked into his fucking blue eyes? He thinks it might be true!”

“He didn’t say that.”

“Did you look at him?! Hell, he loves to talk about how we’re friends, so he shouldn’t even consider it! Yet he thinks it’s possible. What does that say about him? What does that say about
me?” By now Stark had given up on trying to get away from Loki, because there was no way he was going to let go. By now the anger seemed to be fading quite quickly and Stark was staring at him, so lost, searching for help. Loki would gladly do just that. “It doesn’t say anything about you. It shows quite clearly what an idiot he is…”

“You don’t get it… it’s…” Breathing hard Stark shook his head and Loki didn’t miss the change in his features. When anger and confusion were overshadowed by pain. Get used to it mortal, more of it is about to come. So much more. “Okay. I don’t get it. So explain it to me. Please.” Keeping his voice soft, Loki hesitantly let his fingers run over Stark’s shoulder.

“I…” Stark paused, squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and Loki could hear his voice tremble in just that single word.

Loki’s grip on him tightened again, mostly to steady himself. Why was he feeling dizzy again? “It’s okay. Just tell me. It’s okay…”

Their eyes met and it wasn’t just pain. So much softer. “It doesn’t matter what I do. I created Iron Man to be finally able to do something good. To make up for all the mistakes… for years and years of creating weapons. I really tried and now I see it doesn’t fucking matter. Saving innocent families from savages, saving the fucking world or flying into space with a nuclear bomb… It doesn’t matter. I can do whatever I want, people will always only see that one thing. I will always be a narcissistic asshole who would only do a good thing if it makes him look good. I just can’t… be a good guy.”

A choked up whisper, nothing more. Coming from a man who couldn’t take anything seriously, who was always making an effort to hide the fact that other people’s words might actually affect him. The betrayal of a friend had shaken him up and perhaps he couldn’t hide it or he felt safe enough with Thomas.

“Listen…” Loki pushed through the vertigo, both of his hands on Stark’s shoulders. “Nobody else decides who you are. They don’t give a damn so why should you? You are a good man. You are brilliant and you know what kind of person you are. They are just… stupid. Be narcissistic all you want… that doesn’t annul the good stuff you’ve done. Nobody can tell you who you are, that’s up to you… If my opinion is of any importance… I like the kind of person you are. I like it very much…”

These brown eyes showed a hint of disbelief before Stark clearly just gave into it and leaned his forehead against Loki’s. “I… god…” No matter what were the words he was looking for, Stark evidently didn’t find them. All he did was pulling Loki tightly against his body, holding on to him. Closing his eyes Loki let his head rest on Stark’s shoulder, telling himself that Stark wasn’t the only thing that was keeping him from collapsing to the floor.
Hey everybody,

One of my favourite chapters... Tony takes care of Loki and old memories are haunting Loki, but he still can't quite grab them...

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

Si pudiera ser tu heroe  
Si pudiera ser tu Dios  
Que salvarte a ti mil veces  
Puede ser mi salvacion

Heroe ~~ Enrique Iglesias ~~

(If I could be your hero  
If I could be your god  
Saving you a thousand times  
Can be my salvation)

_________________________________________________

“Are you feeling better?” Fingers were running through his hair and Loki thought about his mother, singing softly to him when he had been sick as a child. That had happened rarely though. Asgardians’ bodies were strong and resistant. Thor had been ill more often than Loki. Another reason why Loki felt so… helpless right now. He deeply hated this word and he couldn’t understand what was going on. Why he wasn’t quite able to raise his head? The vertigo was still having a hold on him.

“I’m still feeling dizzy…”

“Have you eaten anything since breakfast? You’re quite pale…” Stark’s fingers brushed over his cheek and Loki shook his head, immediately regretted it. “Ouch…”

That wasn’t a sound that should ever leave Loki’s mouth.

“Okay, got it. We need you to eat something… Jarvis, we still got some leftovers in the fridge?”

“There is indeed some Chinese and pizza left, Sir.”

“Great. I’ll get you something. Don’t move.”

Loki had no intention to move. He needed to gather his thoughts and some strength. At this
moment he didn’t even feel embarrassed. This had never happened before. Not being able to keep
standing. Stark had noticed, of course and had forced him to lie down on the couch. When he was
feeling fine again, Loki would still have enough time to loathe himself for this moment.

Stark was already coming back, balancing a tray filled with food. “There you go and don’t you
dare to…” He suddenly stopped mid-sentence and the look on his face resembled a man who had
just seen a ghost. Loki raised an eyebrow. “What?”

Shaking his head Stark still seemed thoroughly confused. “Nothing. I just realised that I’m turning
into Pepper…”

“Sorry?”

The confusion faded away and Stark started laughing instead. “Hell, look at me. I’m bringing you
food. I’m trying to make you eat. Pepper was always getting on my nerves, I have to eat more. I
have to eat regularly. I have to eat something else than fast food… Hey, that’s a good point. I
shouldn’t make you eat pizza. Something green would be better. Healthy and… Fuck, look at
me… I’m completely domesticated. This is fucking scary.”

No, it is proof that you are in love with me. You want me to be fine. It’s only natural. You’re
supposed to feel this way.

“I’m sorry for making you feel uncomfortable…” Loki closed his eyes for a second when another
wave of nausea was hitting him. Nice try, but this wasn’t going to work out this way. That little
tumour could do whatever it wanted, Loki was in control and he wouldn’t hesitate to cut into his
own flesh if necessary.

“Yeah, sorry. Here. I’ll also get you some water.” Stark handed him the tray and then slipped
away. Sighing Loki sat slightly up and took a bite from the pizza. It wouldn’t help, of course not,
but Loki could impossibly explain what was wrong.

“Here. Drink it. If you’re not feeling better in the next five minutes, I’m getting you a doctor.”

Without complaining Loki drank half the glass of water and rested his head against the cushion.
“I’m not sick, Stark. Just dizzy,”

Sitting down next to him Stark continued to caress his hair. “Hell after all that shit Steve said, it’s a
miracle that I’m not feeling sick too. I’m sorry, you know. You shouldn’t be… That shit has
nothing to do with you.”

“Everybody has to deal with a lot of shit in their lives. It’s not your fault.”

Stark looked at him, again that gentle expression. Loki hated him and he was looking forward to
the moment when Stark would be looking at him in a different kind of way. Desperate, broken, on
the edge of madness. A smile spread on Loki’s lips when the dizziness already started to die away.
Finally…

“But with me… I got to deal with more shit than most people. What the hell, I’m already used to it.
Fuck them. It’s not important. Move over a bit?” Although he was asking Stark didn’t wait, forced
Loki shift a bit to the side when Stark lay down next to him. “Hey, your cheeks don’t seem quite
so pale anymore.”

Loki smiled, then shrugged. “I guess I’m feeling a little bit better. Pizza is able to do miracles.”

“Good… Perfect. You wanna sit around and watch Netflix all day?” Stark pressed a kiss to his
temple and Loki smiled at him. “Sure. Why not? You want some pizza?” Loki held out the slice of pizza and Stark took a bite. “Delicious. What are we going to watch?”

Yawning softly Loki shrugged again. “You choose…”

“Modern Family. We need some good laughs. And the blanket.”

Loki didn’t move while Stark spread a blanket over them. So he was still treating him as if he was sick. Whatever, Loki needed a moment to relax, because soon he would have to leave anyway. To prepare. The final act was the most complex. He needed an incident, a murderer and a body. Most of all the perfect timing. Stark would take care of the rest then and hopefully not die first. Loki would love him to take out a few of the Avengers first.

An arm slid across his waist and Loki gave in, rested his head on Stark’s shoulder. This was a slight unusual setting, but it had been a quite eventful noon. Filled with treason and threats. This was feeling nice. Stark’s body was radiating with warmth, the blanket was soft and Loki was in an actually comfortable position. Also he was content. All of this could easily lull him to sleep.

He didn’t have any idea how much time had passed when he heard Stark’s soft chuckle. “You aren’t watching at all…”

“I’m just resting my eyes.”

“You’re feeling alright?”

“Yes… just sleepy.”

Stark’s hand caressed his lower back and Loki thought that he had decided to let him sleep, but it was Stark. He had to keep talking. In this case Loki actually didn’t mind. The things he said were exquisite. Soft words, whispered tentatively. “You’re feeling safe with me, right?”

Excellent question. Yawning quietly Loki nuzzled his face against Stark’s chest. “Sure, I do…”

“Considering the current situation… it would be understandable if you told me to fuck myself and got outta here.”

“I told you, it’s not your fault. I’ve already answered your question. I’m not going anywhere.”

Again Stark fell silent for a moment, trying to figure out what to say now or how to say it. “So why don’t you stay all the time? Move in. That’s not a question. Just bring your stuff here and stay. I’ll let Jarvis officially change your address and that’s it.”

It was quite entertaining when Stark tried to deal with his emotions, because he was so bad at it. Not really saying the words, but his intent was clear nonetheless.

Loki just smiled and kept his eyes closed. “No. I’m not going to move in. We’ve talked about that. Do me a favour and don’t propose to me just to make me move in.”

“Shit, what I’m going to do now with that huge diamond ring? Okay, you don’t want to move in, I got it. Just remember if you change your mind about this… you can move in any second and I want you to. I really… I’d love it if you moved in, but don’t feel under pressure. I just might fall into deep depression and end up as a junkie…”

“Shut up, Stark.” Loki sighed softly and rubbed his cheek against Stark’s sweater.
Fingers continued to travel up and down his back and Loki wouldn’t mind falling asleep now. “Listen, I’m completely into you telling me to shut up. It’s a turn on, but… our amazing relationship might have reached a point where we should get to first name basis.”

Huh, how funny. “This story again?”

“Yap. I’m Tony. Nice to meet you.”

Chuckling lightly Loki stretched and Stark closed his arms tighter around him. “I’m going to call you Stark as long as you’re going to call me Tommy.”

“You gotta see the difference though. Tommy is awesome and it’s your first name.”

“It’s not. Not even close. Call me Thomas and we can talk about it.”

“Not going to happen.”

“Then there’s no point in having this conversation. It’s just a waste of time while I could be sleeping. Hush, be a nice cushion. Comfortable and silent.”

Laughing softly Stark let his fingers run through Loki’s hair. “I love you too, you know.”

“Hush…”

A kiss was pressed to his hair and Loki decided to sleep. Stark would be happy and content to do some cuddling and Loki was tired. Not that he needed any kind of protection, but it was still not unpleasant to have someone all too willing to watch out for him. Especially now Stark needed the feeling of being capable of doing that. He would find out soon enough that he wasn’t.

***

“Stop gritting your teeth.”

“I am not… Oh…”

“You are gritting your teeth and the sound is obnoxious. Stop it. This must hurt incredibly and I will not be done for quite a while, so scream if you want to. Or if you don’t want to, you will scream anyway.”

“It is not that… Oh, by the Norns!”

“I told you. Try to hold still. I’m trying to make this scar as little ugly as possible…”

“I do not mind the scar. I mind the burn of the needle.”

“It needs to be ardent.”

“I know… it’s… Oh! By the… Nines!”

“There. That’s better than gritting your teeth.”

“Ahh… a pity that your magic… is not able to cure this wound.”

“Oh, it is.”

“What?”
“I could heal it with my mere touch, but it would not make a difference. It will heal just as fine with stitches, potions and a lot of rest.”

“Expect for not making it... incredibly painful...”

“This is the point.”

“Maybe my spirit is clouded by the pain, but... oh... I cannot make sense of your words.”

“I want you to remember the pain. You are strong, but you are not Asgardian. Your skin is not made of marble and it doesn’t heal as fast. It is important to keep that in mind. Especially while training exercise with Asgardians.”

“I know... Ah!”

“There, pain. You think you’re going to remember it?”

“Yes...”

“Good... take a deep breath. Here, drink the glass of wine. Then I’m going to continue. I guess another ten stitches will do.”

“You should not be doing this. It is not the duty of a prince to treat the wounds of a soldier.”

“You are not a soldier and I am not your prince. I will not have some servant touch this wound and do a bad job at it.”

“And still you... argh... will not heal it by magic.”

“No. I want you to remember the pain. Every little bit... it will make you careful and you will not get hurt again.”

“Loki...”

“Would you please let go of my hand? I need it to close up your wound and then I need it to create a spell to curse the stupid oaf who is responsible for it.”

“That would be me...”

“Oh, please...”

“It was my fault.”

“Hush now...”

Warmth that spread from his cheek over his entire body and again the words faded away. Not just the words, but also this feeling of content and... was it happiness? Loki tried to grasp it, but he couldn’t and then felt empty, not knowing what he had been chasing after. Arms were still wrapped around him, holding him and Stark obviously hadn’t moved a bit. How long had Loki been asleep?

“Hey there, what have you been dreaming of?” A sweet tone, almost playful.

Raising his head Loki blinked the last remains of sleep away. Stark was smiling at him, looking amused. “What?”
“You fell asleep and you were smiling the whole time. I was afraid to wake you, you looked like you were having fun. So what were you dreaming of? Was it me?” A smile that turned into a smug grin and fingers that caressed his cheek.

Stark said so many things, deprived of sense and logic, sometimes they were completely annoying. Most of the time Loki didn’t give them much thought, but this was different. Loki had been dreaming, he knew as much, but the images were clouded and so far away. Dreams weren’t important, they didn’t make sense and Loki had never cared much about them. Visions were something else, but they had nothing to do with dreams. No, he couldn’t remember and this realisation pained him. One thing more that had been brutally torn from his memory.

“I don’t remember… I never remember my dreams…”

“A pity. You seemed quite cute. Yeah, you were definitely dreaming of me.”

Maybe I was. Of you dying.

Rubbing his eyes Loki sat up. Netflix was still on and sunlight was flooding through the windows. “What time is it?”

“Early afternoon. You weren’t asleep that long. How are you feeling?”

“Good… I’m going to take a bath.”

“Sounds good… mind if I join you? I can rub your back and make sure that you won’t drown in that ridiculously big bathtub.”

“Sure.”

Loki let pass some time, since Stark was doing a very nice job. Warm water, hands on his shoulders that were massaging the tension out of them. It was a good setting and it also was about time to get Stark to focus. There were more important things to do than proving his devotion to Thomas. Like developing a plan to kill the Avengers.

“Listen… wait, do that again.”

Stark answered with a laugh and pressed his thumb into the same spot again. “You’re horribly tensed.” His lips brushed over the back of his neck. “Even I know that this is a sign of stress and I haven’t been stressed one day in my entire life.”

Bad. Very bad. That was the exact opposite of the point Loki wanted to get across. He was still going to try though. Reaching for Stark’s hand Loki loosely entwined their fingers. “What I wanted to say… you’re being sweet. A little bit creepy considering the fact that you’ve never been this sweet before, but I don’t mind. I like it. Not all the bloody time, but it’s lovely. Yet unnecessary. I’m doing perfectly fine. I’m not scared, I’m maybe a little bit worried. What’s completely normal. I don’t need you to pamper me or watch after me all the time. I’m doing great and after this bath I’m going to lie down and read a book. Without you watching over my shoulder. Okay?”

“So this means we’re going to have sex in the tub? Alright with me…”

“Stark, I’m trying to have an actual conversation with you. I don’t feel like it’s working.”

“Sorry… I know you’re a badass and you are tough, but you’re still an ordinary person.”

Immediately Loki flung his head around and glared at Stark who couldn’t regret his statement
more. “Sorry! Sorry! I know that was stupid. You are definitely not ordinary. Obviously, I wouldn’t sleep with an ordinary person. What I wanted to say is… that you’re not used to deal with these things on a daily basis. It’s going to stop now. I promise you that. No more S.H.I.E.L.D talk or fucking agents that follow you around.”

“Well, that sounds nice, but don’t promise things that aren’t in your power. You know when I got involved with you, I was ready for some shit to happen. Yes, I was thinking about paparazzi or the media, but somebody following me isn’t that much of a surprise. Okay, those are government agents, now I have to deal with that and I will. Don’t think that will stop me from going out anytime I like. The point that I’m trying to get across is… stop being so worried about me. I can bare sweetness at times, but not all the time.”

A hoarse sound escaped Stark’s throat and Loki wasn’t quite sure how to take it. “I’ve only been sweet for about three hours and you’re already sick of it? Wow… I don’t know how to feel about that. It’s kind of cool and also disturbing…”

Shaking his head Loki kissed him and when he tried to pull away two hands came up to cup his face. Stark was looking at him intently and Loki was getting sick of it. These dark brown eyes that were filled with emotion, endearment and devotion. Also the slightest bit of hesitation. As if he was trying to pluck up the courage to say what he wanted to say, but he had no idea which words to use. Loki didn’t like it, it made him feel uncomfortable. The desire to back away was almost unbearably, but he couldn’t and Stark’s thumbs brushed over his cheekbones. “So this you telling me once again how much you love independence and that you won’t give any of it up and you aren’t scared of what happened during the last two days. I listened and I’m okay with all of it. Now you’re going to listen to my little speech and you better don’t miss a single word. Because I’ll be making it up as I go and it probably won’t make much sense… but it’s important.”

A shiver was running down Loki’s spine and he had the taste of bile in the back of his mouth. “Fine… I’m listening.” And he definitely wasn’t feeling dizzy.

He could hear Stark taking a breath and then this expression… “You call it being sweet… I had a freak-out. Shit hit the fan and… I was so looking forward to you coming home, because I missed you. Quite a lot and your nasty comments and general hatred against the world. I think it’s cool and hot. I just… for some reason I hoped or thought that I could separate you from all the other business going on. Yeah, don’t look at me like that. I know it’s fucking naïve. Then you show up, kick my ass, because I didn’t tell you I was hurt, continue in being awesome in general and… then these assholes come around and… I got so fucking angry. I’m used to people pissing me off for the all the wrong reasons, especially when S.H.I.E.L.D or the Avengers are concerned. This was something different though. Because it was about you. No, I’m not going to ask you again to move in, but… we’re assholes. Both of us. Most of the time. Which is totally cool and still… if I feel the urge to be nice, sweet or fucking romantic for a short moment. Just let me do it. Tomorrow it’s going to be different anyway. We can go to a strip club or have a threesome with a hooker if it makes you feel more comfortable… Damn, that’s not where I wanted to go with all that. What I’m trying to say is… I’ve never wanted this to be a big thing, but now I’m talking and talking and you’re about to roll your eyes and I love it that you do that. I love you. That’s it. The whole point of this stupid monologue. I always succeed at humiliating myself. I love you and that’s all. Now feel free to point out all the things that were wrong with this speech.”

Why? Why was he feeling dizzy again? Stark had said nothing that Loki hadn’t already known. Nothing about this was new. Of course, he loved him. It had been obvious for a quite a while now. Loki had known and Thomas had also known, so why was he screaming?

Screaming at the top of his lungs, yelling, crying, clawing at Loki, lashing out with his bares hands,
using all of his pathetic power and Loki could feel every single blow. Although they were so soft, not doing any damage, little stitches that didn’t cause him to bat an eyelid, but… Loki could feel him fighting. Desperately. Whimpering that single word over and over again.

*Please, please, please*

“I…” Loki lowered his eyes and licked his lips. Not that much of a crucial moment, but he had to make it good nevertheless. So he raised his head again, smiled softly. Not too much, more like a person who had never heard something like that before. Not knowing how to react, but happy. “Well, you got lost a few times, but I don’t think there was anything wrong with it. I think it was… beautiful.”

Kisses. Kisses were better than talking. Loki was fairly sure that Thomas would never stop screaming if Stark said another word. “Maybe… I don’t have to go reading after the bath.”

Any answer Stark would have given was smothered by Loki’s mouth. Stark responded eagerly, pulling Loki close and he gave into it. This was so easy. While kissing, Loki pushed Thomas away, locked him away as he had before.

There was no reading after the bath. No plans on how to get rid of S.H.I.E.L.D or of the Avengers. Just more kisses and touches. A few whispered words against his skin. Stark’s eyes filled with adoration. It was a bit of everything. Slow and gentle and then it was rough, hard and passionate. Thomas remained quiet and Loki fell asleep in Stark’s arms.

***

“Why do you want me to remember the pain?”

“You know why.”

“Tell me. I know you’re a prince, but this time it’s me making a request. Tell me.”

“You are right, I am a prince. I don’t have to answer a question if I don’t want to.”

“Loki…please…”

“Your persistence is incredibly annoying… What? I just told you… I want… I don’t… I don’t want you to get hurt again. That’s it. It would be even more annoying to curse every single person that beats you in a fight or cuts your Vanir skin… I wouldn’t be doing anything else and my time is precious. So, I don’t want you to get hurt again. That’s all.”

“I love you too, my prince…”

Loki jerked awake and Stark’s voice was ringing in his ears. An arm was draped over him and Loki hurried to get out of the bed without waking Stark up. Mumbling in his sleep Stark turned over and Loki felt the mist covering his thoughts. He couldn’t remember. The edges war burning, hurting him and he felt so weak, fickle. An opportunity that Thomas wouldn’t miss.

*Please, just let me be with him!*

Shut up! Shut up! You pathetic, useless thing! Loki was trying to remember and he stopped him from doing it. Rushing into the huge wardrobe Loki dressed himself, grabbed his phone and wallet and quick steps carried him straight into the elevator. “Jarvis, tell Tony that I went to work. I’ll be
back around midday."

"Of course, Mr. Pine."

*Leave him alone!*

How? He wasn’t even real! He was Loki’s creation. Loki made him and he could destroy him and all of his feelings were a perfect, but unimportant spectacle. In a few days he would be dead. Dead like all of them. Stark would die and Thomas would fade away with him.

*You can’t do that! Kill the others, but leave him alone!*

Again he was clawing at him and Loki winced. How could he… The edges were burning, pulsing with pain and Thomas was screaming at him.

Loki left the building, stopped the first taxi and got inside. He couldn’t hear his own voice when he told the driver the address. Thomas’ yelling was so loud, Loki’s ears were ringing and he wouldn’t stop.

*Leave him alone. He loves me. Let me be with him. He loves me*
Hey everybody,

Loki deals with a Black Widow and with a Nordic god... and he gets some unexpected news that might change pretty much everything

Hope you have fun :)

_________________________________________________

Out of some sentimental gain  
I wanted you to feel my pain  
but it came back return to sender

I don’t recall the reasons why  
I must have meant them at the time  
Is this the sound of sweet surrender?

Shame ~~ Gary Barlow & Robbie Williams ~~

_________________________________________________

Soft lines on white skin. Loki remembered every single one of them perfectly, he didn’t even need to trace them with his fingertips. He remembered so many things his hands had done perfectly. The moment when he had created the first strings of magic, wrapped around his fingers. What immense joy Loki had felt and how he had wondered why his magic was green. He remembered how Frigga had taken his hand into her own, how she had smiled at him, how she had told him that he was talented. That his magic was a gift, a gift only a few people were blessed with and that he had to cherish it. That she was so proud of her little boy.

Then he remembered how his hands had grabbed his favourite book for the first time. How the leather had felt against his skin. Loki had traced every letter of the first page with his fingers.

The moment when Loki had cut his hand with a blade to use his blood to create his very first curse. Child’s play. He had had no idea what he had been doing. Blood for a curse that would merely cause somebody to trip over their feet, what a waste. The cut had taken so long to heal, Loki had been worried and had asked his mother about it. She explained to him the concept of an enchanted blade and Loki still felt the soft smack he had received. Children weren’t supposed to play with curses.

Loki remembered everything that his hands had been doing. Yet he felt that there was something missing.
Shaking his head Loki dropped his hands and stared at the ceiling. Yes, this was boring, time to get away. His workplace was kind of nice though. Until now he had only let a clone sit here a few times. Just in case. S.H.I.E.L.D would probably show up here sooner or later and it would be easier if somebody had actually seen him around. He was a writer, he worked at home most of the time and Loki didn’t care much if they found some things that didn’t make sense in his life. After all he had made sure that his life could be traced back to his childhood. By now it didn’t even matter if they found anything that didn’t make sense. Stark would just assume that they made it up or he wouldn’t even listen to them. Time was running through their fingers.

Thinking of that Loki had a lot of things to do himself and Stark would grow impatient soon enough. Another few minutes. Grabbing the little mirror on the table Loki watched his face, especially his eyes. They looked alright. Still beautiful, green and alive. Vivid. Loki’s eyes. Loki’s face and features.

Loki’s face…

Sighing Loki dropped the mirror and the edges were burning like fire. He knew that it was important, but the fog wouldn’t lift itself. Those pieces were gone and he would never get them back. If he only had the slightest idea…

His phone rang and Loki rolled his eyes. Stark couldn’t wait, could he? But it wasn’t Stark. An unknown number appeared on the screen and Loki knew who this was. They just didn’t learn their lesson. Well, if they thought the Widow could save the day…

“Thomas Pine, hello?”

“Mister Pine, this is Natasha Romanoff.”

A short hesitation, just a second, after all Thomas knew who she was. “Uhm… hello. If you want me to get you Stark on the phone, I’m at work. Well, you probably already know that.”

“Yes, I do.” She sounded completely unbothered. “I’m not calling to talk to Stark, but to you.”

“About Stark.”

“Exactly. Could we meet up?”

“Wow, you have quite a nerve. You guys don’t bloody shy away from anything.” Annoyance, he knew that wouldn’t throw the Widow off her game. “I admit the last developments were rather unfortunate, but I am very interested in finding a solution to our problem. Stark refuses to talk to me or answer any of my calls. You are a smart man and he will listen to you. Don’t you think it would be in everybody’s best interest to sit down and have a conversation?”

“Listen, Miss Romanoff… Agent… whatever… As far as I know it was you guys who decided to not have a conversation with that cyber attack. Now he doesn’t want to talk anymore and I’m not going to talk him into something. I won’t. He just wants to be left alone. He doesn’t bother you and you don’t bother him. Us. How does that sound to you?”

Unacceptable, but Loki already knew that. Stark was way too powerful and influential to be not kept on a leash. Now they were still trying to appease him, but they obviously were also working on a backup plan how to neutralize him. Best way would be to take his resources away from him, then they wouldn’t get their hands dirty.

“Mr. Pine, you studied in Oxford and quite successfully so. You should be smart enough to know that things don’t work out that way.”
“So you looked me up. That doesn’t impress me since you’re also stalking me. I don’t know the role you play in this and I don’t care. To me this is quite simple, Stark left a team, let him go and he won’t bother you. Why are you bothering him? Oh, right, I already forgot, because it is so ridiculous. Whatever you think he did, he didn’t do it. He just wants to be left alone. I’m not going to tell him that you called me, because it would upset him. Could you please leave us alone now? I’m sure everything would just work out fine if you guys ignored each other.”

Loki thought about just hanging up, but instead he waited if she had something else to say. “I guess you won’t mind if I talk straight with you?”

“So you weren’t doing that until now?”

“You read the newspapers. The government has been concerned about Stark since the second he announced to the world that he is Iron Man. A single man with these resources is a force to be reckoned with. Let’s be honest, do you think that your government would tolerate this?”

“Tolerate? A man who uses his own intellect and own resources to create something outstanding and he uses that invention to help the general public and in people in need? The hypocrisy. Why are you less worried about him in a team full of other people with dubious morals? You should know by now what kind of person he is and now you will allow me to be honest. Fuck you. Fuck you for not standing by your so called friend’s side. It’s just so easy to go with the popular opinion. Now that you fucked it up with him, because you were all acting like jerks, you come to me? Seriously? Are you crazy? Leave him alone for a month or longer… then you can maybe come around to apologize.”

“I guess I was wrong. You are naïve.” Her voice was still even, cutting like a knife, but Loki’s skin was made of iron. Nothing she could say would ever move him. “The reason for my call is simple. I was hoping you could talk to him. Remind him that if he isn’t going to cooperate things will get messy.”

Finally.

“Are you threatening us?”

“Mr. Pine, there are bigger things at work than me. If there was something I could do about it, I would, but I fear Stark has burned all the bridges. People are worried because of him.”

Loki snorted. This was a farce. She had her doubts, but she was trained to consider every option or possibility. Also Loki knew well enough where her loyalties lay. Gratitude was a heavy burden if you let it wear you down. It could make you a slave and break your knees. “Stupidity is more dangerous than any weapon, Agent Romanoff. I fear the people you are working for are especially dangerous. Even more so because they are trying to challenge an intelligent man.”

There was nothing left to say and Loki hung up the phone. Wonderful, that had been taken care of. Sooner or later they were going to come after Stark in one way or another and Loki would be ready. Other people needed to be ready too. Stark was eager to crawl over glass for Thomas, naturally he would be aching to tear down cities at the sight of Thomas’ dead, mutilated body.

Somebody else also possessed the might to crush stone and iron. Loki had neglected them, he should feel bad, because of that.

Before Loki could even finish this thought his phone started ringing again and he sighed softly. Stark really couldn’t wait a single second, now could he? Suppressing a yawn Loki answered the call. “Hey, how are you doing?”
“Bad. Really bad. I woke up, you had run off and the A.I had to tell me that you went to work. 
Fuck work, you are dating a millionaire.” He wasn’t faking the displeased sound of his voice. Not 
that it mattered, Loki needed a few hours to get some things done and he honestly didn’t care if 
Stark didn’t like it or not.

“I like to go to work and I didn’t want to give anyone the impression that I would stay at home now 
and hide. Yes, I’m talking about you.”

“What? I don’t insist on you staying at home. I just would have liked it if you woke me up before 
you left. How long are you going to stay at work? Don’t you want to work at home?

“There, you’re doing it again. I’m going to work and I’ll probably come home to eat. Or better, you 
wanna meet up for lunch?” Loki liked having a conversation without Jarvis around.

“Cool. You remember the Indian place we checked out last month? How about that?”

Loki wasn’t a fan of Indian food. “I don’t feel like Asian food today. Argentinean?”

“Lots of meat? Sure, I’m all for it. The usual place? Great, at 12:30?”

Why not? Loki would build his schedule around lunch time. “Yes, works for me. See you later.”

“Looking forward to it and if some idiot annoys you, just call me. We won’t have any of that. Bye 
gorgeous.”

Hanging up Loki rolled his eyes. Enough of this sentimental nonsense, Loki had some other things 
to attend to. Standing up Loki created an illusion of Thomas, letting him sit behind his desk. “Don’t 
ruin anything while I’m gone?”

The illusion smiled sweetly at him. “Have I ever disappointed you?”

“I loathe you…” Turning around Loki cloaked himself in invisibility and let his magic pull himself 
away. S.H.I.E.L.D better hadn’t destroyed the formidable work he had done. Still the same room, 
nothing had changed. Thor seemed a little more focused, but that didn’t have to be a bad thing. 
Loki had another web ready. For now Loki just watched. The man who called himself his brother 
was sitting on the very same bench, his knees pulled up to his chest, his hands resting on them. 
Lost in thought.

Frowning Loki let his eyes travel around the room. Someone had tried to make a little more 
comfortable. A cushion here, a picture there. Ridiculous. Nobody else was here. Had they given up 
on him? A bit soon, but mortals weren’t the most empathic living beings. They weren’t like…

Turning around Loki slid through shadows, through walls, through the air until he stood right 
among these pathetic little creatures. They were fighting, lovely.

“… really sorry, but he refuses to see you. What do you want me to do about it?” Banner looked 
tired, worn out and frustrated. The dangerous kind of frustration. When you told someone the same 
story all over again and they just wouldn’t understand it. Slowly but surely you got fed up with 
repeating yourself, but at the moment Banner still tried to be sympathetic. To be sensitive about 
someone else’s pain.

Jane Foster was in pain. For her it was probably the worst kind of pain imaginable. It almost made 
Loki angry to see her standing in front of Banner. A person that was dealing everyday with so 
much more sorrow than she would ever know in her entire life. Yet she had no idea about that, was 
too blind or too egocentric to see that. What did she care? Her boyfriend, her loss, her nights
without a body lying next to her. Pathetic. Little mortal who didn’t know anything. Who had never known a single moment of suffering in her short existence.

“Just open the door and let me talk to him!”

Sighing softly Banner took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Doctor Foster, I know you want… He doesn’t want to see you. I asked him, but he refused. I don’t want to act against his will.”

“Doctor Banner, listen…” For the first time she showed some insistence, some passion, but by now it was far too late to impress Loki. “It’s been two days. I’ve been patient, but all you do is letting him sit in this room and... he is staring at the walls and he obviously doesn’t know what would be best for him. I just want to talk to him, because that’s what he needs. Why is he still sitting in there? He isn’t physically hurt and you let him sit in there…”

A shadow appeared on Banner’s face and he slightly shook his head. “I’m not in charge here and I agree with you that he shouldn’t sit in this… cell, but he refuses to leave. He refuses to do anything. I’ve tried multiple times to get him to leave, but... he doesn’t want to. I hoped he would react differently when he heard that you were here, but nothing…”

Taking a deep breath Jane Foster made another attempt. “I will just go in there and talk to him. He needs somebody to talk to and I’m sure he wants to see me…”

Rolling his eyes Loki took a look around. Three other agents were present, but none of them seemed to be of importance. Fury couldn’t hang around here all day, that didn’t surprise Loki. Most probably he was busy discussing bigger problems with the Widow or the Captain. Problems like Tony Stark. Loki wasn’t so sure about Barton, but that didn’t matter all that much now. Originally he had only planned on giving Thor another push, to make him seem more like a dangerous weapon. He wouldn’t release him just now, Loki hadn’t finished his preparations.

So Thor hadn’t seen Jane Foster yet. Loki hadn’t expected that, but it was perfect. He had to work under pressure though, not that he minded. Licking his lips Loki entwined his fingers and pulled them loose again. Green strings of magic were dangling from his fingertips. Glowing softly even in invisibility. Moving his hands in elegant gestures Loki let the fingers of his left hand run over the palm of his right one. The strings grew thicker, pulsing with energy. Rubbing his hands together, Loki brought them to his lips and blew a breath of hot air into the web, filling it with life. Beautiful. Perhaps even better than the first one.

“I’m not sure about this…”

“Honestly I don’t care if you are sure about this or not. I’ve waited long enough and I’m not going to let him sit in there any longer. I’m going to talk to him.” She tried to walk past him, but Banner held her back. Not with his hands, but his words. “Okay, fine, let’s try, but I will not let you go in there alone. Not after… I’m not going to say anything. I’ll be just standing there and if everything’s alright, I’ll leave.”

“Doctor Banner, I don’t think…”

It only needed one glance for the agent to shut up. Loki wouldn’t want to mess either with the Beast. Not in a physical fight anyway. Should Thor do that…

“Doctor Foster and I will talk a minute to Thor. If someone’s got a problem with that, go talk to Fury. Come, Doctor Foster.”
Loki let his magic take him back to Thor’s little realm where said god hadn’t moved an inch. He could let the web wrap itself around Thor’s mind just now, but it’d be more dramatic to wait until they were here. If people suddenly snapped out of nowhere, it was a way bigger shock and made them unpredictable. So Loki leaned against the wall and waited the two minutes it took the mortals to get here. This was going to be fun.

The door was being opened, but Thor didn’t show any reaction. He had heard it though, Loki could tell. Banner was a man true to his word, he didn’t enter the room further than one single step. Jane Foster’s eyes were glued to Thor and Loki could see how she tried to prepare herself, to straighten up, to be strong. But she clearly wasn’t, she collapsed under the tiniest bit of pressure.

“Thor… I… how are you?”

Immediately Loki’s magic urged him to shut her up. For this ridiculous question. The web was slumbering beneath Loki’s skin, only waiting to be freed. It would be perfect.

“I told Banner that I did not wish to see you.” Thor’s voice was even, emotionless, he could easily be talking to the wall. Nothing more unusual for this loud, mindless brute. Loki had done wonderful work.

Just a few words and Jane Foster was shaken to her core. Having Banner tell her and listening to Thor saying it out loudly were two entirely different things. She took the first blow, sucked in a breath and tried to shake it off. Walking towards him she used her most gentle tone and Loki moaned inwardly. “Thor, I know you aren’t fine. I am here to help you. Let us talk about it. You know you can trust me.”

Thor didn’t care if he could trust her or not, didn’t even look at her and Loki’s body was radiating with joy. Beautiful. “Jane, leave. Please.”

“I am not going to leave you sitting here. Thor, please. I love you, whatever is bothering you, you can tell me. You don’t have to deal with this alone. Whatever happened to your brother…”

Wrong thing to say.

Instantly Thor’s head flung around and the speed of that movement contradicted his whole behaviour until now. Jane Foster flinched and Banner made a little step forward. No matter how much Loki hated blue eyes, he couldn’t help but adore the threatening glimmer in Thor’s. Something he had never seen before and now it was directed at Jane Foster. “You are making it worse, so just leave.”

“I…” Already at a loss for words, she was clearly in over her head. This was a good moment to let his magic play out. His feet glided soundlessly over the floor, towards the two of them.

“Just the sight of you is a painful reminder of how much I failed him. I failed to protect him, I killed him and I betrayed him. I betrayed him because of you. Out of pure selfishness.”

What? Loki lowered his hand, strings of magic slipping back underneath his skin. This didn’t come from him. This was Thor’s very own conclusion. Loki needed to hear this.

Jane Foster seemed just as confused as him. “What? Thor, what are you…”

“I denied him. I wanted you to feel good about yourself and therefore I told you what you wanted to hear. A mortal I had barely known half a day and I denied my brother. My own flesh and blood.”
Biting his lip Loki swallowed a snarl. Flesh and blood. They were anything but…

Again Jane Forster proved her lack of intelligence and wouldn’t back off. “Thor, we’ve never even talked about Loki…”

Just the mentioning of his name and Thor’s body tensed up, his eyes sliding shut. As if he wasn’t capable of looking at her anymore. It was tearing him apart and Loki felt this grim satisfaction. Not enough just yet, but this was fun. “Of course, we did…” Suddenly he sounded so weak again and broken. “Out in the desert we talked about magic. Loki was magic.”

Where was this going?

In her helplessness Jane Foster slightly turned around, looking at Banner, but what was he supposed to do? “I… I don’t understand…”

“How could you? You are mortal and I lied to you.” These eyes opened again and they were far away. “I told you that magic is not real. That is only science, but more advanced. A lie. There is magic. It is in every single one of the Nine Realms. These machines are the proof…”

Within this mere second, a moment so short Loki had forgotten how to breathe. His magic was rebelling, screaming and there was only hatred. Hot and rough, taking a hold of him. He was disgusted and so weak. Still. How could he still be affected by this betrayal? Thor had done nothing else than betraying him, killing him and Loki still felt his chest constricting. It wasn’t like he hadn’t known. That Thor didn’t give a damn. Denying the existence of magic was the exact same thing as denying Loki himself. Even before he had known… Flesh and blood.

“Thor…”

“He was magic himself. Every little thing about him…” There was a slight tremble in Thor’s voice and Loki took a step back. “Loki could be anyone he wanted and anything. He was able to create fire from nothing, he could jump between the worlds, heal wounds by touching them… He saved my life with his magic several times. He saved Asgard and I… I disowned him to please a mortal.”

Loki couldn’t tell what Jane Foster’s reaction was, because he was fighting. His magic pulled him into five different directions at once and told him to cut him into pieces. To steal his sanity, replace it with madness and let him kill Jane Foster with his bare hands. Not even that would make Thor understand how Loki was feeling right now.

“Thor, one lie doesn’t make you a bad brother. I am sure your brother would not have…”

“This is not some unimportant detail! I disowned him, I betrayed him and I pushed him into darkness.” Thor dropped his head, his fingers gliding through his long hair before he started actually pulling on it. “He was screaming for me. Desperate for help and I didn’t come to help him. He saved me, Loki saved me and I gave him to the shadows. I let them have him. I failed to protect him again. I could not protect him from suffering. How could I protect him from death? He died because of me so many times…”

Yes, this was good. Old news, but perfect…

“I was there. You did not kill him. Loki saved you and this monster killed him. It was not your fault. Your brother died protecting somebody he loved… he was trying to redeem himself from his crimes…”

It was clearly the wrong thing to say. Thor raised his head and fear clearly overwhelmed Jane Foster. She had never seen that look. Thor’s eyes when he was ready for a fight, when he was
ready to draw blood. When he was a god of destruction. “Loki never committed any crime! My brother died when I pushed him into darkness and… when he came back from it… there was nothing left of Loki. That person was not my brother. None of you ever met him. None of you should even dare to mention his name. He was strong, he was fierce and benign… Even in his suffering… Loki has known more pain than I ever will, pain that took his smile away… He suffered and I was not able to help him. I never was… when the light returned to his eyes, when he started smiling again… When our parents thought that their son was ready to embrace life again… I pushed him into darkness… I will not tolerate a bad word about him from any of you. Now leave… I do not need you to remind me of the crimes I committed.”

The silence in the cell was deafening. Maybe Jane Foster and Banner had vanished. Loki didn’t know. Loki didn’t care. Loki didn’t understand.

Suffering? What kind of suffering? No matter how limited Thor’s mind was, he was referring to a very concrete event and Loki felt so lost. None of this had been his creation. His fingers hadn’t woven this into the web. Thor’s bad conscience had dug this up and Loki didn’t know what he was referring to. How could this be…

Stepping back Loki shook his head and the edges began to burn. Bringing his hands up to his head Loki felt the pain racing through him. There were no scars, just open wounds. So many pieces were missing and Loki couldn’t find them.

But Thor had them.

Thor had them.
Hey everybody,

Yes, I'm sorry, this chapter is kind of a filler... but next chapter is going to start off the final act and there's always calm before the storm :D

Have fun

________________________________________________________________________

One night of the hunter
One day I will get revenge
One night to remember
One day it'll all just end

Night of the Hunter ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~
________________________________________________________________________

Loki needed the pieces. He needed them. So the pain would stop and he could fill in the blanks.
Thomas looked at him with his stupid blue eyes and Loki made an angry gesture, letting the illusion disappear. What had Thor meant?

Suffering…

Thor didn’t know anything about suffering. Least of all about Loki’s pain. Yet he couldn’t stop wondering what he had meant. Loki needed to know and he needed Thor alone for that. Maybe then the constant pain would stop, the open edges would stop throbbing.

He was on time for his lunch with Stark after letting the illusion of Thomas disappear and making himself look presentable. Which meant putting Thomas’ skin on. Sooner or later Thomas would start acting up again, Loki wasn’t naïve enough to act like he didn’t know that. So it was important to stay focused more than ever. To not forget who he was and what made him the person he was.

Sadly that bitter knowledge was undisputed. The knowledge that Loki didn’t have a clue. He didn’t know who he was, because the pieces were missing. Thor could give them to him. By tearing Thor apart Loki could put the pieces back together. Maybe then he’d be whole again…

“Odyssey, this is Houston. We haven’t heard anything from you in a while. Do we have a problem?”

Loki blinked and Stark appeared in front of him like a ghost. How long had they been sitting here? There was a glass of wine, half full, food on his plate and Stark was smiling at him. He couldn’t afford getting lost in thought. “I’m sorry… what did you say?”
Stark’s smile faltered. “You’ve staring into nowhere for almost an entire minute. What’s going on in that wicked smart head of yours? Tell me.”

He was trying to find something he had lost in the darkness. A part of him that had been cut out. Thor had it. Thor could give it back and then Loki would know. Loki would know why…

*You are special, little princeling*

A shiver was running down Loki’s spine and he had to fight to urge to grip the edge of the table to steady himself. Of course Stark had to notice, because bad luck had decided to stick to Loki’s heels. No. This was all in the past. Not part of him anymore.

“Something smart, I fear. I was just thinking about my manuscript. I’m not making much progress…”

“Since when are you worried about work?”

Loki shrugged. “I’m not worried. The author’s style is atrocious and I’d like to change pretty every single phrase, but I can’t, because it’s part of my job to transfer that atrocious style into another language. That’s quite frustrating…”

Once again not Loki’s best excuse, but he was still heavily distracted. There was a chance to recover what he had lost. Why was Stark looking at him like this? With that distrustful glimmer in his eyes. “Tommy, what is really going on?”

Good, back to the plan. This was good. “Why has there to be something going on?”

In response Stark chuckled. “I know you, sweetheart. Something’s bugging you, so spit it out, because there’s no way I’m going to stop before you tell me and you know how annoying I can get.”

“Do you want to know how annoying I can get if you ever call me sweetheart again?”

“I can’t call you sweetheart. I can’t call you Tommy. Then I’ll settle for Honeybunny.” Such a smug grin and Loki couldn’t stop his hand from twitching. Maybe just one of his ears. Loki really wanted to cut something off.

“Take my advice and stop that. I can take you in a fight and you know it.”

“You think so.”

“I know so.”

Poor mortal, he thought that this was just banter. He was smiling, feeling a bit challenged. Still it was all a joke for him, having no idea that Loki could smash his skull with only one hand. All Stark saw was the man he was in love with. Cynical but sweet. “Gotta disappoint you there, Honeybunny. I’m Iron Man. You don’t stand a chance, but it’s cute that you think that.”

Loki snorted, getting seriously frustrated by this conversation. “You wouldn’t even be able to put it on… I would have already kicked your ass by then.”

“Yeah? If you’re so strong, tough and badass… why am I always the one on top?”

If he would continue like this he would walk out of here with some body parts less. “Stark, if you are the type of person that defines one guy’s masculinity by what he enjoys doing in bed, then you
“Wow… trouble with the Avengers or with the government doesn’t bother you, but you freak out when I’m acting like a macho asshole. Interesting. Your awesome levels just went through the roof. All this talk about kicking my ass is also quite a turn-on.” Stark winked at him and Loki scowled. “Whatever…”

Now the smile was completely gone, instead deep lines appeared on Stark’s forehead. The usual cheekiness had faded away and there was no doubt that he had very well realised that something was off. Thanks to all the stuff that had already happened his thoughts went straight into a certain direction and that was what Loki wanted. He had to concentrate on that.

Putting his glass down Stark looked at Loki, his expression a strange mixture of softness and worry. Only love could cause something like that. Loki wondered where he knew that from.

“Okay, enough of this shit. I know you can be touchy and you get easily pissed off, but I’m not a complete idiot, Tommy. You’re not thinking about your work or about who tops and who bottoms. What’s going on? We both know that I’m a jerk, but I think we’ve already established that I can be sensitive at times… Now, come on. Tell me.”

Fine, Loki would tell him, but only after another try. That would make it seem more dramatic. “Bloody hell, will you just believe me when I say something?”

Instead of insisting stupidly Stark just looked at him. “Thomas, please.”

It wasn’t the gentle, silent tone that made all of the little hairs on Loki’s arms stand up. That word. Had he ever used it before? Coming out of Stark’s mouth it sounded strange. Perhaps he had said those other two syllables so often that Loki had gotten used to them.

Running one hand through his short hair Loki dropped it again instantly. His hair was too short and it even felt different. He didn’t like it. “Okay, but try to keep your blood pressure down.”

Stark huffed. “What have these assholes done now? I swear I’m going to…”

“Fine, then I’m not going to tell you…”

“I shut up. Tell me, please. I’m listening.”

Tapping his fingers against the tabletop Loki began to talk. “I was at work when… Agent Romanoff called me.”

Mentioning her name was enough, Stark’s whole posture changed, he was tensing up. “Natasha. That means Fury is scared shitless. What did she say?”

Loki barely remembered, it had been a lot of unimportant stuff. “She wanted to meet up, I didn’t want to, so we had a conversation. She wanted me to talk to you. Telling you that you should stop acting out and play nice with them. A lot of bullshit about how I am smart enough to know that no government in the world would tolerate a single man with such resources. I know, kinda weak as a threat, but still a threat. I guess she was trying to scare me, so I would tell you to stop screwing with them. She did have some valid points though.”

Stark’s features were stern, hard and there was this glimmer in his eyes. A want, need to do something reckless. To teach somebody a lesson. “And what did you say to her?”

Loki’s reply couldn’t be more casual. “I told her to go fuck herself.”
A smug and thoroughly pleased grin spread on Stark’s lips. “Damn, I’ve never wanted you that bad…”

“They are right, you are crazy.”

“For you and that’s another thing we’ve already established. I like it when you tell other people to fuck off.”

“I don’t think this is funny. It was a threat. We’ve avoided this topic until now… what’s the worst that can happen? What are they going to do? If they aren’t going for the legal way and try to take your suits away… since they’ve already tried to kill you and try to make the Captain believe that you tried to kill the Avengers…” Loki faked concern and Stark played it cool, mostly because he didn’t want to upset his boyfriend. “I think you were right about the legal way. I’m pretty sure that Fury wouldn’t mind to nuke my ass, but none of that is going to happen as long as Steve is around. Yeah, he is an idiot and he can go fuck himself, but he has some very strict opinions about going to war with people and Fury can’t risk upsetting Steve. He’s Captain fucking America. No need to worry, nobody is going to kill me. They’re out of options now that I’m no longer part of the Avengers.”

“I don’t get that though… All of you were in that warehouse when it blew up. Even the Captain. Does that make sense?”

“Maybe they thought that Steve could easily survive such an explosion. I think so too. About Natasha… What the hell do I know? Either she was in on it or she has no idea what game Fury is playing. He’s probably the only guy who is able to keep a secret from her. I know that I didn’t cause any of the two incidents and both incidents started with a fucking S.H.I.E.L.D computer… It’s not like I care. I’ll tell you what is going to happen. I’m going to find the robot guy, I’m going to grab him and deliver him personally to the police. I’ll be the big hero and then Fury can’t do anything but smile and tell me how awesome I am.” Stark ended his little speech with a sip from his wine, way too content with himself.

Not a bad plan, it would keep Stark busy and give Loki some time to work on the mechanics of his own plan. He was still in search for a murderer and a body.

“Okay, I admit that doesn’t sound so bad. Except for the part of you going alone after a maniac.”

“Hey, I’ve had worse. Aliens, a crazed out Norse god, a crazed out Soviet scientist, terrorists… Been there, done that. Anyway, there’s something else I gotta take care of first.”

“What?”

“Bruce. He’s still hanging out at S.H.I.E.L.D Headquarters. Now that Thor has lost most of his marbles Fury has a good excuse to keep Bruce around. As a watchdog. Keeping him there as a prisoner but pretending he’s there to watch another prisoner. Almost brilliant. Anyway, I’m going to give him a call and tell him that he should stop giving a damn and come back to the tower. We’ll see how S.H.I.E.L.D will react to that. Probably not too well… Whatever. Sooner or later they have to find out that they can’t just do what they want. They aren’t me.” Stark went back to grinning at him and it was so honest and arrogant that Loki couldn’t help but laugh. “You are quite the optimist.”

“Because in the end things always turn out well for me. Talking about things that turn out well for me… you wanna continue work at home? You look so good in that suit…”

The attempt to get him back into the tower wasn’t unexpected, but it still put Loki on the edge. No
way, Loki didn’t have the time. Even less so now. He had to set the stage and he had to get the pieces back. “The story about the script frustrating me. So I’m not going to work on it at home where you’re just waiting for an opportunity to pounce on me. Not going to happen.”

Stark pulled a face. “This is not fair. Frist I’m waking up alone, then we meet up for lunch and you’re wearing a grey three piece suit that makes me want to lick your face. More than usual.”

What a cheap way to try to distract him from his worries. Why was it so hard to admit that he wanted Thomas to be safe? Stupid mortal with his stupid pride.

“When I get home and I’m not too tired we can fuck all you want.”

Stark pretended to be offended and threw his hands in the hair. “Wow, this is so not romantic.”

Shrugging Loki smiled at him. “I didn’t know you were into romance. Fine, then make it romantic. Sweep me off my feet, but don’t be surprised when I throw up, because I’m not into kitsch.”

Loki reached for his glass, but Stark gently grabbed his hand and softly let his thumb run over his wrist. Barely touching the bracelet. “You’re right, we both aren’t into romance, thank god. But the day we stop having sex spontaneously on every piece of furniture I’ll jump out of a window and the penthouse is very high.”

That would spare Loki a lot of trouble, but also a lot of satisfaction. “No, we wouldn’t want to have that… I won’t be back late. I promise.”

“Okay, I should get used to you doing whatever you want. We’re so made for each other. By the way, you wanna move in with me?”

“Stark!”

“Damn, can’t be mad at me for trying. Now Tommy… if Romanoff calls you again or anybody else of that fucking bunch of assholes… don’t try to hide that from me. Okay? I promised you I won’t do anything stupid and now you promise me, you won’t… keep something like that from me.”

Little bright stars were dancing in Loki’s field of vision and it happened faster every single time now. It was about time to leave this behind him. He couldn’t afford Thomas acting out. This little piece of filth was adamant, a fighter with a strong will. Just like Loki had created him. He was Loki’s creation and therefore he had nothing to say.

Loki on the other hand was a liar, a master of words and he had a lot of things to say. Things that would make Stark want to use his bare hands to choke the life out of Romanoff. “Stark… Romanoff is right. I am smart. I know when something is going on and I know when someone is trying to protect me. “

A little pause and Stark’s brown eyes showed Loki that he was dying to say something, but he had no idea how to. Instead he remained silent and Loki smiled. “And sometimes it’s me who wants to protect someone. Is that so hard to believe?”

The corners of Stark’s mouth twitched and he lowered his eyes. His grip on Loki wrist loosened and his fingers drifted to Loki’s, entwining them. “Tommy, I’m made of iron. It’s in my name. Nothing can hurt me.”

***
The bracelet was lying in Thomas’ office, Loki was lying on his couch. He was caught in a dead end. His plan needed to be perfect, but there were massive holes in it. It has been a while now that Loki had given up any hope that the Captain would go to war willingly. Not as long as Stark didn’t put on the suit and started killing random people in the streets. Next problem – Stark wouldn’t do that. Not yet. Even after Thomas’ death Stark wouldn’t just start a rampage, he would go after a certain objective. Then the Captain would be forced to act.

So far so good.

It all came down to the one big flaw in Loki’s plan. How? It needed to be believable and most of all he needed a distraction.

Thor could do that or the Beast.

Yet Loki had to be careful. Giving the Avengers a common enemy to fight was the last thing he wanted… All of them in different places, Stark coming too late but not much. He needed to feel it slipping through his fingers. So close but out of reach and then lost forever. The other Avengers present, maybe one of them even… Yes, ignorance could be a blessing and a curse. What would Stark do if he didn’t know who exactly to blame? A rush of excitement was running through Loki. Yes, he was going to take his rage out on everybody and he wasn’t going to stop anytime soon. Just thinking about it made Loki lick his lips. It tasted so sweet, everything Loki wanted.

There was still some detail missing. How would he get everybody to be in the exact spot he wanted them to? How could Stark be too late if Loki needed him to witness some of the important events? What kind of distraction would keep them busy long enough while Loki would set the stage and…

It came out of nowhere, but suddenly Loki knew. A second ago his mind had been clouded and he been wandering around aimlessly. Now he saw it all so clearly right in front of him. A way to take down every obstacle in his way. He felt a smile forming on his lips and it was like waking up. As he had been sleepwalking and now Loki felt life rushing through his veins, his skin tingling and his magic was singing. What a sweet tune…

Teleporting away Loki found himself back in Thomas’ office and his eyes fell on the one thing that would pave the way for the last act. Carefully Loki let his fingers run over the bracelet Stark had given him to protect Thomas’ life. Little had he known that he had given away his own.

The only thing that Loki was still missing was a corpse. Nothing easier to obtain than that.

***

“I have such a bad feeling about this… I’m feeling terrible for saying that, but I’m missing the war.”

Loki let his hand run through William’s blonde curls and sighed loudly. His expression mirrored the exact opposite from what he was feeling. He was delighted.

The Captain hadn’t slept in days. He hadn’t said that, but his face was telling Loki long and interesting stories. Dark rings beneath Captain America’s eyes. Loki had already noticed them when he had come to talk to Stark. Now it was even worse.

“You should feel terrible for saying that. Only Nazis are missing the good old times that were World War 2. What’s really going on, Steve?”

The speakers thinned out the sound of Rogers’ voice, but Loki heard enough. “Because things were easy back then. Well, not easy, but the sides were clear. There was no in-between. I knew who I
was fighting. Black and white. No shades of grey and now…”

What a temptation to roll his eyes. Yes, Rogers had lived through some years of this period, but he had clearly spent too much time in the company of military and people who fed him propaganda. He himself had been a little piece of propaganda.

There were always shades of grey. Loki didn’t care about Hydra or other organisations or the Nazis themselves. Things never were this easy. There was no black or white. There were always stains or rays of light. Either the Captain had forgotten about this or things had become so complicated that he was romanticising the past.

“And now? You don’t know who you are fighting?”

The shadow on the Captain’s face was present all the time and now it darkened. “I hope that I won’t be fighting anyone at all. S.H.I.E.L.D is completely sure that Tony used their computers against them, that he is plotting something. I don’t know what I think about this. Tony is… yeah, he’s reckless, but he is no criminal. Or he wasn’t…”

Keep talking, my dear Captain. You make me so happy with the words dropping from your lips

“What do you mean? Did something happen? Did he do something?” Loki frowned, biting his lips to fake concern and the Captain avoided his eyes. “No… he didn’t, but… Fury… there has been some surveillance on Tony’s boyfriend. He noticed it and… he wasn’t pleased… not all.”

Another sigh was pulled from the Captain’s lips and Loki blinked in confusion. “Why would they keep his boyfriend under surveillance?”

“I don’t know… Well, I do know, but… it’s not that unusual. If you want to know what an important and powerful person is up to… you also keep an eye on the ones close to them. I didn’t like it, he’s a civilian. He’s unpleasant and rude, but Tony’s boyfriend and that’s all there’s to it. When Tony found out that agents have been following him around… I tried to talk to him, but he made it quite clear that he doesn’t want to… He’s absolutely irreconcilable…”

“You worry about what he is going to do now and you don’t trust him…”

“Tony hasn’t done anything… nothing that we know of. It’s all just… suspicion and…”

Now he was way too understanding. Loki had to stop him from doing that. “He did something… you said it yourself. Building that robot and Steve… we talked about that almost the entire night. You didn’t know what to do back then and now… you still don’t know what to do… I told you to go with your gut. What is your gut telling you?”

For a moment the Captain’s eyes were looking straight into nowhere and then he let his hand run down his face. So much regret. “My gut told me to go to talk to him, to figure out a solution as friends after he had called Fury and threatened to… That didn’t work. He made it pretty clear, he doesn’t want to have anything to do with this anymore and… he was so angry. I honestly don’t have no idea what he would have done if I hadn’t left.”

“So you don’t trust him…”

“That’s… I’m worried what is going to happen if he’s pushed too far… if he really thinks he needs to burn all the bridges…”

But that’s going to happen, my dear Captain. Enough of this call, Loki just wanted to make sure that Rogers wouldn’t hesitate to use his fists when things got serious. All his pawns were perfectly
placed, it was about time to end it all. Just one more thing. Loki would put his mind back together and then he’d shatter what was left of Thor’s.
Hey everybody,

Here we are, Saturday night and shit is going down. Loki gets literally lost in memories and Thomas is fed up of Loki calling the shots...

I hope you have as much fun with this chapter as me... or even more :)

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Sé que volveré a perderme
Y la enconaré de nuevo
Pero con otro rostro
Y otro nombre diferente y otro cuerpo
Pero sigue siendo ella, que otra vez me lleva
Nunca me responde, si al girar la rueda

Y si fuera ella ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~

(I know that I'm going to lose myself again
And I will find here again
But with a new face
And a different name and another body
But it will still be here who lifts me up again
She never answers me even as the wheel turns)

---

For the first time in ages the elevator doors opened and Stark wasn’t instantly at his side. Putting the bag containing his laptop down Loki took a look around. Jarvis answered the question before he asked it.

“Mr. Pine, Mr. Stark is already on his way. He got caught up in work.”

Laughing softly Loki shrugged and went into the kitchen. “Thanks Jarvis, but he doesn’t have to stop working, just because I got home. I can entertain myself for a moment or two.”

“Mr. Stark says – don’t you even try.”

Shaking his head Loki grabbed a bottle of water and poured himself a glass. He was still in an extraordinary good mood, but he still felt the weight of the veil lying heavily on his shoulders. It probably would be a good idea to just go to bed as soon as possible. Stark could hold him, continue to live in his little illusion that he was capable of protecting Thomas.

“There you are…” Stark waltzed right into the room, planting a big kiss on Loki’s mouth. His first
reaction was to wrinkle his nose. “You smell like a garage.”

Motor oil and sweat. Not very pleasant.

“Yeah, sorry… I’ve been working. At three things at once. Robots. S.H.I.E.L.D… a nice virus… made quite some progress. You wanna get some food? I’m starving.”

“I’m not even talking to you until you had a shower. You smell…” Loki pushed Stark away and the mortal only laughed. “Guess you have a point there… wanna join me?”

Shaking his head Loki opened the fridge. “No, thanks. I’m going make something to eat.”

“Cool…”

Fifteen minutes later Stark was back and now he smelled actually nice. Loki handed him a small plate with the salad he had quickly prepared. Mostly tomatoes, but it was delicious.

“So… your script stopped frustrating you?”

“I got way better. Yes. I had a…” Loki couldn’t hold back a grin. “… a break-through. Now I know exactly what to do with it.”

Stark smiled none the wiser. “Nice. I was a busy bee too. Read all of S.H.I.E.L.D’s files on me. They got nothing, they’re miles away from knowing anything. It’s perfect. Now Jarvis can go through all the protocols and the two of us can do all the nasty stuff Jarvis doesn’t like watching anyway. Right, buddy.”

“Of course, sir.”

A soft chuckle passed Loki’s lips. “Why did you make Jarvis British?”

“Isn’t that obvious, Tommy?” Stark tried his best to fake an English accent, but failed miserably. “You should know by now that I’m really into things from the UK. Most of all you.”

“So you wouldn’t be with me if I wasn’t British?”

“Darling, I can’t even imagine you not being British. I bet you’ve read all seven Harry Potter books.”

“No, I didn’t. I am not into fantasy.” Especially not into stupid nonsense that involved wands. As if it wasn’t bad enough that this world didn’t know a thing about real magic. They couldn’t even make up decent stories about it. Well, those were children’s books after all. “Also there are about a million things that are more British than Harry Potter. Tea. Fish and Chips. Stonehenge. Pubs. Red buses. Black cabs. The Beatles. Stephen Fry…”

“What about Yorkshire pudding? We should totally make Yorkshire pudding!”

Was Stark having a seizure? Or why was he just shouting out things that didn’t make any sense. “What? You want to have a Sunday Roast? You can’t cook for life.”

“Darling, you’re British… you guys eat pretty much anything.” Stark winked at him. “But your salad is good, because it’s Italian.”

“I didn’t think it was possible, but this is indeed the stupidest discussion we’ve ever had.”

“What? You’re allowed to tell me all the time that America sucks, but I can’t make fun of…”
“No.” Loki kept it simple and Stark burst out laughing. “Now that’s a surprise. Enough of this, I can only lose anyway… You want to play some pool? I feel the sudden need to kick your ass.”

“You couldn’t even beat me in laser tag.”

“Nobody beats me at pool.”

“I beat you at everything.”

Naturally Stark enjoyed their little banter and leaned over to brush his lips teasingly over Loki’s. “You wanna bet, sweetheart?”

Would that even be fair? Stark had given him so many things that Loki would keep when he was dead, so what was the point in making a bet? Then again, Loki was competitive and why not?

“What are thinking about?”

Stark actually took a moment to think about it. “Well, I was going to say that if you lose I get to fuck you on the pool table, but I just decided that I’m going to do that anyway. So… we’re going to go to a club. One that I choose and you gotta dance even if you think that the music is atrocious.”

Since it wasn’t going to happen anyway Loki agreed without further negotiation. “Okay, I’m fine with that. And if I win… we’re going to watch Kenneth Branagh’s version of Hamlet and you’re going to massage my feet while we’re watching it.”

“Isn’t that this movie with that never ending runtime?”

“About four hours. I guess it’s only fair, because we’d be spending about as much time in a club.”

“We have a deal.” Stark held out his head, wearing a grin on his face and Loki chuckled. They shook hands and Stark instantly jumped to his feet. “Let’s get started.”

“I’m not finished eating!”

In response Stark rolled his eyes and made Loki think of an impatient child, because he seemed to be about to start tapping his watch. No that Loki cared, he continued to eat his salad and as soon as he was finished Stark grabbed his hand and pulled him along. Loki knew about the rules of this game, but he had never played it before. It was simple enough though and since it wasn’t about speed Loki could take his time to perfect every move. Then again, against all his expectations Stark turned out to know what he was doing.

Except when he was busy ogling Loki who was leaning over table to take a rather complicated shot.

“Stop that.”

“What? I’m not doing anything.”

“You are staring at my arse.”

He heard Stark laughing behind him. “Yeah, as if you weren’t doing that on purpose…”

Straightening up Loki turned around and cocked an eyebrow at Stark. “Why do I have the feeling that you only wanted to play pool to watch me bend over.”

“I can tell you why.” Leaning his cue against the pool table Stark slid his arm around Loki’s waist. “Because you’re smart and you’re completely right.”
Huffing Loki shoved him away. “It’s your turn and don’t worry. I’m not going to stare.”

“Don’t act as if you could resist.”

The banter continued like that for about 10 minutes until Jarvis interrupted them and Loki was quite grateful. “Sir, I’ve finally reached Doctor Banner. Do you still wish to talk to him?”

Interesting

Immediately Stark’s head flung up. “Yes, of course I want to fucking talk to him! Right now!”

Two seconds later they could hear a loud click and then there was Banner’s voice, filling the room. “Hey Tony… I’m sorry, there have been so many things…”

“Are you okay? I better hope you are. You went there voluntarily, that’s the only reason why I haven’t blown up the place yet. I had Jarvis tracing your phone and…”

“Tony, everything’s okay.” Banner sounded tired and never had a lie been more obvious. Stark shared a look with Loki. “Yeah, I’m not buying that. If I put on the suit I can be there in 3 minutes. I can blow up the whole place if I need to. Am I on speaker? Is Fury around? You hear that, Nick!? I can…”

“Tony…” A soft smile spread across Loki’s lips when he heard Banner’s faint and frustrated voice. Definitely a man who had gone through too much to deal with a tamper tantrum or impatience. “I just said everything’s alright… for now.”

Not what Stark wanted to hear. Within a second his good mood had completely vanished and his eyes were shooting daggers. Unfortunately there was nobody here to shoot them at. “Bruce, you gotta get outta there. Did you forget about the fucking bullet?”

“No, I didn’t forget about that, Tony. It’s just not that easy, it’s not about me or you or S.H.I.E.L.D at the moment…”

When Stark opened his mouth to reply Loki almost felt sad about killing him. “Who gives a fuck about Thor? It’s a nice excuse for Fury to keep you there, because they don’t have the means to hold him back if he goes crazy again. Fuck that, you can’t stay around them. I can’t believe that you’re forgetting about this little detail that they fucking tried to shoot you!”

Loki met sure that his eyebrows went up, but Stark was so in rage that he wasn’t really looking at him.

“Calm down, will you! No, Tony, I didn’t forget about anything! If you let me speak for a second, maybe I could tell you what’s going on here? Thank you!” It was quite amusing to hear Banner yell, but he wasn’t too angry, just trying to get Stark to listen to him. “Okay, Thor is doing better, but… he’s sitting in his cell and is staring into a corner. He doesn’t talk anymore. Except for when Jane Foster showed up and that wasn’t pretty.”

Loki met sure that his eyebrows went up, but Stark was so in rage that he wasn’t really looking at him.

“Very fascinating. How about you come here and tell me the story? That would be way more personal than talking on the phone. Oh and you wouldn’t have to hang around people who try to kill you!”

“That’s also a reason why I’m going to stay here. At least for now. Thor is not doing fine and I’m worried… that somebody might be messing with his head.”

Loki froze for a second.
“Care to explain?”

“He is so struck with grief and self-loathing… He’s in a very fragile state, easy to be taken advantage of. We both have our doubts about S.H.I.E.L.D, so I really don’t want to leave Thor alone there.”

So close and yet so far. Hiding his smile Loki leaned back against the pool table and waited how this conversation was going to turn out. Stark didn’t care much, Loki could even see him rolling his eyes. “Thor is a big boy, he can take care of himself. He’s god.”

There was a short pause and they could hear Banner’s soft breathing. “Listen, Tony… there’s a simple solution for our problem. If I could just bring Thor…”

Stark’s face turned into stone and Loki liked the cold expression in his eyes. Deprived of all compassion. He would be seeing a lot of this in the future. When Loki wouldn’t have to put up with Thomas anymore. “No. Thor doesn’t set one foot in my tower.”

“Tony…”

“No. That’s not even up for discussion. Tommy’s here, so…” Stark bit his lip and Loki tilted his head, looking at him questionably. Quickly dismissing him Stark turned away. “I’m not having Thor in the tower. Sorry, Bruce.”

“I understand, but that means that I’m staying.”

“You can’t be serious… You’re sitting in a nest of snakes…”

“Might be, but let’s be honest until now nobody has ever found a way to give the other guy a hard time. I think I’m good and I’ll keep an eye on Thor. He needs a friend and…”

Stark didn’t let him finish. “Let Steve do that. He loves hanging around Fury.”

It was obvious that Banner was taking a deep breath and was trying to not get Stark the better of him. “I’m doing what I think is right and I’ve decided to not let him alone with this…”

A barely audible sigh and Stark ran a hand through his hair. “Okay… that’s a terrible and totally stupid idea, but I’m not stopping you. But seriously, Bruce, if one of those agents is only looking weirdly at you, get out of there. Give me a call, I’ll be there instantly… and you can always come to the tower. Just you though, nobody else.”

Loki’s magic was humming contently. An abyss had opened up in this group and was too big to ever overcome.

“Thanks, Tony. I’ll call again tomorrow. Tell Thomas I said hi and… take care. The people here are really on the edge… Thor, you and me hanging around here… Please, don’t do anything to… set things off.”

“I’ll try. Take care… and watch your back.” The second the call ended Tony turned around to look at Loki. “Why is everybody telling me to no fuck things up?”

Smiling lightly Loki shrugged. “Because you usually do that…” He let a moment pass before turning serious. “Why can’t Thor come to the tower as long as I’m here?”

The regret was all too present on Stark’s face, his teeth were grazing over his lower lip and then he shook his head. “Nothing…”
Loki felt strange, goose bumps were forming on his arms, but he quickly shook it off. “Fine, then don’t talk to me. It’s not like it concerns me in any way…”

“Okay, okay… but it’s weird and twisted and I don’t understand it myself. Thor has had a psychological breakdown. Long story short, he was talking about… having killed his brother. I don’t know if that’s true or if he’s crazy, but that’s what he’s been talking about.”

Not enough. Cocking his head Loki blinked. “Yes, that’s weird and twisted, but I still don’t know what this has to do with me.”

Loki was walking a dangerous path, this could easily turn out badly for him, but he was curious. He wanted to know if Stark would say it.

“Darling, is it so surprising that I don’t want a guy around you who isn’t mentally stable and who attacked his own friends? No, I don’t want him around you.”

Perfect. “Okay… I see. Was that so hard to say?”

“Sorry, darling… but that’s really the last thing that bothers me now. Not when Bruce is still hanging out in the lion’s den. God, for such a smart guy, he’s bloody stupid. Bloody? Holy shit, I’m starting to sound like you.” Stark tried to lighten the mood, but failed miserably.

Fine, then Loki had to play the nice boyfriend once again. Posing the cue on the table Loki walked over to Stark and softly touched his arm. “He said he was alright, didn’t he?”

“Yes, but he’s probably just saying that so I’ll stay calm and won’t tear down the whole facility… He needs to get out of there, but he’s too fucking loyal to let Thor alone.” Stark hissed the words and Loki squeezed his hands. “Uhm… don’t get me wrong, but… is there anything they could do? To hurt him? He’s… you know. I wouldn’t feel in danger if I were him…”

Stark couldn’t deny that Loki was right, but he still didn’t like it. “Yeah, but this is S.H.I.E.L.D… Crazy spies who are just waiting for an opportunity to come up with some stupid shit like a huge glass cage or special guns only to designed to take out a giant, green rage monster. First they wanted to use him as a weapon and when they realised that they would never be able to control him… they try to kill him. They’ve already tried and he’s sitting there right between these jerks. Just thinking about it makes me want to punch something…”

“I know and he told you that you shouldn’t. I’m sure he can handle himself and if something goes wrong, you can still go there and blow the place up.” A little smile and his fingers brushed Stark’s.

The little touch seemed to instantly pull Stark out of his thoughts and his eyes darted to their hands. There was something soft in his expression, mixed with some confusion. Loki suppressed a scowl when Stark entwined their fingers. He was so fed up with this. “We’re making progress. You’re actually admitting that you’re worried about me. Like a person who gives a shit, I’m so touched.”

Oh, Loki did care, he cared a lot. For the trail of bodies Stark would leave behind when he was going on Loki’s path of revenge. “I didn’t say that I’m worried.”

Behind all that anger, confusion and loathing towards S.H.I.E.L.D Stark still was a little child. There was no other explanation for that stupid grin on his face. “You totally are, because you adore me and that’s totally okay and reasonable. Because you think I’m awesome and you are right about that.”

Loki huffed, but decided to let him see a light at the end of the tunnel. He answered with a shrug and a hoarse laugh. “Okay, maybe… I’d prefer it if you didn’t use every stupid occasion to get into
trouble and risk your life. If you want to call that worry… fine with me.”

*You’re making me sick…*

So there he was. Only a hushed whisper in the background, something Loki definitely didn’t care about. It almost made him laugh. At least he had stopped whining.

“There, I told you so.” Stark more or less pecked him on the lips before he cleared his throat. “Jarvis, the second you can’t track Bruce’s phone anymore, I want all of the suits ready. Any updates on Fury?”

“No, sir. The director hasn’t used his phone in a few hours. I can’t outrule the possibility that they noticed that I was listening to his conversations.”

“Nah, as if any of them could figure this out…” Shaking his head Stark took a deep breath and it seemed that he decided to let it go for tonight. Or at least that he would try to. “Come on, let’s go to the living room.”

“You don’t want to finish the game.”

“I’m not in the mood anymore.”

“And the bet?”

Stark shrugged, but smiled at him. “We’ll call it even. You get your foot massage, but I’ll decide which film we’re going to watch.”

Seemed fair and Loki was pleased with Stark’s concern and how these thoughts wouldn’t leave him alone. “Okay.”

So they ended up on the couch in the living room, Loki’s feet in Stark’s lap and they were watching Indiana Jones. Quite entertaining actually and Loki enjoyed Stark’s fingers on his feet. They felt nice and it kind of made him sleepy. When Stark noticed that his eyes fell closed, he pinched Loki’s toes softly. “Hey, show some respect to Harrison Ford. Not even a British bastard is allowed to fall asleep during an American classic. Also you would have kicked me if I had only yawned during Hamlet.”

“And rightly so…”

Turning his head Stark shot him a smile and… Loki felt his chest tightening. Or was it Thomas’? Stark looked happy. This was just a fleeting moment. A few minutes ago Stark had been yelling, caught between anger and worry and now it all seemed to be so far away. Almost as if it had never happened. Nothing about this fake. Loki could tell, he knew everything about lying and deceiving. The man smiling at him didn’t. He was happy.

Loki blinked and that moment went away, Stark turned back to the TV, his fingers lovingly caressing Loki’s heel. Carefully Loki continued to watch him, almost ready for something, anything to happen. He felt unsettled and his head was getting heavier. No, he wasn’t feeling dizzy, just tired. It had been a long day and an even longer day was waiting for him. Sleep had turned into a regular affair since he had arrived on Midgard. All about it was tiring him out. The people, the air, the lack of magic, absolutely everything. By the end of the week Loki would be leaving though. Far away, some new world, to do whatever he wanted. To finally find some peace.

Yes, he was merely sleepy.
“Sweetling…”

“I thought I made myself clear… I am not fond of that term.”

“My sweet one…”

“Just as bad.”

“My prince…”

“Will you stop it?”

“Loki…”

“Better. Now stop talking.”

“Change…”

“What?”

“I want you to change. Into anyone.”

“I thought you preferred my real face.”

“I do… I just… want to… touch you and find out if it feels different.”

“So touch me, my lord. I am sure you do not mind the brown curls…”

“Let me rephrase that… change into anyone but me…”

“You should have seen your face… Let’s try something else. How about this girl?”

“Your skin is still so soft, but… a bit cooler maybe. It’s hard to tell. Does it feel different to you when I touch you? Like this?”

“It is like… a soft veil over my skin, which is so thin I can feel everything you are doing, I can feel your warmth, even the texture of your skin and still… it is not me you are touching. It is, but it is not. When the veil is gone, it is much more intense, because then it is me and only me you are touching.”

“Change back…”

“You are not giving me orders.”

“I am not giving orders, my prince. I beseech you. Lift the veil or I am not going to kiss you. I do not want to kiss this girl.”

“You make a lousy beggar, but I will grant your wish nevertheless.”

“How generous…”

“Do not mock me, I am your prince.”

“You just told me otherwise.”
Darkness was seeping through the cracks. Like some sort of heavy, black mist that simply engulfed everything. Swallowed sounds and light alike. It was pooling around Loki’s feet, creeping up his legs. But not only his. The bright voice faded away, getting lost in the darkness, just like… why couldn’t Loki see him anymore?

A hand was touching his shoulder or at least Loki thought so. He was lying on a soft surface. Warmth was surrounding him and… it hadn’t been like this just a second ago.

“Tommy? Hey, sleepyhead…” Stark’s voice, so close to his ear.

No. No, it hadn’t been his voice. It had been someone else. The mist was covering him, Loki couldn’t see, but somebody had to be there. He had been talking to Loki and he had to know…

“Come on, Honeybunny… wake up. Couch is no place to sleep…” Stark was talking to him and he was so much closer. Loki only had to open his eyes and he would see him. Behind him there was darkness, the voice was gone and Loki could only make out a silhouette in the shadows. The darkness was cold, freezing and Loki wanted to back away, but this desire to go after the voice was so much stronger. Almost inexplicable, deprived of sense and logic, but Loki had to. He was pulled away. He felt the cushions, Stark’s warmth and his breath on his skin. Pulling him away from this place and Loki screamed. Turning away he started running, right into the darkness and it clouded his eyes. Yet Loki had to see him… her… it. He didn’t know. He couldn’t… remember.

Tony was leaning over him, a gentle smile on his lips, his thumb softly caressing his cheek. “I can’t believe you fell asleep during Indiana Jones… You might be the first person that ever happened to…”

Thomas blinked, he was feeling weary and Tony seemed honestly amused. “You want to go to bed, hmm?”

No, not all. Reaching up Thomas slid his hands around Tony’s neck, pulling him down and kissed him. A surprised sound escaped Tony’s lips, Thomas could physically feel it, but only a second later he gave into the kiss.

The darkness was starting to gnaw on him. It attached itself to Loki’s skin like ice. Freezing, cold and he couldn’t shake it off. Loki’s magic was dying away, he couldn’t reach it, no matter how hard he tried. It became harder and harder to make out the silhouette in this endless, black void. As long as his legs could carry him Loki would try to reach it. He needed to know. He needed to find the pieces.

“Wait a second, hmm?” Tony stilled Thomas’ hands which were slipping underneath his shirt. “What?” Thomas looked at him, slightly confused and his heart was beating so fast, maybe Tony had heard it. Or not, because he would have made a comment about that. This simple thought brought a smile to Thomas’ lips.

“Is everything okay? You had that look on your face when you woke up?” Again Tony looked genuinely concerned and Thomas couldn’t help but laugh. “Seriously? You’re thinking about that now? I was about to show you what I think about going to bed.”

“Well, I can’t argue with you…” The concern was replaced by a smirk and now Tony was kissing him. Lovingly and instead of stopping his hand from touching him Tony guided it further up his
chest. There, much better.

Black. Only black. Not a single bright spot visible. Grey was a colour Loki could only dream of. There was not a glimmer of his magic left and Loki couldn’t find it. It was gone. Whatever it had been.

Tony shifted, his whole body now covering Thomas’ and he nipped at his earlobe. Something so simple, but it caused little shivers that were running down his back. Letting out a soft gasp Thomas let his fingers run up to Tony’s collarbones, savouring the feeling of his warm, soft skin. He didn’t have to do anything else, Tony’s mouth left Thomas’ ear and he quickly stripped off his own shirt, dropping it to the floor. The sheer impatience made Thomas laugh. “Hard to believe there was a time when you didn’t even want to take your shirt off in front of me…”

“What? No. Can’t be me you’re talking about. I love being naked. Especially with you. When you’re also naked. Why do you still have clothes on?” Tony winked at him before he caught his lips in another passionate kiss. It felt so much more intense than…

Loki raised his head, wrapping his arms around himself to feel a little bit of warmth. Nothing. He was falling. The darkness was claiming him and he didn’t know where he was? How had he got here? He needed to leave. Now…

“Tommy” The sound of Tony’s voice filled with lust and want tempted Thomas to simply tear his clothes off. Right now he didn’t even mind that Tony wouldn’t stop violating his name. He would remind him later on. Right now Thomas concentrated on kissing his neck and sliding his hand into his underwear.

Getting back up to his feet Loki squeezed his eyes shut and started pushing. Out. Out. He had to get out. He had to. So he turned around and ran.

Something was wrong. Something was…”Tony…”

“Hey…” Tony brushed his lips over Thomas’ stomach, then meeting his eyes, smiling gently. “Can I hear that again?”

No, because…

Loki’s steps were carrying him out of the darkness and when he couldn’t get instantly back – he pushed, clawed and let his magic run freely, ripping apart every resistance there might have been. The light was blinding him and Loki’s head was spinning. There were too many sensations at once. A second ago he had been freezing and now his whole body seemed overheated. His cheeks had to be red, his skin was so hot and tingling, his heart racing and…

Someone else was pressed against him, a naked body. A warm mouth descended on his and Loki’s hands came up to push the person away. The warmth was seeping into him and it felt wonderful. Suddenly the cold was so far away and Loki took a shaky breath.

“Say it again… come on…” Stark’s mouth brushed over his neck, his hand running up the inside of Loki’s thigh.

What was he talking about? Loki didn’t understand what was going on. His voice left his mouth as a hoarse whisper. “What?”

While laughing softly Stark slid between Loki’s legs and propped himself up on one hand next to Loki’s upper body. “I should have known…” He was lowering his head, pressing a kiss to Loki’s chest and Loki could Stark positioning himself.
There was nothing Loki could do but groan in surprise and tightly grab one of the cushions when Stark’s cock slowly pushed into him. His thoughts were clouded and he couldn’t keep up with what was happening to him and the pleasure mixed with a hint of pain made it impossible to even try to stop what was going on.

Stark’s other hand rested on Loki’s hips, pulling him up slightly, making it easier for him to bottom out. Loki bit his lip, hard and waves of fire were rushing through his body, chasing away the last remains of the ice. The heat was claiming him completely and Loki fell right into it. Willingly.

“Oh… more… please…” He was pleading, but he didn’t care. Sliding an arm around Stark, Loki placed one hand on his back, desperately trying to pull him closer. When Stark got the hint Loki felt an unknown gratefulness. Stark lowered himself back onto him, so their bodies were completely pressed together. Loki could feel his warmth, all over him, inside of him and Loki wanted to drown in it.

“Anything you want, babe… anything you want…” Without waiting another second Stark started rocking into him. Slow and gentle, his entire body was moving with every thrust. They were coming so easily, in a perfect fluid rhythm, one body melting into another. Loki held on to him, gasped and moaned whenever Stark rolled his hips and his eyes fell shut.

That hot mouth brushed his neck and particularly well-placed thrust caused Loki to feel every single fibre of his body. His skin was burning and Loki tilted his head. He wanted, no, needed this mouth on his own. Everything that he could get. “Kiss me… please…”

Stark granted his wish instantly and their lips met in a kiss so passionate and fierce that Loki wondered if the fire had burned the veil away. When it finally consumed them both Stark whispered words into his ear, soft and soothing, but Loki couldn’t make out a single syllable. Whatever he might have said was the last thing on Loki’s mind. Finally he felt warm, all tension had vanished, his muscles were completely relaxed…

Hands were cradling his face, his mouth grazing over Loki’s cheek. Stark still hadn’t stopped whispering and the breathless words were slowly getting through. “… what are you doing to me…?”

Yes, what was he doing to him? Loki didn’t know and he couldn’t think. He was wrapped up in a warm, tight embrace and they just stayed like this. Soft breathing that ghosted over his skin, fingers caressed his skin and somehow it felt familiar.

“I love you… Thomas…”

Slowly Loki remembered what had been going on. Indiana Jones and he had fallen asleep. What had he called him? “So you do know… my name…”

“Don’t get used to it. You mind if we don’t move? Never again.”

“No. Not at…”

Loki never finished his sentence. The sudden bang was deafening, the floor and the walls were slightly vibrating.

“What the…”

“Sir, I fear the tower is under attack.”
Hey everybody,

The tower is under attack and Loki has to fight more than one enemy...

Hope you’ll have fun :D

---

*My intentions never change*
What I want still stays the same
And I know what I should do
It’s time to set myself on fire

*Was it a dream? ~ ~ 30 seconds to mars ~ ~*

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It happened rarely, but this time it was the case. Jarvis was wrong. The tower wasn’t under attack, but the whole city. While jumping up from the couch Stark was already muttering about those S.H.I.E.L.D assholes finally coming after him. All it took was one look out of the window and it was clear that S.H.I.E.L.D had nothing to do with this. Flying robots weren’t their modus operandi.

Unbelievable. He did have some guts, didn’t he? Or the little mage was just lashing out. Death wish? Probably…

Loki slipped into his jeans, letting his underwear lie on the floor. In the meantime Stark was already stumbling out of the room, half dressed.

Trying to stand up Loki quickly found out that he was dizzy and he sank back down onto the couch. No, this was the last thing Loki needed right now. He had a little mage to kill, to rip him apart and to finish this. Sucking in a deep breath Loki stood up and he had already wasted too much time.

Stark was back. As Iron Man. “I’m going to save the city… again. You’ll stay here. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“What? I’m not going to stay here while you’re out there and…”

There was no way to talk to this suit of cheap metal. “Tommy, stop! I gotta go and I can’t do this if I’m worrying about you! This is the safest place in the city, so you’ll stay here!”

Not a chance. Loki wasn’t going to stay here and let the mage have his revenge. Especially not when the little mage was coming after Loki. “I’m not going to…”
Now Stark didn’t even let him finish, just turned around and headed towards the balcony. “Jarvis, complete lock-down. Nobody leaves and nobody gets in.”

Damn you, stupid mortal!

“What?! You are locking me in?!” This was unacceptable! Loki needed to be out there, get rid of the mage for once and for all and… if one of the Avengers got hurt and Loki would miss it because he was locked up here...

“I’m not locking you in, I’m locking the bad guys out! Just stay calm, I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Stark opened the door, stepped out and he took off. Loki rushed after him, but the door fell shut and he couldn’t open it again. Not with Thomas’ hands. “Stark!”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Pine, but Mr. Stark’s instructions were very clear. Please, step back from the windows. It’s not safe.”

Jarvis tried to reason with him, but Loki barely heard him. His heart was racing in his chest, his anger was getting a better hold of him by the second and Loki tried to think of a way out.

Creating a clone and leaving was not possible. Loki had only dared to leave a clone lying in bed, he couldn’t do it when Thomas was supposed to be awake. Even worse though, this was an emergency situation and Loki would bet his life on the fact that Stark had programmed Jarvis to watch out for him. If he… No, not possible.

Loki was stuck. A god stuck in a Midgardian hall, with no way out without giving up his identity. The Avengers were all out there, directly under his nose and Loki couldn’t do anything. If the mage managed to kill one of them, Loki would change his mind about leaving Midgard. He would tear cities down. It was his revenge, it was his right. Loki deserved… he needed it. They were his, he had told the mage so.

Pressing his hands against the glass Loki stared outside and he could see the little spots in the sky. Silver and green. Robots circling and firing at buildings. Fires and smoke.

Images were flashing in Loki’s mind. Reminded him of the invasion he had led. There had never been that many robots. Licking his wounds hadn’t been the only thing the mage had been doing. No, he had created an army and he had unleashed it. Without any banter beforehand. Somebody who was learning from his mistakes.

Where was the sense in that?

It had begun with the Avengers, but then he had concentrated on Loki. A logical choice, since Loki had been screwing up his plans. Also Loki was a bigger threat, he had known where to find the mage and what he could do. Why would he now go for such a big attack? He was a magic user, he wasn’t completely stupid. Loki’s presence was still a potential danger and the mage simply had to know that there was no way for reconciliation.

William had disappeared and the mage had only ever seen this glamour. Therefore he had no idea where to find Loki. Was he searching for him? Was this the intention behind this attack? To seek Loki out?

The sudden, sharp pain rushed through him, but disappeared as quickly as it had come. Stop thinking about yourself! Where is Tony?

Loki groaned softly and ran a hand through his hair. This was the last thing he needed. He was busy trying to figure this stuff out, while Thomas was shouting at him. That worthless creation...
should better keep his mouth shut. He had already had his fun.

“Mr. Pine, please. Step away from the windows. It’s not safe.”

“Where is Stark?” Loki couldn’t see him. Robots firing, roofs burning, but no Iron Man.

“He is fighting off some robots which are attacking an apartment building.”

Of course, saving the average people instead of some businessmen. Before he opened his mouth
Loki already knew that it was useless. He couldn’t argue with a computer. He was Loki
Silvertongue. There was nothing he couldn’t make a person believe in if Loki used the right words,
but he couldn’t do this with a machine. Yet Loki would try.

“Jarvis, I need to get out of here. I need to know if he’s okay.”

The response came instantly and although Jarvis didn't have emotions he sounded strangely
empathetic. “I am sorry, Mr. Pine, but I have strict orders to not let you leave the penthouse. Sir is
very concerned about your safety.”

To hell with his worries about Loki’s safety! There was a good chance that an Avenger was going
to die, because Loki could not leave this penthouse! Thor wouldn’t come to help them and Loki
wasn’t too sure about the Hulk either.

Out.

It would be so easy to just… his magic was tempting him. The blink of an eye and he could be
gone.

Then leave! Help him!

Loki snarled at this pathetic whining and pushed him back. Or he tried to. A feeling of dread began
to overshadow his anger. Such a thing did not happen. Not in such a short amount of time. While
reaching out for him Loki’s hands grabbed nothing. It had been so easy to lock him away. Yes,
Thomas had wriggled back out, but Loki had silenced him for days or hours. Now he didn’t back
off, didn’t even stumble.

How?

Just go and…

A growl escaped Loki’s lips and his anger was burning so hotly that he didn’t hear whatever
Thomas was shouting at him. It was so hard to think when this obnoxious voice was ringing in his
ears.

There was a solution to this. Loki had cheated death. Loki had escaped from the void and the
darkness. Not a thing that he wasn’t capable of doing. It was about time Loki organized his
thoughts. Leaving wasn’t an option. Even if he could get out, he would still have to stick to
Thomas’ form. Whatever Loki was going to do, he had to do it here.

His game wasn’t going to end like this. Loki would never accept this outcome after all the work he
had put into this. Perfect schemes deserved a marvellous ending. Or Loki’s thirst would never be
quenched. They had to feel his pain or at least some of it. That throbbing, hot ache which numbed
all of your senses and stopped you from enjoying the things you loved.

Stark…
Loki felt his whole body tensing up. What if he was going to die now? What if he was not able to stand his ground against the sheer number of robots that filled the dark sky? The picture was clear as day and it sparked Loki’s desire to tear down these walls. That man who had dared to mock him without knowing who he was. That man lacking respect and decency. This worthless Midgardian would happily take his last breath.

Having just spent a close and beautiful moment with the person he loved. Dying while saving innocent people. Doing something good. Being a martyr. Everything he had always longed for.

There was no suffering in that.

It would be a good death.

The realisation was overwhelming and his very core took a hold of him. Loki’s magic was welling up, running through his veins, pooling at his fingertips and it wanted to be released. Fire was burning beneath Loki’s skin and the thought about how good it would feel to set everything ablaze was starting to dominate him.

That damned, tiny Midgardian amateur wouldn’t take this away from him.

*Then save him! Go out and help him!*

All at once Loki jerked back, unable to hold back a yelp of pain. As if something had stabbed him from the inside. With a knife forged of fire. Pulling it out of the wound only increased the ache.

Trying to even out his breathing Loki stared at the floor, waiting for the pain to subside. It was too intense to try to think about where it had come from.

An unasked question that was answered a mere second later and Loki finally understood what was happening to him.

*Do something! You have the power to protect him, so do it!*

“Shut up!” Two words that slipped past Loki’s lips before he could bit his tongue. Hushed, almost silent, but loud enough for those ears that simply heard everything.

“Are you feeling alright, Mr. Pine?”

The pain resurfaced with greater force than before and Loki fell. Agony and vertigo mingled together, claiming him and it felt like crashing to the floor. His was still standing though. Loki’s control over his body was gone. He didn’t even feel it anymore.

“No, I am not fine!” That wasn’t his voice and it wasn’t Loki speaking. “Tell me where he is! I want to see him! There must be a way to see him! A camera from one of the other suits! Anything!”

It still hurt and Thomas was yelling.

“I think that can be arranged, Mr. Pine.”

No! This wasn’t him! He wasn’t even real and he had no right! It was Loki’s body and he wasn’t going to let Thomas do with it whatever he wanted. Thomas had hurt him and Loki would do the same. Only it would be so much worse. A mere mortal wasn’t going to stand up to Loki’s hatred that only waited to devour him.
“Oh my god… there are so fucking many of them! He is all alone! Where are the other ones?!”

Loki could hear his voice and by now he might be looking forward to Thomas’ death as much as to Thor’s. Magic. It was important that he concentrated on that. His identity, his power. It should have ever come this far, but here they were and Loki was going to deal it with. He was going to take it back and tear Thomas into shreds.

“Good lord… he’s…”

There was no holding back. Only hatred and unlimited desire. Loki clawed at him, wrapped his hands around that fragile throat and he squeezed, showing no mercy. The resistance was astonishing. Thomas was fighting back lividly, driven by fear. It only angered Loki even more that Thomas wasn’t scared of him. The mortal was shaken up, overwhelmed by fear and it had nothing to do with Loki.

It was all about Stark.

No matter how big Thomas’ concern was, it couldn’t live up to Loki’s sheer endless hatred. Loki felt a little crack and he slipped right through it. Back into his skin, beneath the veil and Thomas was screaming.

Enough.

This was Loki’s game and he was winning. Nobody was going to take it away from him. Especially not his own creation which was holding on to emotions that weren’t even real.

Blinking Loki took in his surroundings. Jarvis had activated a screen right across the room. There was Iron Man, flying around said apartment block, fighting robots left and right and Thomas was right – he was alone.

The attack affected the entire city, Captain America was probably fighting at some other place, alongside S.H.I.E.L.D. Thor wasn’t going to show up, Loki had taken care of that. Too bad for them, he would have been very useful.

This wasn’t going to work out. They weren’t going to work together or even worse, the severeness of the situation would force them to. No, Loki was making the rules and this would play out the way he wanted it to.

The mage couldn’t possibly think that he would win this fight. Yes, there was a possibility that he could hurt or even kill one of the Avengers, but not all of them. If this was even his intention…

What had happened every time now that he had tried to do some damage with his miserable creations? Loki had stepped in and destroyed his plans. Was this what this was all about? Finding Loki?

Of course it was. The protection spell made it impossible to locate him and the mage had chosen a rather drastic way to attract his attention. It was working.

*So do something*...

The whisper was so weak and faint that Loki didn’t even listen to it. He was considering his options. It would be only too easy to make himself noticeable, but what would that accomplish? Focus all the attention on the tower? Loki would have to defend himself and he’d be discovered.

There was always the possibility of talking the mage out of it. Loki didn’t doubt his skills, but such
a task needed time and he was absolutely limited… How could he even get a message out without Jarvis noticing that he wasn’t human?

Damn Stark for locking him in here!

With Thomas…

*If he gets hurt…*

Loki just wasn’t able to shut him up, but he needed to think. There was still the possibility to send magic out, letting the mage know where he was. This would require a lot of energy and there was a good chance Jarvis would register it. If there only were a distraction…

An idea blossomed in Loki’s mind. Unfortunately he had to put some trust in the mage’s capabilities. He had found him before, but that had been William. Then again, he should be able to register traces of magic easier than Jarvis. It was a risk, but Loki wouldn’t wait until one the Avengers got hurt or killed and he wouldn’t be there to witness it.

Closing his eyes Loki talked to his magic, letting it sing. Ever so softly, not doing anything, letting it flow without any target or purpose. Right now he didn’t dare to do anything more, but if the mage knew anything, he would come to him.

An attack on the tower would bring Stark instantly back here and S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn’t want to miss the show either. There would be chaos and Loki thrived in chaos, it allowed him to do whatever he wanted. Hopefully.

Walking back to the windows, ignoring Jarvis’ complaint, Loki’s eyes searched the sky. He watched the robots bringing destruction and then there it was. One of the metallic creatures changed its flight direction abruptly, heading for the tower and Loki suppressed the smirk that desperately wanted to spread on his face.

Instead he took a few steps from the windows and let horror take a hold of Thomas’ features.

“Jarvis…”

“Mr. Pine, please go to the back of the room. Instantly.”

Loki followed these instructions, but kept his eyes on the windows and one second later hell broke loose. How Loki relished it.

Three robots rushed towards the panorama windows, firing at once and the floor vibrated beneath Loki’s feet from the force of the blasts. The penthouse turned out to be different from the lower floors though – the window didn’t give in. Not immediately. They withstood about three blast, then shards of glass were flying everywhere across the room and Loki covered the face he loathed with his hands.

Time for his hero in a metallic armour to show up, but Loki didn’t wait. That wasn’t in his nature, not during a battle. The bracelet felt cool against his warm skin and Loki didn’t hesitate to press his thumb against the spot Stark had shown him. He wasn’t faking a panic, now that would be unworthy of Thomas. Still he was only mortal and that was a good enough reason to crouch on the floor behind the couch.

It depended all of the next five seconds. Stark better didn’t disappoint him.

The sound these robots produced while flying filled the room and the mage had to know it was him, because there was no firing. Raising his head Loki stared at a single one of these creations,
walking around the couch and just looking at him for a second.

If Stark let him down now…

The robot raised his hand and Loki’s scheme turned to dust. He gathered his magic to defend himself when the mage’s creation seemed to be torn apart from the inside. Shreds of metal went everywhere, turning into deadly bullets and ripping holes through the walls with the sheer force of the impact. Thomas would be dead if it wasn’t for the iron shield that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

Loki’s ears were ringing from the explosion, but his highly trained senses didn’t let him down. Just like Stark.

An Iron Man suit was crouching over Loki, covering his body from being hit by the remains of the robot another suit had just blown apart.

“Jarvis…” He was careful to let his voice appear a little shaky. Why did Loki always have to act afraid when he was having fun?

“Just stay with me, Mr. Pine.” The suit replied with Jarvis’ voice and Loki nodded. Within seconds the silence had vanished, replaced by the sounds of a battlefield. Unable to resist Loki raised his head, peeking over the edge of the couch. His magic started to hum contently and the joyful feeling of satisfaction spread all over his body. The fight was one big blur of green and red. Through the broken windows Loki could see more robots approaching, but five Iron Man suits operated by Jarvis were already waiting for them inside the penthouse.

So Stark was willingly jeopardizing human lives to save a single one.

*Every robot is heading here now… don’t think too highly of yourself…*

Thomas was such a spoilsport, but Loki quickly dismissed of him anyway. He rather marvelled at the scene in front of him. Midgardian technology destroying itself… and the penthouse. The thought of all of his books being one level lower was quite relieving.

Stark’s suits were occupied fighting the robots which were already in the penthouse when three new ones blasted through the only window that hadn’t been destroyed yet. They didn’t even hesitate for a second and knew exactly what they were here for. Three blasts of green energy were fired into Loki’s direction. Loki was grabbed by the suit designed to protect him and more or less tossed to the side. A shard of metal on the floor cut into Loki’s skin and he instantly concentrated on suppressing his natural healing. A series of loud bangs threatened to deafen him and how much Loki despised this style of fighting. Nothing was more dangerous than a soundless killer who had made an art out of using his weapons.

This was just brutal and barbaric.

Out of a sudden another robot entered Loki’s field of vision, firing at him and the Jarvis’ controlled suit jumped in, taking the blast for him.

A flash of red crossed the room. Not an ordinary suit. Iron Man himself wrapped a hand around the robot’s neck, activating his repulsors, blasting its head off. An act of pure savagery, but Loki appreciated it. As soon as the headless robot dropped motionlessly to the floor Iron Man was on his knees next to Loki. “Tommy, you’re okay?”

Stark’s voice came out of this metal suit and for a moment Loki respected him for his passion.
“Yeah… I think so…”

“Listen, you can’t leave. We’ve got a security breach on the lower floors. I want you to get into the bedroom and Jarvis will stay with you. Now.”

“No, you can’t…”

“Tommy, do it! For once just listen! There’s a Hulk going to show up!”

Fine, Loki would play along. He would need to end this whole thing pretty soon. All he needed was… Later. Loki stumbled to his feet and made his way down the hall, the suit to protect him right by his side. Security breach. Most probably S.H.I.E.L.D. Of course they would jump at this opportunity.

The bedroom was indeed still untouched from the fight and Loki pretended to be worked up, concerned, afraid. His only reason to pace up and down was way simpler. He was waiting. Waiting for…

Minutes passed and the sound of the fighting stayed all the same until… A loud roar and the floor was shaking. There he was.

A perfect time for Thomas to crack under pressure. “I can’t… I need to…” Loki ripped the door opened and stormed outside, not listening to Jarvis behind him. Just in front of him exactly what he needed. The metallic figure moved to attack him, but the suit jumped in between them.

Perfect

There was so much going on, way too much. Even Loki was having trouble to keep up with it. Screams, explosions and rapid fire. A blast of energy was fired, filled the hall with bright light and a robot limb scattered across the floor towards Loki. He could feel the magic still attached to it, reaching for him and Loki answered. Crouching down Loki picked it up and he felt the connection beneath his fingers.

Closing his eyes Loki followed its lead.

The trace it had left was obvious, not far away. Across a few hills, forests… and…

Loki knew where he was.

\textit{You won't get the fight you're craving for here. I will just wait and watch how they destroy your little toys and when they are done I will seek you out and finish this. That's what you want? That I just wait this out and walk over your cold, dead body? Or we could settle this like men. I know where you are and I will come to you. I leave my toys at home and you yours. Then we will see what you really have to offer…}

Breaking the connection Loki pulled back and looked at the combat taking place in front of him. By now the suit had taken quite a lot of damage, but was still able to discard of the robot.

Then there was silence. More unsettling than everything that happened before. Loki was listening and Thomas was screaming. “Tony!”

Damn you, mortal. Fine, Loki would play along. He started running back towards the main room, past rubble, destroyed robots and suits. Past a corner Thomas had to stop dead in his tracks. Oh, this little attack turned out to be a blessing.
Three men were standing in front of him, unmistakable agents. Like vermin. Their fighting gear still looked impeccable, they have clearly been avoiding the action. Obviously they were here for something else, just trying to use the distraction to infiltrate the tower and steal some from Stark’s secrets.

Instantly their eyes were fixed on Thomas and there was no surprise visible. No questions asked, they knew who he was and they had expected to find him here. At least they were briefed.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Thomas may be scared of robots which could fly and tried to kill him, but he wouldn’t back down in front of some arseholes. Especially when he could see in their eyes that they weren’t taking him seriously, patronizing him even. “Mr. Pine, we’re here to help. Would you please step back, it’s not safe…”

“Fuck you, this is my home, you don’t tell me to step back!”

“Would you…” The agent reached out to touch him and Loki jerked back. “Don’t you even dare to touch me! You’re S.H.I.E.L.D and you’re not here to help! Get the fuck out!”

Of course, they weren’t going to listen to him. Who was he anyway? An unarmed civilian.

The tallest of them just looked at him with grey, inexpressive eyes. Loki knew the gaze of a killer when he saw one. Interesting, so Fury had sent some mere tool. “Sir, it would be in your best interest to step back. It’s dangerous here.”

A threat for the cameras, Loki didn’t need anything else from them. Except for the motive for a murder.

Raising his right arm Loki used his left hand to active the bracelet. Not very subtle, but he had stopped expecting intelligence from S.H.I.E.L.D agents a long time ago. Jarvis didn’t miss a beat. Loki’s bodyguard shot around the corner, both arms stretched out, the repulsors aiming at the agents. An imposing presence and Loki didn’t miss their wince. What? Had they expected that all of the suits would be busy fighting off the robots? Stark loved him, he wouldn’t leave him unprotected.

“Gentlemen, I advice you to leave the tower this very second. Get any closer to Mr. Pine and I will open fire.”

Yes, please. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? If just one of them ended up dead, there would be war. Right now they were merely standing there, frozen to a spot, considering their options. Tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Naturally the Widow had to show up and ruin everything. Or could she make it even better?

She was in a horrible state and Loki’s lips were itching to form a smile. Her hair was a mess, but that was the least of her problems. A large cut covered her cheek and it would leave an ugly scar. Or it would have, she wouldn’t live long enough to ever see it. The holes and slits in her outfit couldn’t be overlooked, but there was no bigger wound visible. That didn’t meant Loki couldn’t see it. The way she moved and how she held herself upright did tell him everything he needed to know.

Yes, her resistance to pain was remarkable. Whenever she took a step Loki could see how she tensed and tried to play it down. Without a doubt she was in immense pain, probably internal bleeding. Good chance that she was going to pass out. Highly amusing as long as she wasn’t going
to die.

“Jarvis…” Her voice was strained, but it betrayed how bad it really was. “It’s me. The robots are gone, you know that. Please, let’s all calm down.”

Since when was she talking with Jarvis as if he was a real person? As if there was a point in reasoning with him.

“I’m sorry, agent Romanoff, but my main assignment is to ensure Mr. Pine’s wellbeing. Your fellow agents presented themselves as potential threats. This is the last warning, gentlemen. Leave this tower.”

“This is not an option as long…” The agent’s words were cut off by the energy blast that hit the wall right next to him. All three jumped to the side and their high training was finally visible, their guns were out in no time. They weren’t aiming at Jarvis, because he hadn’t been the one firing at them.

A hall was limited space anyway, now it was even tighter.

Having placed himself between Loki and the agents Stark shielded him, his hand still in the perfect position to release another blast of energy. His cold words would have sent a shiver down Loki’s spine if they weren’t exactly what he wanted to hear. “Next time I’m not going for the wall. Out. Now. All of you. I still have ten suits ready to blow you away. Leave my tower and if I see one of you looking at him for a single second, you’ll get the same treatment as the robot that’s lying in my living room. It’s missing a head.”
The Guilt

Chapter Notes

Hey everybody,

Tony and Bruce have a little talk about a certain Asgardian god and it's not Thor...

Have fun ;)

_________________________________________________

Do you really want?
Do you really want me?
Do you really want me dead or alive to torture for my sins?

Hurricane ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

“Do you really think this is a good idea?”

“Don’t try me.” Not another word was added and Loki watched the Widow’s face closely. Still doing a remarkable job of hiding the pain, but she had already made her choice. She was too smart to provoke him even more, especially when there was no way she was going to be able to get involved in another fight. Knowing about her situation and about Stark’s rage and willingness to break bones, she decided to step back. Her eyes made it clear though that she was already planning ahead, how to make up for this failure. “Come on, boys. We’re out of here.”

Loki let out a rattled breath and Stark didn’t move an inch. The Widow sent him another glance, cold and calculating, then she turned around, leaving. The agents followed her only too willingly.

“Oh, if you meet Cap on your way out… take him with you. Every person who is still in this tower in three minutes is going to lose a limb.”

The second Stark thought they were too far away to hear him anymore he spoke up again. “Jarvis, I want a scan of the entire system. All video feed of these fuckers. If they touched anything, I want to know. I need the Iron Legion to secure all entrances until I have a new security protocol installed.”

“Already on it, sir.”

Stark turned around, facing him and just stepped out of his armour. Loki had never seen this before. It didn’t fall apart, but kept standing there like one of the suits Jarvis was controlling. Neat trick. Not the thing Loki should pay attention to. Stark’s face was almost as red as his suit, the strain clearly visible and his eyes shining beautifully with worry. Instantly his hands were on Loki’s cheeks. “Are you okay? Are you alright?”
Quickly nodding Loki breathed a single “Yeah…” making it sound like he was still feeling the tension. Still too wrapped up in what had just happened to shake off the fear.

“Fuck, thank god.” Almost aggressively Stark pressed his mouth to Loki’s, then not doing anything, just breathing against his mouth. Stark was shaking and Loki swore he could hear his heart beating. Never had that body felt more alive against his own. It was vibrating, the tension slowly slipping out and Loki could feel all of it. So many emotions all mingled into one, relief, love, dread, anger and Stark didn’t care about anything else than Thomas’ safety. It was all about him.

The sudden rush his weariness simply overwhelmed Loki and Thomas wrapped his arms tightly around Stark’s shoulders. “You’re fine? It is over?”

“Yeah… they’re gone… Come on, we gotta patch you up.” Sliding an arm around Thomas’ waist Stark pulled him along, but Loki when was taking back control he almost stumbled.

“Hey, it’s okay. I’ve got you.”

They made their way back to the living room and the scene in front of him made Loki stop dead in his tracks. There wasn’t much left of the main room. Not one of the windows was still intact, the walls were littered with holes, black with soot and the furniture wasn’t recognizable as such anymore.

All things Loki didn’t care about. What he did care about was Doctor Banner sitting on what was left of the couch, wrapped up in a blanket. He looked shaken up, naturally. Loki wondered why Stark would bring him back here if the room was such a disaster. Maybe Banner was the reason. Loki didn’t have the time to rack his brains, not when he was supposed to be in a semi-state of shock.

“Sit down, Tommy…” Stark softly pushed him down on a still intact stool and let his fingers run down his arm. Right towards the long cut that desperately wanted to heal on its own, but Loki wouldn’t allow it. Ever so gently Stark put both hands on Loki’s arm, examining the wound. “This is going to need stitches… I would do it myself, but… Bruce is better at that kind of stuff than me.”

“I could just go to a medical doctor…”

“Bruce is just as good and nobody is leaving the tower until I’m not sure that it’s safe. Especially not you. Fuck, I’m so sorry… I should have left a bigger security at home and…”

Loki shook his head, making a weak attempt at a smile. “You couldn’t know and I’m okay… what happened?”

“I have no fucking clue. First they were all over the town, attacking buildings and people randomly and then they just turned all towards the tower. Ten minutes later they fuck off… but by then S.H.I.E.L.D was already all over the place. Except for Cap… he was probably still busy clearing a hospital or… what do I know. No idea where Barton is. I gotta make sure that the tower is clear…” Sighing Stark leaned down and pressed a kiss to Loki’s forehead before turning around.

“Bruce… how are you doing?”

The response was hoarse, but firm. “Yeah… I just need some proper clothes and then… I’ll help you with everything going on.”

“Could you take a look at Tommy’s arm?”
“It’s not that important…”

“It is. Close your mouth and let him help you. I have to go through the security protocols…”

This time Loki only nodded in silence and a few minutes later a fully clothed Banner was treating his wound. “You were pretty lucky.”

Again Loki smiled weakly. “Yes… It’s nice to see you again though. You’ve been gone for a while.”

Banner’s eyes hadn’t changed a bit. They were still filled with sorrow, constant worry and that lovely self-loathing. Now they were looking at Loki and his throat was constricting. Something about this was wrong and Loki couldn’t quite grasp it.

“I know. I’m not even sure I should be here right now, but I can’t leave Tony alone with this chaos… also you’re hurt. Tony would kill me if I didn’t take care of your cut properly…” Banner smiled softly at him, but it quickly faded away.

“He’s very worried… me too if I’m honest. About you. I don’t mind you being here. After what happened today I’d feel better about you being here than… where you spent the last couple of days.”

Now Banner was really careful to not look at him. “After what happened here today you really don’t want me around. Half of the damage wasn’t done by the robots but by me.”

“I’m not talking about that… Those agents weren’t here to help to fight off some robots. They were here to either steal from Tony or… I don’t know. Some shady business. You shouldn’t be at their headquarters all the time. We don’t trust them.”

Banner was about to answer, but he was cut off by Stark who waltzed back into the main room, carrying a laptop. “Listen to him, Bruce. He knows what he’s talking about. Security is looking good by the way. Whatever they wanted to do, they didn’t have the time to do it. I’ve already made a few calls, in a couple of hours the tower is going to be under construction. I need some fucking new windows… also we should probably move this party to lower levels.”

Not being done with Loki’s ridiculous wound Banner didn’t move. “Do you think it’s even safe to stay at the tower? The penthouse is trashed and there is no guarantee that whoever did this won’t do it again. Maybe they were just trying to check out how much force they’d need to take down the tower.”

Loki’s gaze darkened. “You think they’re coming back?”

Stark determinedly shook his head. “Nope, because I’m not making the same mistake again. I got distracted by these fucking S.H.I.E.L.D assholes when I should have been searching for that jerk who’s building robots… I am going to do that right now… before that we move to the lower levels and although I love seeing you half naked… you’re going to catch a cold, darling.”

Looking down at himself Loki realised that he was only wearing his jeans. He had completely forgotten about that.

“Don’t worry, Tony. I’m done. For once he’s right though. You should put something on, without the windows it’s getting really cold inside here.” Banner stood up and Stark was instantly there to hand Loki a sweater.

“Thank you…” After Loki had quickly slipped the piece of garment over his head Stark grabbed
his hand and pulled him up on his feet. “You’re sure you are okay?”

Slowly nodding Loki Let out a sigh. “Yes, but I’d be glad if something like that never happens again… that would be wonderful.”

Stark’s hands were back on his head, cradling his face. There it was. Just like before. More pain than he had ever seen in Stark’s expression and beneath that was pure determination. “Listen, you remember what I’ve said some time ago? You are my number 1 priority. I promise something like that is never going to happen again.” His fingers carefully brushed over Loki’s bandaged arm. “I know you don’t need a knight or an Iron Man to take care of you, but I promise anyway…”

“I don’t blame you. I don’t… quite the opposite. It was quite nice to have a knight in iron armour to save my arse. I’m also glad that you are alright…”

Kissing him softly Stark pulled him close and just held him for a few seconds. So happy that he still had him and no idea how close he was to actually losing him.

“I guess I should be leaving now…” Banner’s voice made Stark let go of Loki, turning around immediately. “What? Forget about that! You’re staying here! You’re finally out of there, no way you’re leaving… and we’re not going to have this conversation in this clusterfuck that used to be my living room. Come on…”

Grabbing Loki’s hand Stark pulled him along and Banner was following them, looking like a beat-up dog. They used the elevator to get to a lower floor. During the short right Loki found his lack of unease surprising. Being in such a tight space with Banner should at least make him nervous, but nothing. As soon as the doors opened Stark pressed a little kiss to his temple. “You want to go to sleep? I think you should lie down… I’ll have Jarvis…”

“Oh no. Forget it. I want to know what’s going on. What’s going to happen now and what the fuck did happen… No, I’m not going to bed.”

Stark knew him well enough to not start arguing with him. Instead he turned to Bruce. “I’m telling you this as your friend. You’re not going back to these idiots. I need you here to find the person who is responsible for this…”

“You know what S.H.I.E.L.D did?” Stark spat and his eyes were flashing. A constant battle between worry and rage. “Dozens of robots are blowing holes into my tower and the first thing that comes to their mind is to take advantage of the opportunity to sneak in and sabotage me! Who the fuck knows that they planned on doing!? They walked in here and threatened Tommy because he caught them! That’s what’s going on! Natasha is standing right next to them and doesn’t give a shit! Yes, sorry, I know you like her, but she’s part of that too! She knows a nice lullaby to calm down the Hulk, otherwise I would have thrown her out the second she showed up! I think it is a fucking stupid idea to go back there!”

Loki carefully watched Banner’s face, looking for an answer that he still refused to give. There was so much buried underneath this shell, that armour he had built around himself. So much thicker than any suit of iron Stark could ever create.

“I know, Tony.”

Out of a sudden Stark’s anger seemed to disappear, making place for confusion. “If you know why are you even considering going back?”
Sighing softly Banner sat down and the way he moved made it seem like he was carrying a large rock on his back. “… I was there and I was watching Thor. I’m not a psychologist, but I doubt he will be coming back from this… whatever it is. You didn’t hear what he said, Tony. He’s hardly talking, but when Jane Foster showed up… There is something shady about all of this. Again he talked about Loki and… I can’t stop thinking… maybe we’ve made a mistake back then.”

Loki’s hands started to tremble and he quickly clenched them into fists. What was going on? He didn’t expect Stark to be willing to listen to this. “What are you talking about? Getting in bed with S.H.I.E.L.D? Yeah, that was a fucking mistake!”

Shaking his head in frustration Banner let his eyes slide closed. He looked like he desperately needed to sleep. “After the battle of New York… maybe we shouldn’t have turned Loki over to Asgard immediately. Put that muzzle on him and toss him towards Thor… I’ve come to think that we shouldn’t have done that.”

Stark was running both hands through his hair, almost as if he wanted to pull it out. “I don’t have time for this… Fine, I bite! What the hell makes you think that we shouldn’t have pushed the maniac god of destruction off the edge of the world? Why?”

Opening his eyes again Banner took a little breath. “Look, I’m not basing this on anything, but… I’m convinced that Thor means everything he’s saying. Unfortunately he is incredibly vague, but… from what I’ve heard… Loki went through some tough stuff. I don’t know what, Thor only called it suffering. He said that he was getting better, that he started to smile again… Maybe I’m reading too much into this, but it sounded like…”

Loki took a step closer, his eyes glued to Banner’s lips, wanting to not miss a single word and then Banner just stopped. “I dunno…”

Say it. I need to know…

For the first time in… centuries Loki’s tongue betrayed him. It started talking without his permission, choosing his words without care. “What? It sounded like what?”

Out of the corner of his eyes Loki saw Stark turning to him, but he didn’t care.

Suffering…

Just the thought of this word was making the edges burning. Throbbing, aching, painfully reminding him that there were pieces missing. Gone, brutally cut out and they weren’t healing. Thor had whatever was missing and if Banner had stumbled over a piece, Loki would gladly take it. He just wanted his mind to be whole again. To leave the darkness behind him.

Banner wasn’t answering and Loki needed it. “Tell us what you think… you made it sound important.”

What would Loki give for the sceptre… to just walk up to him and Thor to take from them was he was missing so desperately.

Finally Banner started to talk again. “Okay… like I said… based on nothing but my intuition… A person who doesn’t smile, whose eyes don’t shine anymore and who is suffering… It sounds suspiciously like someone suffering from depression.”

What a disappointment. Had Loki really expected something that could help him understand?

“So? Pepper told me hundreds of times that I’m suffering from depression! Did I invade another
planet? Believe me, I could have if I had wanted to!"

“Tony… could you please shut up and let me get to the point.” Loki was surprised to hear Banner snarl, he almost seemed annoyed by Stark’s impatience and demeanour. “Thor said that Loki was getting better and then it was him who pushed him into darkness. We all have never met Loki, somebody else came back from the darkness. Again… it could mean everything… real darkness… a metaphor… but I remembered how quick Thor was to point out that Loki was adopted…”

There was nothing. Nothing but that word. Over and over again. Loki thought that the vertigo might come over him and this time it would have nothing to do with Thomas. So pathetic and weak. How could Loki still feel affected by this? There had only ever been betrayal. Threats. Hatred. Why should he be surprised by this? That Thor would take this one thing and use it against him.

Flesh and blood…

Monsters… hunt them down and slay them all… like a good Asgardian king would do…

“I think that there’s a possibility that we’re missing the big picture and that… Thor was a shitty brother…”

“And what does all of that have to do with anything that we’re dealing with?” Stark was seriously losing his patience.

Banner didn’t bother, continuing to talk at that even pace. His eyes meeting Stark’s. “We didn’t ask a single question. I know when shit was going down there was no time, we had to deal with an alien invasion, you with that atomic bomb… I get it, but afterwards… we put him in his chains, put a muzzle over his mouth and that was it. Thor said he was beyond reason. Why? How do Asgardians even define madness? Or why would Loki even choose earth… considering what Thor said… about his brother being a different person… we did nothing to clear this affaire up. We were just glad that we were done with it.”

“I still don’t see where you’re going with this. Fuck the guy who wanted to enslave mankind. I don’t care about what made him do it! It doesn’t fucking matter.”

Not once had Loki thought that somebody would be having this conversation and he definitely didn’t expect that somebody would be defending him. With that cold expression on his face. “Then it also doesn’t matter what made me destroy half of Harlem…”

Stark flung his hands up. “What?! There is no way you can compare the Hulk to Loki!”

“We don’t know that! Look at Thor. Look at all these things we’ve encountered. I’m not saying that Loki was innocent, but I believe Thor that something happened to him and nobody bothered to look into this…”

Clearly frustrated Star huffed. “Bruce? For the last time… where are you going with this?”

“We sent Loki back and Thor says that Loki died for him a second time. Because of him and he is completely guilt ridden over that… You know Thor. Loud, cheerful, he always finds a reason to party, constantly laughing… Now he is staring at a wall the whole day. Almost apathetic. The only words that come out of his mouth are… about how much he failed Loki. When it happened for the first time… he attacked us, because he was hallucinating he was protecting Loki. He’s in a weak, vulnerable state… that could be easily manipulated. There now. Are you content now?”

So the conversation was again all about Thor. Not a surprise and still Loki wanted to tear down an
entire wall.

While he was busy trying to keep his anger in check Stark was going through the exact opposite. The features of his face seemed to relax, he was blinking and it was so obvious when it finally dawned on him. “Why the whole fucking speech about Loki when you just could have said that you want to stay around because you think S.H.I.E.L.D might take advantage of Thor’s state…”

“Because Thor is suffering from what happened to his brother and somebody should acknowledge that…”

Pinching the bridge of his nose Stark took a deep breath. “Bruce… I have a lot of things to take care of immediately. I need to turn the tower into a fortress and create a diversionary tactic that makes them think we’re at another one of my houses. Most importantly I need to find the asshole who unleashed the robots. I could really need your help with that. Thor is a god and I’m sorry if he’s… I’m sure he can take care of himself, but I need you here and I don’t want you to go there, because you’re putting yourself in danger.”

Silence. Loki could hear them breathe and he felt the tension although the outcome of this conversation didn’t matter all that much. Not for him.

Finally Banner stood up, clearly having come to a decision. “I’m sorry, Tony… but I feel like I should be there…”

Against Loki’s expectations Stark just nodded. “I see… Okay, I respect that. Just make sure you’ll get out of there if you think something might be up… and stay away from Romanoff…”

Banner almost smiled before giving Stark a short hug. “When you know who is responsible for this… call me, I’ll be gladly helping you to take care of it.”

Loki felt the urge to laugh, but he remained silent. The little mage wouldn’t be a problem anymore after tonight.

They were left alone and they both had a busy night before them. Loki needed Stark’s help though. So he turned to him, nagging on his lower lip. Humiliating himself by looking weak and worried. “Anything I can do to help you?”

“Actually…” Putting an arm around his shoulders Stark pulled him close and brushed his lips over Loki’s cheek. “You’d help me a lot if you went to bed. Get some sleep. It’s safe, I promise. You must be tired…”

“Don’t give me that. You just want to get rid of me.”

“A little bit… but I want you to be okay. It has been a long day even before we had killer robots on our asses. Just try to get some sleep…”

It was exactly what Loki wanted to hear, although his face told Stark something else. “Fine… I’ll try… no guarantee though…” Loki thought about just turning around and leaving, but he couldn’t. Thomas would be breathing out his life during the next two days, until then he could be nice to Stark. Reaching out he softly took a hold of Stark’s hand. “Whatever you do… just be careful, please.”

In response Stark only smiled at him, then pressed a little kiss to the corner of his mouth. He was dying to get into his lab and to find out who had been attacking them. Loki would let him go there, but there would be nothing left to fight.
Stark kissed him again before gently pushing him towards the door to leave the room. Giving him a soft smile Loki left, heading for the bedroom of this floor. Stripping off his clothes Loki let them lie on the floor and slipped under covers. His back was to the door and the blanket up to his shoulders.

The risk he was going to take was considerable and he wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t absolutely necessary, but the little mage forced him to and Loki had made a promise. Luckily the night was still young and Stark desperately wanted to destroy whoever had dared to aim a weapon at his boyfriend. He definitely would be busy for the next couple of hours. By then Loki would be back.

He had done this before. Creating an illusion and slipping into invisibility at the same time. Standing next to the bed Loki watched the sleeping Thomas and decided that this wasn’t enough. If necessary Loki needed to be back instantly, seconds could be vital. Putting his hand on the door Loki let the tiniest amount of magic slip into it. Soft, barely detectable, asleep. It was only supposed to warn him if Stark for some reason would want to interrupt his rest. Should it be activated Jarvis would notice that energy, but they would probably attribute it to the robots. None of that was going to happen anyway.

Loki was going to be back soon. Now he had to rip that mage apart and get rid of that annoyance once and for all.
Hello everybody,

Loki goes after the little mage... what could possibly go wrong?

_________________________________________________

Your reflection I've erased
Like a thousand burned out yesterdays
Believe me when I say goodbye
Forever is for good

Was it a dream? ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

The cold wind was playing with Loki’s hair while his eyes were carefully examining what lay in front of him. Quite a step down from a castle, but a more fitting setting for such a weak character. Loki kept watching the dark, seemingly abandoned warehouse. There was no way the little mage hadn’t some trap waiting for him. Otherwise he would have forced Loki to give up his cover. Which meant the mage felt more at ease having their little fight here.

The memory of what had happened the last time he had underestimated his opponent caused a shiver running down Loki’s spine. No. That was already so far gone, nothing that could ever repeat itself. Loki knew better than that. No fooling around this time. A quick affair, not worth losing anymore time over it. His own fault, Loki should have taken care of this a long time ago.

Teleporting to the edge of the force field that surrounded the warehouse Loki snorted. It would feel good to settle for brute force. Doing just that Loki tore a hole into the protection spell and step right through it. He held out his hand, letting his magic leave his body in a large burst of energy. The heavy entrance door was ripped out off the hinge and Loki continued on his way.

Gathering fire in his hand Loki released it, illuminating the dark hall. Now that wasn’t enough, why not burning the whole place down instantly?

“There you are. What took you so long?”

The voice was coming from the left and Loki sent out a blast of magic before even turning into said direction. Pieces of metal were flying all across the room and quickly disappeared in the darkness. A robot, of course. Weak coward.

“I’m not here to talk.”

No instant reply. Loki advanced further, the flames which were dancing on his fingertips illuminated the small space surrounding him. Only the sound of his steps was echoing from the
walls. Where was he hiding? Did he seriously underestimate Loki so much that he thought there was a point in hiding?

“Too bad. There is something I wanted to ask you.”

Raising his hands Loki let the fire escape from them and seconds later another destroyed robot dropped to the floor right next to Loki. Or at least parts of it. This was getting annoying ridiculously fast. Loki’s magic was getting impatient and he felt a thirst that left him longing for blood. Every single part of his being remembered what he had tried to do to Loki.

“I will show myself if you do the same.”

Gritting his teeth Loki tried to fight his anger down, this was such a weak and obvious attempt to distract him, to make him forget about his caution. No, Loki was smarter than that. He wasn’t going to fall for such a cheap trick. If he burned the whole building to ground there would be no place left to hide.

Loki started by doing exactly nothing. He kept standing there and crossed his arms in front of his chest. The fire had vanished and Loki was waiting. If the little mage wanted to play, Loki would teach him how, but he wasn’t going to make the first move. Not when it was so obvious that the mage wanted him to. Instead Loki concentrated on the energy around him. There were movements in the shadows. Expendables robots, probably just wanting to distract him. This time Loki wouldn’t fall for it, none of these things would even touch him. Where was the mage?

The whole place was filled with different sources of energy, marks, signatures. Nothing that could hurt him. Almost as if somebody had painted the walls to cover something he had written on them before. Obviously the mage had prepared the warehouse to make it harder for Loki to spot him. Tactically the mage was in a better position, but Loki would make him work. Should he come to him, Loki had his own traps laid out.

“Are you scared, little ice monster?”

His fingers were twitching, his heart speeding up and his body felt like it was being taken over by hot burning rage and his lust for destruction. Inside of him his magic developed a life on its own, fulfilling his own deep wishes. Green fire was spilling from his fingers, running down his body, burning the floor around him, but not him.

“A sore spot, I know. Isn’t it tiring to constantly clad yourself with illusions? Even though I kind of like this one.”

Enough is enough. “This is what I look like! Enjoy the sight of me, it’ll be the last thing you ever see.” Unnecessarily dramatic, but Loki was shaking with anger and this would all end here. With blood.

Even when his rage was trying to blind him Loki felt the aura behind him. Magic, feeble, unimportant, but only waiting to stab him in the back. If Loki hadn’t been so lost in his anger, he would have rolled his eyes at this attempt, but like this all he did was holding out his arm, letting the fire run free. There was no need to turn around, Loki knew perfectly that there was nothing left of this creature.

“Do you want to continue like this for hours?”

“That is not my intention. You have something that belongs to me. I want it back.”

Finally they were talking business. What was the mage talking about? Loki’s blood that he had
stolen? Unlikely, even this arrogant Midgardian wouldn’t go as far as to call somebody else’s blood his possession. Loki had taken lots of things from the castle, hidden them and by now almost forgotten about them. At this moment they weren’t of any importance. Actually Loki didn’t know if they held anything of value for him. They seemed to be important to the mage. Interesting, but it didn’t matter.

“I have taken more than one thing. You will have to be more specific. I had quite a lot of time to pick and choose before burning your castle to the ground.” Mocking him felt good, it cooled Loki’s blood to remind himself that he had taken this fly down once before. Now he would finish it.

“The amulet. It is mine. I want it back.”

Loki had felt power within it, but he hadn’t figured out yet what its purpose was. So the mage wanted it back. “Then come and get it.”

Another declaration of war and Loki made sure that the mage could hear in voice that Loki didn’t think him capable of doing that. A cocky smile on his lips. The mage wasn’t the only one who could taunt somebody and make them do something that would be their downfall.

The signatures and sources began moving, slipping off the walls, coming towards him from all different directions. So they were finally clashing. Loki let them approach although they were moving towards him with incredibly speed. There was going to be severe damage, so much energy released in a small space.

Silhouettes were parting from the shadows. Loki could make out grey and green, red eyes enlightening the darkness and a smirk spread on Loki’s face.

Bringing up his defences Loki created a wall of pure energy around himself and the ground started shaking from the force of the impact when the robots were crashing into it. With malicious glee Loki watched them being ripped apart and dropping to the floor which was soon covered with debris.

“Seriously?”

That was all he said, chuckling softly and the energy field around him collapsed when none of the robots was left. Now only silence was surrounding him and Loki moved forward, stepping onto the remains of a robot head. The metal cracked beneath his boot and the sound filled him with grim satisfaction. A nice symbol. Walking further into the darkness Loki relit the fire in his hand and searched another source of energy.

Not far away. It was pulsing, beneath Loki. A lower level of this building. Loki decided against teleporting there, because that would be expected of him. Until now he was amusing himself, but it was too easy. It was impossible there wasn’t something waiting for him. Probably webs of magic which were going to wrap themselves around him to stop him from leaving or moving. The mage had to immobilise him to have any chance to stand up against him. Especially after he had seen Loki teleporting away from the park. A smart person would instantly recognize this as the biggest ace up Loki’s sleeve. They would also decide to use it to their advantage. At least this was what Loki would do. So no teleporting.

Instead Loki took the stairs. It was made of metal and covered in dirt and dust. Loki wrinkled his nose when the boots of his armour were ruined by this filthy place. He hadn’t worn his armour in such a long time and now the setting was completely unfitting and unworthy. The basement was just as deprived of light as the ground floor. No light, but the mage’s presence couldn’t be denied. Well, Loki could acknowledge that he had finally come up with the courage to face him. “Are we
done with the games now?"

There was no reply, but Loki didn’t need one. He could see him, standing in the middle of room, shrouded in darkness. Loki took the last step, putting one foot on the floor, his magic rushing out, searching for potential traps or hidden spells. All it touched was cold concrete. Nothing.

“One should always know their enemy. Don’t you think so?”

That hoarse rasp. Had somebody reached into his throat and torn apart his vocal cords? Something he wouldn’t have to worry about anymore. Slowly walking towards the centre of the room Loki carefully watched the man in the shadows, but he didn’t move. Therefore Loki thought it was smarter to stop. He needed to be close enough to touch somebody to kill them. “Yes, I do think so. If the enemy poses a serious threat. When they don’t, you don’t need to know a thing. You just kill them.”

As much as Loki loved the sound of his own voice and the words slipping past his own lips, he didn’t have any left. It was time for him to get back to the tower, to focus on important things, to fill in the blanks, find the pieces and kill those who were stopping him from finding his peace. To finally escape the void.

Blood was going to be shed right now.

By now Loki had accumulated an enormous amount of magic in his right hand. It was pulsing beneath his fingertips, almost painful. Abruptly Loki raised his arm, already releasing his magic when…

There was a bright flash and Loki faced complete horror. A monster was standing in front of him, mirroring his movements. Mocking him with by staring at Loki as if he was a disgusting creature made from nightmares and pain. Red eyes filled with shock. What would a monster be scared of? A monster that was copying Loki’s body without being Loki. Because his skin wasn’t blue. His eyes weren’t red.

Loki wasn’t a monster.

It was only wearing his armour, his boots and Loki’s face.

Terror had taken a complete hold of him, Loki couldn’t take his eyes off it and it had to be destroyed. Cut into pieces, burned, erased from existence. Loki didn’t realise that he was screaming when so much more magic than intended was erupting from his hands, bursting the mirror in front of him into tiny little pieces. An endless amount.

Breathing hard Loki shook his head. This hadn’t been real, nothing about it. Panic was welling up inside of him and Loki’s eyes immediately searched his hands. The sweetest feeling of relief came over him. White as snow. White nails. An illusion. Nothing more and still Loki’s heart was racing in his chest. Hammering against his rips and it was just an illusion. Nothing more.

Hissing in pain Loki jerked back and yanked the blade out of his shoulder. His reflexes allowed him to counter the next attack from the next robots. They were different. Smaller, agiler and Loki’s first blow didn’t take them down. So this was his little trap and Loki hated himself for walking straight into it.

The shock was still lodged deeply in his bones and it slowed him down. A blast of energy rushed past Loki, brushed his side and he felt a slight pain. Little needle stings. Fighting off two at the time didn’t suffice, when they were so much faster than the others. Pulling out his dagger Loki
used the blade and his magic, drilling the first into a robot’s neck and his magic was tearing another one into shreds. The whole ordeal lasted several minutes and when Loki was finally surrounded by destroyed robots, he was breathing hard, he had cuts on his arms and he was fairly sure that his side was bleeding.

Not enough, his hands were shaking.

They were white. White as snow… reminding him of a Midgardian tale…

Bringing a hand up to his shoulder Loki put it over his wound. He needed to find the blade, he had tossed it away during the fight. There was no way that it wasn’t enchanted. The last time he had…

Magic was rushing through his body, through his blood, searching whatever had been planted there, but there was nothing to be found. Was that even possible? The wound was closing up, healing as quickly as the other cuts and Loki couldn’t believe it. Why would he…

“I do know my enemy. I know what he is scared of. You know what I can do. I can hear your heart beating. So fast. It’s pumping the adrenalin through your veins and you are so scared. Just hand over the amulet and I’ll let you keep your little illusion.”

“This is my real form!” His voice echoed from the walls and Loki himself could hear how panic-stricken it was, but he was unable to change it.

The mage was laughing and Loki wanted to break his bones, let him suffer and cut that vicious tongue out. Blood, Loki was aching for it.

“Think you are so powerful, so strong, but afraid of a mirror…”

Loki wasn’t afraid of mirrors, he wasn’t afraid of what he was seeing there.

“Give me my amulet and I’ll let you keep your precious skin…”

This was too much. How did he even dare? Nobody was going to take it away. Nobody was able to. It was Loki’s. Only Loki’s. The mage did think himself so superior, but Loki would show him who did have the power to take what the other person wanted. Reaching into another layer of the dimension Loki pulled out the amulet. “You mean this?” Whatever the mage wanted to use the amulet for, he would never be able to do it. The amulet cracked easily beneath his fingers when Loki closed them to form a fist. Opening it again Loki dropped the crushed the amulet to the floor.

“Thank you…”

The words sailed through the air and Loki couldn’t try to understand their meaning. His fingertips were burning with searing pain.

No…

There was no need to take a look, Loki had felt this before and it was the one feeling he would never forget. No matter how much of his mind the void was going to take. It happened faster than the last time. The cold spread so fast Loki felt it everywhere on his body. Biting, using claws and blunt knives to tear every single part of his skin off.

No, it couldn’t. He had to…

The pain was unbearable. Every single one of his limbs was being attacked at once, parts of his flesh were being ripped out. Not enough. Instantly the cold slipped under the remains of Loki’s
skin, turning into ice in his veins and the agony was pulling screams from Loki’s lips.

His hands were pressed against the cold floor, trying to stop him from collapsing completely. The floor wasn’t cold. It was him.

Inside of him the flames were fighting, rebelling, but the cold was just marching on relentlessly. Running through his veins and like bleach it was etching off every piece of Loki. They were killing him, taking away all of him.

Reaching for his magic Loki jerked back, because there was only ice. It was claiming him, turning him into something else. A monster. To become a monster Loki had to be erased.

But he was Loki. Loki. Loki was magic… Loki with skin white as snow and green eyes…

Another wave of agony was rushing through him and his screams subsided abruptly when his vocal cords turned into two blocks of ice. They wouldn’t even let him scream while they were killing him. The flames were dying, yielding to the cold and Loki was pushed into the void.

You’re one of a kind, little Asgardian…

Loki wanted to run, to escape from the cold that had attached itself to him and taken his skin away. He still was Loki, he was… Why wouldn’t his legs carry him? His magic…

“I am sorry for the inconvenience, but you’ve run from me before.” Footsteps were resounding on the floor. Loki couldn’t tell where they were coming from. His senses were leaving him, dying away with the heat.

“It’s a simple spell. I don’t doubt that you would laugh at it, if you weren’t so busy fighting yourself. No teleportation today…. all you can do is lying here, on the floor… I’m wondering… The transformation must hurt… all that screaming and the convulsions… it looks horrifying… I wish you could describe how it feels…”

Blades. Blades cutting into his flesh. From the outside and from the inside. It wasn’t Loki’s body, so why did it hurt so much?

Somebody was touching him, roughly yanking on his tunic, turning him onto his back. Trying to wrap his arms around himself Loki wanted to warm himself, but every part of his body had turned into ice. There was no warmth to be found.

“I don’t understand…” A cloaked figure was towering above him. “Why does your true form have this effect on you?”

It wasn’t his true form. It wasn’t. It was the monster…

“I want to understand what you are. Blue skin, red eyes… I’ve never seen anything like you before…”

He wasn’t talking about Loki. He couldn’t be talking about Loki. Loki didn’t have blue skin, nor red eyes. Skin as white as snow.

“I thought about which way to kill you… then I realised I wouldn’t have to do anything…you’re going to do it yourself…”

No… Loki was strong… The ice was getting thicker, making it so hard to breathe. It was devouring him and it wouldn’t stop until Loki was gone. Until all there was left would be a
horrendous monster, too atrocious to even look at it.

A curse. It had been a curse the last time. It had to be, because it wasn’t real. Nothing about it was real. Loki knew everything about illusions and this was one of them. All he needed to do was to find the curse. He had to… now…

Reluctantly Loki looked at his hand. It had spread from there, so Loki could undo it if he found where… It was wrong. All about it. Those weren’t his hands. His hands were white with soft lines and they could create fire. Those hands were dark blue, almost black. Powerless…

Wrapping the fingers of his left hand around the palm of his right Loki tried to pull it out, but he was only touching ice. So cold it was hurting him. He needed to get warm again… someone with a beating heart, warm blood running through his veins…

“You must be in immense pain…”

Pulling his knees up to his chest Loki tried to curl himself up into a ball, to make himself as small as possible, to create some warmth, but… no warmth could come from ice.

“It is not as bad as you think… you should just look t it.”

He couldn’t stop shaking… his body was hurting all over, feeling ripped over. Blades made of ice had cut off skin off and then they had been rammed into what was left of his flesh. Tossing his head around Loki tried to breathe through it, to calm down enough to get a clear thought. To find a way…

Red eyes were staring at him. Menacing and cold. An abomination that had stolen Loki’s face and now he didn’t have one. That wasn’t him.

Using all of his fading strength Loki turned his screaming body to the other side, but the red eyes followed him. All around him, a blue-skinned body lying on the floor, shaking, wearing Loki’s clothes, but that wasn’t him. It wasn’t…

Loki was fire…

Squeezing his eyes shut Loki tried to say his own name, but he had no voice. It was gone, just like his face, his skin. The ice was suffocating him and Loki needed his skin. Instantly. To kill the monster before it killed him. Loki had to get it off him…

Blindly Loki put what used to be his hand on what used to be his arm. His nails were too short and dull, but Loki made up for it with ferocity. Soon he felt cold liquid welling from the fresh scratches, the pain rushing through his entire body. Loki didn’t care. Beneath that blue, somewhere, was Loki. He would find him, even if he had to tear all off the blue flesh off. Burn it off if necessary.

Just get it off…
Hello everybody,

Loki wants to kill the monster. That's all

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

I tried to be someone else
But nothing seemed to change
I know now, this is who I really am inside
Finally found myself
Fighting for a chance
I know now, this is who I really am

The Kill ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~
__________________________________________________

This wasn’t Asgard. The air smelled sweet, full of different herbs. Not of Asgard. There was magic, all around him. Soft voices, the scent of fresh meat and wine mingled together with the herbs. Laughter. No, this wasn’t Asgard.

Vanaheim…

Loki felt hard wood beneath his feet. His shoes were different, slimmer, lighter. Just like his tunic. These weren’t his clothes, not made for him and yet they fitted him perfectly. He wasn’t himself. Somebody else. In somebody else’s body. Making his way through the hall he didn’t pay intention to anything around him, a clear target on his mind.

The feeling was strange, so unfamiliar. Set in stone, so clear and easy. There was nothing wrong. No worries on his mind, nothing was missing… he was in the mood to play, to have fun.

A sensation Loki could barely remember.

He was happy…

***

A sharp noise tore Loki from Vanaheim… or wherever he had been. Raising his head Loki blinked and the sweet state between being asleep and being awake quickly faded away. The dreadful sensation of what was really going on caught up to him.

He was lying on the cold floor of some warehouse… No, the floor wasn’t cold. It was Loki. Or
what used to be Loki.

Shifting slightly Loki heard a cracking noise. Looking at the floor he saw small layers of ice. Where did it come from? Blood was running down his arm, dropping to the floor and…

This time Loki could indeed scream. A sound so filled with horror that Loki didn’t recognize his own voice.

His blood had turned into ice. It was colder than Midgardian air. The liquid running through his veins was… ice. Like himself. All the fire had been extinguished. He was drained of his magic, his fire and…

There was still blue. All over him. Eating him up.

Gathering his forces Loki tried to sit up, but he couldn’t. His body had never been so heavy. But this wasn’t him… it wasn’t.

He could feel sticky liquid underneath his fingernails, a disgusting sensation. Moving his arm Loki groaned in pain, his entire arm was throbbing, his nerves screaming. What did it matter? It wasn’t his own limb. Not anymore.

Bringing his hand back to his lower arm Loki dug his fingers into the open wounds, cold, moist flesh. The feeling was causing his stomach to turn, the urge to start retching was almost unbearable. With a harsh gesture Loki tore a piece of flesh from his arm and his scream of agony filled the empty hall. How could it hurt? It wasn’t his body! It wasn’t his skin!

The ache spread through his entire body, racing through his veins and the sickness overwhelmed him. Nausea was too hard to bear and Loki slipp[ed back into unconsciousness. The darkness was welcoming him and he fell into his willingly.

***

“Are you enjoying the feast, my lord?”

“I am…”

“Your eyes do not need to search the great hall any longer. Prince Loki sent me to you to deliver a message.”

“Oh. Please tell.”

“He read about a special plant that can only be found during the night of a full moon, in the deepest parts of the forests. He needs it for a new spell and therefore he has gone for a ride. Prince Loki regrets that he will not be present during the feast, but he had to leave instantly.”

“I see… thank you, my dear.”

“My lord, are you already leaving? The feast has just begun…”

“Yes, but I don’t feel like… celebrating alone.”

“My lord, if you… I would be most honoured to… keep you company.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I know you are fond of the young prince, but he will be gone for the night and I would gladly take
“his place for a few hours…”

“I… do feel flattered, but nobody else can take a prince’s place. I hope you will enjoy the feast. I must leave you now.”

“Really? Please don’t. Who am I supposed to talk to? Thor or the other oafs?”

“Loki!”

“You will forgive me the little prank, I could not resist when I saw you searching for me.”

“What was this about? Why approach me in another form? Were you trying to test me?”

“I was merely having fun. Thor falls for every single one of my illusions, it is incredibly dull.”

“So you’ve decided to trick me?”

“I am the god of tricks, you know they please me. Let us sit down, I am hungry.”

“I do not feel like celebrating tonight.”

“But you just said…”

“Good night, my prince.”

“Please, wait!”

An endless number of needles were piercing through his skin and Loki’s eyes flew open. Darkness. The scent of herbs was fading and the pain overshadowed the feeling of having done something wrong. Deep regret…

“I am curious… I wish you could describe me how it feels, but I doubt you’re still able to hear me…”

He had done something wrong. Terribly wrong…

What else to expect from a monster? He couldn’t beat it. Now even the pain was helping it. Loki couldn’t keep trying to get it off him, to tear it apart. Just moving his arm sent him into a state of unbearable agony and every breath he released resembled the cold winds of Jotunheim. What was he supposed to do when he couldn’t even breathe?

Loki was gone. A beautiful prince with white skin…

No matter which direction his eyes looked he always saw a despicable blue creature, wearing the prince’s armour. Something he had been so proud of. One sleeve was torn, tainted with a blue substance that couldn’t be blood. It was supposed to be red.

You had to be cursed to have red eyes. Only blood was supposed to be red.

They had killed Loki… they had ripped him apart until there had been nothing left of him. Thor had been right. They should have been hunted down. They all should have been killed. Hunt the monsters and slay them all. Now they had killed an Asgardian prince and he needed to take his revenge. To avenge. He would kill the monster. Burn his skin, slit his throat, spit in his face. He wouldn’t find Loki anywhere under the blue skin. So he needed to kill it.
His magic was gone, buried under thick layers of ice. There was no way it could help him. He had to do it with his bare hands.

Trying to get back up on his feet he was confronted again with his weak and heavy limbs, which wouldn’t move. They weren’t his. The abomination’s eyes were fixed on him, watching him with this scared gaze, its red eyes burning and what was left of Loki screamed, reaching out to crush the mirror, but it kept moving away from him. He couldn’t touch it. The monster remained and Loki collapsed back on the floor. Disappearing completely. Dying.

Death smelled like flowers, grass and leaves. Sweet and fresh. Familiar and exotic…

This wasn’t Valhalla, nor Fólkvangr, nor Hel.

These were the gardens of Vanaheim… and Loki was scared…

***

“You are upset with me.”

“I am not upset with you, Loki.”

“Of course you are. You left the feast without me and I have not shared your bed in three days. You have been avoiding me.”

“I am not angry with you.”

“I was not my intention to test your loyalty. I know you prefer me to any of my illusions…”

“Do you?”

“Yes, I do…”

“I’m glad… I have never seen skin as pale as yours. So white. You are beautiful, Loki Odinson… Those green eyes are going to haunt me forever.”

A spark. So faint and weak and yet it was a spark. So far away, somewhere in the distance, but its presence couldn’t be denied. Warm. Like ember. Desperately trying to restart the fire, while it was raining.

Vanaheim slipped from Loki’s grasp, the sweet scent turning into odourless air and the spark surrendered to the rain. The cold was as ferocious as ever and Loki could hear the monster laughing at him. Maybe it had played a trick on him. Letting him believe there was still life in him. That there was still something left of Loki.

A long time ago there had been a prince called Loki. He had had beautiful pale skin and deep green eyes… and they had been important. They had been his…

Gone. They were gone and Loki didn’t know how…

Cold hands were reaching out for him again, clawing at him and Loki tried to close his eyes to get through the pain, but the darkness threatened to claim him. Endless, no matter how long he’d fall, no matter how many years he’d spend screaming, he would never reach its limits. The void had no limits. It had nothing at all, nothing but darkness.
Finally Loki felt something else than the cold when his mind remembered the exact moment when it had been ripped apart, torn into shreds. Loki could feel the open wounds that had never healed and the holes where pieces had brutally been torn out.

The edges were burning, throbbing in agony and everything else disappeared. Instantly the void swallowed him completely and Loki was falling, wave after wave of pain was running through him and when he opened his eyes to flee the void, the monster stared back at him, reminding him that Loki was dead.

Yet the monster was alive… and Loki would take it with him.

“If I did not spark your anger, why have you been avoiding me?”

“Your illusion at the feast made me realise something. You are right, I am angry. At myself, not at you.”

“Why?”

“You fooled me. You walked in there, walked straight up to me, talked to me. I looked straight into your face and I had no idea it was you.”

“I am a shapeshifter and you’ve made me the best there ever was.”

“Yes, but… I should be able to tell it’s you.”

“You are underestimating me.”

“No, it is about me. I should be able to see you beneath the glamour. Your beautiful green eyes. Your white skin. Your black hair. The way you carry yourself. Your grace and… when we first met… I instantly recognized you underneath any glamour and now…It is still you beneath the glamour… I should be able to see you.”

Biting his lip Loki tried to breathe, to gather enough strength to get through this. Trying to connect to his magic Loki didn’t find anything. Magic was in his blood, but the ice on the floor was proof that there wasn’t any blood running through his veins. No matter how hard he would try, Loki would never be able to teleport, to speak a curse or to create fire to kill the monster in a wild blaze.

If he could not burn it, he would try to find a weapon. Something. Anything. All he needed was something sharp enough to slit a throat. One cut. Quick and short.

For the third time Loki tried to get up from the floor, but the cold was having a tight grip on him and when he tried to push himself up, the wounds on his arm forced him back down.

“Hush… my parents, my own flesh and blood are not able to do that. Because you taught me. I am proud of my illusions. That I am able to pull the wool over your eyes… if I can fool you, I can fool anybody. Nothing makes me prouder.”

“Loki…”
More blood was spilling on the floor, but it wasn’t enough. There was still blue skin, ice cold. It made him sick to see it, to feel it and he couldn’t get away from it. There was only one way to stop it. A heart that needed to stop beating. A throat that needed to be slit.

All he needed was a dagger… Loki always used to have one ready, but Loki was dead. After the third time he had died for good.

“I think I have got what you are looking for. Don’t hesitate to serve yourself.”

How could he not have seen it? Salvation placed right in front of him.

A dagger.

Loki eagerly closed his hand around it. Luckily it didn’t turn to ice. It almost felt warm.

“I promise you… I will not ever talk to you again wearing another face but my own.”

He brought the blade up to the monster’s throat and applied pressure.

“Swear it to me, my prince.”

“I swear…”

A sweet smell crept into Loki’s nose. A soft, fleeting touch on his shoulder and on his cheek. Almost as if somebody was whispering gentle words against his skin. Warming it. Igniting a spark. Spreading across his chest and it felt so much better than the kiss of his blade. His grip around the handle loosened.

“I have always admired your abilities… they were the first thing that draw me to you. Now they’re starting to scare me. You have a million faces and I’m afraid that one day you might prefer another one to your own. Or that you might forget what it looks like. That face I’ve come to love. That one day… I might be looking at another person…”

Somebody else. This was somebody else, but not Loki. Loki could be anyone he wanted to be. He had millions of faces, but only one was his own. It was a beautiful face and it… had been so important… was so important, because… it was Loki’s.

“You won’t. I promise. I swear. I will not forget.”

This was not him. White hands with soft lines had created Loki’s first spells. His first lover had
told him that she loved his green eyes, they reminded her of a soft meadow still moist from the summer rain. Sif had commented on his black hair when they had been younger, so Loki had turned hers dark. Not as dark as his own. An elf from Álfheimr had called Loki a child of the moon, calling him precious and beautiful. And powerful.

Powerful, beautiful, precious with white skin and green eyes and unlimited magic.

No, Loki would not forget that. He was Loki and it didn’t matter which curse had been placed upon him. Loki still knew who he was. A sorcerer. Magic. His power didn’t know any limits. He could jump between the dimensions. He could heal wounds by touching them. He could create fire. Fire hot enough to melt ice.

Tossing the dagger away Loki balled his hand into a fist.

*I have never seen skin as pale as yours. So white. You are beautiful, Loki Odinson… Those green eyes are going to haunt me forever*

Yes… he was fire and magic… nothing about him was cold…

*You are beautiful, Loki…*

It was in his blood. It was him. It couldn’t go away. It couldn’t leave him. It was all still there. Loki only needed to take it and he did. Bringing his fist up to his lips Loki breathed into it, the air leaving his lips was hot, ghosting over his skin and it instantly heated up. Then it washed back over him. That feeling of happiness. Loki felt the heat and magic running down his body. The black fingernails disappearing. The blue colour just falling off him, beautiful white skin was replacing it and Loki looked into his own green eyes.

Fire was burning inside of him and the cuts on his arms were closing up with rapid speed. Easily Loki got up on his feet and the mirror showed him in his entire glory. It wasn’t perfect though. Loki would look better with some red blood on his hands. He would get straight to that.

Releasing a burst of energy from his hand Loki shattered the mirrors, blasting them into pieces. His body was vibrating with energy and Loki could feel it pulsing inside of him. Sheer endless power. Loki remembered what he was capable of, what he ought to do if he only decided to. If he had the desire to wipe out an entire race, to crush a planet in his hand, there was nothing that could stop him. Why holding back? So that they wouldn’t find him? They thought him dead and they had no idea what he could do. Shape this world to his liking.

Noises were audible all around him, coming closer and to Loki they looked like flies, ants, vermin that wasn’t worth his attention. Not even raising his hand Loki turned his head to the robots firing at him and by now he could not even laugh at them. His magic swiped out, stopping the beams in mid-air, holding them easily, nothing more than bright spots of light dancing in the air. Only useful to entertain an infant for about a few minutes. Sending the attack back to where it came from Loki watched the metal melt and deform and it didn’t even give him satisfaction.

*Pawns… useless toys…*

Another wave rushed towards him. This time they didn’t even try to fire at him at a distance. From all directions they approached him with incredible speed. Until they all burned to dust. Loki didn’t smile over it. They simply dissolved in green and gold magic, turning into dust that covered the floor, messing up Loki’s boots.

He didn’t even bother to walk over the remains, he just teleported the few feet. Another robot to his
left, Loki blinked and it went up in flames.

Fire. All around him. Loki wanted the flames to engulf everything, to leave behind ashes that were hot enough to burn a person alive. Exactly what Loki was going to do.

The presence was easy to sense. Loki could smell his confusion, feel how startled he was, trying to figure out what to do now. Scared even.

As soon as his magic had located him Loki gave into him, appearing right in front of the little mage and what Loki saw almost angered him even more. Unbearable. A feeble creature. The outside matching his pathetic abilities. Just a shell that resembled the other robots. Armour not so unfamiliar from Stark’s, but it looked less practical. Stark’s was a weapon, this one made Loki think of a cocoon, covering every single part of the body but the eyes. A green cloak. Nothing would be left of it when Loki was done with him.

When Loki was reaching out the mage made a step back and it was easy to sense the force field he put up to protect himself. Exactly the same Loki had already destroyed once before. Not a single second of hesitation, Loki kept pushing, his magic didn’t know any boundaries. It just keep going forward, tearing holes and crushing every obstacle. The resistance he felt wasn’t even worth mentioning. By now Loki had released all his anger, his frustration and he was about to turn it into fire.

One look into these eyes and Loki could see the fear in them. The exact moment when the little mage realised that there was no way he could stop this from happening. Not when you were up against the god of mischief. Loki, an Asgardian prince, a shapeshifter who could be anyone he wanted, but he knew exactly who he was underneath every veil.

A tall man with pale skin, black hair and green eyes.

Another push and the cracks became too big. The force field collapsed underneath Loki’s touch and his hands wrapped itself around a throat covered by iron. He could ask questions now. What was this all about? What did he want? Or who was he beneath this armour?

No.

Loki didn’t care and it was lacking any importance. The mage should die with the knowledge that his entire existence was just a minor inconvenience. An ant Loki would step on. Nobody asked the ant for its motivations.

“I would like to tell you a story from my childhood…” Loki purred, a maniac grin splitting his face in two. The little mage couldn’t even fight against his grip, Loki’s magic was keeping him down. “My mother told me to never play with fire. Like every good mother would. She was talking about the candles in my room or the torches in the hallway. I was a good little boy, I didn’t touch them. I didn’t need to. I had another source of fire to play with… Let me show you…”

The flames had been blazing beneath Loki’s skin all the time, now he let them free, escaping through his fingertips. Hot, smouldering and Loki was tempted to close his eyes to relish how good it felt. He couldn’t do that though, because then he would be missing the painful death the little mage was suffering from right now.

Constantly rising temperature around them caused the air to vibrate and the metal armour beneath Loki’s fingers lost its dark colour. A soft gold tone that quickly started to glow, to pulsate. Dreadful screams were ringing in Loki’s ears, full of pain from being burned alive. Reminding Loki of his own. Trapped in a skin that wasn’t his.
Loki wasn’t ice. He was fire and fire was going to erase that worm from the surface of this miserable planet.

Liquid iron was running down his fingers and arm. Boiling hot, dripping to the floor and leaving stains similar to blood.

Slowly the screams subsided, the body grew limp in Loki’s grip, but the fire was not done claiming the armour. Loki felt the need to destroy it completely, to make a statement and he needed what was underneath.

Staring into these eyes Loki saw the light leaving them, slipping away and then the fire took the rest. Releasing his grip Loki carelessly dropped the lifeless body to the floor, looking at his hand. It was smoking.

Smiling softly Loki closed it into a fist and took a look at his surroundings. The fire had done quite some damage, but he would tear the place down anyway.

Taking a breath Loki closed his eyes, enjoying the heat still radiating inside himself. No, there was nothing cold about him. Nothing.

Now he needed to get back though. Loki had no idea how much time and passed. What he did know was that he needed to get to Thor. For a second he had felt it, had almost been able to reach it. The one thing that was missing. Flowers… herbs… Vanaheim…

Readying himself Loki’s eyes darted to the disfigured corpse lying on the floor. Finally he’d be of some use. Loki would make him look pretty.

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The sun hadn’t risen yet. Still there was no guarantee. If Stark had walked into the bedroom, Loki would have to go on a killing spree. Way less satisfying, but it would do the job. No, they were so much more important than that.

Teleporting into the bedroom Loki was already wearing Thomas’ skin, but luckily the mortal remained silent. Good chance that he was gone forever. Him and the wolf. Loki knew who he was. A god, beautiful, powerful and they had nothing in common.

Uttering a soundless sigh of release Loki spotted the clone lying under the covers. Breathing softly. Almost as if he was real. Stepping closer Loki did his little trick, by now with perfection. Taking his place Loki let the clone slip back into him, absorbing the magic it was made of. The bed was soft, Loki began to feel the strain of the last hours and he couldn’t leave right now anyway.

Closing his eyes Loki gave himself up to sleep he heard a soft voice whispering into his ear. His own. “I'm not going to leave. I will stay here. With you. If you want me to.”
Hello everybody,

Well, here we are... probably the most important chapter of this story so far. Interested? Loki asks Thor what he can't remember and... Loki reveals why his mind is broken. So yeah, it's not a happy episode, I'm still hoping you have fun though :D

_________________________________________________

The anger swells in my guts
And I won't feel the slices and cuts
I want so much to open your eyes
Cause I need you to look into mine

Open your eyes ~~ Snow Patrol ~~

__________________________________________________

“Tommy… wake up.”

Loki blinked tiredly, sleep still having a hold on him. Stark’s face appeared in front of him, a soft smile tugging his lips. Why was Loki so tired? His skin felt so hot… Right, he had killed the little mage last night. Satisfaction spread instantly and Loki returned the smile. “Hey… everything alright?”

“Yeah… I gotta head out though.”

Sitting up Loki yawned and then blinked the sleepiness away. “What happened?”

Stark’s hand brushed over his arm. “Nothing… a giant explosion outside of New Jersey. Doesn’t look normal. Actually it stinks and there are neon signs blinking all around it… pretty sure it has something to do with the robot guy. I have to go and check it out before S.H.I.E.L.D shows up and destroys the evidence.”

“Okay… be careful.”

“Of course… go back to sleep, I just wanted to let you know…”

“No… I think I’m going to my place and get some stuff… I think I changed my mind about moving in.”

“That’s completely awesome, but you’re not going out now. Not when…”

“You just said that there has been an explosion. If S.H.I.E.L.D is going after it, then they will be too busy to go after me… or they’ll jump at the opportunity to try to get into the tower.”
Stark’s face darkened, he obviously hadn’t thought of that possibility yet. “They won’t get in here again. I’ve updated security.”

“Did you replace all the windows yet?”

“I’m a genius, not a magician.”

Smiling Loki shrugged and pressed a kiss on Stark’s lips. His mood was splendid. Yesterday he had gotten rid of that annoyance, he felt relaxed and happy. Especially since he would take back what was his today. After such a long time… today he would find the pieces and put his mind back together. Then Loki would be whole again, a real person. He had never thought that this would be possible…

“Go and check out whatever you have to check out. I will go to my apartment and get the most important stuff. I have the bracelet, so Jarvis is constantly with me anyway.”

“I don’t like that… you’re safer here.”

“You and me remember yesterday quite differently. It’s okay… I promise I call you… or… you’ve got my permission to use the thing to locate me. I just don’t want you to worry. It’s going to be fine.”

The hesitation was still clearly visible on Stark’s face, but his urge to get to the crime scene got the better of him. Then again, he had to be confident in his technology, because he would never really let Thomas head into a dangerous situation. Yesterday it had been Jarvis who had protected him and with the bracelet he had Jarvis always with him. “Okay… if you only think that somebody might be looking at you, you call Jarvis. I’ll tell him to send the entire Iron Legion. I gotta go now. Call Happy, he’ll drive you. Jarvis, you’ll take care of Tommy for me, right?”

“Naturally, sir.”

Leaning forward Stark kissed him again, gentle but with that hint of passion that made this special. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Be careful.”

So Stark left and Loki hurried up. He didn’t have much time and he was determined to make the most of it. After getting dressed and grabbed his phone and wallet Loki used the elevator to leave the building. The bracelet was on his wrist and Loki played the thought if he should go back to the tower at all. Today was a good day to die, right?

Happy drove him to his apartment and offered to help him move his stuff, but Loki insisted on needed some time. He wouldn’t take big things with him anyway, passport, legal documents, these kinds of stuff. It needed some persuasion, but Loki was finally alone in his apartment. He dropped Thomas’ glamour instantly, filled with glee that the dreaded mortal seemed to be indeed gone. Waving his hand Loki created an illusion right in front of him and Thomas was smiling. The sight made almost Loki’s stomach turn. “Just do a favour and if somebody shows up, don’t let them instantly see that you’re just a reflection.”

The illusion rolled his eyes and Loki cursed himself for giving Thomas such a rebelling character. Snipping his fingers Loki let a book appear that fell right into Thomas’ hands. “There. Have a nice read.”

The illusion saluted and lay down on the couch, busy with the book. Loki turned away, placing the bracelet on the table. An unknown excitement settled in his stomach. This was it. Finally Loki
would be able to fill the holes. Driving Thor to complete madness wasn’t even his priority now. Loki would finally know and the void would have to give back what it had taken away from him. Taking a shaky breath Loki closed his eyes and readied himself. What would it be like… to feel whole again…

Slipping into invisibility Loki teleported away, stepping into Thor’s little cell. Unchanged. This was Loki’s stage and nobody would interrupt him while he was directing his play. Perfectly as always.

Thor was lying on the bench, staring at the ceiling, seemingly lost in thought but not as apathetic as he used to be. Good, Loki needed him sane for this. Or at least a little bit. As soon as Loki had the pieces, he would tear them apart.

Taking a look at the cameras Loki cast his first illusion, just for S.H.I.E.L.D. This was a private discussion between two gods, mortals weren’t allowed to see or listen. They would only have the picture of Thor lying on this bench.

Loki was too eager, he couldn’t wait another second. The pain would finally stop, he would feel whole again…

Soundlessly Loki walked over to Thor, rubbing his fingers together, pulling the strings out from underneath his skin. He had done some major changes, but like all his webs it was close to perfection.

“Thor…” A cold whisper and the god of thunder abruptly turned his head, towards Loki and he let go of the web. Loki watched fascinated how it wrapped itself around Thor’s mind and now it was time to step back. His clone was here to do all the work. Standing at the other end of the room the dead Loki looked at Thor with his grey eyes. Get me the pieces… I need them, so get them for me…

“Loki…” Thor met his gaze, his face suddenly so expressive. Full of guilt, regret, pain and that shock to see the corpse of his brother. Why? He had let Loki lying on the ground… let his body to rot in the Dark World. It had been Odin who had sent the soldiers to get Loki, to bring him home. Probably to make sure he was dead. Too bad for him that they had only collected a dark elf that looked suspiciously like Loki. The remorse about this should eat Thor alive. He definitely looked like it, but Loki had no time to feel good about that. He needed the pieces and Thor would give them to him.

“Brother, you came back…” Almost pleased, full of hope that he would get a chance to redeem himself, but no. Loki was still dead and it was still Thor’s fault. There was no way he was going to let him forget about that. Never.

“It should not surprise me.” The clone’s voice was filled with spite and it sounded raspy. A dead man talking. “You have always been stupid. Ever since we were children I have always been better. At everything. Mother once told me that I shouldn’t mock you, because I was already able to read and you couldn’t even distinguish one letter from another. By the time you were strong enough to pick up a sword, I had mastered five different languages without using the all-speak. All our tutors complimented me for my wit and my magic abilities. So it was always obvious that I was the smart one. All of Asgard knew and I shouldn’t be surprised. You still don’t understand what you’ve done to me…”

By now Thor had sat up, but didn’t make an attempt to get to his feet. Instead his eyes were fixed on Loki and again the great Thor was at a loss for words. No protest, he accepted the insult. “Loki, I am so sorry.”
It was hard to not laugh at that and Loki envied his clone, because he was able to do just that. Bitter, humourless and Thor winced. “What for? Tell me, brother. What are you sorry for?”

Now he couldn’t look at him anymore and Thor lowered his eyes, studying the floor. “I didn’t come for you. You called for me, but I didn’t come for you.”

Was it eating him up alive? Hopefully. It should. Still Thor wouldn’t understand, he would never understand. Loki’s hand formed a fist and the clone just continued to glare. Every reproach a dagger. “Because you didn’t even look for me.”

Silence. Thor didn’t know what to respond to that, because it was the truth. There was nothing he could say. He raised his head though. His eyes were shining strangely, almost as if… No, Thor wasn’t crying. Not yet.

“That’s right…I am so ashamed, Loki. I thought you were lost forever in the darkness, but I should have come looking for you.”

Still making up excuses. Always talking about how much he loved his brother, but he hadn’t even bothered to look for him. Doomed him to be ripped apart by the darkness. Thor should bleed for that.

Loki felt how his body started to shake from anger, but he forced himself to remain silent. Instead he wove his fingers together, reforming the web to his liking and the clone reacted to the change immediately. “Why should you come looking for me when you threw me in there in the first place?”

There was nothing Thor could do when he was confronted with so much hatred. A rotting corpse snarling at him, reminding him of what he had done. Something he could not flee from and yet he didn’t know anything about it.

“I’m so sorry, Loki. I don’t know why I… I know it’s unforgivable.”

Loki snipped his fingers and the clone’s lips formed a disturbing smile. “Oh, I know why you did it. A prince of Asgard is true to his word…”

“Loki…” It sounded like a plea, but it wouldn’t completely pass Thor’s lips.

“You killed me, Thor. You will never be able to wash that stain off your soul or my blood off your hands. You killed your own brother and you still don’t understand.”

Thor opened his mouth, probably to protest, but he knew it was true, so he didn’t. “What… What am I not understanding?”

How could he even ask? After all he had… Loki’s magic was screaming and he was too. With rage and frustration that this stupidity and carelessness could still get to him. Pretending to love him all so much and he didn’t understand a thing. He never even tried to. Loki had disappeared into the void and Thor had all forgotten about him. Loki came back from the darkness and all Thor was putting him in chains and a muzzle over his mouth. Not once. Not once did he ask him where he had been or what had happened to him…

Now Thor was still looking at him with these shining eyes, tears about to fall and Loki got lost in the bitterness of the betrayal. There was only so much he could take after all Thor had put him through. Ripping the invisibility apart, Loki let the glamour slip over him and rushed forward. He stepped right through the clone, it fell apart in golden light and Thor’s eyes grew wide, but he was still looking at a corpse and he wouldn’t understand. He never did.
“What you’ve done to me! What it felt like! What the darkness actually means! What it has done to me!” Loki was screaming on the top of his lungs, because nothing he had ever said had made its way through this thick skull. His anger was burning so hot, consuming Loki when it should be devouring Thor.

This was him. Loki. And he was shaking, his hands trembling with need to wrap themselves around Thor’s neck, to make him somehow feel what it was like to be broken… but Loki still needed the pieces.

Finally some life seemed to get into Thor. “Loki, listen…”

“No, I am not going to listen! I have listened to your meaningless words all my life. I will not continue to listen to them in death. You will listen to me! So you will finally understand. Finally feel it… what I felt when I… fell… and kept falling…” His voice was dying away and Loki felt the memory taking a hold of him. This mere second was enough and Loki’s anger didn’t stand a chance against the touch of the cold he felt in the back of his neck. Again he was shaking, but now for a different reason.

A feeling of dread washed over him when Loki realised the change in Thor’s face. The shock and pain had to take a step back for worry. Thor stood up, his hand cautiously reaching for Loki, as if he wanted to stop him from falling over. “Brother…”

Stumbling backwards Loki feverishly shook his head, trying to regain his composure, but there was only the void or his rage.

“Not a word… There is something I want to know and you owe me that explanation, but first you will be listening… Your stupidity caused all of this. They called me mad, but it was you. The great Thor, wielding his hammer. Who but you would even think of such a foolish thing to do? Dangerous and reckless. Going to that empty world, covered by ice. Full of monsters. I could not let you go there alone. You would have been killed. Like so many times before that I had to save your life. Because all you do is wielding this hammer without even respecting its power. So I came with you to this horrid wasteland and then…”

Loki bit his lip, wanting to stop the words from rolling off his tongue. The memory was all too lively. The touch on his wrist, colder than anything he had ever felt before… until the void. The desire to scream at Thor was still there, to let him feel how furious he was, that there was no chance for forgiveness, but Loki couldn’t. His voice broke and he looked down at his hands. White skin with soft lines. The glamour had made them grey, dead flesh.

“They took it away. You took it away… I need it… I… I know you never knew me, Thor, but even you should know of what I was capable. There aren’t many shapeshifters in the Nine Worlds and there is not a single one who can compete with me. Have you ever thought about what that means? Changing into anyone or anything at will? Of course not. Nobody has ever thought about the implications, the consequences. The first time I have ever succeeded in changing my appearance completely… I looked into the mirror and I broke down. I was gone, I was trapped in the skin of a stranger. It took Frigga hours to calm me down, to explain to me that it was just an illusion. That I could bend it to my will, that it was just a tool and she warned me. About how it easy it was to forget who you are underneath the veil. Just putting on another face doesn’t do much damage, but if you try to be another person… If you create character traits, the way how this person walks, a unique laugh, how they pronounce their vowels, what makes them laugh, what makes them cry, what fills them with dread and makes them scream in anger… when you spend so much time in another body, pretending to have another mind… sooner or later it will start to leave traces. You get used to the new face, you begin to adapt the other’s opinions, their feelings don’t seem so odd
after a while and… if you aren’t careful the veil stops being an illusion. It becomes real and the person you were before begins to disappear. You get erased and the illusion you created replaces you. But not just like that. It’s like losing your mind. Your control over your body, over your emotions, it all starts to fade away. By the end you won’t even remember that you are a shapeshifter…”

Every gift came with a price and Loki had always known about this one. The howling wolf was a constant reminder. Or Thomas… who was thankfully gone, but Loki had always known about the danger. This was why it had been so important and they had taken it away. Thor had taken it away.

“Frigga tried to scare me, told me to be careful. The most important thing a shapeshifter must always remember is quite simple. Their own face. I didn’t… not once. I felt comfortable with who I was. I was content and I knew my face. Every single feature and it was always easy to go back to it. I knew who I was. No matter which illusion, I always knew it was my face underneath. Then you took me to that world made of ice… one of the monsters touched me… it cursed me! From that moment on… I don’t have a face anymore! Mine is gone! It was the one thing that should be real… the one thing that should always help me differ between illusion and reality. Gone!”

Thor turned his head away and Loki found his voice again.

“Look at me! I went there because of you and they took my face! What are you if you don’t have a face? I was looking into the mirror and there was nothing! Loki’s face… gone. It was important… it was part of who I am… and… there’s not just that. Something else… I don’t have a face anymore and it’s killing me, because… someone… something… I can’t remember! I try, but I can’t reach it… it hurts, it burns and then… I only see the gardens of Vanaheim… I can’t remember…”

From a gut wrenching scream to a whisper. Just talking about it made the edges burn and Loki’s desire to fill the holes was tearing him apart.

“Oh, Loki…” There was pity and Loki wouldn’t take it. Not from the person who had done this to him. But Loki would take the pieces. Now… “You killed me, Thor. You betrayed me. You helped them taking my face. For once… be a brother and help me. Help me remember. Tell me why I was suffering. I need to know.”

Thor was slowly shaking his head, because none of this made sense to him, because he had never asked a single question. “I…”

“Tell me.”

“Loki…”

Loki balled his hands into fists to stop himself from shaking. “What was I suffering from? Before the darkness.”

Confusion edged on Thor’s face and his hoarse whisper cut like a knife into Loki’s skin. “I don’t understand…”

“Of course you don’t! You don’t know what it did to me! The void! The darkness! You didn’t come for me and when I came back, you didn’t even ask! None of you did! I saw what I looked like! Couldn’t you see what had happened to me? Didn’t you care? Didn’t you want to know?!?”

This wasn’t his web. This wasn’t his perfect well thought out plan. A silent scheme. The corpse of his brother whose cold words would drive Thor insane. Now Loki was screaming, shaking and he
didn’t want to create another intrigue, he wanted his mind and he wanted it now! Thor had taken it away and Loki needed it back. Also Thor had to suffer for it. To finally understand what…

“I am…” Thor stopped himself, because he probably knew that Loki didn’t want to hear that he was sorry. It was a lie anyway, Thor didn’t even know what he was sorry for. What he had put him through…

Loki turned away, not standing the sight of him any longer. Instead his let his eyes linger on the wall. Boring and plain. Things he had been longing for in the void. “You want to know what Thanos said to me? When he pulled me from the void… whatever was left of me…” A shiver was running down Loki’s spine and he hardly resisted the urge to wrap his arms around himself. Something to protect him or to feel a little bit warm. The words were engraved into his mind. So many things that had been erased, but fate was cruel. Loki would never forget that grin and the amused growl. “You are special, little princeling… You want to know why I was special, Thor? Why he chose me? He was laughing and I was so special… so much more damaged…”

His voice was shaking and Loki tried to push that thought away.

Thor had no idea what he was talking about, but that didn’t stop him from asking his questions. “What did they do to you, Loki?”

You, Thor. You did this…

Turning back to face Thor Loki held onto his anger and this was better. So much better. Loki could hate him, because it was Thor’s fault. The hatred was good, it kept him from reliving what had happened to him. “I had been falling for so long… The last thing I saw were you and Odin… then the void closed around me and there was nothing. Nothing to hold on, nothing to grab or to touch. I was falling… into darkness, out of darkness. Don’t even try to imagine it. You can’t. I was awake, all the time and there was nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to touch, nothing to smell. I was deprived of everything but… it was so cold. Like ice. No matter how loudly you scream, you know that nobody will hear you, because the void never ends… even time doesn’t exist. I just kept falling, only my own thoughts to keep me company… Do you know what happens to a mind when it’s deprived of all stimulation? When your eyes don’t see anything, your ears don’t hear anything… you begin to lose your mind… so it has to protect itself… It tries to fill the emptiness, to cast away the cold, give you something to hold on to… So my mind took a memory to protect itself. To create images, sounds, to remember the feeling of being touched… not just some memory… the most beautiful one I had…”

It felt like a fire spreading in the inside of his skull. The wounds were wide open, throbbing, pulsing and Loki wanted to scream out his pain. Just talking about it made him feel it again, the moment when the void had slipped into him, cutting into his mind with a blade made out of ice. Crippling him, wiping out the person he had been. Making half a person out of him. Pressing his palms against his forehead Loki tried to breathe, to make the pain subside.

“The void took it. I was holding on to it. I was screaming, I was fighting, but there was nothing I could do. There is nothing in the void, I didn’t have my magic to protect me… I could feel the emptiness forcing its way into my mind and it tore it out… like a knife so cold it burns you… I can still feel it, every time I try to remember. The cuts don’t heal, they will never heal… it is gone and I feel it missing. I know that they took it from me. The most beautiful moment I have ever lived was brutally taken away from me… and the void wasn’t satisfied with that… it wants more… but my mind… what was left of it… tried to protect itself… it didn’t let me access any pleasant memory… all I had left were the most painful ones to fill the emptiness… to feel something. The void is cruel, so it doesn’t take the dark memories… I kept falling… months, years, an entire
lifetime… and I only heard your voice… how you told me… that moment when we were kids… When I am king I’ll hunt the monster down and slay them all…”

It did still hurt, it would never stop hurting… unless Thor gave him the pieces. Raising his head Loki met Thor’s eyes. Lonely tears were spilling from them and Loki wanted to spit in his face. Now was he feeling sorry? When it was way too late...

“You did it, Thor. You slew the monster.”

Suddenly Thor was getting up to his feet, his eyes wide, shaking his head in denial. “No… no, you are my brother. You aren’t…”

Loki made a dismissive gesture, he wasn’t willing to listen to this charade. “Thanos pulled me from the void… he saw how badly it had mangled my mind. That there was barely anything left of it… He created another horrendous memory. I will never forget that smile. That… perverse excitement and glee… when he leaned over me and told me that I was special… that there had never been another one like me. My most beautiful and my most painful memory had been so closely tied together… that the void had taken them both…”

What did that make him? Someone who couldn’t remember the two events of his life which had influenced him the most… who had made him who he was supposed to be? Loki didn’t remember what had made him most happy and what had… made him suffer. And yet Loki still knew what had happened in that world of ice. He still remembered perfectly how Odin had refused him. How Thor had said that he would slay all the monsters… what could there be left?

His mind was aching, demanding that Loki would fill the holes, heal the wounds, make him whole again.

“So tell me, Thor… what is there left of me? Am I still a person? Or an abomination without a face, without any memories of the most defining moments of his life… I have lost all of that… and you were the cause. You pushed me. You pushed me and the void ripped me apart. Now give me back what it took from me! You know it! You know what I can’t remember! Why do I always see the gardens of Vanaheim? Why was I suffering? Tell me!”

Still shaking his head Thor seemed overwhelmed, but he didn’t have any right to. “Loki, I don’t…”

“Yes, of course, you don’t understand! I was dying! I was cold, freezing, constantly reminded of what I… then your voice over and over and over again… hunt the monsters down and slay them all… no colours, no ground beneath my feet, nothing to touch… I didn’t feel my magic… I had nothing, lost in a big hole… and it took it away. The one thing I thought that would protect me from it! I feel it missing… all the time! You know what it was! Tell me! You took my life, so give me that! Sometimes… when I wake up, I feel like I’m so close to remembering… like I would only have to reach out and I would be able to touch it… and it feels so… warm. For a moment there is no sorrow, no pain, no… anger… but I can never grasp it, it fades away and then there’s only the void. I need to know… What did I forget? If you ever cared about me… you have to tell me.”

Loki’s body started to fail him. He was feeling tired, he wanted to lie down, to close his eyes. Yet he didn’t move, kept looking at Thor who slowly sank back down onto the bench. For the first time his gaze left Loki’s, instead he seemed to be looking at something that wasn’t there. Something that lay in the past.

Finally he spoke up, his voice so soft and faint. “You… see the gardens of Vanaheim?”

Loki answered with a nod. “I smell the flowers… the herbs… what happened there that I forgot?”
Another tear made its way down Thor’s cheek and Loki was yearning, wanting, needing…

“It’s not an event… it is a person.”

That didn’t make any sense. “What? A person?”

There was no doubt about it, Thor was staring at him in disbelief. “Do you… remember that father sent us to Vanaheim… on a diplomatic visit that was supposed to last a couple of weeks?”

“I remember there being talk about it. I don’t remember ever going there…” It wasn’t possible to stop trembling while Thor was continuing.

“We did… we spent several months there and… He was a member of the Vanir nobility… I didn’t notice him at first, but you spent a lot of time with him. In the gardens. He was very interested in your magic abilities, he admired your illusions and… he admired you.”

Within two seconds all of Loki’s hopes vanished and turned into dusk. A meaningless fairytale. What else had he expected from an oaf like Thor. “Are you trying to tell me a story about a former lover that is supposed to be one thing I thought would keep me sane in the void?”

Why did he look so shocked? Now it was Loki who didn’t understand and Thor took a shaky breath. “He wasn’t… He was… You loved him, Loki.”

How could he have been so naïve? How could Loki have ever believed that Thor would be able to help him? That Thor knew anything… he was trying to tell Loki a story about lost love and other foolish nonsense. Loki had had many lovers and he had not despised everyone of them, quite the opposite, but the idea that his most precious memory was bound to an affair was insulting. All this pain because of a tryst? Thor was trying to tell him that his mind had fallen apart, because he couldn’t remember a single person? The void was supposed to have taken a person from him? Thor couldn’t stop lying, he couldn’t stop betraying him. Even when Loki needed him the most. The only time he had ever needed him.

“Don’t patronize me! You are trying to tell me the void took something as trivial as a lover from me?” Loki spat, but he wanted to shout. To cut his throat for lying. For not knowing.

Again Thor was making this face. Not able to believe what Loki was saying. “Trivial… Oh, Loki… if anyone had called him that in your presence, you would have cut their tongue out… He courted you, not a single day he tried to hide his affection for you. You returned it… you loved him.”

Again… It didn’t make sense. Was the void even capable of removing an entire person? Why would it so important? Loki didn’t know and he couldn’t… what if… It was better to listen, he could draw his own conclusion, but he needed the information. To make something out of it… whatever it would be. “How would you know?”

Thor took a shaky breath and his eyes were filled with sadness. “He didn’t shy away from telling unpleasant truths, he was sarcastic, serious, but playful with you. He preferred silence over the sound of a feast. He knew tales from all the Nine worlds and he knew how to tell them. Every day you walked through the gardens with him. When there was a feast, he always sat next to you. After some time the servants stopped looking for you in your quarters, but directly went to his. You listened to him, preferred his company to anybody else’s. If I hadn’t seen any of that, I would still know, because you told me. You told me when you announced that you wouldn’t come home with me. You intended to stay in Vanaheim. With him.”
His castle of lies was already falling apart. None of this made any sense. “Odin would have never allowed…”

A faint smile spread across Thor’s face. “Father and mother respected your choice, they were happy for you. They appreciated it…”

No. Some Vanr he couldn’t remember? Out of the question. Something so sentimental and superficial. “Why should I do that? Leave Asgard behind? Vanaheim does not even compare to… what is there to…”

“I can’t believe that you cannot remember him…” Thor wasn’t able to fake such wonder, not able to believe it and Loki couldn’t deny that. This was supposed to be it? The missing pieces? A Vanr? “You chose him as your betrothed…”

Opening his mouth Loki searched for something to say, but no words were coming to him. There was no memory of going to Vanaheim with Thor. No memory of a man he would openly present as his… His lovers had always been a very private affair, at least the ones Loki had cared a little bit about. This one everybody seemed to have known about. People fell in love. It happened. Loki had built his whole scheme around this fact. Of course Loki had been in love, he remembered it quite fine and it had never been that important. Every time it had been quite easy to walk away from it.

If the void had taken the Vanr away… Loki’s heartbeat sped up, hammering against his chest and the edges were continuing to ache. Not a single moment… if the darkness had erased every single trace of the Vanr, it meant that…

“I… tell me about him. What was he like?” Not standing the sight of Thor Loki leaned his forehead against the wall.

“I’ve never come to know him like you…”

“Tell me!”

His breathing was becoming irregular and Loki felt dizzy. If Thor was telling him enough, he would be able to remember, it would come back to him. Loki would know… if it had really been the Vanr, Loki would remember. It would come back to him. He would be whole again.

Thor’s soft words came to his ears and Loki closed his eyes, waiting for the edges to heal, the wounds to close up.

“He was… a scholar. Literate, a sharp mind and a sharp tongue. Not like yours. He was more careful to not upset anyone, it was merely playful. The court loved him. His nature was rather quiet, but he didn’t hesitate to speak up. I didn’t always understand what he was saying, but… he made you smile a lot and smirk. He was an observer, perhaps even more perceptive than you… Walking into a room he could instantly tell who was there, what mood they were in and why. That was why people loved him, because he knew how to act around them… I’ve been talking to the court about him, to gain information…”


“Because he was not hiding his interest in my little brother and you did seem inclined to return his affections. I wanted to make sure if he was worthy of you.”

Balling his hands into fist Loki tried not to scream. “That’s not your decision to make.”

“I know, Loki… He said the same when he found out. He didn’t care about anybody’s opinion on
this than yours. Also he made you smile… I didn’t need anything else.”

It almost felt like a smile. Loki squeezed his eyes shut and tried to see, but there was only darkness. Nothing. Why couldn’t he see him? If this was the truth, he should be…

*You are special, little prcingeling*

His most beautiful memory… bound tightly to his most painful…

Loki’s breath got caught and it dawned on him. This was fate’s cruel sense of humour… balance, justice. Loki was manipulating somebody’s mind, making somebody love him, pretending to love them back when all he wanted was to… Straightening up Loki turned back around, his gaze turned to stone. “How did he betray me?”

“What?”

“My most beautiful memory and my worst! If you’re telling the truth he is both! How did he betray me!?”

Thor lowered his eyes, his expression struck with horror. Shaken to his core. “No. Loki, he didn’t. He would have never…”

“So what happened?! I know I didn’t stay in Vanaheim! What happened?!”

Loki felt his blood pulsing in his veins and Thor wouldn’t meet his eyes. “I am so sorry, Loki. Please, you have to…”

“What happened?!”

“He died.”

So quiet, Loki almost hadn’t heard these words. Death. Sooner or later everyone had to die. “How? Vanr are physically similar to Asgardians. Their healers almost superior to ours. What killed him?”

“Loki, please, you don’t want to…”

“Yes, I want to hear it!”

“There was… war. He got hurt and he succumbed to his wounds.”

A dry, rattled laugh was escaping Loki’s lips. “Who would be able to hurt him if he was that important to me? Who would dare? I can break bones, but I can also put them back together…”

Something was wrong. Loki felt it and he could see it. The glimmer in Thor’s eyes was a testimony of regret, hurt and despair. It was evident that he was struggling with his words. “You weren’t there.”

Over a thousand years. His entire life Loki had perfected the art of lying and he had tested all of his tricks and stories on Thor. He also had listened to Thor trying to disguise the truth as something else, but the oaf hadn’t succeeded a single time. Loki knew all the nuances, every timbre of his voice and the way he pronounced the different letters. There was more to these words. Thor dreaded them and he was choking on them.

“Why?” Loki whispered this single word and he realised that he was afraid to hear whatever would be the answer.
“Because… you were busy saving me while… he was dying. I am so sorry, Loki… I know it’s unforgivable…”

Loki couldn’t hear him anymore. He still couldn’t remember. Nothing. But what did it matter? Now he knew that Thor had taken even more from him than he had thought. Everything…

_________________________________________________

You’re the one I wanted to find
And anyone who tried to deny you
Must be out of their mind

Green eyes ~~ Coldplay ~~

_________________________________________________
It was never going to stop. Not in life and especially not in death. There would always be betrayal. No matter how much Loki had come to hate it, no matter how despicable all these actions had been… there was always more.

Thor was still mumbling, asking, begging for forgiveness, but Loki’s thoughts were too loud to let him hear any of that. He still refused to believe that the reason for the pain he was feeling was some Vanr, but Thor was lacking the intelligence to make up such a story.

There had been someone who had made Loki happy. The one thing he had wanted to think about in the void, that should protect him from the darkness. Whoever he had been… he must have been important to Loki. Now he was dead because of Thor. Just like Loki.

It seemed so odd. The thought of another person being that important was foreign and strange. Loki had learned the hard way that the only one who should always come first was himself.

A Vanr who Loki had wished to be with in the void. A Vanr whose death should have left deeper scars than what had happened in Jotunheim? It simply was not possible… People died, that was the course of nature, one day even Loki would die… again and for good. Death didn’t scare him, but the monster who had tried to steal his skin did. One single person dying couldn’t have such an impact.

Yet Thor thought that this was the case.

Thor, foolish and feeble prince, was convinced that the Vanr had been the one thing that Loki had cherished the most. It didn’t matter if it was true or not. Thor insisted on Loki’s love for this person. Thor was the reason the Vanr was dead. Loki would never be able to find out.

Except for one certainty.

Thor had been sure of the love Loki had been supposedly feeling for the Vanr… and then the Vanr ended up dead. Believing in coincidences was proof of simplicity and Loki was anything but naïve.

His magic was running from him, waves that were becoming bigger and bigger. Pulsing, throbbing, trying to liberate itself. So full of rage, way too much to be contained and Loki didn’t even want to try. The urge to let it all out was overwhelming. Now he knew that the ache was never going
subside, he was never going to be whole again, Thor had betrayed him once more… in the most horrible way imaginable.

“Loki… brother, please… say something…”

Raising his head Loki saw Thor standing in front of him. Still taller than him, but to Loki he had never looked smaller or more pathetic. Despicable. Blue eyes that were bloodshot from crying and full of desperation and regret. It was etching all over Thor’s face. How badly he wanted to be forgiven. Loki felt disgusted by this weakness and it made his skin crawl. A lifetime of betrayal and hatred and now he felt bad because of it? Loki wanted him to choke on his guilt, to suffocate and to die in immense pain.

The fire began to consume Loki. It wanted to get out, to burn Thor alive like the little mage, to hear his screams and he wouldn’t stop there. Every single person in this complex should burn, lose their skin and their life in agony. Then he would take care of this building, not a single wall would be left, destroyed by magic, fire and Loki’s bare hands. Then the Avengers and the rest of this world if he…

“Loki…”

Thor reached out for him and Loki jerked back. His fingers were shaking, magic pooling at his fingertips, eager to hit Thor with full force, but he would be giving up his cover. The Asgardian would know that he was still alive… yet Loki wanted to. Burn his face off. Should Thor feel what it was like to live without a face…

“Don’t touch me! What is there left of me that you want to take?! Nothing! You have taken it all! I have nothing left. No family, no face, no mind… no… I don’t even know his name. This is all I’ve got now… Look at it! You did it, so look at it!” Loki was screaming at the top of his lungs, both of his hands pointing at the hole in his chest. No blood was streaming from the wound, it was old, the blood had long dried up and the flesh was rotten. Thor averted his gaze and Loki was caught between repulsion and hatred. “You can’t even look at it! You killed me, so look at the work you’ve done!”

Thor winced at every single word and Loki thought that the walls were beginning to tremble, from all the cold energy that was radiating from his body. Not able to control it and felt no desire to suppress it. Nobody on this pathetic planet had ever got to know what Loki was capable of. Not even Thor. Maybe it was time to let them know.

“Please Loki…” Blue eyes met his dead ones and they were hurting. Not enough though. Never enough. “I love you, I’ve always loved you… you must believe me, it was never my intention to…”

“I hate you.” Not once in his life had words slipped easier from Loki’s lips. “You took everything from me, pushed me into darkness and you were too blind to see what it did to me. There is no hope for forgiveness and you will die knowing that you have my blood on your hands…”

The look on Thor’s face didn’t give him any satisfaction and Loki felt his own power overwhelming him. Act ing against his own desire Loki slipped away, walking the branches of the world tree. Running. Trying to ignore the searing pain. He didn’t know where he ended up, but the second he had solid ground beneath his feet all the build up energy left his body. The earth was trembling, the burst of pure, untamed power uprooted trees, rocks were crushed to dust and a wide fissure opened up right in front of Loki, parting the ground. When it was all over Loki let out a scream of frustration and anger that once again tore apart the silence. Dropping to his knees Loki dug his fingers into the grass, imaging it was Thor’s face.
Liar, traitor, fratricide…

No more. Enough. Tired of waiting. Tired of suffering. Loki would never be whole again, so he would rip them apart. They needed to feel it. Gritting his teeth Loki pressed his palm against his forehead, tried to chase the pain away, but he felt like he was back in the void. Somebody was mangling his mind, cutting out pieces and he was falling apart.

A Vanr…

Love… Thor pretended that Loki had forgotten about love. His blood wouldn’t stop boiling in his veins. How was this supposed to be it? Something so simple and plain?

Thor had taken him away…

Suddenly another sting of pain went through Loki’s skull and it was so sharp and cut so deeply that he fell over. Breathing through it Loki opened his eyes wide and the realisation tasted bitter and so sweet at the same time. His heartbeat slowed down again and his fingers loosened their grip. The tension in his muscles faded away and Loki felt like he could take control of his body again. Within a single second everything had changed. Now he knew, no doubts about it.

There had been a Vanr…

It has never been this bad. Not since the void. His mind had reacted to it, recognized this information as the missing piece. Still Loki didn’t know anything. The pieces were lost. No name, no image, nothing. There had to be something… anything.

The sounds of sirens were coming closer and Loki cursed the Midgardians under his breath. He was tempted to kill all of them, because that would definitely make him feel better. No. First he was going to search his memory. So many times he had done that before, but now Loki knew what he was looking for. One day. No more. Tomorrow Thomas would be dead and Stark would unleash hell upon this world.

A comforting thought and Loki used it to get back up on his feet and his magic pulled him away. With a bit of luck his shield was still intact and Heimdall had been blind to his outburst.

Thomas looked up from the book in his hands, raising one eyebrow at Loki. With a dismissive gesture Thomas vanished into green light and Loki put on the glamour. He had taken way too much time anyway. Getting the few things Thomas had been here for Loki left the apartment, calling Happy to tell him that he wanted to get back to the tower. Unfortunately the Midgardian wanted to make conversation during the ride back and wasn’t discouraged by Loki’s short and sour answers. There was nothing else he wanted or could concentrate on right now. Even breathing seemed too much of a distraction.

Vanir… they were gods… like Asgardians… beautiful in appearance… At least Asgardians would call them beautiful, every race had another perception of this. Usually they were tall, had light skin and bright eyes. They liked being outside, but their skin rarely changed its light tone. Unlike Asgardians… Brown eyes were rare among the Vanir and considered very attractive. Most of them had graceful hands, slender, perfect to create magic…

Closing his eyes Loki tried to search for a face. Every eye colour imaginable, but not a single one sparked Loki’s memory. Blue… green… grey… brown… Nothing. His fingers twitched to slam his fist against the window next to him, but Loki contained himself.

Suddenly he was standing in the main room of the floor they were using now, Jarvis was telling
him that Stark would be back soon and Loki had no idea how he had gotten here in the first place. When had been the last time that he had been so lost in thought that he seemed to be sleepwalking? Out of the car, into the elevator, into the apartment. All he could think about were… the colour of his eyes, or his hair… the tone of his skin… the way he was built...

If Loki remembered what he looked liked, he would also remember what had happened. Filling the holes, finding the pieces. Loki had to… “Jarvis, where can I find some sheets of paper and a pencil?”

“You are in luck, Mr. Pine. The desk to your right.”

Not even necessary to leave the room. First good message of the day. “Thank you…” Getting the sketch block Loki sat down on the couch and tapped the pencil against the paper. Something was still there. When he was slowly waking up Loki could smell the flowers of Vanaheim. Yes, his memory had been cut out, but maybe the edges were still holding some information for him. Loki would find it and then he would be able to remember. Then he would be a whole person again…

Closing his eyes again Loki let the pencil scrap across the paper. Eyes, he always started a portrait with the eyes. Not thinking about it, no decisions, just letting his subconsciousness do the work. If he had drawn him before, his hand would remember the movements. Loki had liked to draw… His fingers drew the lines with confidence, eyes, nose… he hesitated at the lips…

Suppressing a sigh Loki took a look at his work and he was astonished by how hard the disappointment stung. What he had drawn wasn’t a face but several. The nose of a former teacher, the eyes of one of the guards and Loki couldn’t quite put the mouth, but he knew he had seen it before not that long ago. A lot of different features, mingled together. Angrily Loki ripped the page off the block and crumpled it. Just a first try… How long had it taken him to teleport for the first time? Not giving up, that was the key.

This time Loki kept his eyes open, thinking about the smell of the flowers, the herbs and what Thor had told him. Choosing him as his betrothed. Loki still had trouble believing that, but if there was some truth in this… That face would be special. Loki would know it when he saw it. Therefore he started his second try. Slowly Loki created another face, fine brows, thin lips, the nose a little bigger than average, prominent cheeks bones…

Letting his eyes run over his creation Loki shook his head. This was anybody… one of the million faces he had used to disguise himself. It didn’t spark anything, no memory, no emotion, nothing. Another crumpled up sheet and the third attempt was launched.

Vanir… bright eyes… white spots dancing in of them…

Another strategy perhaps… Just the eyes. Concentrating on one thing than the whole ensemble. Big eyes, soft eyelashes… in Loki’s imagination they were green. Not as dark as his but light with sparks of gold. They were strong, filled with determination, attentive and smart… They were…

“Hey gorgeous, I didn’t expect you to stand on the balcony and watch the sky till I get back, but I did expect you to notice when I got back.” Stark pressed a kiss on his cheek and wrapped his arms around his shoulders from behind.

Loki sucked in a deep breath and immediately asked himself if… the Vanr had done this too. Had he? Or had Thor imagined most of their relationship? There was a possibility it had all been one of Loki’s schemes and Thor had fallen for it… yes, that made sense… he had made Thor believe that he had been in love with a Vanr. But for what reason?
“What are you… Holy shit, you can draw! That’s fucking amazing!” Stark climbed over the back of the couch and sat down next to Loki. Blithely he was staring at Loki’s attempt to wake his memories. Loki couldn’t tell why, but he found his amazement incredibly annoying. “Yes, I can… I can do pretty much everything… You are okay? I was worried… S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t cause you any problems, did they? What was that explosion about?” Loki already knew and he didn’t care, but it would raise a lot of questions if Thomas suddenly acted like everything was alright.

Instantly a shadow appeared on Stark’s face and made it clear that his good mood was partly a façade. “I was there before S.H.I.E.L.D and there wasn’t much left to see. According to Jarvis there had been some kind of warehouse, but whoever blew it up did a fucking good job on it. Not even the walls were left. Nothing. Jarvis wasn’t even able to register any traces of energy… Someone wiped that place completely off the map. No idea how that is even possible…”

It was quite easy. All it needed was an upset sorcerer with unlimited power….

“What does that mean?”

“I have no idea… if I had to take a guess I’d say that our robot mastermind gave up a base and made sure that nobody is going to find anything that might help figuring out his next move…”

Tearing his eyes off his drawing Loki looked at Stark’s face. “You think there is going to be another attack?”

“Quite honestly I have no idea. It’s unlikely that he’s going to stop now… why should he? That’s why I gotta go back to work… Security is back up, but I want it to be…”

“No… can’t you have Jarvis taking care of that? At least for another hour or so? We haven’t really spent a minute with each other since last night… and I’m still trying to wrap my head around all of this…”

Before he had even finished the sentence Stark began to smile at him. “You don’t want me to work on the security protocol, because you’d like to spend time with me? It killed you inwardly to admit that, am I right?”

“Just a little bit…” Loki tilted his head to the side, letting it rest against Stark’s shoulder. He couldn’t remember, but Loki wouldn’t stop trying. There was a possibility that he could trigger something… if he re-enacted something he had already lived through. Stark was the next best thing and he was in love with Loki. With a bit of luck…

An arm was slid around his waist and Stark pulled him closer. “You’re sure that you’re alright? You went through a lot of shit yesterday. Stuff I’ve never wanted you to see or to happen to you…”

Being treated like some weak and feeble creature didn’t spark any of Loki’s memories. He would have never respected anyone who had dared to treat him like this. “I’m doing perfectly fine. I just… don’t want you to run off instantly… all this talk about people trying to steal your suits or to even kill you… it’s incredibly tiring and not really pleasant.”

“No arguing about that…” Stark paused as if he didn’t know what to say next and instead he brushed his fingers over Loki’s drawing. “That’s fucking incredible… like a photograph. Whose eyes are those?”

“A guy I knew growing up.”

“First great love?”
Rolling his eyes Loki shook his head. “No, just living in the same neighbourhood. He was an idiot.”

His third try now was also being crumpled up and Stark protested. “Hey! That was looking awesome. Why are you doing this?”

Loki opened his mouth to tell a lie, but it didn’t come out. “Did it ever happen to you that… you can’t remember the face of a person you knew very well?”

It sounded stupid and awkward, but those were things Stark was very familiar with. “Yeah.”

In mild surprise Tony raised an eyebrow. “Really? Who?”

These brown eyes suddenly seemed troubled and whatever he was about to say, Loki knew that every word Stark was about to say was going to be nothing but the truth. “My mother. I was still pretty young when my parents died and sometimes it’s hard for me to recall what she looked like and I have to search some photographs. She wasn’t the best mom, absolutely not, but it’s still a shame that her face fades away and I will always be able to remember perfectly how Howard looked at me… Being an asshole definitely leaves an impression.”

“The person I’m trying to remember isn’t an arsehole…” Loki mumbled softly and was taken aback by his own words.

“Who are you trying to remember? A friend? An ex? Teacher you had a crush on?”

Loki shook his head. “Somebody who was kind to me a long time ago…”

“You do realise how weird that sounds?” Stark cocked his head and leaned down to pick up one of the sheets. “Come on, spit it out. I’m not going to laugh… and I’m not going to be pissed off it it’s a boyfriend you didn’t tell me about.” His voice was soft, his tone sweet and understanding. Fingers were gently caressing his arm and there it was. Thomas would feel protected now, safe, close to a person who loved him. Loki didn’t remember though. Nothing like that.

What he felt was a strange urge. To tell the truth. Not to lie. If his relationship with the Vanr had been in the least bit like Thor had described it… then the Vanr deserved better than that. Loki didn’t want to lie. “It was years ago… he fancied me and I… I was bad for him. That is all.”

Stark looked at him in silence, obviously lost in thought, trying to make some sense from what Loki was saying. It wasn’t much and Stark had wit, he knew that Loki was purposely saying barely anything. “You’re feeling guilty because you don’t remember his face?”

A few weeks ago Loki wouldn’t have thought Stark capable of this. Talking to somebody without judging them, without feeling the need to lighten up a serious topic by making a joke… No, he was sweet, empathic and clearly in love.

“I guess so… it’s a scary thought. Forgetting somebody’s face when they’re gone…” Forgetting the Vanr… forgetting his own face… when Loki only wanted to forget Thor’s. Odin’s… Stark’s…

A hand touched his cheek, gently forcing Loki to look at him. “I’m sorry…” It was so easy to read his face, Stark meant what he said and Loki didn’t understand the implications or the meaning. What should he be sorry for? He had nothing to do with it. He didn’t even know what…

The realisation dawned slowly on him. Stark’s eyes were telling him an entire story. The mortal was feeling guilty over what had happened yesterday. Probably thinking that Thomas had been confronted with the possibility of Stark dying and now he was trying to cope. Should Stark believe
whatever he wanted… at least Loki wouldn’t have to lie about the Vanr this way.

“Stop feeling sorry for things that aren’t your fault. I can’t remember a face… I guess that means it wasn’t that important.”

Stark looked very willing to disagree with him, but finally he only tapped against the sketch block in Loki’s hands. “Take a break from trying. Draw something else, maybe it’ll come back to you later… I want to watch you draw something.”

“Any wishes?”

“You?”

“No chance.” Never would Loki draw Thomas’ face. He was so tired of him. “I have a better idea…”

Stark was right, it was easy to concentrate on a face you hated. It was burned into your mind and would never leave you alone. Until you killed the person the face belonged to. Loki’s hand did the work completely on its own, again starting with the eyes. He didn’t have to look up once to verify, Stark’s features were soon quite easy to make out.

“Now who’s that good looking bastard?”

Loki could tell that Stark was smirking, just by listening to him. He didn’t bother to give him an answer, instead Loki focused on getting Stark’s hair right. There was no denying it, the person coming to life on this piece of paper was beautiful. Nothing new about that, Stark had always been easy on the eyes. His eyes were of an extraordinarily warm colour and the charm in his smile was undeniable. A smile Loki would make disappear forever. Now he had immortalised it on paper, like this Stark would maybe remember it later on. A sad memory. Better than nothing.

“This is incredible… you don’t even have to look at me? Once.” Stark definitely sounded in awe and Loki was tempted to roll his eyes. It was nothing, he has been able to draw like this since his childhood.

“I guess I don’t have trouble remembering your face. It’s just a quick sketch…” Handing Stark the block Loki met his eyes. “Do you like it?”

“Holy shit, it’s fucking great. I love it… You’re better at this than Steve… Look at that handsome bastard, that’s so obviously me… so few lines and it’s a complete face…” His voice was filled with amazement and Loki cocked his head to observe Stark’s expression. The admiration was honest and Loki felt the corners of his mouth twitch. Yes, Stark had called him smart at several occasions, but being complimented on something he had created felt good nonetheless. Until Stark hadn’t known about this ability, so Loki shouldn’t feel so condescending, not when the reaction was pure amazement.

“Is there anything you can’t do better than everybody else?”

Loki gave into the temptation to smirk. “Hardly anything…”

Never shying away from a challenge Stark put on a pensive look. “Play any instruments?”

“Piano, guitar and bass.”

“Ride a motorcycle?”
“Sure.”

“Catch a fly with one hand?”

“The left one.”

“Do a cartwheel?”

“Oh please.”

“Touch the tip of your nose with your tongue.”

Instead of answering Loki stuck his tongue out and touched his nose with it. Stark began to laugh amusedly. “This is really a turn-on.”

“You are stupid…”

“You are a good guy…” Completely taken aback Loki stared at him and Stark replied with a smile, his hand brushing over Loki’s hair. “Don’t get me wrong… you are a bastard with a sharp tongue and I love that. You told me that it’s only my decision what kind of guy I am or who I want to be. Sometimes I have the feeling that you don’t think that rule applies to you. You are a good guy. I know you think it’s terrible that you forgot a friend’s face, but what really matters is that it’s still important to you. Don’t get upset over it… You’re a good guy.”

There was no doubt about it, Stark meant everything he said, he wasn’t just trying to make him feel better and Loki’s heart was hammering against his chest. They couldn’t be talking about the Vanr. Until an hour ago Loki had not known about the Vanr’s existence. He should not have mentioned any of it in Stark’s presence. The mortal didn’t know what he was talking about… just like Loki. It was absurd, especially since Loki would kill the man Stark was in love with tomorrow.

And here he was, telling Loki that he was a good person. Loki. Thomas hadn’t forgotten a face. He had never met the Vanr. Had Loki?

“That’s merely your opinion…”

“Yap, but mine is the only one that matters. You should know that by now.” Lazily Stark slid his arm around Loki’s waist, pulling him close and pressed a kiss to his temple.

Letting it happen Loki turned his body, leaning into Stark, enjoying the warmth that was radiating from Stark’s body. The other one had no idea that he was holding a broken person. Without a face, a mangled mind and without any memory of the person had wanted to spend his life with. If any of this was true…

Loki would never know. The cuts would never heal, but at least he could punish and destroy the people who had done this to him and the ones who had humiliated him afterwards. Then he would leave, find another place, another world and there he’d be Loki. There he’d be at peace.

Tender words were whispered against his ear and Stark nuzzled his neck. So happy that he was here, that he was fine…

And tomorrow it would all just end.
Hello everybody,

The time has come for Loki to set his plan into motion...

Hope you have fun with it :)

_________________________________________________

One last thing before I shuffle off the planet
I will be the one to make you crawl
So I came down to wish you an unhappy birthday
Someone call the ambulance there's gonna be an accident

Infra red ~~ Placebo ~~

_________________________________________________

“I want to do something crazy…”

“I’m tried and not in the mood…”

“That’s not what I mean…” Stark shifted, snuggling his face against the cushion, his eyes looking into Loki’s. “We have great, awesome and pretty fancy sex all the time. Mind-blowing and imaginative sex on regular basis isn’t crazy but I’ve never stayed up all night… talking.”

Both of Loki’s eyebrows went up and he blinked in confusion. “You want to talk the entire night? Are you serious? One of the robots hit you hard on the back of the head?”

“No, it’s just something I’ve never done before.”

“For a good reason, we’ve had all day to talk. Why should we do that now?”

Stark smirked at him and loosely draped his arm across Loki’s waist. They were lying on their sides, facing each other and until now they hadn’t been touching. Honestly Loki didn’t really understand what was going on in Stark’s mind, but he wasn’t actually trying either. His thoughts were constantly wandering, still not accepting that the pieces were gone and that they wouldn’t come back to him.

“Because it’s been a long day and it was hard on both of us. I just… I dunno… it’s just an idea. I’m trying to be attentive and awesome, because so much shit went down. You were so lost in thought the whole day… and I’d like to talk too. About normal stuff. Nice things.”

“What would that be?”

“Star Wars?”
The absurdity of these two words made Loki laugh. “I think I know something else.”

“I’m listening.”

Loki licked his lips and propped up his head on his hand. “Tell me why you started talking to me. The first time you saw me.”

If the question did surprise Stark, he didn’t let it show and he didn’t hesitate to answer it. “I was terribly uncomfortable being there. Who likes to go to the shrink? So I planned on distracting myself by talking with whoever I’d meet there… Second reason, you looked like you absolutely didn’t want to talk to me. Third reason, you immediately started giving me shit. Forth reason, you are gorgeous, smoking hot. I watched you walking out of there, pissed off and with that attitude… I wanted you from that very second.”

“You wanted to fuck me.”

“Sure… from the first moment on I knew that you were awesome… but it took me a little while to figure out how life changing, answer to my prayers awesome you are. Over 9000… I’m a genius, Tommy. I know I don’t always act like one, but I’m smart… Only a stupid person wouldn’t want to be with you. Good thing I’m not stupid.” Stark’s fingers were slipping beneath his shirt, rubbing Loki’s side.

Sighing softly Loki was processing these words. He was well aware of how things had happened, even though he hadn’t planed them like this. A lot of things had happened that Loki hadn’t seen coming, but he was dealing with it because he had to. Just like Stark would have to cope with what was going to happen tomorrow. By the way Stark was looking at him it was easy to tell that he was going to set the world on fire. Literally.

Had Loki done the same?

A hand cupped his cheek and Loki blinked in surprise. “You’re sure you are alright? You’re different today…”

Stark was perceptive and indeed smart, of course he would notice. Realise that Loki was mourning his broken mind, trying to find the pieces. It was time to leave this all behind. The Captain had seen Loki beneath the glamour and now Stark was beginning to sense it too.

“I guess life changed quite a lot within a single day… I’ve never been attacked by flying robots before and I’ve never moved in with another person… It’s all new… but it’s not that bad… moving in. The robot part sucked.”

“There won’t be anymore robots… I’ll take care of that, but you’re going to stay here anyway.” Stark emphasised his words with a soft kiss and Loki tried to use the tingling sensation to spark his memory. So many kisses. Mostly driven by lust or some scheme. Loki had hardly kissed anyone, because he had felt the need to. Stark’s taste was lingering on his lips, but it didn’t help Loki to remember anything. What if he had never kissed the Vanr? What did Thor know anyway? That man had never understood what was going on in Loki’s mind or what fascinated him… what scared him.

Had the Vanr known? Had he understood?

Closing his eyes Loki decided that it didn’t matter. Not tonight. He still had the rest of his life to chase after the missing pieces. Several thousand years and he could use every single day of them to try to find the answers. Tonight he was still Thomas, a character who would cease to exist.
tomorrow. Stark shouldn’t be thinking that he had acted strangely the night before his death.

“I don’t think I’d like to move out again… Jarvis is great company. I’ll definitely stay, but there is a good chance that I’ll throw you out if you start getting on my nerves.”

“Kicking me out off my own tower? Now that’s just heartless. God, you’re awesome…” A grin turned into a smile and Stark pulled him close. Loki let him, rested his head against Stark’s chest. His heartbeat was luring him to sleep and Loki sighed softly. “I don’t think we’re going to talk all night…”

Laughing lightly Stark caressed his back. “That’s okay… there are more fun things anyway that we can do all night. Like having sex… or sleeping. Now I’m really feeling old.”

“You are old, but I like that…”

“Glad you do…”

It felt nice, warm, being held like that and not completely unfamiliar. Loki let sleep claim him, he needed all his forces tomorrow.

***

Loki was dreaming. For the first time in what seemed ages. It was a nightmare. Loki was falling, deeper and deeper into the void. The emptiness was swallowing him and he was screaming for someone. Not Thor. Of course not. His throat was hurting, sore… yet Loki continued screaming although he couldn’t understand which word, which name was leaving his lips.

Then it was all gone. Everything around him was black, but his hands were red. Blood. Not his.

Suddenly deep and painful regret and guilt were threatening to overwhelm him and when Loki opened his eyes he realised that his cheeks were wet. He had been crying. Quickly he wiped his cheeks with the back of his hand and took a shaky breath. Why couldn’t he grasp it? Just out of his reach…

Nuzzling his face against the cushion Loki closed his eyes again. He couldn’t get up just yet. Stark was breathing softly next to him.

Minutes passed and Loki was just lying there in complete silence until he heard and felt Stark moving. An arm was slid around his waist and a firm body pressed itself against his back. Loki’s breath hitched and Stark kissed the back of his neck. “Morning…”

“Morning…”

“Still sleepy?”

No, Loki was wide awake and so was the urge to shrug Stark’s arms off and run away. Why the rush now? This was the last time anyway. “Nah, just lazy. Not in the mood to go to work today.”

Turning around in his arms Loki faced Stark who smiled softly at him. “Then stay at home, you can write here.”

“No going to happen… I want to get out of here for a few moments. Get some fresh air and… you know me, don’t even get started with it being dangerous outside. I’m not going to stay inside the whole day.”
“Hey, I didn’t say anything… I’m not locking you in. Just keep this on and I’ll know you’re fine.” Stark’s fingers were running over the bracelet and Loki released a little sigh. “It’s not like the tower proved itself to be secure than the outside.”

Way to ruin Stark’s mood this early. “This isn’t a conversation to have at such an early hour.” The conversation was ended by another kiss and Loki made sure to screw his face up. Laughing softly Stark pulled back. “Hey, I get it. Time to brush my teeth.”

They got out of bed together, Stark kissed him again despite not having brushed his teeth yet. When they had finally taken care of that, they had breakfast and Loki’s mind was racing. His plan was quite difficult and a lot of things could go wrong, but he had always known that this would be the most important and hardest part. Mostly because he depending on S.H.I.E.L.D and Stark. They needed to be on time and Loki had to be on the top of his game.

The excitement was slowly settling in, Loki’s skin started to tingle and he couldn’t wait. So much power slumbering inside of him and it wanted to be used. To tear them apart and he would start with Thomas… and Stark. All this work, humiliation, things that he had not enjoyed doing, but today it would all pay off and Loki would be able to lean back and watch it all crumble. Collapsing like a house of cards.

“You know… you could still stay at home and we have a ton of sex.”

Not a very tempting thought. Loki had woken up today with the knowledge he’d commit at least one murder today. Maybe even some more. Yes, that prospect was filling him with glee, but he needed to stay focused. Today was going to be difficult, he’d need a lot of will and effort to make everything happen like he wanted it to, so no. No further distractions.

Despite feeling like slapping him Loki let out a soft laugh and shook his head, playfully running his fingers through Stark’s dark hair. “I’m pretty sure you have other things to do… the things you talked about… securing the tower, finding out what S.H.I.E.L.D is up to… you know the unimportant stuff.”

In response Stark smirked like a little boy and shrugged. “I like to be irresponsible from time to time, you know that.”

He was only joking, Loki knew that. The situation had become too serious and Stark wouldn’t jeopardize Thomas’ safety for a second. Also he was fed up with S.H.I.E.L.D and he thought them capable of anything. Stark wouldn’t take this day off, even if Loki agreed to stay at the tower all day. That wasn’t going to happen.

“Yes, I know, but not at this time. I’m leaving now and I’ll be back around lunch time.” Loki pressed a quick kiss to Stark’s mouth and turned around when he felt a bizarre feeling rising from his gut until it settled in the back of his neck. Was this wrong? Was he doing the right thing? Too much sweetness would be suspicious in retrospect, but too little seemed out of place now. Wouldn’t it hurt so much more if this memory was all the more pleasant? If Stark thought back to this very moment as what his life could have been like if they hadn’t taken him away?

Should he just leave like this?

Readying himself Loki turned back around, putting his arms around Stark’s neck who looked decently surprised, but his hands instantly settled on Loki’s hips. “Changed your mind?”

“No…” Playfully Loki ran the fingers of his right hand through Stark’s hair. “I just… thought about that day full of sex you were mentioning… We could work on that when I get back.
Technically it wouldn’t be an entire day, but half a day wouldn’t be too bad at your age…”

“Ouch, that hurt.” Stark put on a sour expression before he leaned forward and caught Loki’s lips in a deep kiss. “Anyway this is still an awfully good idea…”

Loki returned his smile and let Stark kiss him again before he slowly pulled away. “I’ll see you in three hours. You order us lunch?”

“With pleasure. Something specific in mind?”

“Yes, I’d love some Portuguese.”

“Consider it done.”

Smiling contently Loki kissed him again and mumbled a soft “Goodbye.”

Again he couldn’t leave though, because Stark grabbed his hand and the expression in his eyes made Loki’s heart skip a beat. Had he figured it out? Was he already suspecting something? No… this wasn’t anger, not even fear. Worry…

No words were leaving Stark’s mouth, not immediately. Instead he took in Loki’s face, watching him carefully. It put Loki on the edge and he felt the urge to run. “Maybe you should stay here…”

“Stark…”

“Listen, I have the feeling this day is going to suck. It’s going to suck badly… why not simply stay here and we don’t make it suck…” For once there wasn’t a hint of humour in his voice and Loki wished he could be himself right now, because every fibre of his being wanted to shout out a curse. Damn this mortal. Damn him for having a presentiment. Damn him for…

Had the Vanr gone through something similar? Had Loki known that…

“Three hours, don’t try your tricks on me, Stark. It’s not going to work. I’ve told you before, I’m not going to change my life for or because of you. Do something useful with the time, when I’m coming back… well…” Loki took Stark’s lower lip between his teeth and kissed him properly. This time Stark responded only reluctantly and Loki felt so thirsty.

Another moment of silence then Stark seemed to make a decision that he wouldn’t let his nerves get the better of him. “Okay, see you in three hours then… be ready though to drop your clothes the second you come back, because I’m planning on making you suffer for letting me wait… three entire hours. Good chance my hair is going to be grey when you show up again.”

Loki raised an eyebrow and looked at Stark’s temples. The other one noticed and gave him a playful shove. “Fuck you, it makes me look sophisticated… and awesome. Most of all hot. George Clooney, Richard Gere, Tony Stark… what do we all have in common? We’re absolutely irresistible to women and men alike.”

“You love to hear yourself talk… I’m starting to get used to it. Also I do think George Clooney and Richard Gere are not attractive in the least. I’ll make an exception for you.” Loki squeezed his hand, then turned on his heels. Finally, it was about time to leave.

Stark told him to take care and something else, but Loki wasn’t listening anymore. Stepping into the elevator Loki told himself that this was the last time that Thomas’ feet were touching this floor and this thought was strangely comforting. The real satisfaction was awaiting him, still sitting in this little room S.H.I.E.L.D refused to call a cell.
Today he would finally make Thor regret what he had done to him. Make him feel the pain and then Thor would make others feel it. Hopefully it would be enough.

Leaving the tower Loki went through all the steps in his mind. He knew what to do. They should know they had it coming.

Walking around a corner Loki let his magic take him away. At this moment he didn’t even bother about the bracelet anymore. If Stark tried to track him and couldn’t find him… Well, a minor malfunction didn’t hurt his plan, Stark would trace it all back to S.H.I.E.L.D later on. Rage could even cloud the most brilliant mind and then you’d only see what you wanted to see.

Here Loki could just go through the motions. In about half an hour S.H.I.E.L.D would be in a permanent crisis, so nobody would bother to try to figure out what had happened to a security guy who had a very bad headache and who would not be able to remember anything special. The security cameras would paint the same picture, only showing them an empty room and a computer that definitely wasn’t operating. Thor had never appreciated or understood what Loki could do with a single illusion. Steal things and people would believe they were still there, even looking at them. Talking with a person to stall them when in reality Loki was already miles away. Distracting some fool while Loki was really behind him, ramming the pointy end of his sceptre through his body. Or in this case – making S.H.I.E.L.D believe that nobody was here when Loki was messing with their servers. He had learned a thing or two from Stark.

Still his magic was the most useful asset. Now it was even easier to connect to Midgardian inventions. A little piece of information. Nothing more. Since Loki was already here, he would add a bonus. It could never hurt to have a back-up and that file about all the different ways to kill Doctor Banner shouldn’t go to waste.

Within a mere minute Loki had fed the computer all the information he needed. The motive for a murder and enough for a man to set the world on fire.

Humming softly under his breath Loki teleported away, the illusion collapsed once he was gone. Loki didn’t go far though, his way led into a cell. So different from the one he had been sitting in. How foolish had they been… Four walls supposed to hold back the god of mischief? It was offensive how outrageously they had always underestimated his magic. A mistake they would never stop paying for. Never.

Something was different than expected and Loki felt a shiver running down his spine. The sheer possibility of something not going as planned suddenly became real and Loki felt disgusted by his own weakness. No matter what was going to happen tonight, Loki was able to deal and cope with anything. Unlike them.

So this was unexpected. Thor wasn’t alone. Banner’s presence caused Loki to suppress a silent growl. No, he didn’t like this. A giant, immediate obstacle that Loki didn’t want to deal with. The fight wasn’t supposed to start here. Way too little casualties, not enough chaos. If Thor lost his mind right here right now, he and the beast would engage in a fight and there would be no end in sight. Not what Loki was interested in.

Loki may be a strategist, but he could improvise well enough. Scanning his surroundings he could easily spot why Banner and that other doctor were here. A mistake, something that Loki hadn’t intended to do, but this could work out to his advantage. Loki had forgotten to pull the web from Thor’s mind. Yesterday he had left in such a hurry, so fuelled and overcome by rage that he had simply run away. Loki had forgotten about it. Plain and simple

It only angered him for about a second, then he saw the repercussions and Loki could easily admit
that he liked what he saw. The new feeling wasn’t anywhere near satisfaction, but the taste in his mouth was still sweet and pleasant. It left Loki yearning for more, almost desperately. That Asgardian fool owed him and he deserved every bit of the pain he was going through. Nope, it wasn’t enough, not even close. In the back of his mind Loki had always known that it would never be enough, that they would never be even and after yesterday Loki knew it for sure. Thor had taken so much, Loki would never be able to cause him as much pain as Thor had.

Didn’t mean he couldn’t try. Didn’t mean he couldn’t work up to him. And there were the others… all of them deserved death and unbearable suffering.

Cocking his head Loki watched the scene in front of him. This so called god had his knees pulled up to his chest, his head cradled in his hands and Loki could see his shoulders slightly trembling. Impossible to keep the mischievous grin of his face. By now the web must be causing him physical pain. An illusion wasn’t supposed to last that long. Loki wasn’t even sure what Thor must be seeing right now. Flashes. Lights. Sounds that couldn’t be explained… Loki hadn’t been here to manipulate the illusion, bend it to his will. Therefore Thor had to feel like caught between dream and reality. An entire day now. That must be painful and driving someone to the edge of insanity. Perfect for Loki’s plan.

Should he leave him like this a while longer? It was tempting, but Loki had a tight schedule today. Death and destruction didn’t like to wait.

“… let her do something to help you with your headache. Thor, you are hurting and I don’t want to watch you torturing yourself any longer…”

Admiration was something Loki hardly ever felt, but this was an exception. It could have been him saying this. A voice that was able to express determination, pity, a bit of affection and so many things that Thor wasn’t worth of. This brilliant man’s attention and care were being wasted. Confronted with this scene Loki made a deal with himself. He had wanted the Beast. Banner knew how it was like to live with a monster and if he was going to survive this… Tony would let him walk away. Being beaten into the ground suddenly didn’t seem like such a humiliation anymore. Not when you were facing such a betrayal.

Thor didn’t react, did not even move. Banner’s lips escaped a soft sigh and he straightened up, looking at the medical doctor in the room who absolutely didn’t look like she wanted to be here anyway. After Banner had softly shaken his head she quickly turned around and left. Fine, one intruder less.

“Thor… you can’t go on like this… I see you falling apart and you won’t let me help you… Being nice doesn’t work, okay… I will try something else: you make me feel like shit! I am here, because you are my friend and I care about you and you just sit here and don’t let me help you! This is horrible! Don’t you get that!? I’m trying to…” The sudden outburst ended just as abruptly as it had begun. Banner took a step back and he seemed to have entered some kind of shock. It didn’t feel good when you realised that you were reproaching somebody of the very same thing you were doing all the time. Running away from people who wanted to help him.

Elizabeth had been so frustrated with him because of this.

Thor still didn’t seem to hear him, ignoring every word or sound. Banner’s eyes were fixed on him and they were filled with more dread than Thor would ever know and that knowledge made Loki’s hands tremble. This was taking too much time, Loki was aching for blood.

“I’ll… I will be back in a second…”
Perfect. Exactly what Loki had been hoping for. It didn’t matter that Banner felt bad about it, he followed the doctor outside and Loki was alone with the man who had pushed him into darkness. Because of him Loki wasn’t a whole person anymore and by now it was obvious that he would never be whole again.

Thor had caused this and when Loki had come back from the void, the only time he had ever needed help… nobody had cared, nobody had seen that he was broken. Body and mind.

Now Loki would do the same. Break them. Thor would help him, he owed him as much. Stepping closer Loki didn’t bother to conceal the energy that was radiating from him. Filled with hatred and anger. As if the darkness had been inside of him all the time and now it was slipping out.

None of Banner’s words had been able to reach him, but Loki’s presence did. This despicable, unworthy man raised his head and for a second Loki wanted to give into his urge. Burying his fingernails in his flesh and tear it off.

Maybe later… the brute was still needed. For the first time ever.

Now his eyes were more bloodshot than blue, his face strangely swollen. His hair was falling down in greasy strands and there was nothing left of the once so proud prince of Asgard. That fact that he couldn’t see Loki was quite appropriate, he had never been able to see him anyway.

“Loki… are you here?”

Again his lips formed a deranged smile. Even the sound of his voice didn’t resemble anything Loki had heard from him before. A whimper, feeble and pathetic. Thor had finally found his place. Loki would gladly let him die when he had played his part.

Almost gently he reached out and let his hand hover above Thor’s temple. Pulling softly he caught one thread of the web. He didn’t need more. Slowly wrapping it around his finger Loki let his magic sip into it and then stepped back to watch his revenge unfold.

“Ari…”

Not very creative, but it had worked before, so Thor would hear the voice of his dying brother again. Calling for him, so completely desperate, but too weak to utter more than a whisper.

A sound that seemed to tear Thor apart. Shaking his head he covered his ears with his hands and Loki scowled. Nothing new, he didn’t want to listen.

“Please… it’s ripping me apart… it hurts so much… why won’t you help me?”

He could see Thor’s fingers brutally tearing at the blond strands. “My brother is dead… I killed him…”

It had taken long enough for him to understand that.

“It’s so cold… I can’t… please, Thor… I know you’re looking for me.”

Feverishly shaking his head Thor was mumbling one single word over and over again. Loki couldn’t stop smiling and this was how it would be like. How he’d feel when he was done with them.

Taking his time Loki sat down right next to Thor, observing this whimpering, wretched creature next to him. Reaching out again Loki pulled the web from Thor’s mind, letting it slip back into his
body. A few minutes passed and Loki watched carefully how Thor stopped trembling, Loki could almost feel how the pulsing headache was fading away. Snipping his fingers Loki dropped the invisibility, but a new glamour covering him. Dark rings under his eyes, his hair was wild and uncombed, his armour broken and dirty. His eyes were those of a madman. This had been Loki when he had come back from the void. Thor should remember him like this.

Now Loki was just sitting there, letting Thor feel his presence. No need to speak up, Thor already knew that he was there, he only needed to come up with the courage to look at him.

Unfortunately Thor revealed now that he was a coward and he stayed in the same position, not daring to raise his head. Always a disappointment. “Thor, look at me…”

The fool was even shaking his head and Loki wanted to narrow his eyes, but he kept that empty stare on his face. “Be a man and look at me. This is your work, face it.”

His snarl caused Thor to tremble before he granted his request. Not quite broken yet, but Loki was getting there. “You just left…”

“I am back, because I need you something to do for me. Will you do that, Thor?”

Blue eyes were looking at him and Loki saw a flash of eagerness in them. “I’ll do anything, Loki…”

Words, lots of empty words. Thor was willing to do a lot to relieve himself of his guilty conscience, but Loki didn’t trust him to do what he wanted from him. Nothing what a little nightmare couldn’t fix.

“I was so lost, Thor… I was broken when I came back from the void… I needed help…” This time there was no reproach in his voice, Loki was talking to someone he trusted or at least Thor should think that. “…they didn’t help me… instead they hurt me… made everything worse… I was pleading for help, but they only laughed… locked me in, put me in chains… they wouldn’t listen…”

Soft, weak, pleading and the spark in Thor’s eyes became brighter. A glimmer of the old Thor and it was dangerous. Someone ready to do damage. Just like Loki wanted. “Who did that to you, Loki?”

He really had to ask… Loki was too smart though to let his anger show. The new net was pooling at his fingertips and Loki slowly raised his hand. “They hurt me, Thor… and they wouldn’t stop… not until they had my blood on their hands… and I had nothing left…”

Thor didn’t say anything, he was only starting at Loki and his hands were balled into fists. His face was a clear display of anger, pain and Loki counted on every bit of it. Deep inside Thor knew that all of this was his fault and it would only make his revenge crueeller. Thor loved to take out the hatred he felt for himself on other people.

“You are my brother, Thor… you’re supposed to protect me…”

“I am sorry, Loki. I am sorry I wasn’t there…”

“I do not need your pity, Thor. It is too late for that, but there is something you have to do…”

“What?” Thor’s voice was shaking with eagerness and maybe some fear. Loki merely put his hand on Thor’s temple and merely let his final web slip into place. Entering a tiny mind, so it might only see what Loki wanted him to see. Enemies. Enemies all around him. Who had hurt his little,
innocent, helpless brother.

Loki heard how Thor was sucking in a breath and all of the thunderer’s muscles tensed. Seeing his plan unfold Loki couldn’t hold back a grin. Leaning in close Loki put his lips up to Thor’s ear. “Be an Avenger, Thor. Avenge your little brother. They hurt me, so you have to hurt them. Go back to the city. You will find them there. Bestow thunder and lighting on it. Make them come to you and punish them, Thor. For what they did to me. Don’t let them get away with it. Pick up your hammer and do justice… start with their leader.”
The Loss

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Well, what is there to say? Loki has all the pawns where he wants them to be. Checkmate.

Hope you’re having fun :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Camino de rosas, para quien lo sabe
Camino de espinas pa’ el que llega tarde
Camino despacio, que todo me asombre
Después de esta cita, me aprenzo tu nombre

Camino de rosas ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~
(Path of roses for the one who knows it
Path of needles for the one who arrives late
I walk slowly because everything astonishes me
Since that meeting I have learned your name)

All Loki had to do now was to lean back and watch Thor taking care of things. Normally that would end up in disaster, but today this was exactly what Loki was looking for. Fascinated Loki watched how Thor’s face turned to stone, his eyes became cold and started burning at the same time. No more words necessary. Crossing his arms in front of his chest Loki watched how Thor was wordlessly getting up and with clicking his fingers Loki slid into invisibility and the illusion for the cameras faded away as well. Now they were seeing Thor walking towards the door and Loki was sure they had already started running. A man who had clearly lost his mind and refused to move during a couple of days, suddenly wanted out and wore the expression of a killer eager for bloodshed. They were right to be nervous. It was deadly to underestimate a god. They had done it before, but they hadn’t learned their lesson and now it was time to pay the price.

Leaning back Loki’s eyes were fixed on Thor’s back while he was approaching the door. It was being opened before he reached it and an agent and the doctor were blocking Thor’s way. Not Banner. Loki was in luck today.

“Thor, what are you…”

Not slowing down, not stopping. “Get out of my way.” They didn’t move fast enough so Thor pushed them aside, making the doctor stumble and the agent who was definitely lacking a brain pulled out his gun. Thor ignored him, slowly, determinedly walking down the hall and Loki was
chuckling under his breath.

Did he want the agent to fire a bullet at Thor? It would be funny and entertaining, but then Banner would be forced to step in and that would bring the fight to this facility, something Loki wanted to avoid.

Always complicating things for him. Getting up Loki walked towards the door to join the party and to make sure that the fool wasn’t going to ruin his scheme.

A voice resounded across the hallway and Loki smiled, knowing he didn’t have to interfere. “Let him go.”

Banner. How nice of him to play Loki’s game. Finally knowing his place the agent put the gun away and Thor walked passed him. He would be out of here in about a minute, first he would get Mjolnir, then he would unleash destruction on the city of New York. Something Thor was used to, something he has been doing for hundreds of years. The mortals would have trouble to believe what they were about to see, but it was about to happen. Time to find out that the great protector of earth wasn’t the peaceful creature they thought him to be. Time to take off the masks.

Thor’s footsteps were fading away and Loki just stood there. Relishing the moment and it was perfect. Then there was Banner. Standing in the doorway, looking straight at Loki. Their eyes met and Loki froze. It took three seconds until he realised that Banner was looking through him. Scanning the room, trying to figure out if there was something, anything that had triggered that sudden change in Thor’s behaviour.

I am right here, don’t you see me? You feel my presence, don’t you? You know that somebody is here, but you cannot quite put your finger on it.

Loki’s fingertips were tingling when Banner took a step closer and he could almost feel the warmth of his body. Could he feel Loki’s?

What if he just turned around and left? If he didn’t come when the first lighting was going to hit some ugly skyscraper? Would Loki even go after him? He had no interest at all in Banner and his brilliant mind, but he wanted to kill the Beast. To take it apart. Like it had done with him. Beat it to the ground until it was nothing more than a bloody, disgusting mess. What if Banner found something in there that made him turn around and walk away from all of this?

Suddenly Loki didn’t know what to do and he felt disgusted with himself. No, no hesitation, not today. Everything was going to happen like he wanted it to. It certainly wouldn’t end today, but tomorrow or the days to follow Stark would take care of everything. Loki wanted to see them kill themselves.

The moment ended and Loki was grateful for it. Banner blinked, turned around on his heels and walked out of the room. What a stupid little thought. It was out of the question that he would walk away. Not an option. Closing his eyes Loki let his magic take him away and gave himself completely to the dark desire that gladly took control of him. Finally he would not be the only one suffering.

***

The city was calm. Loki sucked in a breath of cold air and stared down into the abyss. Not as high as the Stark Tower, but it was still enough to kill any mortal. A bizarre thought since Loki was just enjoying the view. A few clouds were darkening the sky, but they were white, not dark. No rain to make this day more dramatic. Loki liked a nice stage, but he was good enough of an actor to do
He couldn’t do it completely alone though. Nothing ever changed. Loki would always be the smart one, the one to shape the world to his liking, the one with the plan and the ability to actually set it into action. Yet he was sitting here, waiting for Thor to make a loud of noise and attracting attention.

Only a fool would need so much time to get Mjolnir…

Loki had to stop inwardly cursing Thor when his phone started to ring. Too bad, no more talking with Stark. They were done and he only needed him later on, when the battle was almost done. To start a new one. A worse one. Stark was capable of things Thor couldn’t even think of. Brute force and muscle could never be as scary as a sharp mind. Stark had the creativity and the ruthlessness to create nightmares while all Thor knew was using a weapon to hit somebody with it.

Ignoring the call Loki hummed a soft melody. The thought crossed his mind that he should be worried that Thor might end up killing the Captain. It would be so much more entertaining and satisfying if Stark did it. Thor had failed before to do any damage and his chances weren’t that good anyway. The Captain matched him in strength and his strategic knowledge was far more developed than Thor’s. If the Widow or Barton got caught up in this fight, they would be the first ones to die. Thor could snap their necks with a single touch, but Loki had told him to go after the Captain for a reason.

All Thor needed to do was to finally show up.

Beneath him the streets were filled with people, getting breakfast or on their way to work. The stage was set, Loki only needed his main character for today. Wrong, he needed someone to make trouble. Thomas was the main character.

The rolling of thunder resounded in the distance and Loki smirked. Finally. After so much work it was quite nice to be able to lean back and watch how all the pieces were coming together. Loki had seen this so often, it barely evoked any emotion.

Thor landed not so far from where Loki was sitting, creating a little crater in the street. People were stumbling, stunned drivers were hitting the breaks, trying not to crash into the obstacle which had suddenly appeared. This was Thor. He was an Asgardian god and a fool, he didn’t care about what was appropriate on Midgard. Especially since he was out for revenge. Now he was acting like he always had, a spoiled prince who thought that the Nine Worlds belonged to him. Although the whole court, the whole city of Asgard had always known that the younger of the two brothers was the one to reckon with. Loki knew how to make a lasting entrance while slipping into the room so that nobody saw him. Thor didn’t know how to be subtle, he didn’t know a thing about strategy or tactics. Raising his hammer and summoning lightening – he wasn’t capable of more.

So that was what he was doing right now.

Loki’s eyes followed the flash of white that seemed to rip the sky apart and his lips formed a delighted grin. By now all the phones would be out, to film one of Earth’s supposed rescuers. There was no need to hear him, Loki wasn’t interested in the angry words or the senseless roaring. The chances were good that Thor was already on all the news channels and with a bit of luck the Captain was already on his way. If you were an idiot like Thor you couldn’t just find out where a person lived, he had to go to a public place and yell, so whoever he was searching for would come to them. Thor didn’t understand the concept of a surprise attack. Another bright flash and Loki couldn’t help but laugh when the lightning this time didn’t just illuminate the morning sky. Instead it hit one of the skyscrapers and there were screams. Loki licked his lips, feeling strangely excited.
by all of this, although it was the unimportant part. Maybe it just felt good that the blind
worshipping of this pathetic race was going to stop once and for all. Their own fault for never
asking questions. For ever thinking they could understand the motives of a being that wasn’t
human.

The Captain wasn’t living far from here and with his abilities he should be here in less than five
minutes. If he was at some S.H.I.E.L.D basis it could take longer.

His phone was ringing again, so Stark already knew what was going on. If he was going to show
up even sooner than the Captain, Loki would be in seriously bad mood. He didn’t want to get
involved into that fight and he didn’t have the time to make sure that Stark wasn’t going to get
killed. The weak ones could perish instantly, that wouldn’t be a great loss. Admittedly it would be
a greater pleasure to see them torture themselves. Especially the Widow and that’s what he needed
Stark for. Turning a man who so desperately tried to be a good person, to be seen as such, into a
killer driven by the urge to kill and to destroy. Stark would wipe this dreadful organisation from the
surface of the Earth and it would hurt her so badly. The only reason why she was still here, while
Barton had been insisting on running away.

Nobody ever listened to the smart ones when they were voicing unpleasant truths.

An earthquake brought Loki back to the here and now, he had been lost in thought for a moment.
Shattered windows, fleeing people… Of course Thor had used his mighty hammer to create an
even bigger hole in the street. So many people would be upset when the road was blocked and they
had to take another route to go shopping. Loki did indeed loathe Midgard. All these cities were just
a huge waste of space.

The third flash and this time it was red.

Loki scowled and stood up, now just one single step was between him the abyss. This one wasn’t
dark nor silent. It pulsing with life and panic. Lovely indeed. Yet Loki wouldn’t allow Stark to be
the one to clean up this mess, Loki was still in need of him. One should really be able to expect a
better timing from Captain America. How disappointing.

Taking that one step Loki fell, but only so far as he wanted to. The teleportation let him settle with
both feet on the ground and Loki grinned when people were rushing past him, as fast as their feet
would carry them. Oh, they had to be so confused now. Wasn’t it so much easier to deal with a vile
act when monsters were attacking you? A beautiful soul must inhibit a beautiful body. Barely
anyone dared to voice this, but everybody thought it, everybody was of the same opinion.

What were they supposed to think now that two handsome heroes were about to battle in the
streets they had once protected? United. To Loki this was poetry. Absolutely perfect. A young man
bumped into him, stumbling a few steps, taken aback that thin air suddenly felt so solid, but then
he just continued running. Worthless creatures. Their screams were deafening and incredibly
annoying. This way Loki was missing most parts of Thor’s and Stark’s conversation.

“… so over acting nice and sweet, point break. Either you put that hammer down or I’ll kick your
ass straight back to Asgard!”

Loki chuckled and walked closer. His senses were less interested in their conversation, instead they
were scanning the surroundings. Probably he had been too hard on the poor Captain, he was so
close already. Good boy, he was saving Loki a lot of work.

Stark wasn’t eager on waiting and he was a man of his word. Since Thor had no intention of
putting the hammer down, Stark didn’t hesitate to fire at him and Thor was flung back, hitting the
ground. Loki hoped that it hurt.

Quickly getting back up to his feet Thor countered the attack and threw Mjolnir. His aim was still pretty good, the hammer hit Stark directly in the chest. Without his armour that would have been deadly, but it seemed like after their last... argument Stark had updated his suits. The impact forced him to his knees, but he quickly got back up again.

Loki never said no when a nice opportunity presented itself. His magic allowed him to pop up right next to Thor and since the Captain was right around the corner, Loki wanted to make sure that the fight was worth all his effort. No way he was going to allow Thor to disappoint him again. Loki wiggled his fingers, he felt the magic dripping from them and Loki formed a new web, hopefully the last one. This way Thor wouldn’t lose focus. Letting it go Loki watched the golden strings slip beneath Thor’s skin and these blue eyes flashed with anger and rage. Inexorable.

Finally he would see them like Loki did. Pathetic little creatures that had dared to humiliate him and had walked all over him when Loki had needed help. The only time he had ever needed it. They disgusted him. How they thought that he had treated them cruelly, when they had no idea what cruelty actually was. When they cursed him for the pain he had inflicted when they had never felt real, actual pain. Not once in their entire lifetime. Loki was about to change that.

“I will bring you to justice for your fool deeds!”

What a temptation to roll his eyes and at the same time Loki felt so amused.

Another lightning. What lack of creativity. Especially since electricity was anything but Stark’s foe. The counterattack was immediate, but it never hit its target.

The brightest and greatest hero of them all had just arrived, breathing hard and lowering the shield which he had just used to block Stark’s energy blast. Only that determined stare identified him as Captain America right now, nothing else gave it away. Steve Rogers was wearing civilian clothing, jeans and a blue shirt and Loki had to admit that he was making a bigger impression than the other two. One couldn’t just buy charisma or an notable presence.

“Both of you, stop it! Have you lost your minds?!”

Yes, Thor definitely had lost his mind, it was now in Loki’s possession.

“Fuck you, Rogers! I’m the one here who tries to stop this jackass from frying the city!”

“What in...”

The Captain didn’t get to finish his sentence, his shoulder connected with Mjolnir – the bad way. He landed on his back and Stark was taking matters back into his own hands. More broken windows and destruction all around them. Only the beginning.

Loki left them to themselves, getting back onto the roof of another skyscraper watching the spectacle from above.

Now where was the rest of them? For his plan to work he needed S.H.I.E.L.D around and there was no way that they were going to want to miss out on this.

A silent voice suddenly resounded, so much louder than the fighting in the streets.

*It’s not going to work*
The mere fact that Thomas was still there should outrage Loki, but it didn’t. Not today. It seemed a bit ironic, but Loki could tell how weak the other one was. Barely able to voice a sentence.

“How nice of you to show up to your own death. I am sorry, but I am not going to miss you.”

There, Loki could see the black cars approaching, blocking the streets and now the real game could begin.

*You are not going to kill me. You are not able to…*

Even while saying that the voice faded away and Loki smiled to himself. He barely paid attention to the explosion that caused the building to tremble. Really? They had to destroy the one he was standing on? Fools…

Time to take care of today’s entertainment.

Making a large gesture with his hand Loki opened the layer to finally make some use of the little mage’s work. Before reducing his hideout to dust Loki had stored away some of his toys. Them and the body. Now they were Loki’s and he would do with them as he pleased. Pulling them out Loki looked at the robots, about twenty of them. He only needed two, maybe three. Loki’s magic swiped out and activated them, bending them to his will. Since the little mage was dead, he had had enough time to figure this little trick out.

“Go. All over Manhattan. Do damage. Don’t try to kill the Avengers. Distract them and try to not get blown up the very first second.”

17 of them took off and Loki’s eyes lingered on the three which remained. “Now the both of you are going to try to kill me. Let’s have some fun.”

Again reaching into the other layer of the dimension Loki pulled out the bracelet and slipped it on. For the very last time Thomas’ glamour washed over him and Loki teleported away, somewhere between Thomas’ workplace and the Stark Tower. The streets seemed almost empty, the people of New York had at least learned one thing from the Chitauri attack. They let him walk down the street and turn around a corner, just like he wanted. Then there was a loud bang and the trashcan next to Loki was gone. Went up in flames. The energy of the explosion knocked Loki to his knees and the air out off his lungs. What a show he was putting on. The scared look on his face and how he tried to make himself small to hide behind an abandoned taxi. Worthless creatures, so filled with fear. In this case it was quite smart to run away.

Time to call the cavalry.

Feverishly Loki pressed his thumb against the bracelet, although he was pretty sure that Jarvis was already on his way. The second Loki had pulled the bracelet back into this dimension Stark had been able to locate it again. There was no way he hadn’t told Jarvis to get to him immediately. A little acting couldn’t hurt though. “Please, hurry up!”

Thomas’ voice sounded so scared, shaking, barely audible.

Loki raised his head, he saw one of the robots hover above the taxi and it fired at him. Only one second too late to hit him. The suit that had been approaching didn’t slow down but crashed into the robot with full force, throwing it to the ground.

Taking a shaky breath Loki got up, took a step back and Jarvis was instantly back in front of him. “Stay down, Mr. Pine. I’m going to take care of them.”
Stark would come too, so this was better going to happen fast. For now Loki only nodded, his magic calling the other robot. Both of them fired at the same time, the blasts were hitting the breastplate of the armour and it stumbled. So they would need more power than that. Pressing on hand against the cold concrete Loki sent his magic out, feeding them. In the meantime Jarvis launched back in the air, tackling one of the robots. The suit pressed both hands on each side of the robot’s head, they started to glow… and the metal simply started melting. So much about this robot, Stark had probably told Jarvis to not waste any time either. Fine, let’s make this quick.

Loki’s magic ordered the remaining robot to attack, while becoming one with it, amplifying its power, almost too much. The attack found its target, tearing a hole into the mid-section of the suit and ripping its right arm off.

Perfect

“Get behind the vehicle!”

Like a frightened little mortal Loki did as he was asked and Jarvis threw himself at the last robot. It looked odd. Two lifeless creatures made of metal, rolling across the ground until the robot got the upper hand and reached into the hole of Jarvis’ armour, tearing out wires and cables.

Suppressing a smirk Loki pulled his magic back and it made all the difference. The armour raised the one hand it still possessed and blew a last blast of energy right through the robot’s neck, decapitating it. With a loud clunk the metallic figure dropped to the floor.

Now this was it. The robots were defeated and the suit had taken enough damage. Loki knew how to finish this. Another little thing he had taken from the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters. Remaining where he was Loki closed his eyes and created the illusion. The one he had been planning all this time. There couldn’t be a more perfect setting. He was hidden behind the taxi while Thomas was right next to him. Still shaking from the terror he was going through, but still clearly relieved.

“Go. Die.” Loki only mouthed the words, without making a sound and Thomas got up, running out on the street, in the direction where the damaged suit was lying on the ground. Back into its field of vision.

You can’t do that, Loki…

“Just watch…”

Thomas was running, he was halfway there. “Jarvis, where is Tony? I need to…” The words died on his lips and several loud bangs filled the air.

Stopping dead in his tracks Thomas looked down at himself. “Jarvis, where is Tony? I need to…” The words died on his lips and several loud bangs filled the air.

Eyes widening when they spotted the three little red stains on his white T-shirt that were rapidly growing bigger. His breathing became staggered and he dropped to his knees.

Even the god of lies didn’t have words to describe how much this sight pleased him.

The suit was still lying there, immobilized, not able to do anything, but Loki knew that the camera in his helmet was recording. How Thomas tried gasping for air and went down completely. It also recorded the dark figure walking up behind him. Just a silhouette, dressed in black, their face hidden behind a black mask. They were carrying a gun Stark would easily be able to trace back. Now that gun was pointed at the suit, the dark figure pulled the trigger and Loki opened his palm to release the last piece of the plan.

His magic carried the bullet and it found its way. Directly into the visor of the suit, destroying the
helmet, making the whole suit useless and most importantly it stopped the camera from recording.

Done… just a few more seconds…

The dark figure crouched down next to the dying man, took the bracelet off his arm and ran off. Without another glance at the man he had just shot he disappeared. Loki allowed himself a grin, because it couldn’t have worked out better.

Snapping his fingers Loki changed the glamour. He was losing blood, lots of it. Now the trick, he had done so many times before. Taking the place of a clone. Playing the dying man was getting old, but as long as it was still working out perfectly…

Five seconds, that was all it took.

His eyes were staring up into the sky and he could see him coming. That flash of red. Stark was landing right next to him and Loki was coughing up blood. Metallic arms were closing around him, cradling him against a hard, cold chest and Loki could hear that one word. Spoken with so much dread and despair like Loki had never heard it before.

“No…”

The helmet was gone and eyes, which were filled with fear, looked at Stark’s face. It was a sudden realisation although he had known it all along, he had planned on it. Thomas wasn’t the only one who was dying in this moment. Brown eyes that still looked beautiful, probably because they were so wide with shock and shedding silent tears.

Loki tried to open his mouth, but he could only taste blood and a disturbing, rattling sound escaped his throat.

He felt Stark’s arms tightening around him, but he wasn’t trying to cover his wounds. Stark knew. “Tommy…”

A single word said so much more than a long eloquent story. That was it. What Loki had wanted all along. Pain. Agonizing, mind numbing pain that was so unbearable and powerful that it even tainted your memory of how happiness felt like. Now Stark knew what it felt like and Loki wished he could make it last longer.

Another cough that made his whole body tremble and blood was sticking to his lips. Loki knew what he wanted to say, what he wanted to make Stark understand. Thomas was afraid. He was afraid to die, because Stark had failed to protect him. Loki could do it too, with just a single word. “Tony…”

The impact was remarkable. Stark died even before him. It was completely obvious how he choked back a sob and then started to smile. Loki had torn him apart. “It’s okay. It’s okay… I’m here… You’re not alone. I’m here with you. It’s alright…”

Trying to comfort him when they both knew that Thomas was taking his last breaths. He had been shot three times, the blood was coating Stark’s suit, streaming from the wounds.

Stark was still smiling, a single tear running down his cheek while he was leaning down, resting his forehead against Loki’s. “It’s alright… I’ve got you. It’s okay…”

Loki gasped another time, so Stark could feel his breath on his face. Then his eyes lost their shine and Loki stopped Thomas’ heart. All tension left his body and it slumped motionlessly against Stark.
Thomas was dead.

Until now Stark hadn’t moved, still holding on to him, his face so close to Loki’s. He had to know. It had been almost a minute now that he had not been able to feel Thomas’ breath on his skin. Still Stark remained like this, not doing anything.

Time passed and Loki wished Stark would scream, moan in pain and agony, but then there was something else. Far away in the distance. It reminded Loki of… his own voice…

Thor is going be fine. I have to leave, I have to get back to… What is going on? Why are you looking at me like this? Tell me what… No. No! Where is he? Tell me where he is!

Pain. Nothing but pain…

Stark raised his head and Loki could see him through Thomas’ lifeless eyes. Footsteps were coming closer. Sirens and cars. Tearing apart the silence. A man who had lost everything was looking at Loki and there was still tenderness found in his gaze. With a soft gesture a warm hand was running down his face, sliding his eyelids closed.

“Stark…”

So they had finally arrived. How stupid of them to send the Widow to talk to Stark. She wasn’t Loki, she couldn’t do that. He could tell that she was trying to be gentle, but she wasn’t capable of letting go of this urging undertone.

Either Stark ignored her or he was too caught up in his grief and he couldn’t hear her at all. His arms were just pulling Thomas’ corpse closer, protecting him.

Even more footsteps. They had to be surrounded by agents now.

“Stark, please, I am sorry, but you have to let go of him now and…”

“If you even dare to touch him, I will kill you instantly.” No matter how much cruelty Stark put into these words, they were still marked by immense pain and there was no doubt about it, he meant what he said.

“Stark…”

The same hand that had closed Loki’s eyes was now closing around his bruised wrist. His thumb gently caressing the skin that was already starting to turn cold. If Loki hadn’t been playing dead, he would have grinned. Stark wasn’t looking for a pulse, but for the bracelet.

“You did this… you killed him.”

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Chapter End Notes

Yes, this was cruel, I know. I forgot to add this little note the first time, but I hope some of you are still going to see it.

I need some help for one of the following chapters. There are going to be some bits in Portuguese and since I can’t speak that lovely language (I can only read some of it) I'd like somebody to check it out to tell me if it’s comprehensible... at all :D It's not going to be Brasilian Portuguese though.
Thank you in advance
Hello,

Thank you for so many comments on the last chapter and sorry for the heartbreak :)

If somebody of you speaks Portuguese, would you be so nice to read a few lines that will be part of one of the next chapters? They are kind of a big deal and although I'm doing my best, I don't want them to gibberish :) Thanks in advance :) Now have fun with the new chapter... just as depressing as the last one

_________________________________________________

It was a thousand to one and a million to two
Time to go down in flames and I'm taking you
Closer to the edge

Closer to the edge ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

“Stark, listen…”

Whatever stupid, inappropriate thing she wanted to say, Loki would never know. Most probably Stark had bestowed her with a look that made clear that he wasn’t going to listen to a single word.

Still Stark wouldn’t leave him, holding him close and Loki could feel him softly petting his hair. A gesture so full of tenderness. Words that had shown of much spite and hatred he was capable of. Yet there was no place for this now. Not with Thomas’ still in his arms. Loki knew that Stark wouldn’t let go. No matter how many people were gathering around them.

With his eyes closed Loki tried to use his other senses and his magic to register what was happening around him. Agents, lots of them. The Widow was closest to them, she didn’t move. Not at all. Loki knew what they wanted, but they should know better than asking for it.

“Tony…” Her voice was softer now, not credible at all. “Please, I know what happened is…”

What a mistake. Unworthy of her. Something must have shaken her to the core. Loki was sure that she knew better than this. Nobody was ever allowed to use the words ‘I know’ when they were talking about someone else’s pain. They never knew. How could they?

Instead of telling her to shut up Stark loosened his grip for a mere second and Loki could hear the sizzling sound of an energy beam being fired.

Weapons were pulled out, Stark pulled him closer again and…
“Stop it! Put the weapons away!”

This was a surprise, but not an unpleasant one. Loki hadn’t expected Banner to show up here. He must have gotten here with the agents. If Banner was with them… Thor still had to be busy with the Captain.

“Doctor…”

“Put them away! Now!”

Banner was screaming and Loki supposed that the mere prospect of him turning into the Beast caused everyone else to do as he said. Another pair of footsteps was coming closer. Slow and heavy as if a weight was pulling him down.

“Tony…” From a scream to a whisper. Unlike the Widow Banner wasn’t trying to be gentle, he wasn’t able to do anything at this moment. Not when he was clearly in shock himself. Unlike the other Avengers he had actually liked Thomas and Banner didn’t like to think of the loss of human life as something that happened everyday. Especially not when it was a friend or the great love of your best friend. “Oh my god… this…”

“They killed him. They shot him in the back… like fucking cowards…”

No sob, his voice wasn’t even wavering. Stark was merely stating facts and Banner was shaking, Loki just knew it.

“I am so sorry…”

Silence and nobody in their right mind would dare to say a word now. Unless they didn’t care about the fact that somebody had just been murdered and couldn’t tell that the man in front of them was a second away from shaking off the shock and giving into the rage that was slumbering inside of him.

“Bruce… the fight is still going on…” At least she was not addressing the man anymore who clearly wouldn’t listen. Although it should be fairly obvious that Banner wasn’t going to take her side on this. Couldn’t she see it? Just because she was used to dead bodies piling up everywhere she went, it didn’t mean that Banner and Stark were going to accept that. Not with Thomas’ bloody corpse in Stark’s arms.

“Shut up…”

“I’ll bring him home…”

“I’ll meet you at the tower.”

Stark got up to his feet and arranged Loki in his grip so that his head rested against Stark’s chest. There were whispers and mumblings, but Stark didn’t care, Loki felt him take off. Wonderful, time to get rid of this glamour once and for all.

His magic was sent out, called the last remaining robot. 10 seconds later the loud bang resounded and Loki really hoped that Stark wouldn’t drop him while spinning around. “Shit!”

Stark quickly regained control and Loki had to admit that it was quite hard to figure out what was exactly going on with his eyes closed and up in the air. The robot must have hit Stark in the back, he was speeding up, moving around, but he was clearly limited with a dead body in his arms.
So why don’t you just put him down?

Loki actually felt the heat of the next blast on his skin, it must have missed them barely. Would Stark really risk destroying that beautiful face? A corpse had to look nice, right? Suddenly Stark broke off to the right and Loki did his best not to smirk. Ever so softly he was put down, a hand supporting his head. “I’ll be back in a second…”

So Loki was left alone, lying on the roof of some building and it all had to happen very fast now. Loki created the illusion around him and quickly got up to his feet. Opening the portal Loki pulled out his replacement. Even though it wasn’t the first time, it almost surprised him how much joy the sight of Thomas’ dead body brought him. Finally he was getting rid of this annoying creature. Also this was probably the first time ever the little mage served an actual purpose.

A simple look told him that Stark wasn’t wasting any time, he was busy blowing the robot’s head off. Very effecting. Snipping his fingers Loki dropped the glamour and drifted into invisibility. Another little gesture and the illusion that shielded him faded away, revealing the dead body in the exact same spot where Stark had left him behind.

Perfect.

That had been it. The last part. Loki had pulled it off and now it was up to Stark.

The robot had quickly been dealt with and Stark instantly returned to him. Loki watched as Stark picked him up carefully and flew off again.

It would have been the wise thing to check on the still ongoing battle, but Loki couldn’t shake off his curiosity.

Arriving at the tower Loki watched out of the still broken window and waited. As expected Stark chose the easy way, not bringing Thomas to the lower levels where they had been living now, but joined Loki in the penthouse. It was quite a scene to watch. Walking over to the partly intact couch Stark lowered the corpse down onto it. The head rolled to the side, revealing Thomas’ face to Loki. It was blood stained around the mouth and Loki was so glad he didn’t have to wear it anymore. In the meantime Stark simply stepped out of his suit like Loki had seen him do before. The armour kept standing there, seemingly under Jarvis’ control now. Sitting down on the couch Stark cradled the dead body in his arms. Against Loki’s expectations it played out completely silent. No screaming, no yelling, not even tears. Stark just sat there, holding the corpse while slowly all warmth was slipping away from the dead flesh. It was only there because of his magic of course, Loki knew how to take care of details.

Just holding him close. Stark didn’t do anything else. It was enough though. Pain. All over him. Not a trace left of this man who liked to joke and couldn’t take anything seriously who didn’t care. Finally Stark was suffering. Trying to hold on to something that had slipped through his fingers. The cut was still too fresh, too deep, but soon enough Stark would try to deal with all of this pain and he would punish those who did this to him. Who killed the one he had loved so much.

Shifting slightly Stark pulled Thomas’ corpse tighter against himself, burying his face in the crook of Thomas’ neck.

Loki blinked and he tried to swallow down the bitter taste of bile that suddenly filled his mouth. A sudden sickness washed over him and he felt the urge to retch. Was it the body? That disgusting display of affection and weakness?

No, Loki didn’t want any of it. Tears, rage, blood. That was why he was here.
Turning around Loki teleported away, down to the streets of Manhattan. Now this was lovely. Beautiful chaos. Also Loki was in luck, because the Captain and Thor hadn’t ended up killing themselves yet. Both were in a bad state though. Rogers was bleeding heavily from a wound on his head. Thor was covered in little cuts and bruises, breathing hard. S.H.I.E.L.D was busy getting into position. What were they trying to accomplish anyway? Their pathetic guns weren’t able to hurt Thor, they should be happy if they managed it to wipe him off his feet. Loki scanned the surroundings to make sure, but the only person who was able to outmatch him wasn’t present. Another statement wasn’t necessary. Banner had already taken sides. How helpless they must feel now. Sure, the Captain was standing his ground, but he was only one man. By far not as dangerous as Stark. Always the same mistake – thinking that muscle was stronger than intelligence.

Raising his head Loki observed the windows, roofs around them. Agents… all over the place. Most probably Barton was among them, waiting for the perfect moment. Lovely, but Loki wouldn’t allow them to take a shot. It would be useless and Loki had better plans for Thor anyway. Licking his lips Loki walked closer. At this moment Thor was having the upper hand. He pretty much had the Captain cornered, his back against another abandoned car. Mjolnir in his hand, raised above Rogers’ head, ready to bring it down. Now that would be a nice image for the newspapers. Captain America’s skull smashed by the hammer of a Norse god. Not even wearing his stars and stripes. Too bad.

Rogers’ hands were wrapped around Thor’s arm, holding him back from completing the swing and demolishing that pretty head. Fascinating. Their powers seemed almost equally matched, both were shaking from the effort and the snipers were probably only waiting for the signal. From this angle there was no way they wouldn’t also hit the Captain. Again Loki had better ideas.

Casually taking the last few steps Loki leaned in, taking in the sight. Drops of sweat mingled with blood were running down Rogers’ temple. The strain so obvious, there was no place for disbelief. How must it feel like to look into the face of a friend while he was trying to kill you? Thor’s eyes were burning with hatred and madness, reminding Loki of his own when he had seen them on Stark’s videos.

They had put him into chains without asking a single question. Now what were they going to do with Thor? Nothing as bad as what Loki was going to do to Thor. What Thor was going to do to himself.

Reaching out Loki pulled the web from Thor’s mind. Should he use his eyes to see what he was doing. To realise who he was trying to kill. Who was his foe.

It was impossible to miss the moment. Thor was blinking and at least a bit of sanity seemed to return to him. His eyes widened and Rogers didn’t need more than this fleeting moment of hesitation. Barely a second. He pushed Thor back and the god stumbled. Tempted to hum a soft tune Loki joined Thor and he was sure that a single whisper would suffice. With Rogers’ voice.

“What are you doing, Thor? I am your friend…”

Mjolnir slipped from Thor’s grasp and landed on the ground. Rogers was breathing hard, picking his shield back up, not trusting Thor’s sudden change of behaviour. The bile was gone, replaced by a wonderful sweetness and Loki almost couldn’t believe that he was getting all he wanted. That it felt so good. Almost fulfilling. Almost.

Thor dropped to his knees, staring at Rogers as if he had never seen him before. Blood was running into the Captain’s eyes. He should really have that checked. Taking a step forward Rogers tried to make sense of the situation, looking Thor up and down, but keeping his guard up. “Thor?”
Oh, just try to talk to him. What use is there to try to reason with a shattered mind? If somebody should know, it was Loki.

Without giving any answer Thor kept staring and S.H.I.E.L.D started to move. They must be feeling confident that Thor had given up for whatever reason. The Widow was the first one who dared to approach. How Loki loathed her. He couldn’t wait for Stark to destroy everything she had ever cared about. It couldn’t be happening too soon.

“Cap… are you alright?”

Rogers needed a few seconds to even register her presence, he seemed confused, not to say overwhelmed.

“Cap?”

“No… no, I don’t think so.” He was shaking his head, finally lowering his shield. Agents were approaching and Loki instantly lost all interest in the current situation. Whatever they had in mind, they couldn’t do anything to hurt Thor, so Loki didn’t care. He had other things to do, other places to be, other faces to wear.

***

“Tony…” Banner still sounded unsure, not knowing what to say. His skin tone had turned to a sickish grey, he looked like he was about to be sick. Loki could understand, Stark’s beautiful, bright lab had been transformed into a morgue.

Thomas was laid out on a table and nobody would be able to mistake him for a sleeping person. No, this was a corpse. A dead person.

Stark was sitting on a stool next to him, a bloody cloth in his hand. He had been cleaning Thomas’ face and neck. Although Banner was coming closer with hesitant steps Stark didn’t look up, his eyes fixed on the body next to him. “I need your help, Bruce.”

The words didn’t sound like Stark. They were so monotone, deprived of feeling. Only meant to transport these five words and nothing more.

Banner answered instantly with a small nod. Watching him up and down Loki was fascinated. The whole setting was making him uncomfortable, but he was also struck with grief, pain and anger. Not knowing yet what to do with all of it, but Banner felt that soon something was going to happen. The world was going to collapse and he knew it. “What do you need?”

Putting the cloth away Stark’s eyes left Thomas’ face and settled on his chest. By now the shirt was completely soaked with blood, it was impossible to even tell which colour it had been. The three holes in the garment were screaming for attention. That pathetic creature hadn’t deserved any better. Both of them.

“There were four shots… three went… there are three exit wounds. Those bastards don’t miss which means there is still a bullet inside of him. I thought about getting it out myself, but… he’s been hurt enough.”

Loki gritted his teeth, this foolishness was upsetting him. The person on this table was dead, it was impossible to hurt him anymore and there was no need to be careful. Stark needed the bullet and he needed it for good reason. Waiting for somebody else to do it was stupid. Thomas was gone, this was nothing but dead flesh. Worthless.
“You want me to get it out?” Banner wasn’t shocked, but he didn’t hide the fact that he clearly didn’t want to do it.

Finally Stark was looking up, meeting Banner’s gaze and Loki heard him gasp. An empty expression but his eyes were burning. A smile made its way up Loki’s face. This was what he had been waiting for. Thor’s eyes may have contained madness, but Stark was so much better. Rage burning so fiercely, its power seemed unlimited and Loki knew what Stark was going to do with it. Tear it all down.

“Yes.”

Coming closer Banner took a breath, he was probably still trying to figure out how to act around Star. What was appropriate in such a situation? What had he expected? Stark sobbing over the dead body of his lost lover? “Wouldn’t it better if we found a real doctor who…”

“No.” Stark shook his head. “Nobody is going to touch to him. I trust you and you have more experience with this than I do. I need this bullet. I know who is responsible for this, but I need some proof. I need that bullet.”

There was no use in arguing and Banner was intelligent enough to realise this. “Okay… I’ll do it. He… was shot in the back, right? We need to… turn him around.”

For the first time the mask on Stark’s face seemed to slip. The suggestion to turn Thomas around evoked horror, but then he nodded. There was no way around it anyway. “Alright…”

Before turning him around Stark carefully stripped him off the blazer Thomas had been wearing when he had died. He even folded it before putting it away. Then nothing. The two men looked at each other, nobody daring to act first or to even touch the dead man. Seconds passed and eventually it was Stark who reached out and put his hands on the corpse’s shoulders. A soft touch. Banner helped him and Loki was taken aback by how much care they were using. Almost as if they were afraid to hurt him. Foolish…

The sight was grotesque. Thomas lying face down on this table, it was lacking dignity. Banner took another breath before deciding to get it over with. Stark had prepared all the necessary tools and Banner reached for the scissors. With a single cut Banner parted the shirt and revealed white skin, partly stained with blood. Three bullet wounds were all too visible and Stark abruptly turned away.

Loki smirked.

“Tony… you can leave if you want to. He was my friend. I’ll be careful with him. I promise.”

“I know… I won’t leave…”

Banner nodded shortly before turning his attention back to his work. His hands weren’t shaking, but his face told Loki that this task was a burden. One he wished he could avoid. Loki watched the scene in silence, impressed with his own work. He had created this. A piece of beautiful art and there were no flaws in it.

After all Loki hadn’t made it so hard for them. The one remaining bullet wasn’t located very deep, Banner should be able to get it out easily. He did. Wordlessly he handed the bullet to Stark, already knowing what he had discovered. Stark closed his fingers around it and they were trembling.

“Those bastards…”

“Tony…”
“Can you… stitch him up, please? I… need to…” Holding up his hand Stark took another look at the bullet. “Vibranium… fucking dirtbags… shooting him four times in the back didn’t suffice, they had to be completely sure…”

“Tony, are you sure that…”

“He’s dead! They killed him!” Still no screaming, he had barely raised his voice. “A fucking vibranium bullet. The same kind they used on you… Tommy’s lying right in front of you. Dead on this table. Don’t insult him by pretending you don’t know it was S.H.I.E.L.D.”

The conflict was barely there. Banner could see what they were heading towards. Clear as day. War, destruction and so much pain. He didn’t want that. “Thor attacked Steve… You were there too… why should they send somebody after him while all of this is going on?”

Be smart, Stark. Show me you are worth all my effort.

Not wasting any time Stark reached out, softly closing his hand around Thomas’ wrist. “Do you see that? His skin is broken… they just ripped it off.”

Of course Banner understood and his resolve was fading away. “The bracelet you made for him…”

“Yeah… those fucking agents saw him using it when they infiltrated the tower. They have always been after my suits and they figured this was the easiest way to get it. I gave it to him to protect him and they killed him to get it… The second I heard about Thor, I tried to call Tommy, I couldn’t reach him. Then I tried to locate him via the bracelet. Jarvis couldn’t do it. That’s impossible, I don’t know what they did, but they… they killed him because of it. His phone is gone too… maybe they thought there was something to steal from it too…” Stark’s voice was shaking, but by the end he managed to get himself back under control.

“Oh my god…”

“They destroyed the suit that was there to protect him. Before that Jarvis could record everything.”

The last bit of colour left Banner’s face. “No. Tony, you didn’t watch that, didn’t you?”

“Of course, I did. I must know who pulled the trigger. All of S.H.I.E.L.D is going to pay for this, but I want the one who did it. The video just shows somebody completely dressed in black… not enough to identify anyone. I already have Jarvis going through S.H.I.E.L.D’s database. The gloves are off. I’m going to find everything and then they’re going to…”

“Tony, please wait…” Banner touched his lower arm, staring at him intently, pleading. “This is… I know you’re pain and this is… I’m hanging on a thread, because I am so angry about what has happened and that Thomas is… I don’t even understand how you’re capable of having this conversation with me right now…”

Pulling away Stark laughed breathlessly and completely deprived of joy. It was almost scary, but Loki it sounded like music. “What? You expect me to break down? To hide myself in a corner and drink myself to death? Don’t worry, Bruce. I plan on doing that. I only have to take care of a few things first. They killed him. They did not even try to take it from him some other way. They shot him in the back. They took him away from me and now… I’m going to destroy them. They’re going to pay for it. All of them.”
Hello everybody,

Well, what is there to say? Tony is trying to cope and Loki... didn't expect what is happening to him now...

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________
Llévame, donde estés
Llévame
Cuando alguien se va, el que se queda sufre más
La Despedida ~~ Shakira ~~
(Take me to wherever you are
Take me there
When somebody leaves, the one who stays suffers more)
_________________________________________________

It was hard to admit, but Loki didn’t understand. Something didn’t quite fit. Perhaps he had hoped for a complete breakdown. For screams and sobs of agony. Stark was so expressive, he hadn’t expected him to shut down completely.

Well, that wasn’t the case either. Stark was working feverishly, Jarvis was breaking every single security code S.H.I.E.L.D had. It was obvious that his mind was racing, searching a way how to take them all down. So similar to Loki.

All this was happening while Banner was carefully stitching up Thomas’ wounds. Why even bother? Put another shirt on him and according to Midgardian costumes they would put him a wooden box under the earth. Nobody would see.

Just like Stark right now… who was busy staring at every screen, typing, doing anything but looking at his dead boyfriend. Why having him in the same room?

“Tony… I’m done,” Banner put the tools away and looked at his work. Loki had to admit that he had done a very nice job. Three wounds that were now sewn shut. There was no way to not make it look ugly, but the corpse now was back in one piece. For whatever reason.

Stark turned around, stepping closer, his hand brushing over Banner’s shoulder. “Thank you… can I… have a moment?”

Hastily Banner nodded. “Sure... I’ll… be right outside.”
It looked like Banner was fleeing and he had every reason to. Loki had difficulties to find out how he was feeling right now. Yes, his plan was working out perfectly, Stark was his little puppet and doing his little dance. Yet he wouldn’t let it show. The impact of Thomas’ death could be felt, but Loki wasn’t sure how to understand Stark’s behaviour. How was he able to keep it all inside? An almost cold face and no outburst. Somewhat disappointing. Loki knew the pain was there, burning behind these eyes, but he wanted to see it. All of it.

Sitting down next to the table Stark reached out and took a hold of the corpse’s hand. It had to be cold by now. Again not a word passed Stark’s lips and Loki felt the anger swelling in his guts. Why wouldn’t he share it? Loki wanted the pain, see it, hear it, feel it.

Stark just watched Thomas’ face. Nothing else happened. No words. No promises. No apologies. How unsatisfying. Loki wanted to shout at him, to hit him with all his strength, to tell him that Loki had killed the guy had been in love with. Obviously Stark hadn’t understood that yet. Thomas was dead. So why was he still keeping it together?

Slowly Stark brought Thomas’ hand to his lips and pressed a soft kiss on the knuckles. Filled with curiosity Loki took a step closer, eager to see the mask cracking. There was a faint glimmer in these brown eyes and Loki wanted it to break through. The suffering, the despair… it was all there, so close, but Loki couldn’t grasp it, because Stark wouldn’t give in. Why? All the time he had been so expressive, wearing his heart on his sleeve and now he was sitting here with a face made of stone.

Just that glimmer, nothing more.

No, there was the tenderness which seemed so out of place. Completely wrong. Stark was reaching out, his other hand softly touching the corpse’s cheek. So Stark refused to let Loki savour the pain, but he was still showing the love he was feeling for this… character. A dead body draped on this table. A disgusting piece of burned flesh, covered by a glamour to make it look pretty. Like Thomas.

But it wasn’t Thomas.

Was this supposed to make him laugh? Should he relish the fact that Stark was probably trying to say goodbye to someone completely different? That he was wasting these touches?

Loki didn’t feel like laughing, but quite the opposite. He was disgusted. It just wasn’t right. Stark traced his thumb along the corpse’s cheek and nuzzled his own against the cold hand. Not saying a word.

Why wasn’t he talking? He should be talking. Loki was sure that… The feeling of disgust wouldn’t fade away, instead the urge to vomit and nausea overcame him. Turning around Loki reached for the wall, to find something to support himself and then the searing pain in his skull almost forced him to his knees. The edges of the wounds were burning, screaming for the missing pieces and Loki gritted his teeth. Closing his eyes he tried to only concentrate on getting through this moment of agony, but he couldn’t escape the voices resounding in his ears. Sounding like someone he knew…

_I told you to remember the pain… Why didn’t you listen to me?_

Searing, burning, agonizing. It brought Loki down to his knees and he couldn’t breathe, no oxygen seemed to enter his lungs. His head was throbbing, making him nauseous and why wouldn’t it stop? A blunt, rusty nail that was slowly being pushed into his brain. Then another one and another one. He was so close. The memory was right in front of him, he could almost… How desperately
his mind was reaching out for it. Tried to take it back, to become one with it again and why did it hurt so bad? So much worse than before. Unbearable.

Loki felt something cold. Against his right hand. Not himself. He was touching something cold. Something… Almost. Loki knew it was there, he just needed…

Then it fell all apart. The pain subsided and Loki savoured the sweet release, to be able to breathe again. Unfortunately that also meant that the memory was far away again. No time for that anyway.

Raising his head Loki saw Stark who hadn’t moved. One hand still lingered on Thomas’ cheek. It wasn’t Thomas. Thomas was a piece of Loki’s imagination. Shaped like a dream, custom-made for Stark.

Another kiss was pressed to the corpse’s hand and finally Stark showed some reaction, something that let Loki see a glimpse. A tiny fragment of the pain. Stark took a shaky breath and for a second Loki thought that it might turn into a sob. Then those brown eyes slid closed for a second and Stark obviously was fighting with himself to keep his composure. No way he was going to be able to keep this up for much longer.

Eventually he let go of the dead hand and gently placed it back on the table. This was it?

“Jarvis… please, tell Bruce that he can come back. I need his help.” Casually. No pleading, no despair. Nothing at all. Instead Stark got up on to his feet, going back to one of the screens he had been working on.

Fine… he didn’t let it get to him just now. Loki would have to deal with that. Stark still had made a promise. To drink himself to death as soon as he had avenged this murder. Then Loki would still have enough time to watch the grief eat him up alive. Until then Loki would watch Stark take out S.H.I.E.L.D one by one. Quite a lovely distraction.

When Banner came back some colour had returned to his face and Loki’s eyes instantly wandered to the piece of garment in his hand. How very thoughtful. Couldn’t they stop making such a big fuss out of this piece of dead flesh?

“I just… thought… we should… he should wear something.” Banner seemed a little bit embarrassed about it, but Stark nodded. “Yeah… I’ve never seen that sweater on him. I don’t think he ever… wore it.”

“Should I get something else?”

“No, it’s fine. Just… give it to me. I’ll… take care of it.”

Dressing a dead body was a grotesque act. Unresponsive like a puppet, but it was someone you loved. What was left of them. Stark put that sweater on the corpse and Loki felt sick to his stomach.

As soon as they were done Banner was looking at him again and Stark returned to his screens.

“Tony, we… we can’t let him lie here. We have to… You’ll have to start thinking about… making some arrangements.”

Stop talking about the body. It is meaningless.

“Tommy is staying right here.”
“Tony…”

“No!” Stark hissed hoarsely, turning his head around. “I don’t know what he would have wanted. I know he was catholic, but… I don’t know if he would have wanted… if he wanted to be buried in England or… I need time to find out what he would have wanted and I can’t do that now… Not when the bastards who are responsible for this are still walking around. I’ll take care of S.H.I.E.L.D… then Tommy will get the funeral he deserves… when I can think about this…”

Banner didn’t reply immediately, probably thinking about what to say. What was there to say anyway? “But… he can’t stay like this.”

“I know… I will… think of something. I won’t let him…” Stark hesitated, not saying that horrible word. “Bruce, I need you to go through the stuff Jarvis found on the S.H.I.E.L.D servers. I’m still working on the general update on the suits. By now Jarvis should have decoded the entire security protocol of S.H.I.E.L.D’s main base.”

“Tony, what are you doing?”

“I’m going to war.”

“God…” Taking his glasses off Banner shook his head. “Can’t we…I know what you saw and what it looks like, but… we need more information on what happened. I know you want the person who did this to pay for it and I want that too. I’m willing to help you with this, he was my friend too, but you can’t just unleash a… Tony?”

Loki was raising an eyebrow too, because Stark didn’t even seem to be listening anymore. While Banner was trying to be the voice of reason Stark sat down in front of one of the computers and pressed a few buttons. “Jarvis… pull it up.”

Had he already found it? Now that would just be wonderful. His heartbeat sped up in excitement when Jarvis didn’t use a mere screen, but created a hologram. A big, shiny portrait of Loki’s lie. Perfection.

There were so many little reactions and Loki relished every single one of it. Banner was reading and his eyes were slowly widening. Filling with disbelief and finally he covered his mouth with his hand as if to try to disguise his shock. Loki loved it, but he was still more interested in Stark.

Nothing. He could also be looking right through the hologram.

“This is…” Banner had balled both hands into fists, they were shaking and Loki smiled contently. “… I didn’t trust them… but I didn’t think… Damn it!” He was screaming and Loki wanted that from Stark. All of it. “He had nothing to do with anything. He was a civilian…”

“Fury doesn’t give a flying fuck about that. He had something they wanted and they knew he wouldn’t give it to them, so they killed him.”

The text Loki had created was short, but very informative. A message that couldn’t be misunderstood. Get the bracelet. Try to get him alone, when Stark was not around. Don’t worry about using force. Collateral damage is not a problem.

Banner turned away and propped himself up with his hands against one the desks, trying to stop himself from shaking. Yes. Loki could feel it, it was practically pouring out of his pores. The anger. Mingled together with grief and disappointment it was a dangerous mixture. “Collateral damage… he is a person… how could…” Shaking his head Banner just stopped. Loki closed his eyes and the aura was almost overwhelming. Pulsing inside of this man. How did it feel to have
such power? Loki knew and Banner was about to learn. When you wanted to make use of it. Not because of some emergency, not because they forced you to.

But because you wanted to. Because you wanted to make them pay.

“Who knew about this? This order went out to whom?”

“They hid it quite well, Jarvis almost didn’t find it. I can’t track it further back, but I guess it was top secret. Probably it went only out to the few people who actually did it. The one Fury considers his very best. A few cold-hearted killers…” Stark trailed off and Loki smiled happily. Good boy. Smart…

A soft gasp was audible, but by far not as shocked as before. “No… you… I don’t think she would go as far.”

“She clearly proved where her loyalties lie. You’ve ever seen her file? There almost isn’t enough paper to list all the names of the people she killed. Why? Because it was a mission. A fucking mission. They’ve made Tommy a mission. Next one will be me. They’ve already tried to get rid of you and they will do it again… No, they won’t. I’ll be done with them before they get another chance to. I don’t want any misunderstandings about this, Bruce. I will make this quite clear. I’m going to destroy S.H.I.E.L.D. There will be nothing left of it when I’m done. I’ll erase every code, every protocol, maybe I’ll sell some of it to Russia or North Korea, I don’t give a shit. I’m going to find out who shot him. I’ll kill them. The ones who gave the order, the one who carried it out and everybody else who had a part in this. People are going to die and I’m not going to argue about this… not even for a second. If you don’t want to have any part in this, I understand. If that’s the case, please just leave. You are my friend, I won’t hold this against you, but… they took him away from me. I held him when he died and… he was scared. He almost died alone on a dirty street, shot in the back by some bastard who ripped the bracelet of his wrist… brutally enough to tear blood. They are not getting away with this. I won’t let them… They murdered Tommy. They killed him… so I’ll kill them.”

Opening his eyes again Loki stared into Stark’s and there were tears in them. It hit Loki with full force. The sorrow that didn’t need any shouting or large gestures to show how powerful it was. Some tears and these words. While Banner was trying to channel his rage, to not let it devour himself, Stark was drowning. For now he was still trying to catch his breath, to keep breathing because there were still things he had to take care of. But as soon as that would be over… Stark would let go and willingly swallow water. Until he was dead.

Banner’s eyes wandered from the corpse on the table back to the hologram. Most probably thinking about how he had been on the run and how they had never lost track on him. How they were building cells for him and probably trying to figure out how they were going to turn him into a weapon. Was this really such a difficult decision?

“I’ll stay…”

Stark met his gaze and only responded with a slow nod and a silent “Thank you…”

Grinning softly Loki licked his lips and surrendered himself to this moment. Even in a lifetime as long as his own Loki would not encounter many perfect moments. This was one of them and he loved everything about it. If he had to decide he would probably choose the corruption. What did it take to make a good man ready to draw blood? To make them ache for it in a way that had nothing to do with self-defense? The Beast and Iron Man were going to war. For Loki.

So beautiful…
They started talking again, hushed voices, but Loki was not really listening. Something about getting the suits from Malibu, making the S.H.I.E.L.D servers crash and some other energy source. Loki didn’t care and he had enough trust in them to know they would do a good job at setting the world on fire.

At this moment he could easily leave and look after the Captain, but for now he still felt a little sting of childish curiosity. Stepping closer Loki glanced at the body on the table. Of course he was perfect, but Loki could still see the ugliness beneath the glamour. It wasn’t the person Stark wanted it to be. Yet the stench of death was already sticking to it. Their senses weren’t sharp enough to make it out, but Loki knew. Loki knew that he had been dead for two days already.

So yes, it had been bizarre to watch Stark holding the hand of this dead person. To have him think that the warmth was slowly vanishing, when it had been gone for two days now. The hand he had been holding was cold. It had been cold for quite a while… Like the touche Loki had felt when…

The rusty nail was replaced by a barbed hook, ripping right through him and Loki gritted his teeth to stop himself from screaming. Staying on his feet was impossible, so Loki slid down to his knees, trying to crawl further away from the two mortals, so they wouldn’t hear his ragged breathing. However the pain was searing, not only in his head, but everywhere. Loki couldn’t locate it. All he wanted was for it to disappear again, but the throbbing kept getting worse. Something else joined the pain. Something loud, deafening and black as the night.

_I promise you. They will pay for this. Every single one of them. I will break their bones. I will obliterate them. Wipe them off the surface of any world. This is the oath I take…_

Loki couldn’t breathe and suddenly the pain was… inside. Not his mind was yearning for a missing piece. There was not the slightest physical connection to this. Yet Loki was completely overwhelmed. He had been torn apart before, but this was unbearable. Desperately longing for being able to scream and to cry Loki let his magic take him in a firestorm. Not having a say in where it took him Loki tried to have some rational thought, anything, but it was all over him.

Falling over again Loki couldn’t hold back the sob that escaped his throat. He recognized the feeling of despair, of being alone and desperate. Dangling over the void until he decided to let go, because he had been supposed to die so long ago. Being a child and sneaking away from the guards to go into the forest to find some herbs for a spell. Getting lost in the darkness and not finding his way home. Screaming for his mother and father and slipping in a cold bed made of leaves, crying himself to sleep. That guard coming to his cell, telling him that his mother had been killed by a monster. The cold touch of another monster that had turned Loki into one as well.

Nothing compared to this. Loki was suffering. There was nothing he wanted to do. Not a thought or a desire he wanted to chase. Lying here in the cold, wet sand and listen to the sound of the sea. Except that he could only hear his own voice. Of an older version of himself who was still complete. Who had a whole mind.

And who was being consumed by grief and loss.
The Eyes

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

I know the last chapter was a bit slow, but now we're working our way back up to the action :)

Sorry to all the Portuguese people who read this, I adore your lovely language and Loki does too ;)

Have fun and tell me what you think :-D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_________________________________________________

The kiss goodnight, it comes with me
Both wrong and right, our memories
The whispering before we sleep,
Just one more thing that you can't keep

Our favorite place we used to go
The warm embrace that no one knows
The lovin' look that's left your eyes

No surprise ~~ Daughtry~~

__________________________________________________

“Senhor? Precisa de ajuda?”

Loki didn’t know the sound of this voice, but he recognized the melody of the words. Of the language. He had always loved Portuguese, from the moment the very first time he had ever heard it. When they had talked about the fact that Loki refused to use the all-speak, but insisted on learning the language... How much he had liked that…

“Você está bem?”

Blinking Loki tried to sit up and frowned in confusion when he only now realised he was lying on a beach. The wet sand had slipped into his clothes and Loki was shivering. What was he doing here?

“Senhor?”

Shaking his head Loki tried to also shake off the confusion. “Eu estou bem…” Coughing softly Loki glanced at the person talking to him. A young man. Olive skin, hair darker than ebony and wide black eyes. His face seemed worried and Loki felt an instant affection for him. Or maybe just for the words that were leaving his mouth. They sounded lovely, their meaning didn’t matter. Loki
“Tem certeza?”

No, Loki wasn’t sure, but he felt so much better than… how much time ago? “Onde eu estou?”

The young man was frowning, his eyes darting around as if trying to find somebody else to help him with this situation. He seemed to be uncomfortable, but that wasn’t Loki’s intention. Right now he really just wanted to know where he was. Where in Portugal.

One word but that was enough. “Sagres.”

His magic had taken him around the entire world. Away from the pain and right into it. Taking a deep breath Loki tasted the salty air and it was cold, fresh and lovely. Familiar. Loki still didn’t remember, but he didn’t have to. Being here he just knew. “Ele estava aqui. Estávamos aqui. Juntos. Nós amamos este país… “

„Senhor, você não pode ficar aqui. Você vai ficar doente…”

There was no hesitation in it, the hand that grabbed Loki’s was firm, hard and a bit calloused. The skin of person who was used to hard work. A bit overwhelmed Loki didn’t object and just let it happen. He had been here before. With the Vanir. They had been on Midgard together. Perhaps even right here…

Startled Loki jerked back when the man suddenly put an arm around him. He was ready to defend himself, but the other was merely putting his jacket on Loki’s shoulders. “Calma! Esta a tremer como varas verdes… Sua roupa está molhada…”

Looking down at himself Loki realised that the mortal was right. He must be looking dreadful. His clothes were wet and covered with sand. Absently Loki touched his hair and it was in the same state. How long had he been lying here?

“Venha comigo…” The Portuguese softly put a hand on Loki’s arm and tried to lead him away. No, Loki had places to be. Other things to do. A world to set on fire. Shaking his head Loki remained where he was, causing the young man to give him a concerned look. “Tenho que ir…”

Loki had never seen a person with such dark eyes. Those two bright spots only made the blackness more prominent. It should be impossible for them to convey any kind of emotion, but here he was. That mortal was obviously worried. Why? Loki was a stranger and the kind you probably should stay away from. There was also determination. “Eu acho que você deveria consultar um medico…”

It would have been so easy to just leave. To teleport away. Why should Loki spend a single second longer here? Yet he didn’t, but looked at the young man with the ebony eyes. Loki loved listening to the words coming out of his mouth and he felt the need to make him understand. To take care of him. “Obrigado por sua ajuda… adeus.”

About to turn around Loki realised he was still wearing the jacket the mortal had offered him. Loki reached out to take it off, but the mortal shook his head. “Mantenha-o… Posso ajudá-lo? De qualquer maneira?”

Again Loki shook his head, still not understanding why the mortal was so eager to offer him his help. “Tem feito o suficiente… Muito obrigado. Cuidado…”

Now he made it to turn around and walked away. His feet sunk into the wet sand and Loki didn’t mind. The familiarity of the feeling was reassuring. A new desire settled in his heart. To stay. To
enjoy the one place that seemed untouched by the void. Loki knew that they had been here. Together. This place had been touched by the Vanr…

“Poderia ajudá-lo...” The voice behind him almost made him stop. What would happen if Loki took him up on that offer? What if the mortal could indeed help him? What if he actually wanted the mortal to help him. A foolish thought... disgustingly naive. There was nothing the mortal could do for him. Acutally Loki had more trust in the soft breeze that was playing with his hair. It carried the salt of the sea and words. Spoken probably years ago.

“Tell me another one.”

“I do not know any more stories.”

“Such a bad liar. Come on, tell me another one of these fairy tales...”

“They are all filled with violence and tragedy.”

“Yes, that makes them interesting... and I like the way you tell them.”

“I really don’t think there is a single story left that I haven’t told you yet.”

“Then tell me the one about Pedro and Inês... I like that one.”

“Betrayal, murder, war, revenge... why am I not surprised that you enjoy it so much?”

“It’s tragic and poetic and part of it is true... that makes it fascinating. I want to hear it... tell your prince a story, he wants to hear it.”

“Now you are my prince again?”

“Whenever I want you to do my bidding, I am your prince.”

“I see... since my prince wants me to tell him a tragic love story... I guess I have no choice. Pedro was the son of King Alfonso...”

Taking a deep breath Loki reminded himself that he couldn’t just stop. He needed to keep walking, he shouldn’t have had even come here. So many things he had to do... but his magic had brought him here for a reason. It had remembered and now Loki had heard his voice. Still he could barely make out the words, but this place had given him back one of the pieces. Only yesterday Loki’s desire for them had been endless and now... he was afraid. There had been so much pain and Loki hadn’t known anything. How much would it hurt if...

No, Loki wasn’t a coward and he wouldn’t hesitate to take his mind back. Also he felt safe here, at ease... at home. So yes, Loki would come back and he’d find the rest of this memory. He would dedicate all of his time to this... as soon as he was done.

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“How are you feeling, Captain?”

To be honest Loki was a bit impressed. Thor had done quite some work. The Captain was in a bad state and Loki was fairly sure that a normal mortal would be dead. Half of his head was covered with a white bandage and Loki remembered the wound that had been bleeding excessively. His skin was unusually pale and a long, ugly cut was disfiguring his chin. Loki almost felt bad for this pretty face.
“I’ve been better…” His voice sounded kind of hoarse, causing Loki to take a closer look at his throat. Had he been strangled? Incredible, Thor was about to make Loki proud.

“I want to make it clear that I advised Captain Rogers to stay in bed…” The doctor fell instantly silent when Rogers only slightly turned his head. That gaze made clear that he didn’t want to hear a single word. “What happened? They refused to fill me in, but now I’m all stitched up. I want to know what’s going on.”

Fury exchanged a glance with the Widow and the tension in the room was almost unbearable. “Our situation is critical. Thor didn’t come up with any resistance and went with Agent Romanoff. For now he seems almost stable, but we have no guarantee that something like this isn’t going to happen again. If he decides he wants to go on a rampage again…”

“I don’t think Thor did decide anything. He didn’t look like he knew what he was doing…” Still the righteous Captain, defending the man who had tried to smash his skull with a hammer. Loki watched the scene, leaning against the wall, smiling softly. This was going to be fun.

“To be honest I don’t care about his condition, Captain. We just relearned something today. We have nothing to keep Thor in check if he decides to turn on us. He did that two times now.” Fury’s face was as hard as stone and Loki chuckled under his breath. It’s not like you didn’t design a bunch of weapons for this case. Wouldn’t this be the perfect moment to try to convince the Captain of their usefulness? “What are we supposed to do if he does it again?”

A mere second Rogers seemed to think about it, but then brushed it off. “This is Thor we are talking about. He’s not our enemy. I’m not a psychologist, I don’t know the right terms to describe what’s happening to him, but he’s… he needs help.”

“I see where you are coming from, Captain, but if people with psychological problems get too dangerous for society, they get locked away. We are not capable of doing that. For now Thor agreed to go back into his cell and we have people watching him, but we all know that they can’t hold him back if he wants to leave. You are very noble, Captain. I know you consider him your friend. A friend that hit you with such force that…” He trailed off and pointed at the Captain’s bandage. “It’s impossible to ignore what happened today though. The property damage is severe, people got hurt… we don’t have any numbers yet, but it’d be a fucking miracle if nobody died today. We have to act now.”

Slowly Loki moved closer, driven by greed. He yearned for every single emotion visible on the Captain’s face. It was fascinating to watch a man fighting with himself, because he wanted to do what he thought was right, but in the end he succumbed to doing what he thought was necessary. Loki could still see the glimmer in his eyes. Unlike Stark’s it was still there. Yes, he would be the hardest to break, but Loki was looking forward to it.

“I’m listening.” Not even for second Rogers tried to hide that he didn’t like any of this.

Fury had to know and he didn’t care. “Until we find a way to figure out what is wrong with Thor, there is only one power we know of that can match his…”

Rogers didn’t even blink. “Bruce. I thought I was around Thor all the time.”

Until now the Widow had remained silent, her arms crossed in front of her chest, eyes carefully watching the two other men present. The doctor had left minutes ago. When Banner was mentioned Loki thought he could sense a change. Ever so softly. Obviously she had regained control. Next to Thomas and Stark she had made a terrible mistake and probably was eager to redeem herself. Might be too late for that.
“Not anymore. When we heard about what was going on in New York, he came with us, but he left with Stark… I don’t think he will come back.”

Now this was the most interesting part of the story. The Captain thought so too. A deep frown appeared on his pale face. “What happened? Tony and me were fighting Thor when he just… took off.”

Tell him. I want to hear your version of the story. How are you going to make him understand this? Loki only expected the best from her and she started quite well. Lowering her eyes, not hiding her discomfort. “Stark’s boyfriend was shot.”

Yes, Loki had already known, but that phrase was enough to reveal that there was only one person in this room who possessed empathy. A heart as the mortals would say. A meaningless phrase, but it was obvious that Rogers was different. He had other principles that weren’t tied to an organisation or a certain ideology. Would they ever realise that this made him so much stronger than them? His motivation was unimportant. Rogers wasn’t bound to anything and that made him a liability. Blue eyes widened and before even knowing any details, Rogers was already feeling compassion. “By whom? Is he…?”

“He died on the scene. We don’t know what happened yet. Our best guess is that it was one of the robots. That would outrule the possibility that Stark has anything to do with them.” Some tale. A story that didn’t have anything to do with her or people that she knew.

Unlike her Rogers didn’t even pretend that this didn’t have an immense impact on him. He even took the time and closed his eyes for a second. “How is Tony?”

“Unfortunately it seems like Stark is our major concern now. He accuses S.H.I.E.L.D of killing his partner.” Fury snorted as if the mere thought was utterly ridiculous. “He left with the body and Banner followed them. Before that he threatened Agent Romanoff’s life.”

Rogers raised his hand to indicate Fury to slow down. “Thomas Pine was killed and… Tony thinks S.H.I.E.L.D is responsible for that? Good lord… did somebody talk to him? He must be going mad. I need to talk to him…”

“We’ve been trying to get into contact for over two hours now. Nothing. No word from Banner either. We should be preparing for the worst… there is a good chance that they are working on something to…”

“No.” Rogers shook his head determinedly. “Suspicious have brought us here. I am not making the same mistake again. I… didn’t like him very much, but he was no bad person. Tony loved him very much and now he’s dead… I am going to talk to him. As his friend…”

“Captain, Stark made very clear what was going to happen if we should dare to keep his partner under surveillance. Now he ended up dead. What do you think an unstable person like Stark is going to do?” It was a direct reproach, Fury was calling him naïve, but Rogers wasn’t going to fall for such a cheap trick. He didn’t care about these things. “It’s not about what I think. I’m going to talk to Tony and we are going to figure out what happened. Who did that… and then… we’ll see.”

“Don’t get your hopes up too high… I’m not going to leave this base unprepared for an attack. Any news on Barton?”

The Widow shook her head and Loki swallowed another chuckle. Did he disappear? Loki wouldn’t be surprised. There was nowhere Barton could hide where Stark wouldn’t find him.
So the Captain still thought that he could save this situation. Naïve fool. Fury was ready and preparing for a confrontation, Loki was content. Stark better went to war soon.

Teleporting away Loki found himself in Stark’s lab and the one big change couldn’t be overlooked. The corpse was gone. Seems like Stark had come up with an idea what to do with it without having to arrange the funeral yet. Whatever, Loki didn’t need it anymore. He forgot about it as soon as his eyes landed on Stark who was leaning over one of his suits, doing some work on the repulsors. Very good.

“Sir, I just managed to unlock the second database.”

Without raising his head Stark nodded. “Good. How many?”

“25, sir.”

“How many are in New York at the moment?”

“6.”

“Add them to the list… how far are you on the security protocol?”

“As long as nobody is allowed to notice what I’m doing, I can’t speed up the process.”

Sighing silently Stark nodded. “Alright, I don’t want them to realise what’s going on. Keep working on it…”

Then there was silence. Seconds turned into minutes and Stark didn’t say a single word or made a sound. All he did was tinkering with his own technology. Whatever update he was creating right now, Loki was sure it was going to make quite an impact. Literally.

Somehow Loki wished he could slip under Stark’s skin, into his head to figure out his plan. Curiosity had always been one of his few weaknesses. Moving closer Loki took a look at Stark’s face. It was hard to make out since he was leaning over the armour, but Loki could see hard lines and eyes that were anything but empty. Anger was still covering the pain, but for now that was exactly what Loki needed.

There was nothing here for Loki to do. He trusted Stark to do a good job on his own, Loki didn’t need to be here. Some many other strings waited to be pulled.

Two seconds later Loki found himself in William’s apartment and sat down on one of the chairs. How long had it been? Pulling out his phone Loki pushed a few buttons and waited. He was convinced that the Captain wouldn’t disappoint him. Well, he did let him wait for a few seconds.

“Hello? Will?”

“Oh, thank god! You’re alright…” Loki let out a sigh of relief and William’s voice sounded as familiar as ever.

“Yeah… somewhat…” Clearly overwhelmed, not knowing what to say, not wanting to lie and his mind was elsewhere. A wonderful state to be in. Loki was tempted to lick his lips. “What? Aren’t you okay? How are you? Come on, Steve, tell me. I’m losing my mind over here…”

A slight hesitation and Loki was smiling. “I’m… okay. Really.”

“Wow, you’re such a bad liar. Steve, please…”
“I’ve got a slight concussion and I needed a few stitches, but I’m alright. I’m a fast healer. Thank you for calling… it’s really nice that you’re worrying about me…”

Incredible, Rogers was actually spending some of his precious time talking to Loki. He just couldn’t stop being nice.

“Steve… god… I have no idea what is going on, but… this can’t be your life. Being afraid to be killed every other day. Not after all you’ve already done…” Straight to the point. This conversation was probably going to be very short, so why waste precious time?

Rogers was taking a breath, probably trying to figure out how to tell his best friend that he didn’t have time to talk, that he should be stopping a grieving hero from turning into the worst villain the world had ever seen. Well, at least his motives were nobler than the ones of the average bad guy.

“Listen, Will… right now I can’t have a discussion about whether I made some bad decisions in life to end up where I am now, but… I’m telling you this as a friend, because this shouldn’t be some government’s secret…”

Wonderful. Hadn’t it been the Captain who refused to talk about these details with civilians? Or could he also bend the rules to his liking? Most probably he was already feeling guilty about not appreciating Thomas enough when he had been still alive. Too bad.

“Okay?”

“Tony’s boyfriend was killed this morning.”

I know. I did it and it felt good. “Oh my god…”

“For now that’s all I know… He’s my friend and something terrible happened to him. I have no idea what he must be going through right now and I’m just leaving to go to talk to him… honestly I have no idea what to say to him. This is different. This is Tony…” Not quite shaking, but Loki could hear the strain in Rogers’ voice.

Loki took a breath. “Lord… I am so sorry. How did that…”

“I don’t know… I have no idea. There might be trouble heading our way if Tony wants to… take care of this himself.”

“What do you… if he wants to go after the guys who did it? It was his boyfriend, I can see why he would want to do that… or are you worried that… Iron Man might become a vigilante?”

“Something like that… I really have to go now. I’ll try to call you tonight. We haven’t talked in a while… Don’t worry. I’ll take care of myself, I always do. Thank you for calling, that was really nice.”

Oh yes, try to go and talk to Stark. Maybe for old time’s sake he won’t try to kill you on the spot. No, he was smart and Loki had seen that he was working on a plan. This was going to be interesting. “I know nobody can convince you otherwise, so I’m not even going to try. Somebody died and you don’t know who is responsible, so please be careful. Don’t forget to call me either… I want to know how you are doing.”

“I promise I’ll keep you up to date. I will talk to you later.”

“Good. Take care.”

Hanging up Loki took a moment to grin and to feel extremely smug. There were still some
possibilities where things could go wrong, but Loki thought himself perfectly capable of taking care of that. Stark wasn’t going to have any discussions about what happened and even if… Loki would remind him of his loss. There was nothing he was better at.

The Captain was going to visit Stark and Loki wasn’t going to miss that for anything in the Nine Worlds.

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“Tony, even with my glasses I only got one pair of eyes… this is an awful lot of information…” Banner was rubbing his temple, his eyes parting from one screen to a hologram and then back to the printed dossier in his hands.

Stark hadn’t moved yet, still completely caught up in his work on the suit. “Jarvis has already gone through most of it, but another pair of eyes can’t hurt. Maybe you’ll find something he missed…”

Not saying something else Banner turned his attention back to his work. Only partly interested Loki glanced at the pages in his hands. Assassins. A list of protocols, orders… half of them not decoded yet. Not surprising, Stark wanted a name. He wanted to know who pulled the trigger. Probably he was already working on several scenarios on what to do to him. Creativity was something wonderful.

Unfortunately there would be no name and no way to get to the person who did it. Stark would come to his own conclusions.

Time seemed to have come to a hold in this room. Stark and Banner were caught up in the same task and from the way it looked like maybe they were going to continue like this forever. For now Loki was content to sit on one of the tables and to watch them. Fascinating how a man surrendered himself completely to his work to stop himself from drowning in his pain. It was good to have a goal, wasn’t it? The desire for revenge and justice could keep a man upright… for some time. Until now Stark hadn’t had a single chance to let it out. Not a person to yell at, no piece of furniture to destroy… he hadn’t even stopped for a second to scream.

Loki almost felt sorry for the first man who would step into Stark’s way. Speaking of the Captain…

“Sir, Captain Rogers is waiting in front of the tower. He asks if you might want to talk to him. He wants to… express his condolences.”

Even a machine like Jarvis hesitated at such a moment. Banner abruptly raised his head and looked over to Stark who stilled his movements. What was going to do? What kind of greeting was the Captain going to receive?

With Thomas dead Loki felt so alive and excited.

Standing up Stark let his hand run across the arm of the armour. A gesture that almost looked affectionate. “Is he alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Armed?”

“Negative, sir. He also isn’t carrying his shield.”

Nodding slowly Stark sat back down again, going back to work. “I want to talk to him. Put him
Banner swallowed visibly and Loki wasn’t able to keep the smile off his face.

Seconds later a hesitant “Hello” resounded through the speakers and Stark still didn’t show any reaction. “What do you want, Steve?”

The Captain’s voice was still filled with strain and horror. A lovely sound. “Tony… I am here to… I am so sorry. Can I come in? Can we talk?”

Stark huffed and the bitterness in this short sound couldn’t be ignored. “Who sent you? Was it Fury? Or Romanoff?”

“Nobody sent me. I am your friend Tony, that’s why I’m here. I want to help you find out what happened.”

A good choice of words, but too late.

Stark got back up, walked around the table to another one. Different parts of another armour were placed on it and Loki just might begin to understand Stark’s plan.

“Are you still with S.H.I.E.L.D?”

“Tony, this…”

“Easy question, Cap. Yes or no. Are you still with S.H.I.E.L.D?”

A short hesitation and they all knew that Captain America wouldn’t lie. “Well, yes, but…”

Having heard enough Stark put his hand flat on this piece of technology which got activated and wrapped itself around Stark’s arm. “Then there is nothing to talk about.”

____________________________________________________

Viajé de Bahrein hasta Beirut
Fuí desde el norte hasta el polo sur
Y no encontré ojos así
Como los que tienes tú

Ojos así ~~ Shakira ~~

(I travelled from Bahrein to Beirut
I went from the North to the South pole
And I didn't find eyes like those
Eyes like yours

____________________________________________________

Chapter End Notes

Translation
“Senhor? Precisa de ajuda?” - "Sir? Do you need help?"

“Você está bem?” - "Are you alright?"

“Senhor?” - "Sir?"

“Eu estou bem…” - "I'm okay…"

“Tem certeza?” - "Are you sure?"

"Onde eu estou?” - "Where am I?"

“Ele estava aqui. Estávamos aqui. Nós amamos este país…” - "He was here. We were here. Together. We loved this country."

„Senhor, você não pode ficar aqui. Você vai ficar doente…” - "Sir, you can't stay here. You will get sick."

"Calma! Está a tremer como varas verdes… Sua roupa está molhada…” - "It's okay! You're shivering like a leaf... your clothes are wet."

“Venha comigo…” - "Come with me."

“Tenho que ir…” - "I have to go…"

“Eu acho que você deveria consultar um medico…” - "I think you should see a doctor."

“Obrigado por sua ajuda… adeus.” - "Thank you for your help…. goodbye."

“Mantenha-o… Posso ajudá-lo? De qualquer maneira?” - "Keep it.... Can I help you? Somehow?"

“Tem feito o suficiente… Muito obrigado. Cuidado…” - "You did enough... Thank you very much. Take care."

“Poderia ajudá-lo…” - "I could help you…"
Hello everybody,

Everything is going according to plan... until somebody shows up... and Loki refuses to face the truth

Have fun... I enjoyed this chapter quite a bit while writing :D

_________________________________________________

I've tried so hard to tell myself that you're gone
   But though you're still with me
       I've been alone all along

   My immortal ~~ Evanescene ~~

_________________________________________________

“Tony, stop. This is Steve.” Banner was there instantly, grabbing Stark’s uncovered arm. His eyes were pleading, filled with shock, not wanting to believe what Stark was about to do. Pushing him away Stark shook his head. “This is a S.H.I.E.L.D agent.”

“Damn it, Tony! You can’t believe that Steve was in on this. He would never accept any of this. You know that.”

Jarvis must have cut the connection, because there was no reaction from the Captain and Stark growled. “Who do you think send him here? They did that before. Because he is a boy scout, because I had a fucking poster of him above my bed when I was 10 years old. Because we would automatically believe that he doesn’t have anything to do with it.”

“Because he doesn’t! It’s Steve! He wasn’t in on this and you know that!”

Banner was actually trying to make Stark understand, to get through that immense rage and pain. Sadly he had a good point, but Loki knew that reason couldn’t compete with the memory of having Thomas die in his arms.

“Just talk to him first, please. Steve is a good guy. He doesn’t kill innocent people.”

Releasing a deep breath Stark closed his eyes for a second. “He trusts them more than me. He thinks I’m dangerous and he refuses to believe that a government organisation that is supposed to protect people might be a danger. We’ll see what he has to say about this.”

Loki couldn’t tell how Stark activated the remaining pieces of the armour, but they suddenly flew towards him and attached itself to his body.
This was going to be fun.

Making a quick decision Loki waited with the Captain for Stark. Again Rogers was looking better, but he was still wearing the bandage and the cut on his chin was still very visible. Yet Loki couldn’t stop looking at the Captain’s eyes. He was at loss. Almost scared. Hadn’t he told William that he missed the war? The times when everything had been black and white. Good and evil so easy to tell apart. That was history now.

Five seconds.

Stark must have used the broken windows as his exit way. Fully glad in his armour he was quite an imposing figure and Rogers instinctively made a step back. He wouldn’t have done that a few weeks ago.

“Tony…”

The Man of Iron greeted him by raising his arm, ready to fire any time. “What do you want?”

“Jesus… Tony, please, I just want to talk.” The Captain lightly held up his hands as to show that he was no threat. “I want to make sense of all of this… and be your friend.”

“Whatever they told you to tell me… save it. There will be no talking. Quite the opposite if someone else shows up to open their mouth to tell me a fucking lie… You can just walk away from this, Steve. Turn around and leave. Don’t get in my way and we’ll be fine.”

Spoken with determination, Stark meant every single word and the Captain had clearly trouble keeping up with him. He had been disillusioned a long time ago, but when it came down to his friends and the people he trusted… Rogers could still be shaken up. Like right now. He stared at Stark, his eyes wide and filled with disbelief. “What are you implying?”

“I am not implying anything. I am telling you to stay out of this. You are not going to pick a side, so stay out of it. Spare me the talk and leave. Just don’t get between me and the guys who killed Tommy…” Stark was about to turn around and Rogers made a step forward.

“Tony, please, you’re mourning and I want to help you figure out what happened. I know you think that S.H.I.E.L.D had something to do with…”

Loki flinched and a gasp escaped his lips. It happened so fast he didn’t see it coming. Neither had the Captain. The shock on Rogers’ face was a sight to behold when the energy beam hit him directly in the chest and knocked him to the ground.

He hadn’t even let him finish…

Coughing and groaning Rogers raised his head, propping himself up on his arms and was faced with the repulsor right above him. “I don’t want to hurt you, Steve, so just don’t. No lies. No sweet words to appease me. Nobody is going to insult him by playing this down. Stay away… before that you can tell Fury to give me the one who did it. Maybe things won’t get as messy then…”

A deed that Loki hadn’t thought could be done this easily. The great Captain America was immobilised. Helpless. Why? He had been recently fighting with Thor. A friend turning against him. Rogers didn’t trust Stark, he had known about this possibility and yet he was completely overwhelmed by what was happening to him.

“Tony…” Rogers whispered that name as if he wasn’t sure if said man was even in that armour.
Loki’s heart was hammering against his chest and he watched in silence as Stark took off again, leaving the Captain just lying there. Everything he had imagined and more and still…

Rogers let out a shaky breath, his eyes following the red flash in the sky. Shock seemed to have taken a hold on him. He didn’t even bother to get up or he wasn’t able to. Lovely and… what was wrong? Why was Loki feeling the exact same way? He felt like he couldn’t move, like Stark had also hit him with the blast. Or even magic. Caught in such a weird state between excitement and disappointment. Seeing that great man, so similar to Thor, lying in the dust and doubting everything he was so fiercely believing in was giving Loki the satisfaction he was craving for, but its sweet taste didn’t linger. Fading away so quickly that Loki didn’t know if it even had been there at all. Or was it just a piece of his imagination? Leaving him yearning for more… or for something else entirely.

It must be really upsetting that you can’t blame this one on me, right?

Loki had changed six lives over the course of several weeks and all it took to make his own crumble and fall apart was one single second. The one he needed to realise who was talking to him. A second demon that joined the one already living inside of him, there to hunt him and reminding him of his failures. Of the fact that he wasn’t whole. Not a real person.

You are only being dramatic, because you know exactly what is going on, but you don’t want to admit it.

Shaking his head Loki pressed his eyes shut. His mind was racing, trying to figure out how this was possible. He felt light-headed, almost dizzy… and confused. The dizziness was familiar, but Loki knew that it wasn’t going to overpower him. Both him and the Captain were in shock, but he knew that he wasn’t going to lose control. Which made it all the more… strange and unsettling. His voice was sounding different, but yet so incredibly familiar.

Come on, you are smart. Smarter than all these feeble mortals… don’t pretend you don’t know already what’s going on…

No. Out of the question.

Rogers was getting up to his feet, brushing himself off before reaching up and touching his bandage. His eyes were still looking up into the sky, searching for something he wouldn’t find there. It was up to him now. Which side he would trust. Whom he would believe. Because Loki knew and Stark knew as well – Rogers wasn’t capable of staying away and Loki didn’t want him to. He wanted…

To know why that piece of scum was still there. The Captain wasn’t a man to jump to conclusions, nor did he like rash decisions. He would come back from this and talk to S.H.I.E.L.D, search for answers. Stark wouldn’t bring the world down during the next five minutes. Loki would make use of this time…

The Captain turned away and Loki’s magic took him to a new place. Sitting down on the couch Loki watched the empty seat in front of him. He could use an illusion, but just the thought of ever seeing Thomas’ face again made him sick to his stomach. Sadly that didn’t stop his mind from imagining him there. With his legs and arms crossed, his head cocked to the side and with a smirk on his lips.

At this moment Loki felt more disdain for him than for any of the Avengers. He was going to work this out, there was nothing Loki couldn’t do and he wouldn’t let this… malfunction hold him back. Time to talk. “You are dead. I killed you.”
In his mind Thomas laughed amusedly and somewhat patronizing. *I told you, you wouldn’t be able to do it.*

Unworthy fool who dared to insult him. “Except that I did. I killed you and I enjoyed it.”

*You got rid of the shell and right now I am even grateful for that.*

There was nothing Loki despised more than not understanding what was happening to him. None of what his creation said made any sense to him. Loki wasn’t going to use said shell anymore, there was no more need to pretend, so no more danger to get lost in someone else’s thoughts. To become someone else.

“You are a figment of the past and now you’ll fade away. It might take some time, but that’s what’s going to happen.”

*Oh Loki, you’re supposed to be smarter than that…*

For a short moment Loki wished for Thomas to have a body so he could release his anger upon him. The primitive, mortal way. Using his fists and feet. Hitting him, causing him pain and loving every second of it. “I know the wolf is still there. I feel him everyday, but it’s faint and unimportant. It doesn’t control me. It’s nothing more than a fading scar. This is going to happen to you. You are gone, I killed you. I put your glamour away and you won’t ever say another word. By the end you’ll a light scar…”

Loki heard him chuckling and it made him furious. Such incredible confidence…

*Not going to happen. You know it’s something different, Loki*

The one thing Loki knew without a doubt was that he had already spent too much time even talking to the other one. Loki had killed him off, he wasn’t going to put on that glamour anymore, so it would be best to ignore him from now on. It would make him fade away quicker and Loki wouldn’t have to bother to listen to him anymore. That annoying voice which… The realisation struck Loki out of all sudden. How could he have missed this? Something so major… his mind was racing, but he wasn’t able to find the answer. It didn’t make any sense, how was it even possible. Loki hadn’t giving anything away. That little useless creation wasn’t worth talking to. He should have never done that in the first place.

Unfortunately this was something Loki couldn’t let slide. “How do you know my name?”

The fact that Thomas was here, talking to him was proof of something that never should have happened. Getting a life of his own. Thomas had lived his own life and of course he had been aware of Loki, but he had no insight. He couldn’t tell that he was only a character, controlled by someone else. Otherwise Thomas would have told Stark about him. Luckily Thomas had never really understood what was going on. The creator knew everything about his work, every single detail, but his creation didn’t know anything. Least of all who Loki was. Thomas was tied to Stark, he was blind to anything else. So how did he know?

*Why are you asking questions when you already know the answers? You know why I am still here. You know why I sound different. You know why I know your name and you know why seeing the Captain on his knees doesn’t taste as sweet as you imagined.*

Yes, Loki knew and it wasn’t a surprise. It was the same feeling he has had for weeks now. It hadn’t been enough. Not enough pain, not enough humiliation, not enough betrayal. They weren’t there yet, Stark would force the Captain to make a choice and then people would die. At the hands
of former friends. Then it would be enough. Every single person was different, they all needed a
different approach to break them.

This was the way to break the Captain.

*Not quite…*

Loki wasn’t listening anymore, he didn’t care whatever Thomas had to say. He had killed him once
and now he was going to watch him fade away. Into oblivion. In the meantime Loki would observe
the pawns getting into position.

It couldn’t hurt to know how the Captain was dealing with the new information he had gained.

***

The Captain hadn’t come back. S.H.I.E.L.D hadn’t heard from him in over an hour and they were
getting really nervous about that. Loki hated to admit it, but he felt the exact same way. What if he
had left too soon? Had the Captain tried to force entry into the tower? Or had Stark changed his
mind and they had engaged in a fight?

A thought that was enough to make Loki’s blood boil and he cursed Thomas and his own
foolishness. At this time it was too late to make mistakes or to get sloppy. Nobody was going to die
without Loki present. He didn’t allow that, he wasn’t going to accept it.

Magic carried Loki to the tower, but he didn’t even have to enter to know that he wouldn’t find
Rogers here. A man with such a presence and aura was easy to spot when you were close enough
and that wasn’t the case here. So where did he go?

Loki sent his magic out, searching the city, determined to find the best man of them all. It was
impossible that the Captain would stay away for long, he wasn’t capable of letting them down.
What would Loki do if he had a conscience and if he had to make the decisions against what friend
to go to war…

Not a situation Loki was likely to end up in.

Central Park? Had he gone to pick flowers to put them in his hair? Loki would never understand
the reasoning of mortals. When Loki arrived there about two seconds later he easily spotted the
Captain. A dark blue cap was now hiding the bandage on his head, he had his hands shoved into
the pockets of his jeans and Rogers seemed awfully interested in the ground beneath his feet. Most
probably he didn’t dare to raise his head, some jogger might recognize him. Loki observed in
silence, his eyes following his every move. Even mortals had realised that body language could say
so much more than words. Unless you were Loki of course. Still, the way the Captain held himself
was telling him more than he needed to know.

Thor was mad. Stark was dead. Rogers was lost. Not knowing what to do, because they forced him
to make a choice. One he didn’t want to make. Not enough to break him though. These bones were
made of steel.

Rogers kept walking and Loki his distance. This couldn’t take much longer. He was pondering,
thinking, but it was out of the question that he would spend more time away. Duty was calling…

Not stopping Rogers reached into his jacket and pulled out his phone. Ah, the choice was already
made. Now Loki was curious what he was going to tell S.H.I.E.L.D. Ask them what had really
happened? Or tell them that Stark was out for revenge? It would be…
The vibrations against Loki’s leg told him that it was neither. Huh. What do you expect of me, dear Captain? To make the decision for you? I don’t think it’s going to work out like that.

Pulling his phone out Loki answered the call. “Steve? You’re okay?”

Rogers’ steps slowed down and Loki wanted to come a little closer to check out his eyes. “Hey… I need your help.”

“Yeah, sure… what’s going on? Steve?” A hint of worry and Rogers kept walking, his head between his shoulders. “I have no idea what to do. This is… I know things aren’t supposed to be easy, but do they have to be so terribly difficult?”

Because it’s supposed to be hard, it’s supposed to eat on you. After all you are the strongest, the one able to stand the most pain. “You met Stark? What happened? Tell me…”

It was so easy to keep his voice soft, to make the Captain understand that he cared. The effect was instant. Rogers slowed down. “He is… absolutely convinced that… He is absolutely convinced that his boyfriend was murdered… by our people.”

It had taken Loki years to be able to smirk while his voice was shaking terribly. “Dear god… he is losing his mind over his grief…”

Rogers was running his hand down his face, turning his back to Loki. No, don’t hide… Slowly Loki walked around him, careful to stay far enough away so his steps wouldn’t be heard. “Will, I have no idea what to do. He is in so much pain. I’ve seen him upset before and he always tried to hide it by cracking jokes or… right now I don’t even recognize him anymore. He is completely cold and consumed by anger and grief. He was quite forward about what he was going to do now… and I can’t let that happen.”

Was this the only reason for the call? Time to confess before going to war against his friend? Interesting. Sitting down in the grass Loki studied the Captain’s face. Only now when they were twisted by worry Loki seemed to realise how beautiful his features were. There was no resemblance to Thor whatsoever despite the blonde hair and the blue eyes. Also even when Thor was suffering, he was only worrying about himself, the things he had done, the things that were happening to him… Rogers was tortured by the fact that misery was plaguing other people and he found himself unable to help them.

“What do you mean what he is going to do… Oh… my god… you think he is going to take the law into his own hands?”

One had to be blind to not see how badly Rogers flinched. They both knew the implications. “That’s not a question of interpretation… he was quite clear about it.”

“He can’t do that, Steve…”

“I tried to talk to him, to reason with him, but… he wouldn’t listen and then… he was so angry, the things he said and the way… he was so overwhelmed by his grief… I didn’t know what to say. I… had no idea how to handle this. His boyfriend died, he was shot… Not because he was a soldier or because he was at the wrong place at the wrong time…”

Huh? Are you in doubt, Steve? Are you starting to realise that you have no idea what happened?

“Steve, what are you implying? Is there… a possibility that he is right?”

“I don’t know what happened, but S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn’t kill an innocent person. Also there was no
reason to... it doesn’t make any sense...

What would William say? In the end it didn’t matter, there was no way out for Rogers. Most likely he would come to the conclusion that Stark was going crazy with grief and he would stop him from taking revenge. But... if Stark or the evidence Loki had placed was enough to convince him that S.H.I.E.L.D had indeed killed Thomas... The Captain would turn his back on the organisation. Yet there was no way that he would ever allow Stark to quench his thirst for vengeance. Especially Stark had already made clear that there would be blood. Captain America couldn’t let that happen.

Therefore it didn’t matter what Loki whispered into his ear. Rogers would have to take Stark down and he knew that too.

“Listen, Steve.... I trust your judgement and you should do that too. You aren’t jumping to conclusions, I know that. You’re going to figure out what happened. I am sure.”

“I might not have the time...”

Loki tried not to laugh. “You will have to. I know you, Steve. You wouldn’t be able to live with yourself if you rendered judgement before knowing all the facts... You’ll have to find out... what happened if you’re getting involved in this... There is no way you can stay out, is there?”

His heart skipped a beat when Rogers froze. Was he actually considering it? Of course, he would stay, but did he even dare to think about leaving?

“He is my friend, Will. I know we’ve had a lot of disagreements and I have my issues with Tony, but... I’ve never doubted that he was a good guy. I was worried that one day he might... do something stupid for some stupid reason, but not because he was... Now he has already made clear that he is going to attack S.H.I.E.L.D one way or another and they know that. They are already trying to come up with a way to disable him first or... he’s most probably doing the same... What am I going to do? This isn’t right, this is... good people killing each other and I don’t know what happened.”

“What do you want me to say to you?”

Raising his head again Rogers looked into Loki’s direction, but not at him. Still Loki sucked in a breath. “Just be honest. Tell me what you think, like you always do. I trust you... and I needed to talk to someone who isn’t going to... try to get me to do whatever they want, but what they think is right.”

Another time it was so hard to not laugh at him. Rogers was desperate and he came to the one who had caused him all this desperation. “Okay... I... Find out what happened to that poor guy... and then... do what you think is right. Whatever your conscience tells you to do, because it will be the right thing to do. You’re the most righteous person I know, Steve... trust your guts. You will know what to do...”

Loki watched him closely and Rogers closed his eyes. It was about time and Rogers knew that he couldn’t hide anymore. “I really hate this...”

“I know, Steve.” For once not a lie.

Roger’s body language changed completely. He was straightening up, his demeanour filled with determination. “Thank you, Will... I... god, I really wish I could talk to you about normal things... seems like we’re only talking when something bad happens or when I need your help and I’m not even... Guess I’m not very useful as a friend...”
As the god of lies Loki should feel proud, because this was the most blatant lie Loki had heard in a while. For some reason it didn’t make him proud, but furious. Was it never enough? An entire life dedicated to serve other people not worthy of him and Rogers still wanted to give more of him. Felt bad because he hadn’t sacrificed enough although he had barely more to give. No life, no past, no friends but this single one and Rogers still beat himself up for not being good enough for him.

Never enough…

“That’s not true and you know it.”

“Will, let’s just… I have to go…”

Slowly it dawned on Loki that this might be the last time they talked with each other and Loki simply loved a dramatic exit. “I know. Take care please. And Steve… you’re the best friend I’ve ever had… I knew that when… You remember the day when… you asked me what I saw… and I refused to tell you…”

“Will, you don’t have to say…”

“I saw my father. When all this is done… we can sit down and I’ll tell you about it. Until then… please be careful.”

“I… I promise. Take care.”

Their conversation ended and Loki was torn between content and rage while a strange yet somehow so familiar voice resounded in his ears. Laughing at him.

***

43 minutes later Captain America was standing in front of Fury and the Black Widow. Still no trace of Barton.

“Sir, I want to know what happened while I was fighting Thor. Everything single piece of information you have gathered concerning the death of Thomas Pine and I want it now. Most urgently I want to know why the one of the most intelligent men on this planet is talking about having proof that a S.H.I.E.L.D agent killed Mr. Pine. Please, straight to the point, I’m not going to lose any more time.”

That’s right, Captain, Stark’s not going to wait for you…
Hello everybody,

Steve demands answers... Tony doesn't ask questions anymore

I hope you're having fun with this although it's not really funny :D

______________________________

Don't ever take a single second to breathe
They're gonna send me on a murdering spree
I cannot wait to dance upon your grave
They don't even have a soul left to be saved

Northern lights ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

______________________________

Cold eyes were looking at the Captain. No nervousness, no hesitation and it made almost made Loki growl. So much arrogance and completely unearned. Fury was nothing without them and a short time ago he had still known that. When they had still all been there, when he had still been able to keep them in check. For about five minutes. Now that they were all walking away, one even threatening to take down his empire… he acted like he was so much more important than them. A strategy of course. Don’t let them see that you’re falling apart.

Loki wanted to spit on the floor.

“Proof? Captain, we are talking about an alcohol struck with a persecution complex.”

A pity said alcoholic wasn’t here, he would have ripped Fury’s throat out by now and Loki wouldn’t feel so terribly tempted. Unfortunately the Captain would never do such a thing, but Loki could still see the shadow that spread across his handsome face.

“A man with paranoia who talked about people being after him and his boyfriend. Now said boyfriend is dead. Looks like he was right about something. So?” His voice was even, but one had to be a fool to not notice the potential menace.

Fury didn’t show any reaction, merely quirking one eyebrow. “Are you implying that Stark is right and S.H.I.E.L.D has something to do with this unfortunate event?”

Fascinated Loki watched the glint in Rogers’ eyes and it was so obvious how fed up he was with all of these games. He was a soldier, he wanted it straight and simple. “With all due respect, sir… we don’t have time for this. What happened? Who was there? I know that S.H.I.E.L.D has been watching Tony and his boyfriend, you have information on this.”
Again Fury didn’t let anything show, but at least he seemed convinced enough to tell Rogers a few things. “As you know Stark was very clear when he told us that he didn’t want us to observe his boyfriend anymore. So we stopped. Nobody was watching him when this happened. We’ve had our eyes on Thor and for good reason. When we arrived at the scene everything was already over. Romanoff’s team arrived there first. Her report is quite clear on this. Stark was sitting in the middle of the road, a dead body in his arms. He instantly started blaming and threatening Agent Romanoff for what happened and only Doctor Banner calmed him down. Stark left with the body and that’s it.”

The shadow grew darker. Finally the good little soldier was stepping up, narrowing his eyes. “Sir, please don’t patronize me. That’s the kind of description an inexperienced civilian would give. Not somebody like Agent Romanoff. If you don’t give me details, I will have to start wondering if you’re hiding something from me.”

Loki was almost bursting with pride by now and he enjoyed the fact that a thick vein was appearing on Fury’s forehead. “I don’t like what you are…”

“No, Captain. It’s you who is wasting time, because none of these details bares any importance. Agent Romanoff spotted three exit wounds on the body. He had obviously been shot…”

Do it now. Loki was so tired of waiting and he wanted Fury to give Rogers a reason. To betray him, to make it even harder for him. “By whom? Three exits wounds, so there must have been bullets. What does the ballistics say?”

“Nothing. Stark took them.”

Liar. He wasn’t Loki. This lie was going to come back to haunt him.

“He sent several of his armours to secure the place, disappeared with the body and the bullets. We have no idea what happened there, Captain. Only Stark was there when it happened and he swiped away all traces…”

Now this was audacious, but now the Captain had already stepped up and he wasn’t going to be fooled this easily. “Don’t even… Nothing has ever been more important to Tony than this man… Insinuating that he has something to do with this… is ridiculous and dastard. Sir, all I want is to understand how it came to this tragedy. Is this all the information you have for me? Nothing else? No idea who is responsible for this?”

“I don’t like this tone, Captain. Have you forgotten what has been going on today? A god left this facility and went on a rampage in New York City. At the same time there was another robot attack… we had other things to do than surveilling a civilian. A tragic loss? Of course. Like every other person that got hurt or died during an attack. There will be a time to figure out what happened too, but right now we are dealing with more important issues. Said god is sitting in a cage right now. A cage which isn’t going to hold him back if he decided to leave again. We still have no idea where these robots come from. We are quite busy.”

He should be ashamed for making it so easy for Loki. This man couldn’t afford to let his aversion against Stark cloud his judgment, but it so obviously did. The Captain was perceptive and after the most recent events he wouldn’t let that pass by. Especially with a huge threat casting its shadow over them.

“You’re missing the most important matter at hand. Tony. He is convinced that S.H.I.E.L.D had
something to do with Pine’s death and… he made it very clear that he wants revenge on the one who did it. Something I can get behind. What I can’t get behind is how he wants to… Sir, I fear focusing our attention on anything else than finding out what happened to Pine would be a mistake we can’t afford to make. I’ll still try to talk to Tony, but I fear he won’t listen to me unless I can present him a murderer. He is reasonable if we find the one who did that…”

“Reasonable?” Fury interrupted him and spat. “We are talking about Stark here? He was a liability from the very first second. He only got on this team, because we wanted to keep him in check. I feel very foolish now for even thinking such a thing would be possible. You went there today, Captain. I am fairly sure you have already realised that he can’t be talked to.”

“He is mourning. His partner got brutally murdered today. I am not going to hold that against him. His reaction was completely understandable.” Rogers crossed his arms in front of his chest and Loki could feel it. The change in his aura. With every second Rogers got more comfortable protecting his friend. The more spite Fury implied in his speech, the more the Captain felt the urge to defend him. Pity was sometimes as dangerous as love.

Fury’s lips were forming a sneer and Loki asked himself if this man was even capable of smiling with happiness. Loki found him despicable and if Stark wasn’t so keen on doing it for Loki, he would have killed him right now. “You understand his reaction. Interesting. I know social media isn’t your field, Cap, but you should give a damn or two about a little video that has been uploaded on YouTube about half an hour ago. It’s titled ‘Iron Man attacks Captain America’.”

Interesting. Midgardians and their cellphones. How quick they were to pull them back out after running for their lives. Rogers didn’t show any visible reaction, but Loki just knew that he was inwardly cursing this new time and age. How badly he wanted to go back to the 40s when everything had been easy. Black and white.

So naïve…

Loki heard a little, spiteful chuckle. Almost familiar to Fury’s but filled with way more amusement. Again there was something different about Thomas’ voice. It was wrong, but not unknown… Shaking his head Loki pushed that thought as far away from him as possible. If he ignored him, he’d fade away.

“He didn’t intent to hurt me.”

“So why did he attack?”

“To make a point. I am not playing this down. I know that he is dangerous, that’s why I want… that’s why we need to figure out what happened and convince Tony of the fact that S.H.I.E.L.D had nothing to do with Pine’s death.”

Ah? Had they already established the fact that S.H.I.E.L.D was innocent? Or was Rogers trying to get Fury on his side? There would be no agreement. Loki was yearning for Rogers to finally make decision. Stay or leave. It’s time to go into battle…

“You want the impossible, Captain.”

“I want something that should be taken for granted. Justice for a dead person. It will give Tony peace and…”

The door was being pushed open and Loki raised both eyebrows. A panting agent stumbled into the room, looking way too young and inexperienced to have a place here. Rogers cocked his head
and Fury growled at him. “Taggert, Captain Rogers and I are having a private discussion that…”

“I am sorry, sir, but this can’t wait!” He barely got the words out, he was breathing so hard and Loki sighed softly. By now it shouldn’t surprise him anymore how pathetic they were. All of them. “We’re not in control of the base anymore.”

Loki was sure that his eyes were lightening up while a shudder was running down the Captain’s spine. Yes, please. Loki had been waiting for so long and Stark owned this to Loki. He wanted it so bad and he wanted it to be smart. Ruthless, malicious, devious…

“What? What are you talking about?”

“The system isn’t reacting to any of our actions. None of the codes are working. They have all been overwritten… We have no idea how this is even possible…” Every single word was the truth, the poor little man seemed seriously overwhelmed while Fury spun around glaring at the Captain. Almost as if it was his fault. “He just attacked to make a point, right? Taggert, why are you up here? We need every man to work on this!”

“We tried to call, sir… but it seems like not a single phone is working on this compound…”

Licking his lips Loki leaned back against the wall and he congratulated himself for not having been there when Stark had come up with his plan. Like this Loki was in for a surprise… like S.H.I.E.L.D. It was thoroughly entertaining.

“Then get back down there and…”

Another interruption and Loki barely suppressed the urge to applause when the big screen on the opposite wall flickered on. Loki could clearly hear the Captain’s silent gasp and it couldn’t get any better.

Stark’s former rather beautiful features seemed to have faded away within one single day. A face that was used to be dominated by a cocky smile now looked strangely contorted by an unfamiliar cold expression. Loki remembered how these brown eyes had looked at him. White spots had been dancing in them and now they were cold, almost lifeless. Thomas indeed hadn’t died alone.

“You are probably trying to regain control over your security system and the main server right now. Stop it, you’re only wasting your time. I was planning on doing a little bit more of preparation, but then Jarvis showed me how fucking pathetic your firewalls are… let’s say I thought it couldn’t hurt to make you understand how serious I am.” Stark took a little breath before continuing, but Loki was not stupid enough to believe that he was having a hard time saying any of this.

“Jarvis is running the show at your little playground now and since I don’t like beating around the bush, I’ll come straight to point. I’m going to blow the whole place up. Today at 9:39 one or several S.H.I.E.L.D agents brutally killed an unarmed civilian named Thomas Pine. I know that the order to kill him came from the highest ranks and the average Joes among you have no idea what I’m even talking about. There will be enough time for all of you to get out. I’m just making a point. I want the ones who did it. I want the murderers of my boyfriend and I want the ones of gave the orders. So when you are out of this building and watch it go down in flames, remember that I let you go this time. Because you maybe have nothing to do with it. If you know who did it, get that information to me. I want the one who pulled the trigger and I’m going to make sure that nobody else will be killed by… your top agents… A list of the people I want was sent to every single one of your phones. Here the highlights, so there won’t be any misunderstandings.”
Loki closed his eyes, a smirk dancing around his lips.

“Barton. Romanoff. Fury.”

Oh, Stark… if I ever doubted you. I am so sorry…

“This base is the beginning. If tomorrow I notice that you all are crawling back into your little holes and continue to work for this group… I won’t give you a warning before I blow up the next base. Now start running… Oh, Nick? I’m sure you’re listening. Don’t even try to transfer some of your precious files, it’s all going down. You only have five minutes. I want the people on my list and I want them to come to me.”

There was no need to say what would happen if they didn’t come. Opening his eyes again Loki saw that Stark’s face had disappeared from the screen. It had been replaced by a countdown.

4:57

Lovely. It was creative and cruel. A power play and Loki loved every second of it.

“Taggert, start the evacuation. Now!” Rogers was being Captain America again and while the young agent stormed out, he didn’t move a muscle. “Jarvis? Are you there?”

“Indeed, Captain Rogers.”

Oh, Loki missed talking to that computer. The only Midgardian thing that still managed to amaze him.

“Mr. Stark thought that you would be here and he wanted me to tell you – Don’t play the hero. Get out of there. Don’t die for these scumbags.”

Fury opened his mouth, but Rogers glared at him. “Please, I need to talk to Tony. This is madness. There is no way all people can get out of here in 5 minutes…”

“I can assure you, Captain Rogers, Mr. Stark calculated with great care. There is more than enough time for every person to leave this facility and get away far enough from the explosion. Nevertheless I strongly advice you to leave instantly.”

Rogers was shaking with anger. “Tony! This is madness! I know you’re in pain, but you can’t…” Reaching into his pocket Rogers pulled out his phone, staring at it. “Belova, Rumlow… There are more than 15 names on this list!”

“Every single of them a highly paid assassin on S.H.I.E.L.D’s payroll. Mr. Stark advices you to ask Director Fury about it. Before that though, you should run.”

4:01

“Tony, talk to me! If I can talk to Jarvis, I know that you can hear me! Stop this! I swear we can find out what happened, but… stop this, please.”

3:56

3:55

3:54

Loki had tones of time left, but he decided that he wanted to reserve himself a top spot for the
spectacle. Teleporting outside Loki watched people fleeing from the building and took a deep breath. The taste of panic was sweet. If Stark weren’t in such numbing pain, he would be feeling like a god. Did he even know what kind of power he possessed?

He was striking fear in the hearts of these minions and desperation in a man so strong and noble as the Captain…

*Desperation and you aren’t even there to look at it*

Growling softly Loki let his magic pull him away to get a better view.

The flood of people was coming to a halt and Loki waited, ignoring the whispering in his ear. Maybe it was just his imagination, but Loki swore that for a few seconds the world just stopped and everything fell silent. Until the explosion tore it apart. It was beautiful. A big blast that tore down the walls before the flames were licking the rubble. What a sight to behold. Loki hoped that Stark was somehow seeing this and that he appreciated it.

There was nothing left for Loki to do here. The Captain would be busy to make sure that nobody had got hurt or killed and Loki wasn’t interested in seeing any of this. He knew another place where he wanted to be now.

***

Loki took a look around and frowned. The tower had been abandoned. Why was he surprised? Stark was intelligent and he had just started a war. Only a fool would stay in the place where they thought you to be. Somehow Loki was sure that it would be a bit harder to find Stark than it had been to find the Captain. Him and Banner couldn’t have had much time to get away, but Loki knew that they had planned every step of this plan thoroughly.

If Loki were Stark – what would he do next? He would give S.H.I.E.L.D a little bit of time to do his bidding. Stark had proved once more that he had quite some brains, he had sent his little message to every single agent in this base. Not all of them were coldblooded killers, most of them probably worked behind tables, staring at a screen all day. Maybe Stark had even managed to touch some of them. If not, you could always count on the cowards. Somebody would be so afraid of Stark’s rage that they would send him some information. False or true. Loki was interested in how this was going to turn out.

If the Widow and Barton knew what was best for them, they shouldn’t show their faces again. There was no way Stark would ask any more questions. However this was going to turn out, Loki thought this turn of events highly entertaining.

Next step – Rogers was busy, Barton and the Widow had to think about their next steps, Banner and Stark were playing terrorists. Which Avenger was left? It was out of the question that Stark had forgotten about him. Loki would start his search right there.

Loki didn’t know why they had brought Thor to another S.H.I.E.L.D facility this time, perhaps it had been a lucky incident that he hadn’t been in the one Stark blew up. Now Loki was wandering down bright hallways until he was standing in front of a big door. Strong enough to hold back most Midgardian forces. Loki would be able to tear it down with a snip of his fingers. All too easy.

Teleporting into the room Loki took a look around. Quite a lot of space. Obviously a prison meant for the Beast. How many did they have of those? Mjölnir was nowhere to be seen which meant that this beautiful weapon was still lying somewhere on a dirty street in the middle of Manhattan.

Lazily Loki let his eyes travel across Thor’s form. The last illusion and the cruel awakening had
shaken him up and lifted the mist of confusion a little bit. Not enough to realise what was going on, but at least it made Thor restless. No sitting around, but aimless wandering. Nothing had happened yet and Loki decided to wait. Sitting down on the floor Loki watched Thor closely and let the minutes turn into hours. At least they felt like hours to him.

Stark was taking his time and when he finally made his appearance Loki almost sighed in relief. His patience was finally running thin. There were no screens in this prison, but Stark didn’t need them anyway. He had found a way that carried his voice through this room.

“Pointbreak, this is Tony. I will keep this short and simple, because I have quite a lot of things to do at this moment. I want you to tell me what happened today. Why in god’s fucking name did you decide to go to Manhattan and do your lightshow?”

Thor stopped in his tracks and gazed around, probably searching for Stark before realising that he wasn’t really here. It changed nothing about his empty stare and Loki smirked. What was Stark even trying to accomplish?

“Talk to me, big guy. You tried to smash my head in just this morning, I guess I deserve to know why. Spit it out. Now.”

Not quite the same tone he had used with Fury or Rogers. A notch softer. As if he knew the circumstances were different. Should it worry Loki? It didn’t, he found it intriguing and he wanted more of it.

Thor didn’t react, of course not. He never did, but Stark wasn’t a man to be ignored. Especially not when he was desperate.

“Damn it, Thor! This is important! I need to know what happened today! Bruce said you just got up and left and I want to know why! He left the room before you left and then the surveillance video gets fucking blurry. Did they tell you something? Anything? Did those fucking dirtbags want you to go out and fuck everything up?”

What a brilliant idea, but badly executed. Stark was too angry and in too much of hurry to choose his words wisely. Also it wasn’t his field. You were never supposed to say the words you wanted them to admit. They had to voice them on their own.

Still no reaction and Thor turned away as if he knew that Loki was sitting there, watching. Stark was letting a few seconds pass before he spoke up again. His voice showing nothing of the same strength from before. “You remember my boyfriend Tommy? You called him Thomas. You liked him, didn’t you, Thor? You said he reminded you of your brother… Thomas is dead. Some S.H.I.E.L.D agent shot him.”

Suddenly everything changed. Loki could see the tension in Thor’s shoulders and the slight movement of his head. Subtle things could make quite an impact sometimes. Then the prince of Asgard started to talk. It seemed like ages since he had been talking to anyone but Loki. “He was killed?”

Loki narrowed his eyes and he could hear Stark taking a breath. It was all his creation and… was he jealous?

Such a brilliant mind. Always so superior to everybody else and yet you don’t understand anything…

“Yes… he is dead.”
“Did… am I to blame for this?”

Sadly that laugh wasn’t allowed to escape Loki’s lips. Of course, you are to blame… it is all your fault. It could have been different.

“No. They used a gun. Not your kind of weapon. I will get to the ones who are responsible. Now all I want to know is… what made you leave the S.H.I.E.L.D base. I need to know. I need to know if you were supposed to be a distraction. If this whole thing is even more fucked up than… why did you do this, Thor? Tell me.”

There it was. Loki had yearned for it for so long now and this was the place where he had expected it the least. The despair and the pain. Why would Stark let Thor hear it? Or had it been long enough? Was there no holding back anymore?

It wasn’t good though. Not like Loki wanted it to. Perhaps he needed to see Stark’s face. Needed to be there.

_Maybe not so brilliant after all, I guess…_

“I… it’s blurry… like a haze… I wanted to… Loki. I saw Loki…”

He couldn’t breathe. Loki’s name spoken with such softness. No, he had nothing to do with this. It was their own little war. Loki had his own and it wasn’t here. He had given a promise…

“You saw your brother?”

“No… no…” Thor shook his head. “I heard him. He was calling for me and I needed to… I needed to punish the people who hurt him. They locked him away before they sent him back in chains… to his death.”

Stark didn’t say anything and Loki didn’t dare to make a sound. He shouldn’t have been pulled into this… Not like this, but it…

The door was being opened by an invisible hand. “Why don’t you let me help you to punish the people who hurt your brother?”

This time Loki wasn’t able to breathe even though he wanted to and he was being laughed at.

_Your marionettes are cutting the strings, I was just the first one…_
Hello everybody,

Loki has trouble keeping up with things happening around him and Thomas is starting to act.... weird? ;)

Have fun ;)

_________________________________________________

Angel or a demon
I gave up my soul
I'm guilty of treason
I've abandoned control

Stranger in a strange land ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

His knuckles were turning white. Loki’s grip around the edge of the table was so hard, it started to hurt. Yet Loki didn’t pay any attention to it, his mind was too busy trying to keep the wrath inside, to stop himself from tearing this place apart, then this city and then the whole planet.

I know you like dramatic settings, but now you’re just overreacting

Growling Loki straightened up, lashed out with his arm and half of the furniture flew against the wall. Wood splattered all over the floor and Loki was shaking. Why couldn’t he just do that with him? What he deserved…

Are you now feeling better?

This wasn’t possible. He could not be getting louder or stronger. It was out of the question. Not when Loki had shed the glamour, had left this all behind. Maybe there were traces left inside of him, but they would fade, become almost invisible… They couldn’t become stronger, not if there was nothing to feed on…

Stop embarrassing yourself, this is ridiculous

How did he even dare? He was nothing, he was nobody, just a little image that Loki had painted and that he had torn apart…

Gritting his teeth Loki spun around, ready for the confrontation. He knew that it was wrong, he knew that he needed to ignore him, but Loki couldn’t pretend he didn’t hear any of this. Couldn’t pretend it didn’t make him want to grab a knife and cut him out. Among other things.
“You can talk all you want… it’s all you can do. I am the one calling the shots, so keep talking. You are nothing more than a voice…”

So you left Thor alone, because you wanted to… not because you are still trying to run away from something you already know

Loki’s fists were shaking and he wasn’t willing to even think about what this meant.

Oh, you know… you’ve always been smarter than everybody else… ever since you were a child…

No, stop talking. Loki knew who he was, he didn’t need anybody to tell him. Nobody else but him knew of what he was capable and…

Exactly…

The sudden need to see him was almost overwhelming Loki. A face. A body. Something to hate, something he wanted to destroy. His fingers made a quick gesture and Thomas was standing in front of him. As beautiful as he’s always been. With a snarl on his face. What was there no to hate?

“Now listen to me carefully… You are adamant and insolent, I’ve made you this way. But don’t think that anything you say or might want to do matters. At all. Because it doesn’t. I killed you and the people you care about soon will be killing each other.”

Thomas voiced a laugh that sounded honestly amused. “I have to admit that I don’t care about most of them…”

“You care about Stark.” Loki spat the words out and Thomas crossed his arms in front his chest, not looking defensive at all. He even raised his head a little bit, a challenging glimmer in his eyes. They were darker now than when Loki had created them.

“You care about Rogers.”

In a sudden burst of rage Loki lashed out, but of course there was nothing he could do to hurt him since he wasn’t there. Just an illusion. With strangely dark eyes and a voice that Loki hadn’t chosen for him.

“The soldier with his foolish beliefs and his will to save the whole world even it’s trying to kill him. His morals are ridiculous and I couldn’t feel more disdain for him.”

“Now that wasn’t half as good as you used to be. What happened? Silver tongue turned to lead?” Thomas grinned maliciously at him and Loki wanted to wrap his hands around his throat, squeezing the life out of him. All he could do now was to hiss and ball his hands into fists. His nails were digging into his flesh, but he didn’t feel the pain. It was overshadowed by blind rage. “Don’t ever talk to me this way again.”

Thomas raised his chin, his sneer even getting more prominent and Loki knew that he was perversely enjoying this. His eyes were almost black by now. “You’ve always appreciated a good liar as much as you appreciate the truth. There is no lying without truth… tell me the truth, Loki. Stop pretending you don’t know what’s wrong with my eyes. Stop pretending you don’t know with whose voice I am speaking…” He came a step closer, but Loki wouldn’t give him the satisfaction and didn’t back off. Thomas watched him carefully, he seemed to be waiting for something, but he soon had to accept that Loki wasn’t going to say a thing. “Alright, if you insist… it’s not like I don’t enjoy rubbing salt into your wounds. Where were we? Right, I was pointing out the fact that you don’t live up to your title, god of lies.”
Narrowing his eyes Loki still wasn’t willing to play this game. Not with… this thing. “You think I’m a bad liar for telling the truth?”

“No, you are a brilliant liar… that’s why this one terrible, unworthy lie stands out so much.” Thomas shrugged casually. “It’s driving you mad, isn’t it? That you couldn’t get any satisfaction from Tony putting him down. For a moment I thought you would drop down on your knees and help him get up.”

“Your perception isn’t very good then…”

“You remember that day… you weren’t doing so great…” Now he was chuckling under his breath before he cocked his head, eyes drilling right through Loki. “…you know that I’m here for you? No matter what. You’re my best friend and… honestly, I’m scared for you.”

Every single word was a slap in the face and Loki’s skin turned cold. Just the memory of said day caused nausea and he wanted it as far away from him as possible. Yet that wasn’t even the worst thing. Loki remembered that phrase. The way it had been spoken, the intonation, everything about it had been carved into his mind. It would take the void to make him forget about it. “How… how can you know this? You weren’t there!”

Smirking Thomas shrugged another time. “But you were. Where’s the difference?”

Loki’s control was slipping. Inside of him his magic was rising up, flowing in his veins and it wanted to draw blood. Why couldn’t he just kill him? Ram a knife into his chest and cut his chest open, only to watch him bleed out. He tempted Loki to give into his most savage nature and he so badly wanted to.

“So? Stark has said things to me that were so much more open, vulnerable and full of… fondness. Yet I could kill him with a cold smile on my face. Do you believe that I wouldn’t do the same with the Captain?” There was nothing Loki wanted to do more at this very moment. Find him, wherever he was and crushing his skull. Just to make a point.

To wipe that grin of Thomas’ face.

“Because the Captain didn’t say these things to William or to Thomas. He said them to you. To Loki. It was a raw moment. You were wearing a mask, but every word you said was you. He saw you and he didn’t shy away. Now you can’t ignore that. You hate it, but you care…”

“I care about my face. I care about my mind and the pieces that are missing. I care about justice, they will get what they deserve. Suggesting that I wouldn’t gladly cut their throats is madness.”

The smile on Thomas’ face was disturbing. “You call me mad and yet you are talking to yourself. Isn’t this the definition of madness? Especially when you aren’t even realising it?”

Screaming out his rage Loki wiped the illusion away and stared at the now empty spot on the floor, knowing that it didn’t make any difference. No. He was having none of this. Thomas could talk all he wanted, throwing insults and insisting on nonsensical things. Loki knew better and he was in control. When they were all dead or broken Loki would leave this world and it wouldn’t matter anymore.

Except that you can’t leave… not when you just found one of the pieces.

Closing his eyes Loki shook his head and his magic was singing, filling the room with a terrible sound. “Don’t talk about him. He’s mine. He was… Loki’s.”
Suddenly there was a change. The teasing vanished, faded into something else. A hint of sadness, but Loki couldn’t be sure. Also he didn’t want to think about it. He felt foolish and ashamed. Stark had released Thor from his so called prison and Loki had… run away. Scared and taken aback by Thomas’ presence Loki had wanted to confront him, he hadn’t been able to deal with Stark and his new strategy that Loki hadn’t seen coming. Surprises never made him feel good, unless he was the one who bestowed them on other people. At this moment Loki couldn’t get side-tracked by… such a thing. Not even worth thinking about. Now he had to find Stark and to make sure that Thor wasn’t going to ruin his entire scheme like he had done so many times before. Standing there Loki was just waiting. For a comment. A sneer. Anything. Again Loki was surprised, because Thomas wouldn’t say anything. Instead of relief Loki only felt his anger being nourished. Thomas was making fun of him and there was nothing he could do about it. Perhaps it was better that way, Loki had things to do. Very important things.

Looking around Loki sighed at the destruction he had caused. Not a very smart action, but it wasn’t like he was in need of this apartment any longer. Sitting down on the floor Loki closed his eyes and rested his hands in his lap. His magic was happily slipping free, rushing out and started searching. Right now he wanted Stark. Just a mere mortal, not much of an energy signature. Thor would be so much easier to find, but there was no guarantee that he was already with Stark. Not so much time had been past, Stark probably still was in the city. Searching for Stark’s pain and rage Loki’s magic flew across the streets, buildings.

It took him minutes which didn’t help to improve his sour mood. Then Loki could feel that soft presence, not that far away, as expected. Cloaking himself in invisibility Loki teleported away and found himself in a room without windows. Underground? Probably. It was definitely Stark’s place though. Another lab, full of machines and technology that Stark could create miracles with. At least for Midgardian standards.

Said mechanic wasn’t present, but Loki knew that he couldn’t be far. Not paying any attention to his surroundings Loki walked towards the door before simply teleporting into the adjoining room. This was way more interesting. Amours over amours, the whole room was stocked with them. Without bothering to count Loki thought that there might be at least 30 of them. Stark had been a busy little bee.

“… not right, Tony. I am not going to stand for that!”

“I didn’t do anything yet. Was I supposed to let him sit in his cell where S.H.I.E.L.D could do with him whatever they wanted?” Stark was in suit, seemingly about to leave, but Banner wasn’t too eager to let him go. “We don’t know yet if that’s what happened.”

“You were the first one to come up with this idea. Doubting your own words now? Look, if it makes you feel better pretend that I’ll bring him here to make sure that he doesn’t go out and starts again to tear down houses. I’ve already let him out, so I gotta take care of him anyway.”

Banner was rubbing the bridge of his nose, torn between so many emotions that Loki had trouble not to marvel at it. “Where is the difference between you or them using him? He needs help. He has severe psychological problems… you heard what he said about Loki.”

“Well, when he gets here, we can figure out how to help him. I am not taking the risk of S.H.I.E.L.D weaponizing him. They already got Cap, one god is enough. I’m leaving now, Jarvis is still digging through the files… you continue to work on the update. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“Yeah, with a lot of luck.” Banner didn’t make an attempt to not sound reproachful and maybe
their alliance wasn’t as strong as Stark thought. Still no reason to worry. Even though Banner didn’t agree with Stark’s actions, it was out of the question that he would change sides. He was loyal to his friend, Thomas’ murder had been too gruesome and Banner had also considered the dead man as somebody close to him. Somebody who hadn’t been scared, somebody who had seen the man, not the monster. Banner wasn’t able to betray Thomas without renouncing all of his principles.

Without a goodbye Stark left and Banner kept standing there for a moment as if he didn’t know what to do with himself. Something about him looked strange. Loki had the impression something was pulling him down and it took him a lot of effort to remain standing. Whatever Stark wanted him to do, Banner obviously wasn’t in a haste. Unlike Loki. His mind was racing if he could allow Stark bringing Thor here. What would be the outcome of his union? Why hadn’t Loki considered this possibility sooner? There would be talk about him and Stark was too calculating. Yes, Loki had chosen this way, because he knew Stark outsmarted all of them, because there was so much potential inside of him. Power to destroy without looking back. What he hadn’t expected was Stark taking so much time… to be planning this thing out with great care for details. Now Stark was even pulling Thor into this and Loki needed to come up with a way how he wanted this to play out. If Stark wanted to utilize Thor, fine. The only thing the brute was good for was hitting things with his hammer. Then again just the thought of Thor somehow walking away from this at the end made Loki want to rip his spine out. Trying to keep his cool Loki went through his options. His webs allowed him to bring Thor to do what he wanted. For a while he could easily be working with Stark, but then Loki could tell him to turn on him. The dilemma was very simple. Loki couldn’t decide if he wanted Thor dead or if he wanted him to live a very long life with blood on his hands and a shattered mind. It would be only fair.

Stark should live. Him and Loki both knew that punishing and killing Thomas’ murderers wouldn’t give him peace. That also wasn’t the thing Stark was chasing. Not peace, not justice, just revenge. When he was done Stark would stop and drown in his pain. It would kill him and that would be so much more devastating than dying while trying to avenge his boyfriend. That would almost be noble. So no, Stark had to live.

Maybe Thor’s help wouldn’t be a bad idea. Stark could use him as his shield, sent the brute to do some dirty work… why not.

At the moment Thor was confused, tortured, but not under the influence of magic. His mind should be clear enough to not hurt Stark. Especially not after Stark had promised him to help him with his cause…

So it was once again to wait.

“Doctor Banner, we have an incoming call. S.H.I.E.L.D is trying to call Mr. Stark. They’ve been trying every different number for over 15 minutes now.”

Sighing softly Banner sat down, leaning back, closing his eyes. “Any chance they’re going to be able to locate us if I take the call?”

Loki raised an eyebrow. Did that mean Banner wanted to take the call?

“Negative, Doctor. The line is completely safe. Mr. Stark refused to talk to anyone.”

“Why should I take the call then?”

“I just thought I should let you know.”
Taking another second Banner covered his eyes with his hand and huffed. “Put them through, please.”

Leaning back Loki concentrated on listening carefully, because this was going to interesting.

“Stark?”

The very first word and Loki was already pleased. A discussion between Banner and the Widow could only turn out one way – deliciously tragic. Loki could see the tension in Banner’s shoulders. “No, it’s Bruce.”

Her mind must be racing now, adjusting to the new situation. Change of strategy. “Bruce, you need to stop Stark.”

Now that was just weak…

“Stop him from doing what?” Loki smirked at his tone. Bitter and cold. So unusual for him.

“I know he is your friend, I know you are loyal, but let’s call this thing by its name. He has become a terrorist. Blowing up a S.H.I.E.L.D base is an act of terrorism and there is no guarantee for what he is going to do next or how many people…”

Banner didn’t let her finish. “Nobody died at the S.H.I.E.L.D base. We made sure of that.”

“You help him with that? God, Bruce, can’t you see what he is doing? He had lost his mind and declares war on S.H.I.E.L.D and he clearly doesn’t care if people get hurt or die.” Not so bad, she was trying to get to him through his conscience. Unfortunately she had no idea that Banner had a piece of information that would make her attempt completely useless.

“I guess he is in good company then. Or since when does S.H.I.E.L.D care about hurting or killing innocent people?”

Such sweet bitterness. Loki wanted more of it.

The Widow wasn’t giving up on her plan yet. Too bad she hadn’t realised yet that there was nothing to gain for her if she insisted on reason and Banner’s sense of duty. This was all about emotion. Too bad for her that had cut herself off from these feelings long ago. Barton could tell a long story about this. “Bruce… I have no idea what he has told you, but you have to see that he is grieving and overwhelmed by his loss. He wants someone to blame, so he blames S.H.I.E.L.D although…”

“Please, Natasha, spare me the lies. I saw the proof with my very own eyes. I don’t know if you had personally anything to do with it, but… Tony doesn’t care… and he won’t stop until he… He wants all the people responsible for it and S.H.I.E.L.D’s top assassin so they can’t do this to anybody else. I may not like how he wants to do this, but… I can’t disagree with him about one point. S.H.I.E.L.D needs to be stopped.”

She didn’t falter. Good girl. “Bruce, S.H.I.E.L.D had nothing to do with Thomas Pine’s death. Stark may think that’s nothing but a bunch of paid assassins, but…”

“Natasha, stop.” Banner was shaking his head. “I am so fed up with all of these lies. I’ve had a target on my back for years. Then you showed up and dragged me back into this mess. Unlimited energy to produce weapons. A little plastic cage for me. A whole team of freaks put together to do the dirty work and still… I saw the files, Natasha. A long list of dead people because they were getting uncomfortable… and…” Banner stopped for a second and Loki realised that Stark was once
again surpassing his expectations. He had found all of it. Full of hope Loki had put these files into
the computer and Stark had already found them. This was wonderful. Finally a grain of truth in this
building of lies.

“More files… about people who are still alive but considered a threat. Detailed information on
where they live, where they work, family, etc. Also even more detailed and explicit ways on how
to kill them. Most of these people aren’t soldiers or agents. They’re just different. I am pretty sure
S.H.I.E.L.D hasn’t ever talked to most of them, but they have already considered killing them. It’s
not even the fact that I am on this list. I would probably put myself on there. The fact that this list
exists… and you still are bold enough to tell me that you have nothing to do with Tony’s boyfriend
ending up dead and an essential piece of Stark technology missing? No… I’m not going to stop
Tony from doing anything. I can only advice you to get away… but I’m not going to stop him.
Goodbye, Natasha.”

Jarvis got the message and ended the call before the Widow could say anything else. This was
beautiful and Loki didn’t need to worry about Banner anymore. No matter how this thing was
going to play out. Stark would take the lives of several people and Banner would forever feel guilty
for that. Lovely.

After ending the call Banner let some minutes pass, not doing anything, merely staring into pace.
When he finally got a grip Loki saw him working with Jarvis on some protocol that didn’t seem to
make any sense. To Loki.

When his magic suddenly became active and made his skin tingle Loki knew what that meant.
Stark had returned and he wasn’t alone. Gritting his teeth Loki told himself to wait and see how
this whole thing would turn out. His eyes closely followed Stark as soon as he stepped through the
door… with Thor.

“Doctor Banner…” Still that pathetic and weak tone in his voice. Thor had no idea what was going
on.

Slowly standing up Banner did his best to smile at Thor, but it looked forced. “Hello Thor. How
are you?”

Thor was staring at him, barely believing that Banner was talking to him. “I… not so fine, I guess.”

Stupid oaf…

“He’s sit down, we have some stuff to talk about.” Stark, out of his armour, walked past them, still
cold and distant.

It was the most awkward setting Loki had seen in a while. Three men and they couldn’t be more
different. One made of stone, one trying not to shake and one still searching for another way.
Banner didn’t ask or say anything, he just got a glass of water and placed it in front of Thor. Loki
could see why, Thor was still looking sick. It took a lot of time without sleep for an Asgardian to
have such dark rings beneath their eyes. Frail skin with a sickish tone of gray. Thor actually started
to remember Loki of the illusion of his own corpse. Sometimes life was indeed fair.

“What happened after Bruce left? Before you left the base… I know something must have
happened. Don’t start all over again with apologizing, I don’t care for the attack. I just want to
know why.” Stark was still a shell, empty but for his hatred and thirst for revenge. Banner was
judging him with his eyes, yet not saying a thing. Focusing his attention on Thor. During his whole
life Loki had thought that one day he would see something like this. The great prince of Asgard
sitting at a table with two mortals and they were casting large shadows over him. Loki felt
incredibly proud.

“I would tell you if I knew… I don’t know…”

Such a faint whisper and Loki was at the same time disgusted and pleased. Stark didn’t share the sentiment, he simply gritted his teeth, not hiding his impatience and frustration. “You said you heard your brother.”

“Yes, I heard him scream. Pleading for help.”

Banner winced and glanced at Stark, only to be ignored. “And? Did you leave to help him?”

Thor slowly shook his head. “There is no way to help Loki. He is dead.”

“So you can’t help him… but you can punish those who did him wrong.” It was something between a question and a statement and there was no way to miss the sudden glimmer in Stark’s eyes. A sign of life.

Loki had no time to feel good about it, because Banner had to ruin it instantly. “That would be us… it was me who hurt your brother, Thor. Don’t you remember that?”

Thor still avoided Banner’s eyes, but he kept talking. Something he hadn’t been capable of a few days earlier. Loki was still torn and he didn’t know if he could things let continue like this. “I do remember… but… I used my own fists to hurt my brother… because I didn’t see any other way… because I didn’t bother to ask him… I didn’t bother to find out what has been torturing him… and nobody else did either… there were no words… just… chains and muzzles…”

You should take a dagger and bury it right between his eyes…

What?

“That wasn’t us. The Avengers stopped him from taking over this world and he had to be stopped. What happened afterwards was S.H.I.E.L.D’s doing. They wanted him off the planet instantly and they didn’t want him to say a single word. Other people might have been interested in what he might have had to say.”

Stark was lying beautifully and Loki could feel how Banner wanted to correct things, to be better than the people they were going up against. Not a word passed his lips.

Perhaps he knew that there was still no room for reason here. Thor was anything but deaf to Stark’s ideas. “Loki told me that… he had needed help, but… they wouldn’t listen to him… they only put him in chains and they… had laughed at him…”

I remember Barton’s grin… we should put a blade in his mouth and let him drown on his blood…

Dark eyes met and Banner warned him not to go down that path. That they were better than this, but Stark was beyond that. Only one last thing he needed to do before he could finally die. Loki had woven an unparalleled web, unmatched in his beauty and complexity and now all he could do was standing there, watching in awe how Stark was weaving his own string into it.

“I might know who your brother was referring to.”
Hello everybody,

Thomas and Loki keep talking, but they aren't agreeing on anything... is that a bad thing?

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

Do you know what's worth fighting for,
When it's not worth dying for?
Does it take your breath away
And you feel yourself suffocating?
Does the pain weigh out the pride?
And you look for a place to hide?
Did someone break your heart inside?
You're in ruins

21 guns ~~ Green Day ~~

_________________________________________________

“Are you crazy? Tony, this is going too far!” Banner wasn’t holding back as soon as the door fell closed behind them. Maybe he was so angry, because he already knew that his words wouldn’t be heard. Stark had already made his decision.

“What? I didn’t lie, did I? S.H.I.E.L.D did want to get him off the planet and they put him into chains. Nothing about it was made up.”

His initial reaction was to stare at Stark before clearly sucking in a breath to probably calm himself. There was no place for the beast here. “We did too. We wanted to get him off this planet and we put him in chains. S.H.I.E.L.D isn’t entirely to blame for this. You just can’t pick the parts of the truth that are most useful to you. It’s not fair and it doesn’t make us better than them.”

“We don’t kill innocent people, Bruce. That makes us better than them.”

“Innocence is such a big word… this whole plan we’ve been working out. It’s only goal is to kill people and not all of them had a hand in killing Thomas…”

Stark raised an eyebrow, clearly challenging. “But every single one of them would have done it without a second thought. Without asking a question. They’re constantly out doing S.H.I.E.L.D’s dirty work. You’ve seen the files. They’ll keep on killing people, because it’s their fucking job and they don’t care. I am not going to kill the one who pulled the trigger and forget about it. The whole organisation is going down. I’m going to tear out all the bad weeds… and the roots. It’s never
going to come back. I am so sick of just people deciding over life and death, because they are doing it with the blessing of the government in the name of national security or world peace. I am going to put them out of business… I told you, you don’t have to do this with me. I’m not going to do half a job on this. If you want to leave… do it. I’m not holding you back. I know this isn’t easy… if you want to get out, okay. But don’t delay me with these kinds of things…”

There was this moment when they only stared at each other and Loki didn’t dare to breathe, because he wasn’t sure how this was going to work out. Banner had been shocked and there was so much precious rage inside of him. Also loyalty. So many conflicting emotions. As a matter of fact Loki wouldn’t be too surprised if he wasn’t willing to go all the way besides Stark. Some sacrifices were just too hard. It would be a pity though.

“We’re selling our souls with this…” Banner mumbled under his breath, it was anything but a refusal.

“I am not too keen on keeping it.” Shrugging casually Stark turned around, seemingly wanted to go back to the other room. Again something that didn’t work out as he had planned to. “What you are trying to do with Thor is wrong. It’s a lie and you’re giving him the hope for an absolution that’s never going to be granted…”

The reproach must have hit something, at least Stark thought it was important enough to stop and to continue this conversation. “It’s not a lie. S.H.I.E.L.D wanted to get Loki off the planet… and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that he goes crazy again after being in S.H.I.E.L.D’s custody for days. I wouldn’t be able to think of a better distraction.”

Judging by the look on Banner’s face he only partially disagreed with him. Loki didn’t know if that made things easier or more difficult. “Maybe… probably they tried to do something to him, I was the one who brought this up, I know… but you can’t forget that he had a breakdown before all of this. Before S.H.I.E.L.D got their hands on him. Jane Foster told us, she told me about it. About nightmares, him being distant and so on. I talked to Thor or at least I tried to. Whatever is hunting him has nothing to do with S.H.I.E.L.D…”

“Yeah, I know. It’s about Loki…” Stark sounded terribly disinterested.

“It’s something serious… I am… fairly sure that Thor did… something… nobody is being tortured by guilt so much… if you haven't done anything… We will never know what happened, but I can’t help feeling that he did something terrible to his brother. Maybe even without knowing it. Whatever happened is gnawing on him… so badly that he couldn’t stand it anymore and… he lost it. One time to save Loki, the other time to avenge him… he turned against us. Not against S.H.I.E.L.D. We hurt his brother, not S.H.I.E.L.D. I hurt his brother…”

No, he didn’t. The Beast did…

Loki shook his head to get rid of the little voice in it.

Meeting Banner’s eyes Stark blinked, but kept his face completely expressionless. “I don’t mind it if he wants to go up against the Avengers. Against those who are left.”

There was no arguing, Banner was right, they were going to lose their soul.

When there was no reply Stark continued with another topic and Loki was actually getting goose bumps. “What did Romanoff want?”

Banner was frowning, but he didn’t point out the obvious. Stark could just ask Jarvis or watch the
video feed to find out. Asking Banner about it was almost a proof of trust… or a reminder that Loki didn’t want to think about. The both of them fighting was the last thing he wanted right now.

“She wanted me to stop this madness.”

“And what did you say to her?”

“I told her that I may not agree with your methods, but I am of the opinion that this madness has to end… S.H.I.E.L.D is killing civilians because of greed and I want nothing to do with that. He was my friend, Tony… Not just because he was your boyfriend. I liked him, because…” Banner trailed off and Loki saw it too. Stark turned his head away and his fists were shaking. Trying to hold something in that tearing him up inside. That was dying to get out. The entire extent of the pain that this loss had caused which Stark still refused to confront.

“…because he was kind… incredibly mean if he wanted to, but he was fair. He was my friend. There is no need to question that.”

Raising his head Stark met Banner’s gaze. “I don’t question that… Like I said you don’t have to do this. I’ll do the dirty work… go, talk to Thor. See if he… might go crazy on us too. I’ll continue working on the satellite…”

Banner nodded and finally he was the one who left the room while Loki wasn’t able to decide who he wanted to keep watching. The mortal sat down, looking at three screens at once, his eyes darting from one code to another and then his fingers were flying across the keyboard. After walking around to get a better look at Stark Loki leaned against the wall, trying to make out what was going on.

He’s not letting us down. He might be the first one to ever do that…

Loki bit his lower lip and let his eyes fell closed. No, that wasn’t the truth. There had been the Vanr…

We don’t know that…

“Jarvis… any news from the main base?” Stark’s deep voice pulled him from his thoughts and Loki opened his eyes again.

“All security codes have been renewed, sir. Just as expected. Also a lot of data has been transferred, but I’ve had no trouble finding the new files. It will take some time however to override the new protocol.”

Stark nodded absently. “Where is the big guy?”

Jarvis told him the name of the base Fury had chosen to hide and again all Stark did was nodding. Was that all? Loki wasn’t expecting a lot of exposition, but this was still so unsatisfying. Thor had been different. Wearing all his emotions on his sleeve, not able to close his mouth, mumbling and babbling about it. It had been wonderful. Stark was different and Loki should have known that. Maybe he expected too much and he had to be content with the knowledge that in front of him was a broken man. Until now Stark was still driven by his thirst for revenge and justice. That was keeping him upright, because he didn’t have the time to mourn, to break down. Loki had known all the time that Stark was swimming and when he was done, he would drown willingly. There was no guarantee that even later on Loki was getting the breakout he was hoping for. Not everybody was the same. Perhaps Stark would never even utter a word and this was all Loki would get. Not that it made a real difference. The pain was there and that was what Loki had wanted. Stark was suffering
and that had been Loki’s intention. So he should be content and not be so eager for screams and just. Too bad… Loki has always had a weakness for dramatic scenes.

Right, because that’s the problem…

The taunting tone made Loki flinch. Not now, he didn’t have the time to deal with a voice that was damned to fade away very soon. It was necessary to ignore him, no matter how much Loki would have loved to scream and yell and to tell it that it was wrong. So wrong…

Liars always know the truth. So don’t pretend you have no idea what is going on. It’s pathetic. We should be out there and seek out Barton. I don’t like it that S.H.I.E.L.D doesn’t know where he is

Gritting his teeth Loki shook his head and he had to ask himself how Stark was doing this. Being so cold when every fibre of his body was possessed by rage and hatred. Loki felt it inside of him, burning and spreading. Eager to eat him away. If he only could Loki would reach inside of himself and erase whatever was still fuelling that little voice. After Loki had taken his body, he could also take the rest.

How long do you plan on being in denial? We don’t have time for this…

There is no ‘we’. There has never been and there never will be a ‘we’.

At least one thing that you’re right about…

“Jarvis… file MCHB 2b, please… and lock the doors.”

Blinking in confusion Loki seemed to notice that he still was in the same room and Stark was still sitting there right in front of him. His hands were still flying over the keyboard and his eyes focused on the screen.

What file? Why would he be locking the door?

Maybe you’ve been too loud… talking to yourself…

No, Loki hadn’t been…


“Stark, I got it the first time. You know a lot of adverbs.”

Loki’s entire body tensed when these two voices, floating through the air, reached his ears. His head spun around and it took him two embarrassing seconds to realise that it wasn’t him. None of this was his imagination or a ghost coming back to hunt him. This was the file. Of course Jarvis had registered all of their conversations. Loki was fairly sure that he registered every word that was being said within the walls of the tower.

“That really wasn’t the point that I was trying to get across. Seriously though, even Steve is slowly getting into video games. Not liking them is weird.”

“So I’m weird, I don’t care. I also think you’re weird. Creating a machine that helps you undressing. Weird.”

It was hard to admit and impossible to accept, but Loki could see the corners of Stark’s mouth twitching. A smile. No. No, there was no place for it. Not here. Especially not after all Loki had
done…

_He’s so much stronger than you give him credit for. He will get through this. Unlike us…_

Why was it so different? The one in his head. The one talking to him. Loki could hear both of them. The recording and the remaining piece of this character. They were nothing alike… almost like two different persons…

_We’re finally getting somewhere, aren’t we? Stop being so pathetic! Just admit it! We are brilliant and you know what’s going on. Just face it!_

Taking a step back Loki took a breath and let his eyes fall closed. Empty thoughts. Nothing special. Just trying to not listen to this little demon that was whispering things that Loki didn’t want to hear. That didn’t make any sense. Unacceptable. Impossible.

“It’s also weird to hear Ironman talk like that about an American idol.”

Once again Stark’s voice brought him back to where he was and Loki reopened his eyes. “Stop it…”

It was… different. Finally Stark had stopped working. His elbows were resting on the table, his fingers tangled in his hair. Brown eyes fixed on the table, yet staring into nowhere and still there was nothing. No tears, no sobs, he wasn’t even trembling. Nothing, Loki didn’t get to see anything and… he felt so empty. As always. Also mesmerized. Something about him. The way he was sitting there, staring into nothingness when he had never been able to stand still for an entire second… unless Thomas had been there with him… Now… this was a different person and Loki couldn’t wrap his head around what was missing. Or what was wrong…

_He is going to walk away from this. You know that. We’ll take care of that…_

There was no ‘we’, no ‘us’.

Loki wasn’t going to listen to this any longer or continue to look at Stark. There was nothing to do and nothing to gain. It would be wiser to go and check on Banner and Thor. Why had he even let them alone this long? Who knew what nonsense Thor was going to tell as soon as he opened his mouth?

Without another glance at Stark Loki teleported back into the other room. Not so much of a change. Thor and Banner were sitting at the table and they were actually talking. Seemed like Thor needed another nightmare…

“… what Stark meant when he…”

“No.” Banner determinedly shook his head and Loki couldn’t help to be impressed. Even in Asgard there hadn’t been many people who had been able to deny Thor anything and look at him without the slightest hint of intimidation. Then again, why should Banner be afraid? He was carrying something inside of him that was way more fearful than Thor could ever aspire to be.

“We aren’t going to talk about. Not now.” The sound of Banner’s voice made clear that he hadn’t said this for the first time. So Thor was eager to find out who had hurt his little brother. Who he could take revenge on. One thing less to worry about. “You haven’t been talking this much for days… This morning I was still trying to get some words out of you and… no chance. Why now? Why have you decided now to talk to us?”

Thor lowered his eyes and still looked past Banner. A god not able to meet a mortal’s eyes.
Ridiculous. “I don’t think it was a decision… in the room… I do not know how to explain and I do not think you would understand.”

_Fool… Thor is not even able to use words that Banner wasn’t going to understand…_

“Try me. I’m a good listener and I’m sure you’re going to find the right words to explain it to me.” Loki was disgusted by Banner’s smile and torn if he wanted to hear Thor’s interpretation of the events. Banner was perhaps even smart enough to make some sense out of it.

Thor was still hesitant, but even he was smart enough to realise that nothing was going to happen unless he told Banner what he wanted to hear. Although none of that was making sense to him. “It was… different. I felt different… Not all the time. Sometimes I was sleepwalking and then I was waking up. Sometimes it was hard to tell. I do not know, but there was always… only one thing I could think about…”

Banner nodded softly, almost looking sympathetic and Loki swallowed a soft growl.

Now he is thinking all the time about us… when we’re dead. He didn’t give a damn when we were still alive…

“It’s all covered by a haze… I was walking through it and sometimes I didn’t know where I was, then it was all clear again. Sometimes Loki was there and then he wasn’t…”

This was getting dangerous, Loki couldn’t let it go on much longer. Yet he enjoyed the little tale, it was a quite fitting description of his web. Maybe the right moment had come to weave another.

“Wait a second…” Those eyes were filled with sparked interest and Loki bit his lip, still not jumping to action although Banner had taken the bait. “You said that Loki was there with you? How?”

No reminder of Loki being dead – just a question. A dangerous one.

Thor closed his eyes and Loki’s hatred for him was threatening to burn him alive. Now. Now it suddenly mattered. After nightmares and illusions. There was no doubt that Thor would have ever felt this way if Loki hadn’t shown him what he had done.

“He was pleading for help. He was screaming at me for not being there for him… because I pushed him… because he couldn’t remember… he couldn’t remember… he was desperate and angry… so full of rage…” Thor trailed off, his voice wavering a little bit and he shook his head. Although his eyes were closed Thor’s face told Loki and Banner so many stories.

Why couldn’t Stark be like this? This was what Loki was looking for.

_Because he is so much stronger…_

“He was falling apart… his body was… rotten… he smelled like dried blood and… decay. Because I left him like this… in the Dark World. I left with Jane and I didn’t return. My father had to send soldiers to get Loki… he had been lying there for… I left him in life and I left him in death…”

Loki despised every single word. He despised the tone, the voice that said them…

“Was Loki there when… I was with you?”

No, this wasn’t good. Too much intrigue. Banner was even leaning forward and Loki could tell when somebody was on to something. When they were figuring something out.
“No… he always came when I was alone…”

Instead of jumping to his feet like he clearly wanted to Banner slowly leaned back and nodded. Taking his time so Thor wouldn’t suspect…. What? “I see… I need to talk to Tony for a second. Excuse me…” Unusually rude for Banner, but he was in a hurry and Loki’s heart was beating fiercely against his chest.

An answer from never came and Banner joined Stark in the other room, Loki close behind him. “Tony, I need to tell you something…”

“I get to go first.” Still sitting in the same chair Stark turned around, his hand pointing at the screen behind him. “Our first snitch contacted me. Very eager to save their own skin and instantly gave me Barton’s location.”

That stopped Banner in his tracks. “Where is the catch?”

Tony let out a huff. “It’s a trap. Romanoff must think I’m stupid or she still hasn’t realised how fast Jarvis can do his research…”

“If it’s a trap why are you…”

“Oh, I’m not going to disappoint her by not showing up. I said I wanted all of them. Romanoff is a good beginning.”
Hello everybody,

What is there to say? It's getting dark...

Have fun ;)

_________________________________________________

To the right, to the left
We will fight to the death
To the edge of the earth
It's a brave new world from the last to the first

This is war ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

“How can you be sure?”

“The place… abandoned and it belonged to an associate of S.H.I.E.L.D years ago. They tried to wipe the records clean, but they can’t do a good enough job to keep that from me. Jarvis, I need the blueprints…”

Banner was looking over his shoulder and Loki did the same with him. He raised his hands, still unsure what to do. Only two possibilities. One would make his plan prosper and the other one would cause his downfall.

What were the chances? Death wasn’t a game and Banner didn’t take it lightly. The odds were in Loki’s favour, but one could never be sure.

“Tony, I just realised something… about Thor.”

“Ah?” Stark raised an eyebrow, looking at Banner expectantly. “Come on, spit it out. Unless it’s not helping.”

“He said he saw Loki… Actually saw him, he could describe what he looked like. A walking corpse. He said that Loki always came when he was alone. I know we haven’t seen anything on the footage, but I think we should take another look. Maybe we missed something.”

Loki frowned, his heart was beating fast and he couldn’t tell if he was scared or not. This could be a treasure or a nightmare.

Stark tilted his head, taking in what Banner had said. “Thor contradicts himself when it comes to his little brother…”
“I know, but the way he describes it… Look, if we were talking about anybody else and if the circumstances were different I’d be convinced that Thor has severe psychological troubles, but since he was in S.H.I.E.L.D’s custody… we have no idea what kind of stuff they have to… provoke hallucinations or… I don’t know. I could be wrong. Most probably Thor is haunted by a bad conscience and I’m just…” Banner shrugged, running out of words and Stark blinked, seemingly confused. “You still do think that Thor fucked his little brother over.”

“I think that we missed the opportunity to ask some important questions. Anyway, that doesn’t matter now. We should look take another look. Maybe we can spot something…”

Without further questions Stark told Jarvis to show them the footage before Thor had left the base. There was no reason for Loki to be nervous now. His illusions were impeccable, there was no way for them to spot anything.

The video showed Banner leaving the little cell and Thor was just sitting there. No change for several minutes. Then the illusion ended, only for Loki to see and Thor got up, leaving. And that was it.

Stopping the video Stark shrugged. “I don’t see anything.”

Banner’s eyes were still fixed on the screen, a slight frown on his face and Loki knew he was on to something. Unfortunately he had no idea what that might be. He couldn’t shake off the feeling that Banner could see beyond the illusion or at least he was trying. Way too much attention on a detail that Loki hadn’t considered important.

“I don’t see anything either and that’s what’s weird about it.”

“Go on?”

“He’s just sitting there.” Banner shook his head in disbelief. “Thor said that he saw Loki. With him in this room. Looking like a corpse, he said he was… rotting. Pleading and yelling at him. Don’t you think that would get the slightest reaction out of him? Nothing. He is just sitting there. He doesn’t even blink or look into a specific direction. Hell, I am absolutely sure that I would try to talk to Loki if he showed up right now.”

Somehow Loki doubted that. They were more likely to fire shots at him than talk to him.

Stark’s eyes lit up with understanding and he took another look at the frozen footage. “It’s a fake… they probably used old footage and cut it together. So nobody had an idea what was happening while you weren’t in there with him. Bastards. Any chance that we can make Thor understand this?”

“I don’t think so. He is convinced that Loki was there… I don’t think we could explain it to him that S.H.I.E.L.D is responsible for this… but other people would be willing to listen…” Banner’s tone was soft and his expression told Stark everything he needed to without using words for it. An incredible turn of events. They had spotted a mistake in Loki’s scheme, one due to carelessness and yet it was working in Loki’s favour. It seemed like he couldn’t lose. The suggestion was clear as day and Stark wouldn’t like it which made it all the more intriguing for Loki. Exciting.

As expected Stark’s face darkened even more and he let out a sound that was filled with disdain. “I’m not going to show this to Steve.”

“Why not? Steve wants to know what happened, I am sure. He just needs proof that S.H.I.E.L.D is responsible for… He is not going to let them get away with it.”
In response Stark only huffed. “I don’t think Steve would take the same approach as me…”

“Maybe one reason more to talk with him about this… Tony, we should show him what we’ve found. You know he’ll be on our side.”

“Yeah, sure… Captain America, the shining symbol of justice… he’d waltz in and arrest a couple of people… that’s not going to happen. It doesn’t matter, he is going to jump in and try to stop me anyway…”

Biting his lip Banner slowly shook his head. “There are other options, you know…”

“Not for me.” Turning around Stark restarted to type on the keyboard, his voice cold and emotionless. “Do you really want to have another discussion about that? You saw the list and you know that Tommy wasn’t the first and only person they’ve ever done this to. They’re going to keep doing that. Kill people. And no fucking judge is going to punish them for it. So I gotta do it.”

Loki could see what Banner was thinking. How he was struggling to keep the words inside. No, Stark wasn’t doing this to prevent them from committing other crimes. He was doing this all for himself, because they had taken Thomas away from him. This was all that mattered to him. Yet Banner remained silent and Loki wondered if he was able to go through with it. In the end there would be blood on their hands and Banner knew that. He desperately wished that there would be another way and yet there was this little voice inside his head. That told him that Stark was right, that they deserved what he had in store for them. All that proof and that pain. Stark had told him that he could walk away, that he wouldn’t mind, but of course Banner couldn’t do that. To him that would feel like betrayal and he had run away so often, he couldn’t let him down.

But was he able to go through with it?

“What are going to do about Natasha now?” Change of topic…

“Since a welcoming committee is going to wait for me… it would be best to bring my own… They like a good distraction, don’t they? I’m going to give them one. Or even better, you are going to give them one.”

Banner raised an eyebrow. “The satellite? I thought you’d still need time to infect it?”

“No, I changed my mind. I don’t wanna play… They know what I can do anyway, so why not just show them? We’ll kill off their major communication device that will jam them… You’re okay with that?”

Huh? Why would he ask that question? He was perfectly able to do it all by himself. Banner nodded anyway. “Sure… but don’t you think I should come with you? You’ve already said that it’s a trap… Wouldn’t it be better if you didn’t go there alone?”

“You don’t actually want to go there, Bruce. And that’s fine… Just make sure that everything’s ready and I let you know exactly when I need it to go down.”

“And… what about Thor?”

Suddenly Stark stopped. He took his time, not giving an answer, but he was obviously pondering. Finally he mumbled some soft words, barely audible. “He’s going to stay here. S.H.I.E.L.D has been messing with him and if he stays away from them, he’ll feel better. Then he can decide what he wants to do. Just make sure he isn’t going to lose his shit again…”

Now that was something Loki had to keep in mind.
“Okay… just be careful and… if you get into trouble, just say the word and I’ll be there.”

It was Banner’s way to tell him that he cared, that he could rely on him, but Stark wasn’t capable of showing him that he appreciated it or that it meant anything to him. Instead he gave a little nod before getting up. “I gotta go…”

Loki smirked to himself. This was going to get interesting, he couldn’t wait to see the spectacle. He trusted them to make it worth his while.

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The complex the Widow had chosen was huge. An abandoned factory, several buildings and every single one looked like it was about to cave in. Endless possibilities to hide or to lie in ambush for someone. Even Loki hadn’t spotted them yet, so they had done a good job despite the short amount of time. Still Loki had no doubt that Stark was still going to outsmart them.

Settling on the top of one of the buildings Loki sat down and waited for the show. He had a feeling that this wasn’t going to be the final act. Then again – who knew? Humming softly to himself Loki waited, not bothering to look for the little agents. Let Stark do the dirty work.

Right now he was only taking his time. Soon Loki was going to count the minutes. Should he go back? Had Banner talked him out of it? Now that would be awful. Thomas would be so mad…

Just to prove him wrong Stark showed up one moment later. Flying across the sky as a red flash and then slowing down. He didn’t land though, but kept hovering above the area. Probably running scans and figuring out which building he had to blow up first to get rid of most of his enemies. What a pleasing thought…

We should participate… it’s been so long…

Shaking his head Loki concentrated on Stark who now stretched his arm out and was preparing a shot. “Get out. Out. Out. Wherever you are. Fuck this, I know exactly where you are, Romanoff. So get out before I make the building crumble all around you.”

Huh… Stark was sounding strangely cocky. Almost witty. Like he had been before Thomas had died. Was he pretending to intimidate them? Why should he? The message he had delivered in the main base had been anything but cheerful, but it had made quite an impression. Desperate men were capable of anything.

Nothing moved. Not a sound to be heard.

“Well, too bad…”

It was a warning shot, not supposed to bring said building down, but it was enough to burst all the windows and the blast must have hurt the people hiding inside. A nice beginning. Loki was content with the…

The detonation was deafening and the armour started spinning around, getting closer to the ground with every second. Loki’s eyes darted around, searching for whoever had taken this shot. The building right next to Loki’s. They were hiding behind a partly covered window. Also the building Loki was on casted a shadow over said window, making it even harder to see the fools who had dared to fire at Stark. With something big.

Now everything seemed to be happening at once. Agents were storming out of the buildings, aiming their guns at the armour that was rapidly coming down. That didn’t look good, but Loki
wasn’t worried. Rather curious.

While still falling the armour opened fire and the agents returned it. Too easy. The Iron Man regained control just before crashing down and landed on his feet, instantly attacking the first row of agents which were thrown back by the energy beams. Since they had formed a circle around Stark the fire didn’t stop and Loki almost felt like applauding, because they had been smart enough to not use actual bullets but some newer variations of the gun that agent had used on Loki during the invasion. Sometimes they were able to learn from their mistakes. The Captain wouldn’t approve though.

Loki felt the urge to get up to his feet when it was becoming more and more obvious that the scale of this attack was enough to seriously damage the suit. The red metal was turning black, sparks were flying through the air and then one of the rather bold agents decided to play the hero. A single blast directly into the back of his neck. It must have been a weak spot because suddenly the armour collapsed like dead weight and the fire stopped. The sudden silence which followed this chaos was unsettling and Loki could hear how hesitant their steps were. Slowly approaching, their arms still ready to go for it all over again.

“You have 5 seconds to get out of the armour…”

Loki narrowed his eyes, still waiting for the…

“Not going to happen. How about 5 seconds for you to fuck off before you are all dead?”

Another reason to feel proud and to pity the mortal fools. How willingly they had taken the bait.

Loki watched their faces with relish. That expression of shock when they realised that they shouldn’t have completely focused on the armour on the ground. Not when 15 other ones were approaching with high speed. Instantly all of the weapons were pointed at them and Stark’s voice seemed to be transmitted by every single one of the suits. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

Despite these very clear words a few shots were fired and even Loki’s eyes were having trouble to keep up with what was happening. The suits were moving so fast, changing direction constantly, flying all across the area without getting in each other’s way. Stark was just toying with them, but unfortunately he couldn’t have fun.

Again, from one second to another, everything fell silent. Confusion and shock were taking a hold of them when the agents repeatedly pulled the trigger and nothing was happening.

Oh, Loki had chosen wisely…

The suits had stopped moving, hovering comfortably in the air, perfectly positioned to watch all the agents and more importantly to hold them at gunpoint.

“I guess you’re missing those Vibranium bullets now… Romanoff! I never took you for a coward. 5 fucking seconds before I start taking your minions out. One after another. Got it? Five. Four. Three…”

The Widow didn’t need to be asked twice. Seeing her Loki was reminded of much he loathed her. The confident way she carried herself and that stoic look on her face. As if she considered none of what was happening as impressive or even worth a frown. Magic was surging up, trying to pull Loki along. Tangling one hand in her hair, yanking her head back and putting a knife to her throat. Nah, it wouldn’t be fair to steal this from Stark, he had done such a nice job so far.

**But we could help… that one scar on her cheek is not enough**
Her steps were slow but only because she wanted to show Stark that there was no reason for her to rush. She was still in control, not worried. There was a good chance that she actually believed that herself. One gun in each hand, she made clear this fight wasn’t over. “Can we have a conversation now?”

How could she even dare to sound so tedious? After all…

*She is just begging for it…*

“Oh, definitely. Minions, fuck off. Go home to your little bases. Get me the people I really want, but just fuck off or I will tear you apart. And leave the guns.”

It was disgusting to witness how quickly they followed his orders, discarding of their weapons and fled. Nothing new, but still bothered him.

“Jarvis, secure the area. I don’t want any interruptions.”

All of the suits except for one dispersed in different directions. So the only one left was Stark, staring down at the Widow and Loki was shaking. His body vibrating with so much energy and want. Stark should just kill her right on the spot. The knowledge that it was him who took her life would be humiliation enough.

“You can’t go on with this, you have to know that. Right? One man can’t take down the entire world.” Was this strategy? Was she trying to make him feel like there was nothing he could do to intimidate her? Too bad for her that this wasn’t the case. Granted, a woman like her would never be frozen in fear and watch wide eyed how things were falling apart around her. Nevertheless Loki knew that Stark frightened her. His cold determination and will were something she had never seen in him. Now it was all out in the open and it was beautiful.

“Oh, I could… but I don’t plan on doing that.” Stark didn’t waste any more time, just landed right in front of her. A pity that the mask hid his face, Loki would have loved to see it. “Who did it?”

Three simple words, but Loki could hear that nothing had ever been of more importance for him. Even she knew that and yet she couldn’t bring herself of show any sympathy. Loki kind of understood. Stark had declared war on the only thing she valued. Although Stark’s motives were nobler than hers…

“I don’t know, because S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t…” She jumped out of the way, barely dodging the shot Stark fired at her. Rolling over the floor the Widow got quickly and elegantly back up to her feet, using both guns to shoot at Stark. Completely unimpressed he continued to come closer, the bullets merely bouncing off his armour. “What? Couldn’t they afford more Vibranium?”

This wasn’t the time for games. Loki could see in her eyes how she was scanning the place, trying to figure out how to use it to her advantage, how to get cover, but Stark saw it too. Another energy beam brushed her shoulder and since she was only human, she let out a hiss of pain. The gun slipped from her hand, but the other one didn’t even waver.

“Who did it? I’ll find out anyway, but you could spare me time and make this easier for you.”

Loki had no words in any language to describe the beauty of this.

“Will you actually listen to me if I try to tell you something?” She was screaming, but not fearful, rather frustrated. Not good enough.

Rage and disappointment were starting to claim Loki when Stark without hesitation lowered his
arms, ceasing his attack. “Better don’t waste my time.”

She was taking a breath, straightening up, but her gun was still pointed at Stark. Completely useless. “Fury wanted to observe Pine to keep his eyes on you. The whole project blew up in his face and nobody tried to track him down anymore, but I was supposed to do some research on him… I found some loose ends which didn’t make much sense, it was all pretty much covered in darkness, but during the last 24 hours I was able to put the pieces together…”

*We have to kill her, she knows…*

“He wasn’t real. I’ve created dozens of fake personas, I know what they look like. It was done almost perfectly, but this man never existed. He was a…”

She never got to finish this dreadful sentence. Loki winced the tiniest bit when she was brutally knocked to the floor. This time Stark had aimed for her chest without even raising his hand. The beam had been fired from a little device hidden in the shoulder of his armour. So he had been working on this. She hadn’t seen it coming.

Now things were even happening too fast for Loki to catch up with.

Stark took the three steps and kicked the second gun away before she could reach for it. “You are scum. That’s what rats do, isn’t it? Making up stories to blame the victim. Dragging them in mud…”

Groaning in pain she was trying to reach down, probably to get out a knife or another weapon, but Stark was having none of it. Her scream ripped through the air when Stark put his right foot on hand, pinning it to the floor. “I should just be like you. Kill someone you love, so you’d maybe finally understand… But you don’t love anybody. None of you. For you people are just names to scratch off a list when they become uncomfortable… You don’t care about anything but yourselves… at least that makes it easier for me.”

Writhing in pain she jerked her head back, staring at him with wild eyes and finally the situation seemed to catch up to her. “Damn it, Stark… I am not ly—… Argh!”

Loki could hear the lovely sound of bones being crushed when Stark shifted more of his weight to his foot on the Widow’s hand. “Shut your mouth! You don’t have the right! You just…”

Stark paused as if he couldn’t just share this anger and pain with anybody. After her accusation he wasn’t able to keep his voice cold or even. The raw pain Loki had been longing for was finally lying in front of him and now Stark was pulling back. As if…

“You can just go to hell.” His hand was right above her head, the repulsor started to glow and…

A part of Loki was screaming in terror when instead of another scream or desperate pleading he only heard the sound of metal hitting metal and Stark was sent to the ground.

“Tony, please, stop. Don’t force me to…”
Hey everybody,

How do you call such a moment in a story? Game changer? Break through?
Anyway... something happens :)

Porque todo el tiempo
que pasé junto a tí
dejó tejido su hilo dentro de mí

Antología ~~ Shakira ~~

(Because all that time
That I have spent at your side
Left its thread woven inside of me)

The shield scattered across the ground and Loki jumped off the building. Stark was getting back on his feet and the Captain was standing right in front of the Widow. That damned soldier really couldn’t help himself. Impeccable timing. He really had to love destroying Loki’s day and fantasies. It was the same with all of them, their only purpose was to make Loki’s life miserable.

Just die…

“Don’t. Please, don’t make me do this.” Still not wearing his costume, but Rogers didn’t need it. His gaze alone told everyone who he was. Determined, ready to do anything to make things right and to protect the innocent. Unfortunately things would never be right again and there were no innocents.

By now Stark was standing again and Loki thought that this empty mask could convey actual emotions. Hatred and Fury. “Get out off the way.”

“No.” Rogers shook his head and Stark got in attack position. “Steve, for the last time, get out off my way!

A slight whimper of pain could be heard and Rogers shook his head. “No.”

Stark kept word – it had been the last time. His first attack was being dodged by Rogers who then stormed towards him, using both legs to deliver a strong kick. Only shortly stumbling back Stark quickly regained his composure and then there was no more holding back. The Captain’s fists connected with the beautiful armour and Stark delivered just as many punches.
Loki watched them for a moment, admiring Stark’s determination and ruthlessness, although the Captain was just an obstacle between him and the person he really wanted to crush. Turning around Loki watched the Widow and the vicious grin was threatening to split his face apart. She was on her knees, how fitting. Trying to get through the pain, to not be paralysed by it anymore. Stark had turned her hand useless, Loki’s knowledge about Midgardian surgery wasn’t vast enough to tell if there was a way to undo the damage. Getting it fixed was only an option if she survived this encounter and she knew that. Struggling, moaning in pain she did her best to get up, using the distraction to get away. Should he stop her? Offer Stark a little hand? Who knew how long this fight between Rogers and Stark could last. If Rogers walked away from this as the winner… No, Stark wouldn’t give in as long as there was still life in him. He would leave the Captain no choice and if Stark’s blood was to be spilled, Banner wouldn’t stand for this. Also, Loki would convince Thor that he needed to be avenged.

The Widow had made about two shaky steps when an energy blast hit the ground beside her.

“Don’t move!”

Not another shot was fired, because Stark was now busy avoiding being hit by Rogers’ shield.

“Tony, you have to stop this!”

Instead of answering Stark delivered another punch that Rogers only barely dodged and the second one hit his jaw. Stark was fuelled by rage and yet it was obvious that he didn’t intend to seriously hurt the other one. Rogers was an obstacle, the person he wanted to kill was just a few feet away.

“Tony, please! I want to help you! I want to help you find the people who did this to you. What you are doing now is madness and it’s not going to get you anywhere!” Rogers was trying to talk some sense into him, but he was missing some very important information. Everything that he was saying right now was an insult to Thomas’ memory. Stark used his repulsors, the Captain was thrown back and Stark immediately abandoned him. Taking off he flew the short distance towards the Widow, grabbing her at her collar. There was no care to this touch, no acknowledgement of her being hurt or female. Stark didn’t see any of this, all he saw was her responsibility. “Tell me who did it. You know about everything that Fury does, so spit it out… or I will try my best to make you feel the pain I’m feeling right now…”

The Widow stared up at him with her eyes wide and Loki couldn’t quite put his finger on it. Was she shocked that he was indeed willing to go that far or that her plan failed? It didn’t matter in the end… Stark was going to rip her apart.

“Let Natasha go!” Rogers had come back, his shield in his hand, threatening to throw it any moment if Stark wouldn’t back up. Never going to happen.

“How can you even live with yourself? Aren’t you supposed to be better than all of us? Yet you come here and tell me to spare this piece of shit who killed more innocent people than the guys you are usually after…”

To Loki’s disappointment the Captain didn’t hesitate nor falter. At this moment the Captain didn’t care what Stark was telling him or what he thought was going on. The Captain only bothered about saving a life. “Killing Natasha and everyone else you think responsible isn’t going to bring him back, Tony.”

“Do you think I’m stupid?! I know that nothing is going to bring him back. But unlike the thousands of people who were killed by S.H.I.E.L.D before him, he is going to get some justice!” Stark growled, his second hand hovering above the Widow’s face. “Give me a fucking name! Who shot him in the back like a fucking coward?! An unarmed civilian who had nothing to do with any of your shit!”
“Tony, stop!”

The Widow groaned in pain, struggling to get a few words out, but that was enough to get all of Stark’s attention. “He… he was…”

“What?!”

It was a trap and Loki wanted to scream at him. Couldn’t he see it? Nothing had ever been more obvious and Stark was so eager to know, so eaten up by his thirst for revenge, he was blind for these sorts of things.

She raised her head the slightest bit, seemingly afraid and then she fooled him. “He was…” With stunning quickness her hand came up and touched Stark’s wrist. Loki couldn’t see what she had done to him, but she must have used some device. Something to mess with the electricity that powered the suit. Sparks were flying and Stark back off, letting out a yelp and not able to move his arm. Knowing that her life was on the line the Widow had gotten up, scrambled away while the Captain jumped at Stark, wrapping his arms around him from behind, one around his neck. “Stop it!”

Stark was struggling, his functioning arm not fighting the Captain, but sending out energy beams after the fleeing killer. “NO!”

“Tony, stop it! Let her go!”

“Let go of me!”

With a snarl on his face Loki watched the Widow slipping away, disappearing between the buildings. Should he go after her?

“Jarvis! Get her!”

Oh, Loki felt bad for forgetting about the other suits. They couldn’t be far. Stark would have made a dashing villain. Too bad this would be his only tour to the dark side of the power.

“Call him back! Tony! Call him back! Please!” Rogers was having a hard time still holding on to Stark who was now pulling at Rogers’ grip with both hands. “She’s our friend!”

Loki huffed and shook his head. What a wrong thing to say. Almost as if Rogers wanted to intentionally fuel Stark’s rage. A definitive success. With a jarring scream Stark tore himself free, spun around and both of his hands released an energy blast that hit Rogers directly in the chest and flung him to the ground. Instead of going after the Widow Stark looked down at the Captain. “You get in my way and I will kill you, Steve. I don’t want to! Don’t you fucking get that! You didn’t like him, but you would have never hurt him. You would have protected him. Romanoff was in on this. They murdered him and I am not going to let them get away with it! You do something like that again – I will kill you!”

Coughing softly Rogers sat up, staring at Stark with eyes that made clear that he would never be able to respect Stark’s orders. Death was only a small matter to him when justice and freedom were at stake.

Worthy to be admired and still Loki was annoyed by it.

“I can’t let you do this, Tony and you know that. Not against innocent people.”

“They aren’t fucking innocent! Romanoff got more blood on her hands than you can imagine. This
week it was Tommy. The week before it was somebody else. Next week it is going to be someone else. She’s Fury’s right hand. She knows who pulled the trigger and she’s going to tell me.”

“And what about your list? Are you going to kill every single person on it? Tony, this is madness!”

Loki had heard this before and he didn’t care. Stark shouldn’t care either.

“So that’s what it has all come to? The great legend of Captain America? Protector of freedom and the innocent? You are now protecting murderers?” Stark spat and the Captain blinked at him. Maybe he was only trying to keep this conversation going to stop Stark from going after the Widow. Or there was indeed this little doubt inside of him and he wasn’t willing to let go of it yet. Or it was this terrible hope to understand what was going on inside of Stark’s mind.

Getting up to his feet Rogers kept staring at Stark, not really daring to blink. “If we could just talk about it… Stop this whole mess for a second and have a conversation. Tell me why you are so… sure that it was S.H.I.E.L.D who killed him.”

Loki didn’t miss Stark’s wince. His hand was trembling, probably longing to hit the Captain in the face to make him pay for this comment. That didn’t happen and Loki wondered why he was still here. Was he really wishing he could make the Captain understand? To pull him to his side? This was never going to happen and Stark was smart enough to know that.

“Jarvis recorded it. He recorded some guy dressed in black with a masked face who shot Tommy in the back. He was still alive when they took the bracelet I made for him. They shot him for a piece of my technology. The one thing Fury always wanted to get his fingers on. That’s what I saw and then I went through S.H.I.E.L.D’s database and I found the fucking order they gave… Get the fucking bracelet and it doesn’t matter how. They called him collateral damage. Fury gave a fucking order to get the bracelet and with that he said that it was okay to kill him! That’s the proof I have!”

Pretty blue eyes, so wide in shock and disbelief. Loki knew that it wouldn’t be enough. Stark had enough of waiting and explaining. He knew what was going on and he was only losing time by trying to explain this madness to someone else. Especially someone like the Captain who had chosen to believe in the good in people.

“Tony… We have to…”

“No! We don’t have to do anything! You have to get out of my way! I am going to get all of them and then it’s finally going to stop once and for all. He died in my arms… he almost died alone on an empty street, not knowing what was going on…” Stark paused and Rogers’ eyes were shining, so quickly again filled with pity and compassion. It must be terrible for him, because you couldn’t just talk the death of an innocent person away. Especially when you knew how much Stark had adored Thomas.

“Wouldn’t you have done the same?” A cold whisper left the helmet of Stark’s armour and this time it was the Captain who flinched. “Wouldn’t you have done the same if you had been able to get your hands on them? All of them who killed your friend? If it hadn’t been war, but… cold blood? That’s what happened to Tommy and I can do something about it. I don’t have to sit there and watch them do it again… to somebody else. That woman you just saved didn’t get to work for S.H.I.E.L.D because she had great morals like you, but because she is good at killing people and she’s so good at it, because she hasn’t been doing anything else for quite a while. It doesn’t make her a good person that she killed a couple of people that are supposed to be fucking dead… She…”

Stark’s voice was shaking and Loki could hear the strain. Just a few more moments, one wrong word from the Captain and it would all be over. “… she looked right into my eyes and tried to
make Tommy the bad guy. They fucking murdered him and failed to cover their tracks and now she is trying to drag him into the mud. It’s disgusting, but it doesn’t surprise me and so finally stop to try me to change my mind about this! It’s going to end when they’re all dead!”

Lowering his eyes Rogers took a second to gather himself and then he met Stark’s gaze. It was hard and unforgiving. “I am sorry, Tony. I can’t understand what you’re going through… You’ve lost the person you wanted to spend your life with. That never happened to me and I am so sorry you have to go through this… but I can’t let you do this. I can’t.”

“Too bad.” Stark sighed and before he was finished saying the last word his repulsor hit the Captain a second time and Rogers bent over, gasping for air. Turning around Stark took off. “Jarvis, where is she?”

“Tony!” The shield was thrown at Stark who easily took the hit and let it drop to the floor. Not even looking at the Captain anymore Stark took off and Rogers started running, trying to keep up with up.

“Get out wherever you are!”

Landing on top of one of the buildings Stark started firing at the one next to him. The time to use the small guns was definitely over. The nice new additions to the suit were doing some impressive damage. First the ceiling was coming down, followed by the walls and there was Stark, not stopping until it had been reduced to dusk.

Yes, Loki really hoped that the Widow was inside there. Unless it would have been a nice show but completely useless.

Watching the scene unfold itself Loki couldn’t miss the Captain rushing up to the building, jumping and climbing his way to the top. No hesitation, he just threw himself at Stark, tackling him to the floor. After a short teleportation Loki was standing right next to them and this was giving him no joy. The Widow could be dead by now, Loki could be writing messages with her blood on the floor for Barton. Just thinking about it gave Loki more thrills than these two rolling across this roof, hitting each other with their fists. The Captain was smart enough to use his strength to his advantage and tried to keep Stark’s arms down, so he wouldn’t use the repulsors against him.

Loki didn’t understand how, but Rogers got the upper hand, pressing his knee with full force against Stark’s stomach, his hands wrapped around Stark’s wrist. It wasn’t quite as easy since Stark still enough leeway to fire a beam at Rogers who jerked back. Jumping up to his feet Stark went back to using his fists and Loki wondered if he still refused to seriously hurt Rogers.

So similar to you…

It was the Captain who finally put off the velvet gloves. Something must have triggered it, but Loki couldn’t make out what it was. A fit of rage? Or the realisation that he wasn’t capable of stopping Stark the way he wanted to. Nothing was going to stop this man but violence or maybe even death. Perhaps this was making him so furious…

Anyway Loki almost thought to feel the impact of his fists when Rogers didn’t stop hitting Stark, delivering punches with his hands and feet so fast and with such force the attack resembled a storm.

Stark had to take a step back, but stumbled and Loki bit his lip. The big metal shell landed on his back on the ground, mirroring his position from before. Only this time Rogers was faster and Loki realised that the Captain had planned this. His legs were resting on Stark’s arms, keeping them
down, making it impossible for him to launch another attack. While Rogers still had both of his hands to use them as he pleased.

*If he gets him out of the suit it’s over*

It’s not. Stark still has his entire army, part of it around here. No reason to worry.

*He’ll be helpless and people get so easily hit by bullets…*

Loki ignored that, because it didn’t make any sense and he also didn’t care. It was fascinating to watch. Not joyful, but at least somewhat entertaining. Until the Captain’s hand ghosted over Stark’s chest, dangerously close to the arc-reactor and Loki’s heart was beating too fast. How many times he had wanted to rip it out… One time he had almost done it. He had already had his fingers on it…

“I am sorry, Tony.” Raising his fist Rogers slammed it down on Stark’s breastplate and Loki made a step forward. Not knowing what he was doing.

It came down another time with unlimited force and Loki could see the little fissures, the sparks and the pieces of red metal flying. Suddenly it made sense. Only a person like Loki, rotten to the core, would even think about doing such a thing. It never came to the Captain’s mind. Rogers wasn’t going for the arc-reactor. The breast plate was the biggest surface he could reach, so Rogers was trying to rip it apart. To destroy the suit.

Thomas was right – it was so easy to catch a bullet when completely unprotected.

Stark was struggling fiercely, but Rogers wasn’t stopping, not caring about his comfort or security. His skin was torn, his fingers bleeding while he was digging into the broken pieces of metal. Trying to do enough damage to make the suit useless.

*She is still around… or another one… one bullet is enough*

It doesn’t matter. If they kill Stark Rogers is not going to stand for it and the whole thing is going down and Loki would send Thor after them. Stark dying now would be unfortunate, but it wasn’t going to destroy everything.

*He could die…*

All of them could die at any second…

*We lost the Vanr, because we couldn’t protect him…*

Nothing about this had anything to do with the Vanr. The Vanr was dead, but he had been… he had…

“I am sorry.” The Captain’s fist was going up again and Loki couldn’t think, nor breathe and then he was moving.

Brutally Rogers was pushed off Stark, the force of the impact knocking him to his back. The Captain flung his eyes around, his eyes wide with confusion, searching for whoever had attacked him while Stark didn’t miss a beat to get up again.

Loki just kept staring at his hands. The same hands that had just torn Rogers off Stark. What had he done?
Hello everybody,

So Loki saved Tony in the last chapter. What?! Does he know how to deal with that? No, he doesn’t...

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

Quién nos quita el tiempo a los dos,
Quién dice que lo escribió,
Que no hay destino; eres tú y soy yo
Ya no está en las manos de Dios
   Ni en las señales de amor
   No existe suerte, somos tú y yo

Como decir sin andar diciendo ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~

(Who steals the time from us
Who says that it's written down
That there is no destiny: it's you and me
It's not in God's hands anymore
Nor in the signals of love
Luck doesn't exist, it's you and me)

_________________________________________________

“That was a mistake.”

The process of Stark getting up caused some strange noises, but there was too little time to take it all in. For Stark the fight was over, but the way he took off and flew away had nothing to do with running away. No, he was done. Done with the man who had just tried to…

Turning his head Loki took a look at the Captain and he saw his own confusion. Instead of looking after Stark Rogers was checking out his surroundings. Searching for somebody. Whoever had touched him and got him off Stark. Unlike most of them Rogers wasn’t a fool, he was absolutely able to tell the touch of hands and some formless energy apart.

He is going to say it. He is going to ask where you are. Who you are. Because he knows that you are there…

Rogers didn’t ask. He jumped off the roof and started running. Maybe searching for the Widow, going after Stark, looking for back-up. Loki had no idea and he didn’t feel any interest to find out. Should he go wherever he wanted to, do whatever he wanted to do, Loki was frozen to a spot.
Frozen and yet shaking. This hadn’t been the plan. This had been the exact opposite of the plan.

From the very beginning Loki had known that Stark was running a huge risk of being the first one to die. It would be inconvenient, but Loki wasn’t supposed to mind. There had been no reason to help Stark. The mortal had been clearly holding back, because he refused to hurt Rogers. Perhaps he would have changed his mind before Rogers had managed to make his armour useless. Even if Rogers had won this fight, he would have never hurt Stark. Or Stark had planned this… all his suits were still around and there was Jarvis… Banner…

There had been no reason whatsoever for Loki to interfere. Yet he had…

No… he had planned this, for months he had been putting all of his resources into it and the thought of them suffering and dying had kept him going. It had been the only thing that he desired, the only thing he needed to leave and to get away from all of this. When he had saved Stark from the robots it had been something different. He hadn’t been theirs to take and he hadn’t known pain yet…

Now Stark was in constant suffering and… there hadn’t been any real danger and yet Loki had put his hands on Rogers. Not his magic, his very own hands.

It didn’t make any sense… something was wrong. Something was wrong with Loki.

Staring at the spot where Stark had been lying Loki shook his head, feeling the sudden and strong urge to get away. To take care of himself, to find out what was wrong. Away from these people who were still somehow able to get to him. To make him act like he wasn’t supposed to.

Closing his eyes Loki and let his magic do the rest. It always knew what was best for him and what he really wanted. Now Loki wanted to get away, should they kill each other, Stark knew what to do. Loki could happily pick up the pieces afterwards. At this moment he needed to be alone, to figure this out… and come back from it.

This time it wasn’t sand but grass. Loki was sitting in the middle of a meadow, looking at the sea right in front of him. It would be so easy to throw himself off these cliffs and let the sea swallow him. Maybe the salt water would wash these thoughts away. Thoughts that weren’t his which seemed to have been implanted.

That wasn’t though why his magic had brought him here. Loki had been whole and he had been… No, he hadn’t been filled with desire… Not even for…

His eyes fell closed and Loki put his hands on the soft, slightly wet ground and felt the grass between his fingers. The texture against his skin was familiar, telling him once again that he had been here before. It wasn’t just familiar, it was reassuring, comforting… a place where he had been Loki. Where it hadn’t been necessary to put his own decisions into doubt…
An arm was put around him and Loki held his breath, too afraid that it would fade away if he changed anything about this moment. The weight of the arm lingered, but Loki still refused to move or to open his eyes. Yes, he wanted to, desperately. What if he was gone then? What if he had never been here in the first place?

The touch was soft and fleeting. Lithe, agile fingers that brushed his hair from his neck. Biting his lip Loki tried to stop himself from sobbing, holding perfectly still. He knew. He knew if he moved the illusion, the spell, whatever it was, it would collapse and fade away.

"Why don’t we stay here? We could make this place ours… Not Asgard, not Vanaheim… something else… just for us…"

Loki had smiled, he knew that. Smiled and dismissed the idea…

"How sad… I thought myself cunning enough to take Asgard’s future king away…"

Again Loki had laughed, shaken his head and whatever he had said… probably something about never being king of Asgard. Not as a second born, not with Thor right in front of him… and for some reason that hadn’t mattered. Not at all. Not for a second.

"If I can’t do that and we’re not going to stay on Midgard… would the Aesir accept a Vanr as their King’s consort?"

There was his voice. Loki could hear it. Deep and soft as silk and he made the words sound sweet. Keeping his eyes shut Loki concentrated on the feeling of lips brushing over his cheek and warm breath ghosting over his skin. How could he remember what he had said and what he had sounded like… but still have no idea what he had looked like? The colour of his hair, his eyes… had he been tall or of small built… freckles or pale skin… muscled or lithe… Loki didn’t know.

Not the slightest idea how he had answered this question… Thor had called the Vanr his betrothed. So Loki knew what had been his answer in the end. He would have teased him… back when Loki had been whole, happy and full of trust… he would have teased him about it, they would have laughed… At least Loki thought so.

A gasp escaped his lips when Loki felt a gentle pressure against his mouth. So familiar and yet completely new. Just the hint of a kiss and so playful. Full of confidence, because it wasn’t the first one and an endless amount was going to follow.

“I am sorry, but I am astonished that the most brilliant person I have ever met cannot see what is right in front of him. Especially since everybody else can see it. You know who they see? A prince with a sharp mind who knows diplomacy better than anybody else, who uses his charms to turn enemies into allies, who is strategic and cunning, who knows other cultures almost as well as his own and who has mastered the art of magic like no other mage… That prince would make a fine king. He will be a great king.”

Nobody knew honesty better than the god of lies. Not the smallest bit of a lie could be found in these words. The Vanr had meant every single one and Loki knew that he had believed them and that none of it had mattered. He felt the warmth of two strong arms engulfing him and all that talk about kingship and worthiness faded into nothingness. It didn’t matter. He didn’t need it. They could live in Asgard, Vanaheim or Midgard… Loki could be king or become the most powerful sorcerer to ever walk the Nine Worlds. Set them on fire or create one of his own. For the both of them.

Whatever they wanted to do…
Taking a breath Loki gave into the warmth, feeling it all around him and that was it. This was being whole. Suddenly Loki was a person again and tears welled up in his eyes. Suddenly he knew what to say though. Never had words slipped so easily from his lips. “This king you talk about… he would have a Vanr as his consort?”

Goosebumps were spreading all over his skin when Loki heard him laugh. Light, contagious, bright, beautiful. “Said Vanr definitely wishes so, but a king can choose whoever he wants to be with.”

Desperately Loki was trying to hold back the tears. He couldn’t change anything, he would destroy it and realise that he was still sitting here, somewhere in Portugal. Alone. Yet he was completely powerless and he felt the wetness on his cheeks. The warmth didn’t leave him though. Instead there was an additional weight on his shoulder, leaning against his head. Somebody else’s resting against his own. Warm breath in his hair. “Said Vanr definitely wishes so, but a king can choose whoever he wants to be with.”

“And if said prince never was to be a king? If all he ever wished to aspire was to be a prince? Or a sorcerer?”

Fingers played with his hair and another hand settled on his stomach. Loki had never felt so warm… coldness was just a fading memory. So far away and out of his reach. “This talk about kingship and princes is not what I had in mind and you know that. So stop teasing me… I don’t want to be the consort of a king, of a prince or of a sorcerer… I just want to be Loki’s… if you want that too.” Loki could hear in his voice that he was smiling, but he was also nervous. So unusual for him, he was never nervous. Never… Loki was whole and perfect.

By now he would have turned his head. Loki would have kissed him and tasted his fresh mouth, he always tasted like peppermint… like herbs. “This is not the formal way to do things. You would have to ask the all-father’s permission to even ask me this question…”

Then he had said something. Something lovely… like most things he said. “I know, but I don’t care about the all-father’s opinion on this matter, only about yours. It’s none of his business…”

The tears were running freely down his cheeks and Loki wanted to turn around, to bury his face in his chest, to take in his scent, to touch him and to ask him what his name was… and to tell him that Loki would rip apart anyone who would ever dare to hurt him. That Loki would hunt the ones down who had killed him. Like he had promised…

“I’m never going to be yours… and you are too strong to ever be mine… but if you want us to be together… yes, that’s what I want.”

Finally his worth wasn’t about crowns or might and yet Loki knew that he mattered. He was whole, warm and important. Lips brushed over his temple, arms pulled him closer and he could feel him all around him. Their strength seemed without limits, they didn’t need each other’s presence and yet they had both decided that they wanted it. Then Loki remembered the cold blade of the void. It had started to cut right here. This had been the first thing it had taken away. Them together on Midgard, sitting by sea and choosing each other, deciding that they wanted each other…

Opening his eyes Loki turned… if he could only be fast enough… the warmth dropped like a veil and the memory of the touch became just that. A memory. Loki heard the waves crashing into the cliffs and he was alone. Releasing a shaky breath that turned into a sob Loki pulled his knees up to his chest and stared into the distance, letting the tears stain his cheeks and the hole inside of him
devour him.

They had taken him away. Twice… and with him so many parts of Loki…

“I miss him too…”

Loki would have given anything, even his revenge to get a glimpse of the Vanr, to look at him. Right now he didn’t want to look next to him, because Loki knew what he would see there. His own illusion haunting him. There was no strength left to face him, Loki had finally found one of the pieces. He had felt the presence and therefore his absence hurt even more. “Not now… I can’t do this right now…”

Thomas next to him remained silent for a moment as if he was giving him time to breathe, but Loki only felt himself falling apart. One piece was back and now it was only emphasizing how many others he was still missing. His face… and the Vanr.

“Right now is the moment for it… you are ready. We are ready.”

There was no ‘we’. Loki shook his head, watching the grass move in the wind. “I don’t need you to relish… what I did. I don’t need your malice.”

“Malice is part of who we are.”

There was no ‘we’.

“Be quiet… Go away and die… like you were supposed to. I created you…” Loki trailed off, the words lying on his tongue, but they wouldn’t pass his lips. He was feeling so tired, ripped open and he couldn’t give it in. Couldn’t admit it was true…

Thomas wouldn’t leave though, Loki felt him just as close to him as he had felt the Vanr. Trying to get under his skin, to fill the hole. His tone was gentle, almost indulgent and for a fleeting moment Loki stopped hating him. “What is your favourite book?”

“Shut up…” So weak and feeble.

The other one was proving his patience, repeating the same phrase. “What is your favourite book?” What was the point in fighting? Sighing in defeat Loki mumbled a single word. “Hamlet…”

“Mine too.”

Balling his hands into fists Loki’s head spun around, taking in Thomas’ appearance. He was mirroring Loki’s position. His long black hair was framing his pale face and Loki lowered his gaze, avoiding his eyes. “Stop it.”

“I love the story, the structure and the poetry in it… like you. What about sports?”

“Football…”

“I know. Me too.”

“You aren’t proving anything.”

“What am I trying to prove?”

Gritting his teeth Loki shook his head, ignoring him and that voice which could have come easily
from his own mouth.

“Do you sometimes miss your family?”

A spark of anger, but it wasn’t enough to pull him out of passivity. “I do not have a family.”

“Me neither.”

“Stop talking.”

“What was the most beautiful gift you’ve ever received?”

Loki snarled in response. “I don’t remember….”

“Which one do you remember?” Terribly adamant, not willing to stop this torture.

There was no way to distract himself, to think of anything else, to keep his thoughts from wandering. The three boxes full of books that Stark had chosen for him, full of beautiful lines that were only waiting for him to get them. Loki remembered their feeling, the old leather and the soft paper.

“The books…”

“I love them too.”

Biting his lip Loki didn’t react, he couldn’t. If he looked at him now, he would see it and it would be so much harder for his eyes to deny this.

Next to him Thomas continued talking with a voice Loki hadn’t created but had been born with. “I’m not going to ask you, but I’m going to tell you what I hate most. Thor and every single despicable word that comes out of his mouth. He never cared about us and only now that we drove him into madness, he starts realising what he did to us. That he killed us. Thor killed him. He took him away from us…”

The tiniest bit… Thor would never fully understand it.

“Of course, he won’t…”

Loki’s hatred was still there, still burning fiercely and it gave him the power to raise his head, to look at his creation next to him. Green eyes were staring back at him and Loki couldn’t find a single hint of blue inside of them.

“Why did you step between Stark and Rogers?”

Still looking at him Loki only saw himself and there was no greater sign of weakness than lying to oneself. “I did not want him to get hurt…”

Loki knew everything about words. As soon as air was carrying them away, there was no way to ever get them back. Also your thoughts only became real when you voiced them. It was real now and Loki felt the emptiness… pulling back. No. Not by him. Not when Loki couldn’t even remember the Vanir’s name.

“We couldn’t protect him… but we can prevent it from happen again.”

Yes, Loki could. He had the power to do anything he wanted, but right now Loki didn’t know if he wanted that. More than he yearned for their blood. So he’d finally find peace…
“We can do both…”

Maybe… Loki didn’t know. It was too much at once and he still felt shaken-up, confused, slightly dizzy. Yet his hand was completely still when he reached out to touch the illusion next to him. Loki’s fingers touched his own face which dissolved in green light, slipping back beneath his skin, becoming one with his magic.

Just like this Thomas was gone and Loki admitted to himself that he had never been there in the first place.

With the back of his hand Loki brushed the tears away and took a deep breath to gather himself. A weak attempt since he felt like his head was spinning. Part of him still chasing after the first moment the void had taken and the feeling of the Vanr’s presence. While another part of him was already searching for…. Something else.

Slowly coming back to life Loki’s magic began insisting although being torn itself. Feeling like he belonged here and that he should be somewhere else. Pushing himself up to his feet Loki shivered a bit, being reminded of that moment on the beach. And what had brought him there.

Giving into his magic’s desires Loki was pulled away and found himself in another place that wasn’t unfamiliar but without meaning. His magic hadn’t carried him to his room, but to the person who was rushing from one screen to another. Loki’s eyes followed Tony with mild fascination, barely registering how rushed he seemed. The cut above his eye stood out. A trickle of blood was running down his temple, but Tony was completely unbothered by it. Unlike Loki.

The Captain had drawn blood…

Slowly Loki started moving, not clear about his own intentions, but he couldn’t keep standing there and watch. Tony was bent over a desk full of different keyboards attached to several screens. The room was filled by the sound of fingers hitting keys without care and in such haste. Loki stopped behind him, unable to overlook the tension that had taken a hold of Tony’s frame. If Loki reached out right now to touch his shoulders, there would be no softness beneath that skin. A hard soul was bound to take a hold of the body it was living in sooner or later. Loki had seen it happening and he saw it happening right now. It was his doing, his intention.

None of that mattered right now.

Loki felt the emptiness pulsing inside of him with the memory of being whole and desire. Why couldn’t he tell if it was the lingering touch of the Vanr or Tony’s presence? There was only one way to find out and Loki told himself that this was reasoning and not some foolish, illogical yearning.

Ever so slowly Loki raised his hand and hesitantly reached out. His eyes still fixed on the muscles of Tony’s back moving. What would it feel like if Loki just touched him? Could it fill the hole? Let him feel the warmth? Loki’s fingertips were hovering over Tony’s back and suddenly it all stopped.

Tony froze in his movements and so did Loki. The sound of the tipping vanished instantly and the silence was deafening. Not daring to breathe Loki remained in his position, staring at the dark shock of hair. Seconds full nothingness until Tony straightened up and turned around. The blood on his temple started to dry and the lines around his eyes told stories of sorrow and of lack of sleep. Brown eyes were looking at Loki and through him at the same time. It wasn’t possible for Loki to not see the change. Eyes deprived of life which were suddenly filled with a tentative glimmer. Tony could feel it on his skin or lingering in the air, his scent or he heard his heart beating… Loki
didn’t know, but he could see a sign of life which hadn’t been there since Tony had witnessed Loki drawing his last breath.

Tony’s gaze left him, traveling across the room, searching in vain until it settled back on Loki right in front of him. Still looking through him and yet Loki could feel these eyes on his skin and Loki put his left hand on his mouth to suppress any sound. There was a weight in his arms. A lifeless, already cold body and yet Loki never wanted to let go. His hands were moist and sticky with blood.

The pain was tearing him apart and Loki’s magic was longing to wipe the red off Tony’s face. Or yell at him when he was closing his eyes. Even through the black shirt Loki thought he could see the blue glow, he could definitely feel the power radiating from it. Again it was pulling Loki in and he wanted to touch it, to drown in it and lose himself in the heat. Just feel…

Loki’s hand came closer and Tony still wasn’t moving, with his eyes closed as if he was waiting. So close, it was calling Loki and…

“Tony? Are you okay?”

It all fell apart.
Hello everybody,

Last chapter was quite a bit emotional, I know and Loki is still trying to come to terms with it... a rather difficult job

No se puede vivir con tanto veneno,
La esperanza que me dio tu amor...
   No me la dio más nadie,
   Te juro, no miento.

No se puede vivir con tanto veneno!
   No se puede dedicar el alma
   A acumular intentos,
   Pesa más la rabia que el cemento

No ~~ Shakira ~~

(One can't live with so much poison
The hope that your love gave me
Nobody else has given me
I swear to you, I'm not lying

One can't live with so much poison
One can't dedicate their soul
To accumulate attempts
Rage is heavier than cement

Not trusting his feet Loki teleported to the other end of the room and Tony’s eyes flew open. They darted around, unfocused and Loki knew that he was searching for him.

“Tony?” Banner stood in the doorway, worry etching on his face and Loki wanted to run away. As far as his feet could carry him. Maybe to Vanaheim…

Ignoring Banner Tony made a step forward, still looking for something he couldn’t grasp. Looking for Loki. His logical mind told him that nobody was here and he was right, which wasn’t any comfort at all. The realisation was still infuriating. Loki could see Tony’s fists shaking and Banner knew the signs better than anyone else. “Tony, you should…”
“No! Don’t tell me to sit down or to calm down or to do anything!” Fisting both hands in his hair, Tony shook his head and he was yelling. For the first time since all of this. Naturally Banner didn’t back off, but he didn’t try to corner Stark either. “You should let it out… You can, so do it. Otherwise it will eat you up and then you won’t be able to do anything about it.”

Not saying a word Tony turned around, smashing his fist against one of the desks. The sound made Loki wince. “They are blaming him! They killed him and now they are trying to put the blame on him! How is killing him not enough! She… a notorious liar and double agent looked at me and told me that he was fake! How could anyone be like… this is…” Trailing off Stark shook his head, his arms still trembling and Banner was slowly coming closer.

Loki had possessed this knowledge all along, it had been clear as day from the very beginning. Should Tony ever find out the truth about him… it wouldn’t result in rage or fury. It would destroy him. Tho-… Loki had given him something that Tony had craved for, affection, freedom, someone to listen, someone to talk to who didn’t depend on you and who didn’t want you to depend on him. Somebody who didn’t give a damn, without any pretence. If this was to turn out a lie, Tony wouldn’t be able to take it. Everything would just end, this was a way to end a life.

The Widow had already told him, but there was no reason for him to believe it. Loki was fairly sure that too much damage had been done for Tony to ever believe a word coming out of the Widow’s mouth. Especially not when he was trying to defame someone he trusted completely. Someone he loved.

“What did she say?” Banner’s voice was gentle, but he clearly sounded distrustful. “She did have to try to prove this somehow to you. Otherwise this strategy makes no sense…”

Tony let out a dry laugh and it gave Loki chills. So deprived of any joy or positivity, even unsettling for him.

“I didn’t let her finish… oh, she had something up her sleeve to back it up, I am sure of that. They don’t come up with something like that without securing their asses… She definitely wanted to tell me her entire story… About Tommy being… I will kill her with my bare hands…”

The lack of Banner’s reaction was very telling, but Loki couldn’t concentrate on that. He couldn’t concentrate on anything. He remembered the things he had told Tony and so many secrets that Tony had shared with him without asking a question. Because he had wanted to, because he had felt like Loki should know these things, because he also wanted to learn about Loki. Wasn’t that how it was supposed to be? What all the romance novels, poems and legends told you? Most of the time they tried to remain silent about the fact that you didn’t have to like the things they told you. Most likely you were to downright hate or despise some of them.

A cold shiver was running down Loki’s spine, slipping inside and caused a feeling so unbearable that Loki felt trapped in his own body. Wishing he could shed it and leave it behind.

Had it been like that? Had the Vanr known things about him that Loki hadn’t been willing to tell anybody else? Had he felt secure talking about the doubts in his abilities, his jealousy of Thor and his dark, all-consuming desire to possess enough power to create and destroy worlds? What had made the Vanr smile and what had tortured him? Would Loki have tried to free him of that? And would they both have kept things to themselves, because Loki didn’t believe in giving himself away.

“I don’t see where she would want to go with that… She is smart, she can’t seriously expect you to fall for this…”
Loki was pulled from his thoughts by Banner’s voice and he could sense the brilliance these words… just like the desperation that he was trying to hide. Ignoring that Tony had just uttered the wish of killing a person that clearly meant or had meant something to Banner. The talk about talking her life was nothing new…. But until now both of them hadn’t got the impression that Tony would actually enjoy doing it.

Tony kept pacing around the room, his face still distorted by the burning rage he was feeling. “Because she doesn’t care! Not about what Tommy meant to me or who he was! She’s just answering to Fury and what they’ve wanted all along…” Stopping in his tracks Tony blinked and Loki could see the realisation in his eyes. Banner saw it too. “What?”

“It’s not about me… of course I wouldn’t believe this shit. I knew him… unlike them I actually knew him! This is about Steve…”

Loki felt lost in a haze, he had trouble to make out the sense in Tony’s words… if there was any sense at all. Luckily Banner was feeling similar. “What do you mean?”

“They won’t be able to keep this charade much longer and they know that. You said it yourself… Steve doesn’t kill innocent civilians and he won’t stand for that… So they have to make him the bad guy. They’ll make it look like… I don’t know! She said he was…” For a second Tony stopped and Loki simply knew that he was having trouble repeating these words. He remembered them just fine, but they were going against anything he believed in. Trying to hurt and taint something he deeply cared about. “… he wasn’t real, but a double identity. Like… an agent or something like that.” So much disdain in a single word and it was suddenly different.

All along Loki had known about the trust, the devotion and Tony’s deep affection for… his former boyfriend. Until now it had filled him with proud and sweet malice. Parts of that feeling were still there, what he had created had been fake, prepared with care, following a precise plan. Or… had it been different? Loki couldn’t quite remember. He wasn’t sure… All he knew was that now he was feeling something slightly different.

If Thomas had never been there, because Loki hadn’t been careless and had created a character so much like him that it had never been an actual character… Did that mean that Tony was infatuated with… And why should Loki care? This was his game. Not a new one. He had done with numerous times before. It had never been his favourite, but he wasn’t going to deny its great usefulness.

Affection, sexual pleasure and even love could be used as a tool to bend people to your will and Loki had mastered that weapon so long ago. As soon as he had realised the fleeting glances and smiles of the maidens in the palace. Then of some very young members of the guards. His status as a prince had made Loki unperceptive for this kind of attention. He was royalty, they were supposed to shower him attention and show their respect. Only when a new steward who had been in charge of Loki’s favourite horse hadn’t been able to keep his eyes off Loki every time he came to the stables to go for a ride. It was rude to stare at a prince and even Loki wasn’t used to people blushing when he spoke to them.

It was then that Loki realised that people considered him beautiful. Comparing people’s reaction to his physique to his reflection in the mirror Loki began to understand what they were seeing in him. His appearance was pleasing to the eye and although it still wasn’t something Loki based his confidence on, he could see the advantages in it. He continued to prefer impressing the Asgardians with his magical abilities, but Loki found out he was also pleased about people admiring his looks.

Only after this realisation Loki had paid more intention to how he moved, how he carried himself and how to react to other people’s attention. It had been remarkably easy. Loki had been born with
more grace than most of his friends could ever dream of. Especially Thor.

Ever since being a little child Loki had tried to get people to do what he wanted. Just little tricks and plays. It had never worked on his mother, so he had turned to the guards and servants. Asking things or little favours that not even a prince could demand of them. Loki had figured out his talent very soon and only practicing magic gave him more pleasure. When he used words he could do pretty much anything.

Being beautiful and desirable had suddenly opened up new possibilities and Loki had been eager to explore all of them. The words he had used now were different and always accompanied by suggestive or charming smiles. Loki had been stunned by how good it had worked. Only when he had gotten older and joined Thor on his adventurous quests and later on his own, Loki had gone further than sweeting talk people. Touches and kisses and sometimes suggestive promises that he mostly never fulfilled. Using his charm and his beauty was quickly a standard weapon in his repertoire of trickery and he didn’t mind sleeping with people to get what he wanted. Occasionally he also got pleasure out of it, but even if he was bored or disappointed by his lover’s abilities… Loki didn’t mind, but he always preferred using only his words or magic. Those were his favourite and most powerful tools, the ones he was most proud of.

So no, seducing Tony had been nothing new… except for the fact that Loki had never intended to follow that route. Tony wasn’t the first person Loki had deliberately made fall in love with him. Yet Loki had always been able to turn around and walk away without giving them a second thought. Some of them had loved creations, characters, images. Others had loved other versions of Loki that didn’t exist, something he pretended to be that he wasn’t.

Now that he tried to remember Loki wasn’t able to tell. It all seemed so far away. Like a life somebody else had lived and Loki had only heard about.

Had any of them…? Did Tony…? Did Loki want him to? Why should he even care? Loki didn’t care…

He couldn’t remember caring about the Vanr, but Loki could feel his shattered mind and the hole inside of him which were proof of the Vanr’s absence. Also Loki was still marked from that moment on the beach which had been filled with… Loki had found a small part of him again. No, he wasn’t whole, but he got something back and it was beautiful.

Tony had nothing to do with this.

Loki was shattered and broken… because the void had taken the Vanr from him. Doubting that his devotion and love for Loki hadn’t been real would be an insult to him. It had mattered to Loki. In the emptiness and darkness Loki had tried to hold on to that memory to stay sane, to protect himself and it had been torn from his hands. It had mattered so much…

Did any of this matter? Anything that was happening in this room? What Tony was feeling for him?

Squeezing his eyes shut Loki shook his head, not able to separate all these thoughts from each other. He couldn’t see the whole picture, kept getting lost in details and the memory of Tony telling him that he was the most important thing in his life. Again, the mere life of a mortal, but an impressive one…

“… They’ll make up a story. About him being a bad person, about him not actually giving a damn about me, but… trying to gain information, infiltrate the Avengers, whatever! It will be something that will make Steve think that maybe it wasn’t so bad that they shot him. I have proof that they
did it… so they have to work their way around it, but I won’t let them do it. They killed him and now they’re trying to dishonour him! No! Fucking no! I will end them! Jarvis, I want…” Tony wiped the keyboards off the table, screaming and Banner was instantly there to grab him.

“Tony…”

“No!” Trying to shake him off Tony fought Banner’s grip, but even without being the Beast Banner was able to hold him back. “I won’t tell you to calm down! What they did is atrocious and horrible and there is no way I’ll ever understand how you feel right now, but before figuring out our next step you have to… be able to think clearly. Blind rage is only going to play into their hands. She didn’t tell it Steve, but you! To make you lose focus!”

What perverse irony…

Tony didn’t stop fighting, his hands fisted in Banner’s shirt, trying to push him away and hit him at the same time. “They are blaming him! While we’re talking here, they are making shit up about him! I won’t let them do that! Jarvis, get the satellite ready and…”

“No!” Banner shouted over him. “These bases are full of people who have nothing to do with it! Also there is no guarantee that you’ll get the guys you want!”

Slowly Loki realised the stakes of this argument and the power he had. Tony was willing to kill so many faceless persons to only get to a few. The few who were besmirching the memory of his lover… with the truth and yet it was a lie.

“Fury knows what you can do! He won’t be there! You won’t get him like this! Just people working in offices who have now idea what happened to Thomas! You will kill innocent people! Just like them!” Banner was still holding on to him, his stare hard and it still showed his care and affection for his friend. How much he shared his pain and could even understand what he wanted to do, but he knew it was wrong. Terribly wrong.

Tony was panting, his fingers curling around the collar of Banner’s shirt and his brown eyes were flashing dangerously. He could be a demon or a monster if there wasn’t so much pain. For Loki to feast on and he wanted none of it.

It reminded it too much of his own.

“They killed him, Bruce! They…” From a scream to a whisper and all strength was slipping from his body, slumping against his friend who didn’t miss a beat and wrapped his arms around him. “They killed him and now they won’t leave him alone. I didn’t protect him and I can’t protect him now…”

Banner closed his eyes and his face was still telling Loki how much this was taking from him. Almost too much. “I know, but it’s not your fault. It’s not your fault…”

There were still no tears, but it was there. That moment Loki had waited for, what he had longed for. All this time he had wanted to revel in it.

Tony’s suffering.

The first of the Avengers who was experiencing what Loki wanted them to feel. He could have killed all of them months ago, but he hadn’t, because that wasn’t enough punishment. Loki wasn’t whole, Loki was shattered and they should know what that felt like. From the moment Loki had faked his death he had seen it slumbering under the surface, but Tony hadn’t let it out. Instantly he had been focusing on planning his revenge, on figuring out how to make them pay.
Now it was there. The mask was cracked and dropped from Tony’s face. Emptiness had to make room for desperation, sorrow and overwhelming guilt. So fascinating how many emotions a face could convey. How broken beautiful eyes could look.

“I could sleep when he was there… he didn’t try to change anything about me… He was… He didn’t want any of the money, the fame or the parties… he was here for me and I didn’t protect him. They killed him and I didn’t protect him. He was lying in his blood on the street and I couldn’t do anything. I knew he would die. Now they’re covering his name with dirt and I am going to protect him now… I’m going to…” Shaking his head Tony looked up and there was nothing but agony. As if a part of his soul had been brutally ripped out off him. As if he wasn’t whole… “He’s dead. They killed him…”

“I know…” Banner was whispering, not able to offer more comfort, but he was trying to do the best he could.

All air was being pressed out off his lungs and hot streams of magic were taking a hold of him. It was part of Loki and just like him it didn’t know what it wanted, what it was supposed to feel. If this was right or wrong… or what he should do. Loki was at the top of his power, he could do anything he wanted and Loki had no idea…

No, that wasn’t true. Loki’s desire to see them suffer and die hadn’t vanished, nor lost any of its intensity. Except for him.

Tony was right in front of him, Loki thought of the Vanr and when he finally saw him breaking down… Loki’s tasted ashes in his mouth. Bitter and hideous. That couldn’t be all. So Loki had been Thomas… So what? Loki could still pretend, like he had done so many times before… What did it matter that Tony adored him? It didn’t make it any more or less sweet. The effects were the same and Loki…

A book written by Shakespeare, a sport from England, a certain type of food or a sarcastic attitude. None of it meant anything.

Loki was magic. Loki wasn’t Midgardian. Loki was unlimited power. Loki was a person without a face and with a mangled mind. Loki was not whole. Tony hadn’t seen any of that. What did he know? Nothing…

“Stark…”

A sudden rush of energy went through Loki and he had to ball his hands into fists to stop his magic from seeping out and wrap itself around Thor’s neck to choke the life out off him. What was he doing here? How did he get even here? Why had Stark brought him here? Thor should be rotting in a hole, crying after his lost mind and his abandoned brother.

Ridiculously quickly Tony let go of Banner, taking a step back, but the mask couldn’t be put back together. Thor could see it just like Loki and Banner did.

Even an oaf like Thor had to realise in what kind of situation he had just stumbled. A man falling apart in front of him. In all those years Loki hadn’t seen that look on Thor’s face. It was unfamiliar and that was another weight to rest on his shoulders.

“During your absence Doctor Banner filled me in about… what they did to Thomas. How they deliberately murdered him to unrightfully gain access to your weaponry…”

He still wasn’t able to hide the wounds, but at least now Tony was getting angry and his face
hardened. “Where are you going with this?”

“I know I have given you reasons to distrust me, but I appreciated Thomas… I accept that you do not want to hear why, but I was… I liked him and I want to help to bring his murderers to justice. The ones I took for my allies without knowing them… while renouncing my own flesh and blood… I have failed to protect and avenge a loved one. If you accept my request… I offer you my power and strength to take revenge on those who murdered him.”

Loki wanted to scream. This wasn’t about him. This was…

“Let’s go then.” Tony nodded more or less to himself and Loki longed for the void to take another part of him. To make this disappear. To make him stop feeling like this.
The Discrepancy

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody,

Just came back from seeing Civil War a second time and I love it, although I am a little frustrated with the ending and I am seriously confused how anyone could be Team Cap ;) I love you, Steve, but... Tony is right :D

Have fun with the next chapter, Loki is still trying to figure himself out and we're rushing towards the finish line.

_________________________________________________

If I ever hurt you, your revenge will be so sweet
Because I'm scum and I'm your son
I come undone

Come undone ~~ Robbie Williams ~~

_________________________________________________

It was hard to tell if there had ever been such an amount of power. Seemingly without limits and it had its own ideas and desires. Naturally they matched Loki’s, but it was too much. Too much at once, especially when the last bit of reason inside of him told him that he wasn’t supposed to do this. Not if his plan should ever work out.

Thor on Tony’s side wasn’t something that Loki had considered and it was definitely something Loki didn’t want. The mere idea was giving him nausea and that burning sensation inside of him was threatening to annihilate him if he didn’t do something about it. Like reaching inside of Thor’s head and twisting his mind before yanking it out, tearing it to pieces.

Yet all Loki could do was standing there and watch the scene unfold itself in front of him. The three of them talking, most of it coming from Tony. The sting of what happened was still present, the look on his face slightly distracted even when he was about… Loki didn’t get a single word. Every single thought in his head was so terribly loud, he couldn’t put his finger on a single one and everyone else in this room could only be moving their lips. Loki didn’t know and he didn’t want to know.

Thor should be sitting in a corner, staring into nowhere, not even knowing that his mind had been ripped apart. Then Loki would give him new nightmares. Images so horrendous that they would burn themselves inside of whatever was left of Thor’s brain. People, loved ones being slaughtered, entire worlds burning, piles of bones and human decay. Faces torn to shreds, drying blood and screams of agony.

That was what Thor deserved. He had no right to go to war for Loki. Not now, not ever. Thor had killed him. Thor had killed… the Vanr.
No, Thor had no right…

Especially when there was no guarantee that it would cost his life… Loki had faith in Rogers, he might be able to do it, but he lacked the will. As much as Loki admired a man with clear principles, this attitude was getting in his way. Especially when Rogers was the only one who could take him on.

“It would make most sense for them to be there, because it has the best security and they put some thought in their firewall… or they finally had someone working on it who knows what they are doing… during the last couple of hours. I just need some time and it will come down too. I don’t see any reason to… it’s too obvious. Fury’s hiding somewhere else.”

There was talking and Loki shook his head, he was so tired of words. Tired of them, he wanted to see blood, hear cries and feel the suffering. The room was suffocating him, closing in on him and the air tasted like dust and sweat. His stomach was clenching and Loki blindly teleported outside.

Sucking in a deep breath of fresh air Loki bent up over, resting his hands on his knees. He felt as if somebody had placed a heavy weight on his shoulders and Loki couldn’t shake it off. It was there to stay. Also inside of him there was another feeling. A bitter knowledge that was harder and harder to deny. Loki had committed a terrible mistake. Or maybe the initial idea hadn’t been bad, but Loki had been too patient and had turned greedy. It would have been so easy to end it so long ago and there would have been suffering and despair.

Loki had been denied so much that of course he wanted more. If he had stopped some time ago, none of this would be an issue. He would be… No, Loki would never be whole again, but it wouldn’t be like this. If Loki had killed them earlier on, he would not be looking at Tony now and… tempted to build a wall around him.

It wasn’t right. Not one way or another. Emotions had the terrible ability to linger. Regardless if they were good or bad. Looking at his hand Loki remembered what he had done. He could feel the warm energy of this blue light and its power pulsing. How consuming his desire had been to rip it out. To tear it out off Tony’s chest and to watch his shocked and broken expression while he was dying. Killed and betrayed by the man who he had been in love with.

But Loki hadn’t done it. Instead he had kissed Tony. To kill him later on and to cause him even more pain.

Raising his other hand Loki’s fingers were following the lines which betrayed his age. There was something about them that he quite couldn’t grasp and Loki wasn’t even sure if he should go after this. It was buried and hidden in darkness. The void had taken it like everything else, but Loki simply knew that this wasn’t part of his most beautiful memory. No, it had been taken from him for another reason. Something was sticking to his skin. Feeling disgusting and filthy. There was nothing there, nothing to be seen and yet Loki started to rub his hands as if there was something to get off. No matter what he did, the feeling wouldn’t subside.

Loki had sliced, stabbed, hurt and killed enough to know what this was. His hands were covered in blood.

According to Thor’s story Loki hadn’t been there when… the Vanr had died. Loki hadn’t been there. If he had been there, the Vanr would still be alive and Loki would have never let go of Gungnir. Loki would have stayed with him in Vanheim. He would have never gone to that frozen wasteland and Loki would still be whole. Thor wouldn’t have pushed him into the abyss. Loki would be with someone who…
Closing his eyes Loki tried to remember. The day they had met. The moment Loki had decided that he was worth his attention. A smile. A word. His name. Anything. But there was only a blank space.

It didn’t matter… one single thing. One single thing Loki was completely sure of. All he had access to was one memory. Some words and touches, but no face and no name. Loki knew that he had cared. He had been in love with the Vanr and he hadn’t lost himself in it.

Thor had killed him…

Trying once again to brush his hands off one last time Loki closed his eyes and tried to keep that desire down. To just lash out. To set everything around him on fire. To splatter blood all around him.

Yes, he had let pass so much time and things had… changed, but Loki made the choice to not be dominated by this. Loki still longed for their pain and their death. Until now Thor nearly hadn’t suffered enough and it didn’t mean anything that he was offering Tony his help. The damage had been done and the betrayal had happened so long ago. Nothing Thor could ever do was going to change anything and Loki would make sure that all of this ended right here…

Sitting down in the grass Loki took a breath, trying to empty his head to find that presence. So easy to spot, so different from anybody else. No wonder that even the mortals realised that he was special, not like them. Not because he was from another time and didn’t belong here, but because he meant what he said. A rare gift. In every single world, not only this one.

Seconds later Loki frowned in confusion. The Captain hadn’t moved yet. How was he still in the same place as before? Loki couldn’t be sure how much time he had spent in Portugal, but it had been more than enough for Rogers to join the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D, Loki was sure of that. Why would he still be there?

Instead of continuing to ask himself this question, Loki let his magic pull him away and bring him there. One of the factory buildings. The Widow was lying on an old, half broken bench, her teeth clenched and her features tensed. Sometimes it was hard to decide between physical and psychological pain. For now Loki was content with what he saw. Her hand wasn’t the reason though why they were still here. Loki could see a rough-and-ready bandage on her side. When had that happened? Perhaps one of the armours had hit her after all when she had been fleeing. It made sense. The Captain wouldn’t risk moving her too much, because he didn’t know the gravity of her injury. Tony had created some nice updates on the suits, maybe he hadn’t just used energy beams at her, but also bullets. Vibranium for Vibranium. No way to be sure, Loki was speculating, but there had to be a reason for Rogers to keep her here. Probably waiting for back-up and medical attention.

Rogers was sitting on the dirty floor next to the bench, his head leaning against the wall, the look on his face far away and haunted. Wasn’t it terrible to see your friends getting hurt? Or trying to kill each other? She was in pain and Loki wished he could take all of it in, punish her for the arrogance and the deceit. Looking down on people when being a murderer herself.

“They’ll be here soon…” Rogers was breaking the silence, his voice firm and determined and yet Loki could tell that he said that to reassure himself and not her.

“I’ve had worse…”

Loki didn’t doubt that, but it was still audible that she barely got the words through her gritted teeth. Rogers bit his lip, his perfect little soul giving him trouble seeing a friend, a woman in pain.
“They’ll have to secure the area… but I think the suits are gone.” Taking another look at his phone Rogers let out a deep breath. “I still don’t get a signal…”

“Stark fucked them up…” Her voice turned into a groan and Rogers instantly got up only to kneel down next to her. “You should stop talking…” Checking her bandage Rogers was probably sure that she wasn’t losing blood. Or more blood than she could take.

Turning her head to him the Widow glared at him. Seemingly angry at him, because he was acknowledging the fact that she was hurt. And she was hurt badly.

Taking a step closer Loki leaned over her, taking in the state of her hand. It was a sight that squeamish people wouldn’t be able to stand. The skin had turned flaming red, was partly broken and the entire hand was smashed. Fingers twice the size of what they were supposed to be. Loki could easily tell that the bones had been shattered into tiny little pieces. Even he would need quite a lot of time to undo the damage. Midgardian medicine was about to face a challenge.

Rogers was having the same thought, his eyes lingering on her broken member without disgust, but clear concern. A hint of resignation maybe. Seeing it made clear that she was suffering horrendous pain and there was nothing he could do to make it easier for her.

Helplessness. Not able to take care of the people and watching them go through pain that you thought yourself responsible of.

If there wasn’t Tony… Rogers would be the one who would make it worth it. Captain America was in agony. Way more than the Widow. Unfortunately they weren’t able to see that. Only Loki could which was deeply unsettling.

Everything he believed in was falling apart, everything he wanted to protect was turning against him and soon he would be forced to destroy it himself. To rip him apart Loki didn’t need his hands nor his magic.

“I know it’s fucked up…”

Why was she still talking? It was annoying Loki. How about putting his hand on his her mouth and smothering her to death? Very tempting, but it wasn’t the moment and Tony should still have his chance.

“The doctors will take care of it. It will be alright.”

It looked like she wanted to laugh, but her face only contorted in another fit of pain. What a feeble attempt to comfort her. Both of them knew that there was much to do about her hand, but Rogers always had to try to make everyone feel better. No matter how grim things were.

“We’ll get you to a doctor and you concentrate on getting better and… I’ll take care of all of this. I’ll end this madness.”

Even Loki was tempted to believe him when he heard him talk like this. Or he would believe him if he didn’t know the truth. If it wasn’t him who was pulling the strings.

After squeezing her eyes shut for a moment and getting through another fit of pain her wide, glazed eyes focused on him. “You wouldn’t… be able to talk him out of this…”

“I don’t plan to.”

Suddenly Loki felt as if someone was wrapping a hand around his throat. Not cutting off his air, but
slightly squeezing. As a warning.

The Widow just looked at him and just for a fleeting second Loki thought that there was no distraction, no pain pulsing in her hand or in her side, tearing her insides. That second she needed to process what he meant or what she thought that he meant. She had no idea who he was. Everyone else saying these words, it would mean that they were out for blood, but Rogers wasn’t like this.

“He didn’t get... any pleasure from... hurting me.”

Unlike Loki, he remembered fondly her bones breaking.

Rogers blinked, somewhat confused. “Of course not... it’s still Tony.”

“That’s not...” Her voice turned into a groan and she held her breath for a moment before continuing. “He is not enjoying it... but he still feels like he needs to do it. That makes him dangerous. He is not... going to be... distracted by enjoying it... it doesn’t give him joy. It’s just... cold revenge.”

So right and wrong at the same time. Yes, it was revenge. It was cold and calculating, just like Loki. She was wrong about there not being any joy. Just looking at her like this made Loki smile and lick his lips in malicious pleasure. Coming a little bit closer Loki looked down at her, careful not to brush against the Captain. Her hairline was moist with sweat, her eyes again squeezed shut and her lips in a tight line. How much he hoped that her death would be similar to this. Slow. She should torture herself.

A smile spread on his lips and Loki tilted his head to get a better look and there were blue eyes staring at him.

There was no reason for Rogers to even look into his direction. There was nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing but Loki.

The hand around Loki’s throat started squeezing, just a little bit.

The Captain’s eyes were still on him, searching, full of distrust, doubt and worry. Loki hadn’t made a noise, he knew that. He could move soundlessly and he always did. No magic was involved and yet Rogers wasn’t focusing on the suffering person who he considered his friend, but his eyes were searching for something else in this room. Or someone else.

Even she noticed. “Cap?”

“Nothing... it’s just...”

Loki’s air was cut off and Rogers was frowning, his gaze lingering on Loki. He could feel in on his skin and he wanted to run away, to hit Rogers, to become visible and tell him to get away. Tell him to kill Thor for him. Tell him to help Tony to get rid of everyone else. Tell him to kneel and to go to hell. To die.

Then Loki could hear them. Still too far away for human ears to hear, but they were coming closer. Lots of them. Rescue was finally on its way.

Rogers blinked, his eyes leaving Loki and the pressure subsided. “They’re coming, Romanoff. Time to get you out off here.”

Minutes later the agents came in and things started happening. To Loki’s surprise they had been smart enough to bring doctors with them. They took care of the Black Widow and after a short
amount of time they could transport her out off the building. Everything under the Captain’s surveillance.

Helicopters were there to pick them up and Loki was confronted with silence for a long time. Something he couldn’t stand. If there wasn’t any talking, the thoughts in his head were threatening to become too loudly. Thoughts about the Vanr, Tony and the void. Loki wanted none of it. Just his revenge, his peace, so he could leave.

So Loki kept watching Rogers the entire time. Trying to read on his face, to understand what he was planning to do. Tony was demanding violence and murder, something Rogers wasn’t willing to do. Then again, Tony wasn’t going to stop as long as there was still a single breath inside of him.

Rogers would be forced to kill him to stop him.

Something Rogers was unable to do.

And if not… Loki had stopped him once. Intentionally? Would he do it again? Loki couldn’t tell and this was scaring him.

Finally getting to wherever they were hiding Loki played Rogers’ shadow, walking three steps behind him, always following him around. They ended up in a small room, barely furnished and Fury was waiting there, sitting at the table, trying to convey his usual sovereign demeanour, but the last day had already taken its toll on him. The tension in his shoulders couldn’t be denied, although he tried to put on that emotionless mask.

Rogers didn’t sit down, just kept standing there, looking at Fury and Loki took a seat. Wishing he could tell them to start the show, because he was ready for it.

“Did you change your opinion about Stark, Cap?”

The reproach was barely hidden and Loki watched the Captain’s jawline. Would Fury ever learn? This man in front of him was his only chance to stay alive. Tony had gathered a little army around him. They were only three men, but every single one of them was unmatched. Ignorance wasn’t bliss. It got you killed.

Rogers crossed his arms in front of his head and was slowly shaking his head. He wasn’t answering the question, but dismissing the question. “I am not going to talk about this. Not again. Tony said he had proof. He said that there was an order to get a piece of technology that his boyfriend had on him and that it would be considered collateral damage if he died in the process. He said he had seen it. Is that true?”

Smart… lovely.

Fury’s face didn’t show any reaction, but once again his eyes were telling Loki another tale. There was no time for confusion, not when panic was approaching so quickly. That meant that Fury did know that his life was depending on Rogers. He couldn’t afford the tiniest doubt.

“I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about, Cap.” How long has it been since Fury had said the truth. An honest line and now Rogers was frowning, not sure whom to trust and determined to not make a quick decision.

“I asked him why he was so sure that you killed Pine. He said that he scanned through your data and found an order to get the bracelet that can call an Iron Man suit. Is that true? Is there an order to get the bracelet?”
Standing up Fury was about to give one of his speeches, with that voice of a crazy man. “I have never even heard of such a thing. None of my sources ever said anything about that technology. We are agents, it’s our job to ensure the security of the citizens of this country. We do not kill them.”

Lie. Bunch of lies and one of them was so easily discovered. The agents had seen using Loki the bracelet in the tower. He had made sure of that. They had had the information and the motive. Bulletproof.

Yet Fury was honest about one thing, he never gave the order to kill Thomas Pine. That was also the one thing Rogers desperately wanted to believe. The one thing he needed to believe to go on. Taking a moment Rogers raised his eyes to ceiling, clearly lost in thought until his body language told Loki and Fury that he had made his decision. “Okay… so why is Tony saying that he got this proof when it doesn’t exist?”

A big weight was falling of Fury’s shoulders and he straightened up a little bit. “Because he has gone mad. Maybe he believes it himself.”

Rogers was slowly shaking his head. “No. He sounded very clear on that. What if that order does exist? What if somebody wanted that bracelet and tried to make it look like S.H.I.E.L.D did it? To send Tony on this… To turn him against us?”

Us… Loki didn’t like the sound of that. Rogers wasn’t like them. He was so much better. He was an actual person.

Except for that little word… this theory was brilliant, Loki could have come up with it himself, but it was time for Rogers to let go of his little fantasies that this could end well.

Of course Fury immediately jumped on the train, willing to do pretty much anything now to keep Rogers in his camp. How scared must he be now? Tony had blown up one of their bases, used their technology against them and turned their little weapons useless. And he wasn’t going to stop. He had put out a list and Fury’s name was on it.

Steve’s wasn’t. If he wanted he could walk away from this and nothing would happen to him.

“Someone setting us up?” Fury raised an eyebrow, then nodded softly. “You are thinking about the robots.”

“Exactly. They were there too and we still don’t know who is responsible for them. Tony was on to something, but… now nobody is looking into that anymore, because we got the most powerful man in the world trying to destroy S.H.I.E.L.D. We are fighting each other… for some people that probably sounds like a dream come true.”

Loki leaned back and let his eyes wander over Rogers. He was so wasted. So much potential was hidden beneath that glamour that only made people think of muscles and physical strength. Perhaps they should have left him in the ice.

Clearly Fury wasn’t interested in a conversation that didn’t make Tony look like a traitor and the worst person on this planet, but he knew when he had to pretend and bow to someone who was in a better position. “You might be onto something, Cap, but that doesn’t help us right now. Not with Stark still out there and working on a plan to destroy us. We’ve told him that we didn’t have anything to do with it. Sure, we can try to find whoever is responsible and make them confess to Stark, but that will take time and resources… We don’t have time when the most resourceful man on the planet isn’t wasting any of his. You saw what he did to Romanoff. No matter why he did
it… he went too far.”

A shadow was creeping on Rogers’ face. “I know…”

“He’s got Thor.”

“What?”

“He hacked the security and let Thor out of the cell. Telling him he would help him to get revenge for his little brother. That power hungry son of a bitch. Stark downright promised him to punish the people who hurt him. He also got Banner. Cap, I don’t have to explain to you what that means.”

No, that wasn’t necessary. Not at all.

Rogers sat down.

Why hadn’t Loki seen that coming? Rogers had already been carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Naturally he would be only one left in the end.

“Bruce is reasonable… if I could only get to talk to him… and…” He was trying to grab a straw, but there was none and Loki couldn’t stay in his chair when he realised something. Rogers was breaking down and there was no one there to catch him. Or to even offer him a hand. None of them understood. They were all scared for their lives and he was scared for them.

Scared of what they might make him do.

Scared of what that would make of him.

Someone or something that he didn’t know and that he didn’t want.

Putting a hand on the table Rogers stared at it, not saying anything and loneliness was sipping from every ounce of his body. This man was all alone and Loki got another moment.

Captain America at his lowest. Realising that he wouldn’t walk away from this without blood on his hands.

And nobody cared but him.

Balling his hand into fists Loki still couldn’t stop them from shaking. It wanted out. Magic that was too great and too powerful to remain locked in a physical shell. An unknown amount of hatred was pushing it out, wanting it to do its will. To make them bleed. To make them pay and suffer.

And to protect.

To be able to.

Just this once.

To wash his blood of his hands…

And to destroy, to cause pain.

Loki was a god, he could do both.
The Promise

Hey,

Do you guys know what I'm doing? I'm sketching out the final chapters... yeah, can't believe it myself. It's a pain in the ass, I'm completely lost in three pages of notes, but it's still fun :D

So... this is the last "filler" chapter, I promise. Yes, it's all character developement, but I know you want to see shit going down :)

_________________________________________________

Et j'te mentirai
S'il faut pour te garder
C'est fauter je sais
Et fais semblant d'y croire
Si je m'y prends mal
Mais c'est pour mieux te garder

Je te mentirai ~~ M. Pokora ~~

(And I will lie to you
If it's necessary to keep you around
It's cheating, I know
And pretend that you believe in it
If I'm doing it wrong
But it's to keep you around)

_________________________________________________

They were talking strategy. Different guns and traps and getting into contact with Banner. Yes, the Widow had already tried, but they all agreed that Rogers was the better option. Loki had no experiences to compare this to, yet he thought they could also be talking about invading a country. Would that amount of military forces be enough to take down these three giants? They could also be throwing stones.

Loki was satisfied with the effect this whole situation had on Fury. Finally realising how important and outmatched he really was. Not against a god, but a mere mortal. A mechanic.

Rogers was strangely passive and Loki didn’t like it. Yes, he did want Rogers on this side of the battle, but… Loki didn’t know. Feeling the urge to change something and not knowing what. Loki just didn’t know.

“Captain?”
Both him and Rogers winced at the frustrated tone and Rogers raised his head, looking at the general, colonel, whatever who had spoken up to him. Repeatedly. Rogers seemed uncomfortable while Loki wanted to rip that man’s throat out.

“I am sorry… what was the question?”

That man who wasn’t even worth talking to the Captain was saying things, but Loki didn’t hear any of it. He saw his blood painting the walls and the floors. Or him lying on the ground and Loki using his foot to crush his throat. Similar to what Tony had done. Only worse.

“I don’t know about any new weapons. I am sure you guys have most of it on video, so check that out…and… he didn’t use anything new against me… he was fighting fair… it’s just… there was something else…” He wasn’t looking at anybody, a far away gaze on his face, trying to figure out something that was impossible to grasp.

“New technology?”

Loki gritted his teeth. Their undisguised greed was disgusting. They wanted something that didn’t belong to them and they had no right to claim it, but they still desired it and didn’t care. A sinister thought was being born in Loki’s mind. This wouldn’t go over without him laying his hands on one of them. His disgust for them would get the better of them and Loki didn’t want to hold back anymore.

“No… I can’t really explain it, because I don’t understand what happened.”

“Why don’t you try, Captain? We can’t afford to miss the tiniest detail.”

Tiniest detail? Like the Asgardian god standing right among them, plotting their downfall? That kind of detail?

It was no coincidence that Rogers still wasn’t looking at anybody. “I had him on the ground… I was trying to disable the suit when… I was pushed off him, but it wasn’t an energy beam or a blast… I felt someone touching me. There were hands, I could feel the fingers.”

Loki flinched, but Rogers continued anyway. “They were strong. Incredibly strong… but there was nobody there. I got pushed off and Tony flew away.”

The atmosphere in the room changed and it was obvious that they didn’t believe him. Or thought that he was interpreting things wrong. It was Fury who finally spoke up. “Are you sure? Maybe Stark used some…”

“No.” Rogers shook his head. “Somebody else was there… I…” Loki could see him swallow. “I could hear them breathe…”

A cold shiver was running down Loki’s back and he felt exposed. Tony and Rogers. Both of them. Loki was supposed to be a fleeting shadow. Not able to be grabbed and so quickly gone. Having his complete lack of control pointed out like this made him want to evaporate all life in this room with a burst of magic.

By now Rogers had their attention, even they couldn’t continue doubting his senses when he gave them so many details. When he seemed so sure. “Do you think that he had someone there to help him and Stark was somehow able to use his stealth technology to hide them?”

“It’s possible…” Rogers didn’t believe it for a second, his gaze travelled across the men in the room and when Captain America was barely able to hide his disdain you should seriously wonder
what you had done wrong. Getting up from his chair Rogers walked past most of them. “I am going
to check on Natasha.”

“Captain, we are not…”

“Yes, I am finished.” He sounded cold and didn’t look over his shoulder when he left the room.
Loki smiled contently to himself and followed him. The medical wing wasn’t far away and Loki
stopped in the doorway. A beautiful picture to take in.

Finally she had been stripped off her arrogance and that stern, distant demeanour. Lying in that
sterile white bed she looked small and fragile, beaten into shape. Tony should see that, it would
make him feel better… No, it wouldn’t.

“Hey…”

Tilting his head Loki took a look at her hand. It was placed in a strange apparatus that kept her
from moving it. There was wire and metal and the sight would be hard to bear for anyone who
didn’t enjoy seeing her in pain. Loki couldn’t keep the smile of his face. She was so pale, dark
rings beneath her eyes and worn out. How frustrating it must be to be shown your own limits? If
you had those.

“You are still here. So they have no idea yet what to do.”

She just couldn’t stop.

Rogers had sat down next to her bed and he was still trying to keep a positive outlook. “Let’s not
talk about this. How are you? What did they… say about your hand?”

They both looked at it and she was still holding on, her expression not showing any care as if
nothing could ever get to her. Even being cut apart or broken. How arrogant could a single person
be? She wasn’t like them. Not special, just a killer and Loki had been fooled by that shocked look
on her face. Every breath she took was putting Loki on the edge.

“They aren’t done operating on it yet. Not talking about it, but is there need to? It’s never going to
be the way it was. There is only so much medicine can do.”

“I am sorry.”

“You have nothing to do with it. I have to thank you, Steve. He wouldn’t have stopped. He isn’t
going to stop…”

No, he wasn’t and there was nothing they could do. They hadn’t cared, treated him like a little
soldier to keep in line and when he had refused to play their little game, because it was pathetic.
Tony was so much smarter, he didn’t need them.

The reminder of who did this caused Rogers to tense and he closed his eyes for the shortest
moment. Things had changed so drastically so fast and the Captain was never going to understand
how all of his was possible. He didn’t have it in him.

“Nat… I need to know… the thing you said about Pine… is it true? Him being a fake?”

Loki smiled, grateful that Rogers was asking the right questions. The Widow met his gaze and her
lips curled slightly. What? Was Loki’s comedy displeasing her? He was a 1000 times better at this
than her.
“Yes. I’ve looked into him before and he looked perfectly clean, but after him getting shot and Stark losing his mind… I did another research… admittedly with more resources. It wasn’t a priority before. Some parts in his life don’t add up. There are parts that looked perfect, but I found some holes. I’ve been seeking out double agents for years… you learn where to look, details that they forget to take care of. All the official work had been done, perfectly so. Somebody knew what they were doing, but there was hardly anything else. A track of official documents… but there was hardly anything personal. Tickets for concerts, receipts, being tagged on photos… it’s so much harder to create a fake persona now than fifteen years ago. I found things that didn’t add up, so I took another look at his birth certificate… it was perfectly done, but it’s not real. I have no idea how. It’s only been there a couple of months… I hate to admit it, but I couldn’t trace anything back. I have not the slightest idea who created his persona. It’s not possible for one single person to do that. Not in the way it was done. Thomas James Pine was an alias. We have no idea who died yesterday.”

Both Rogers and Loki had been listening carefully and perhaps he should be angry that something so trivial was revealed to be another one of his mistakes. Midgardian paperwork was ridiculous and time consuming. Yes, he should consider himself lucky that she only found the flaws now. What flaws were they anyway? Only people who didn’t matter would believe them. Loki had created an emotional bond which made all the other details irrelevant. No matter what they would come up with – Tony would dismiss it.

Rogers didn’t move. Perhaps he didn’t even blink. His behaviour would be similar to her if it wasn’t for his eyes. All that concern and pity. The confusion. “Double agent… You think that’s what he was? There can be other reasons for people to take another identity. Being on the run… or…”

The Widow was shaking her head and Rogers fell silent. “S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t see it the first time they checked him out. His cover was fantastically done. It was professionally done. Also you think it’s a coincidence that a man with a fake identity ends up being the boyfriend of the most powerful man in the world? Then he got murdered. Somebody else is involved in this. Somebody with an agenda. People are working on finding out who he really was. They search his face and fingerprints in all databanks. It would be easier if we had his body, but we were able to get some blood, so we have his DNA. Sooner or later we’ll find something. Maybe we can convince Tony this way that he should take a moment to listen to us…”

Loki’s eyes were glued to Rogers’ face, fascinated to see his repulsion. They were estranging him more and more from their ideas and plans. For her this was all a mission, a mission for survival since Tony was clearly after her life. Of course she would look at this another way than Rogers, but he still couldn’t stand the cold way she was talking about a dead person. A person who had meant so much to Tony. Who had been murdered.

“No.”

“What?”

“Tony isn’t going to believe it. Not a single word… Not now. Not anymore. You shouldn’t have told him. Not like this. Not in that situation. Not without proof.”

Her already hard features turned to stone. “Not in that situation? He was out to kill me, Steve and there is no situation in which he will listen.”

“Natasha, you said that he wasn’t real. The person that meant most to him in the world got murdered and you just told him that this person might not have been… Tony is dying inside, because he couldn’t protect him and you outright… he was a victim and you made him… Tony
will think that you are blaming Pine for what happened to him.”

“There is something wrong about him and you know that.”

“I don’t know anything, Natasha!” He was raising his voice and her eyes got a little wider. “Tony loved this man and he is dead now! So Thomas Pine wasn’t his real name… That doesn’t mean his relationship with Tony wasn’t real. That doesn’t mean he didn’t care about him. We don’t know! I am not jumping to conclusions without more information on this. All that matters now is that Tony is going to stop… so no more people will get hurt and we can find out what happened and who is behind all this.”

After the last word had passed the Captain’s lips silence began to fill the room and Loki was content. Rogers would protect her like a civilian or an innocent. Yet they were drifting apart.

When the Widow spoke up again, it was a soft and still bitter tone. “You said yourself that he would not stop.”

Rogers didn’t respond, a clear silent agreement. There was probably nothing left to say. He had nothing to do with this, he wanted nothing to with this, but somehow he was the one who was going to have to take care of it. Getting up from his chair Rogers looked at her and Loki thought he was trying to smile. He didn’t make it.

“Any news on Clint?”

Loki’s eyebrows went up. Why would she be the one to ask this question?

Shaking his head Rogers sighed. “No. He completely dropped off the radar. Wouldn’t you be the first person he would talk to?”

“I don’t know. We disagreed… on an issue about S.H.I.E.L.D. He talked about quitting. I didn’t think he would do it…”

Almost unable to believe it Loki stared at her. This was the thing she was feeling guilty about? Barton being smart and running away from this madness.

“We need to find him before Tony does…”

Good luck. Have a nice time trying…

“I need to leave… I…” Whatever he wanted to say Rogers kept it to himself and left her alone. Without taking another look at her Loki followed him, surprised to find out that Rogers wasn’t heading back to the people who were trying to overthrow Tony. Instead he was walking down small hallways, around corners, finally ending up in an empty, dark examination room. Driven by curiosity Loki watched how Rogers sat down on one of the benches. His movements were slow, heavy and he was clearly tired. Worry and sorrow were now taking a physical toll.

This was it. The whole setting. Captain America had decided to sit in a tiny room, without turning on the lights, hiding there. He wasn’t crying though, he wouldn’t allow himself to. Not even for a second. Loki couldn’t see the difference. Probably neither did the Captain. It all came down to this. An empty room and being alone. Rogers had long outlived his time and yet his life had been so terribly short. Most of it spent alone. Family had died so long ago and then the last person he cared about had fallen to their death. Something Rogers would always blame himself for. Then that woman. Rogers was still young and beautiful while death was already reaching for her, after a long and probably fulfilled life. She was the last connection to Rogers’ former life. What he considered his real life.
So what were they doing? They were trying to control him by setting another woman on him. Rogers didn’t even know that. It was cruelty. Loki knew one or two things about this. They were almost doing an equally good job as him.

Loki took in this sight and the darkness didn’t let him see Rogers’ face. His head was bowed, his demeanour broken. It reminded Loki of his power. All of this was his doing, his brilliance and strategy. Loki had most of them where he wanted them. Tony and Rogers were torturing themselves and Loki…

Putting on hand on his chest Loki held his breath, trying to ignore the sudden sting of pain. It was in his chest and yet Loki wasn’t able to actually locate it. All he could be sure of was the fact that it didn’t subside and that this wasn’t the first time Loki felt it.

Rogers was still sitting there, not moving and suddenly Loki saw someone else. The darkness was cast away by light filling a big beautiful chamber. Nothing was warm about it, even the light was cold. Loki could feel it on his skin, it was giving him goose bumps. He was sitting on something soft, probably a bed. Something was wrong with his face. His cheeks were wet. The pain wasn’t just pulsing in his chest. It was everywhere.

There was something in his hands. So lithe and soft. It had to be some kind of garment. Bringing his hands up to his chest Loki curled his fingers. The garment was cool against his skin, just like everything else around here. Loki was alone and none of his incredible power could anything about it.

Leaning against the wall Loki tried to shake the memory off and he succeeded, but the pain remained. Rogers was still there, only accompanied by his loneliness. Not able to take it Loki let himself fall, his magic carried him away and he dropped to his knees, unaware of his surroundings. It was still there. All that power running through his veins and the sensation seemed strangely unknown to him. As if he had only discovered it yesterday. Yet it was overshadowed by this dark hole inside of him. Pain that was gnawing on him, on every part and no matter where he turned, he only fell deeper. Then the agony latched onto his power, trying to bend it to its will and Loki’s magic didn’t refuse.

He remembered that. Wanting to let it go, to use it to…

Loki shook his head, trying to loosen the grip the memory had on him. He knew what was waiting there for him. The most beautiful moment of his life… and the worst.

Falling over Loki kept lying in the grass, staring at the haulms, but he didn’t see them. It was quiet, peaceful and Loki didn’t belong here. He was an intruder and this world didn’t want him. The same way he didn’t want it. They should just let each other go. So many places were still waiting for Loki. Far way and free from all the things that might remind him of his humiliation or his…

Not giving it a second thought Loki reached into the other dimension and took out his phone. Instead of using it he tossed it from one hand to the other. This was one thing he didn’t have to worry about. Sure, Tony was trying to locate it, but this could be barely considered a piece of Midgardian technology anymore. Loki had placed so many spells on it, transforming it more or less into a magical object. There was no way to track it down, Loki had erased any trace that might lead to a person that had never existed…

Letting out a long breath Loki closed his eyes and put the phone to his ear after typing a certain number. With every passing second Loki’s hope got stronger that his call wouldn’t be answered.

“Will?”
It could have been Loki. Tired and worn out, yet there was something else in his voice. Just a hint. It was enough for Loki to understand. His call was the best thing that had happened to Rogers today. Surrounded by people who didn’t care and wished he would just happily agree to the order to kill his friend.

Steve wouldn’t do it, Loki knew that. He would be the one to find other way although he didn’t know it himself right now.

“It’s going to be okay.”

A moment of silence on the other end of the line. Then Loki heard this whisper. “What?”

“I know you always have to be the one to take care of everyone else. To be the great hero, to tell them what to do, to tell them it’s going to be alright. It’s always you, so I am sure right now you have nobody to tell you these kinds of things. So I am calling, to do that. It’s going to be alright. You’re going to be okay.”

The words were coming naturally, flowing from his lips. There was no need to even think about them. Loki was telling Rogers what he needed to hear and what he wanted to say. Rogers had taken care of him. Now it was Loki’s turn.

Loki could hear Rogers releasing a breath, it sounded shaky. “How do you know that?”

He didn’t get specific, but Loki figured that he was referring to everything.

“I know you… you told me what you are up against and I figured… I just wanted to make sure you have someone who isn’t going telling you that the world is going to end or how awful things are… or that good people get murdered by… You are going to be okay and that’s not me telling you what you want to hear. I know you’re going to be alright. You will work this out… and if you find out that you don’t want to do this after all… then just go. You don’t have to do this. You’re not obligated, you didn’t sign up for this. If you want to leave, then do it. If not… you are going to be okay.”

Loki managed to smile at the end and he was again rewarded with silence. Rogers was actually thinking about it. It was out of the question that he would ever leave, but even Captain America had to sometimes play the thought. What if all could be a little bit different? If you could just change one single detail…

Killing his so called brother before he could do the same thing to the Vanr… Taking the life of the person who actually deserved to die… Would you do this for me, Steve? Play the hero for me?

“Thank you…” Rogers was whispering softly and Loki closed his eyes. “I really hope you are right.”

“You are not going to leave, aren’t you?”

“No… I can’t. People are in danger and I have to help a friend…”

Yes, that’s exactly what you are going to do…

“Of course. It’s going to be okay… if you do what you think is right and whatever that’s going to be… I’ll have your back. I only wish that would actually mean something…”

Now the response was instant. “It does. Thank you. Will, I really wish I could continue talking, but… I’m running out of time.” There was honest regret and Loki sighed. “I see… Please, take
care. Call me as soon as you can…”

“I promise…”

And everybody knew that Captain America was keeping his promises.

After the call had ended Loki realised in relief that the pain had lessened and he was able to get back on his feet. Giving into his magic Loki opened his eyes and took a look around. Screens, tables, empty. Nobody was here. They had left.

Tony was gone and he had taken his two biggest weapons with him.

So what if Loki just left too? Everything had been set into motion, there was nothing left to do… all he needed to do was to sit down and watch the spectacle.

How long had it been since Loki had been afraid? Of something else than the monster that was hiding beneath his skin.

Loki had built a card house only to watch it collapse and now he was scared who might be end up beneath it.
Hello everybody,

Can you believe it? We've finally made it to the final act... there isn't much left, so enjoy the ride :) 

_________________________________________________

Love is a dangerous game to play
Hearts are made for breaking and for pain
I'm selfish and I'm cold
I promise you I said: Never again.
Never again. No never

The Race ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

“Loki…”

“Don’t. Leave me alone.”

“You shouldn’t be…”

“I want to be alone with him. Just leave…”

“When you see your child suffering, it’s an impossible task to step back. You are my son and you have to go through pain that I wished you would never have to experience…”

“I don’t want to talk to you. I just want to be alone with him. This is the last time I will ever be with him. I was not there when he died. He… would not have died if I had been there. This is the last moment I have with him and I do not want to share it with you. Leave, I am not going to ask again.”

“Loki… it is not your fault.”

“I know… I know exactly whose fault it is.”

“War is an ugly thing, turning men into beasts and light into darkness. I am so devastated that it cast its shadow over you. Love was brutally taken away from you. I know the grief you are feeling is consuming and it is already starting to devour you… please don’t let that happen. He would not have wanted that.”

“Do you know what he wanted, mother? Do you?”

“Loki…”
“He did not want to die. Not in a pointless war that has nothing to do with him or his people. He did not want to be stabbed and slowly bleed to death. Alone and cold. He wanted me. And I wanted him. That’s what he wanted. I cannot leave him now, but when I do… my grief will not be devouring me but them.”

“This is a dangerous path you are intending to walk down.”

“His skin had already turned cold when I got here. His lips are turning blue… like…”

“How many of them did our people kill? How many women were made widows today? Do you believe that your pain outweighs theirs?”

“I do not care about their pain. They are monsters, all of them and they deserve to die. I will bring death upon them. Free all the Nine Worlds of them…”

“This is not my son speaking.”

“Is not that the reason why you are here? You have told me how talented I was… how powerful I would become… I did well, didn’t I? All of the court, Asgardians, Vanir, Elves, Dwarfs, all of them complimenting me, staring at me in awe and you were so proud of me… I was proud too. One hour ago, when I walked into this grave, when I saw my betrothed lying here, his life stolen from him… I realised that it was all nothing. As if I had been holding back my entire life. I saw him and something inside of me was… unlocked. When I felt his cold skin against mine. You can feel it too, don’t you? That’s why you came here. You could sense it. My power… and now you want to stop me from using it. You are wasting your time. I can do whatever I want… and I want their world to burn…”

“You are wrong, my son. I have come here for one single reason. My child has been severely wounded in battle. So my place is at his side.”

“Shouldn’t you be with Thor then? He was the one who got wounded…”

“They merely cut Thor’s flesh and his injuries will heal, thanks to you… I am afraid your wounds will never heal, Loki. So my place is here.”

“Mother…”

“I am so sorry, Loki. I wish the Norns would have granted you more time together…”

“Please… this is all the time I have left. Please, mother.”

“Alright… I will wait outside. Nobody is going to come to take him away. Not before you are ready…”

“I will never be ready…”

Opening his eyes Loki stared at the blank ceiling. The impact and force of the words had brought him down to the floor and yet they were fading away so quickly. Within a few seconds they were all gone and all that was left was the blood on Loki’s hands. Dry and sticky.

There would be more blood. Loki didn’t know when they had left, perhaps they had already reached their destination. Maybe some people were already dead. Still Loki didn’t found the strength to get up and join the fight. This was strange, because Loki felt his magic pulsing in his
veins, moving, dancing and being full of energy. So much power…

Loki still perfectly remembered the look on Odin’s face when he had realised. When they had brought Loki to him, in chains, seemingly humiliated and not a word or a demeaning glance had managed to cast the smirk off Loki’s face. At first the mighty all-father had thought it was arrogance or madness.

Even Loki wouldn’t deny that these were his weaknesses and yet he had smirked for another reason. Because he had known there was nothing they could do. Yes, they put him in chains, but only temporarily. They would lock him away, but Loki would get out. Because there was so much power inside of him.

In front of Odin Loki played his little game, using words as daggers and did not hide his disdain for the man who had robbed him off his face. Odin was quick to speak his cruel sentence. The rest of his days would be spent in the dungeons and his magic was to be bound.

Loki’s smirk had only grown bigger, looking deranged, so incredibly pleased.

Just try old man… let me show you what you brought into your home. What kind of monster…

Then Odin had tried. Tried. With pure satisfaction Loki had watched the surprise turn into shock. Every guard around them instantly understood the seriousness of the situation judging by the all-father’s face. What a terrible thing had to be happening when he wasn’t able to keep his stoic expression, when he wasn’t able to hide how shaken up he was.

“What is it, old man?” Loki had made a step forward, only to have one of the guards yank him back. The chained collar had been cutting into his skin and Loki hadn’t been able to stop smirking. “Mother must have told you. Did your arrogance not allow you to believe it? How could the all-father be so blind? It’s in my blood, it’s me and you and nobody else is able to do anything about it. Your naivety disgusts me. The magic chains and walls will only be able to hold me back for so long. Better lock me up and start searching for a way to keep me there… You’ve seen my power now. Soon you will feel it.”

So they had locked him away, Odin had spent excessive amounts of dark magic to secure his cell while Loki had sat there and had smirked. He had known that it would take years, but nothing would be able to hold him forever.

Perhaps they would even need him someday… and that was exactly what happened.

Odin, the all-father, had surrender to shock when faced with Loki’s power. There was nothing Loki couldn’t do if he had enough time and the will to do it.

Yet he was lying here like a pathetic helpless creature. Like a mortal. Feeling so disgusted with himself Loki finally got up to his feet. All he needed to do was to make a decision. His hands weren’t bound, he had all the power. The strings were still in his hands, he could still decide who to cut loose and who to make dance. It was Loki who had the power. A god could choose who to kill and who to save. After all they were just pawns for him to play with. His game.

There was no way the last round was going to be played without him.

Stepping into the shadows Loki gave into his magic and became one with them.

***

“Keep trying… All of Tony’s known numbers and Bruce’s…. This is our top priority.”
The agents nodded, but their faces made clear that they didn’t agree with the Captain. How weird this must feel to them? A military man who wished to solve a problem by talking to the opposite party… and wasn’t directly going to war? Actually trying to solve a problem without using his fists or an arsenal of weapons which would cause collateral damage. Of course Rogers was fighting a losing battle, but he was still willing to do it, for him it was the only option. Convince them to stop the bloodshed and to find a peaceful solution. They rewarded him with barely hidden spite. His own people. Loki wasn’t surprised, feeble minds didn’t know other ways to react to other views.

“Sir, there is no response. I honestly don’t think that us calling every five minutes is going to change anything.”

Loki raised an eyebrow at the agent and the Captain gritted his teeth. Maybe he was tempted to punch the other one, but instead he repeated his first words. “Keep trying.”

This must be a conscious decision. Captain America spending his time here, trying to call Tony or Banner, to talk to them while the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D was preparing their weapons or were coming up with whatsoever cruelty to make sure the Man of Iron was never going to bother them again… and how to steal his creations.

The whole building was pulsing. With nervousness, energy and fear. They were getting ready and they were waiting. It couldn’t take much longer. Tony didn’t know where Fury was hiding, which base or hideout to attack, but he would figure it out, no question about it. Seconds could turn into minutes, then into hours… it was a countdown. Nothing to change about that. Loki was waiting just like the rest of them and followed the Captain about half an hour later when he left the agents who were still unsuccessfully trying to establish contact with Tony or Banner.

Loki slipped into the headquarters behind Rogers. People were rushing around, but he didn’t even look at them to find out what they were doing. His eyes were glued to Fury, in the middle of the room, his only eye reading meaningless words on a screen. When Rogers stepped up to him, he didn’t look at him. “You still think this is a good decision, Cap?”

Raising an eyebrow Loki cursed himself for missing out on so many details. In the grand scheme they probably didn’t matter at all, but Loki still liked to know everything that was going on. Especially when Fury was clearly upset with him and didn’t try to hide it, although Rogers was the one person in the world which he needed most.

“I don’t see why I should you infiltrating a clearly abandoned tower… Tony isn’t there, we know that and he is too smart to leave any traces and hints behind what he is going to do next. Honestly, I think this is a waste of time.”

Ah, not when you hoped to obtain some technology by entering in the Stark Tower. This could very interesting, because there was a good chance that the fake body was still there. Tony wouldn’t allow anything happen to it. That was for sure more important to him than protecting his suits.

“The tower is the heart of all of Stark’s operations, whatever we find there is going to help us…”

“Sir…” Another minion approached Fury who was willing to give him his attention. “They are about to enter the penthouse…”

Sighing softly Rogers shook his head. “This is not going to achieve anything. I know Tony…”

Fury sent him a look that said ‘Really? Do you really know him?’ before focusing on the screens in front of them. Loki did the same. A squad team had been climbing the stairs, breaking a door open without any resistance. They still had to know that the penthouse had been completely trashed by
the Hulk and the robots? The camera showed the broken windows, the destroyed furniture… and so many little places and corners Tony had kissed him in. Loki shook his head to get rid of these thoughts.

“What are they supposed to find here?” Rogers didn’t hide his distrust, but Fury ignored him.

The squad advanced further and Loki began gnawing on his lower lip when he saw more glimpses of the penthouse on the screens. How much time had he actually spent there? Pretty much living with Tony. It was obvious where they where they were heading, which room they were searching. Loki knew that they would get in. Tony had let them into the tower, abandoned or not, they wouldn’t be in there if Tony didn’t want them to be there. Were they still so arrogant to not see that?

The door to the workshop was locked and instead of trying to be smart, they started attaching explosives to the door and Loki rolled his eyes. Really? You wouldn’t even try? Again, Tony let them in. One minute later there were some more pieces of rubble and they entered the workshop. No, Loki didn’t like it, not at all. But Tony had let them in…

A smile spread on Loki’s lips when the cameras caught the state the workshop was in. It looked even worse than the rest of the penthouse. There was nothing left of all the extraordinary technology, Tony had obviously used one of his suits to blow up pretty much the entire lab. It was a field of destruction. Fury cursed under his breath, but quickly straightened up. “Bring in the techs… see if they can save anything.”

“Really?” Rogers crossed his arms in front of his chest, softly shaking his head. “This is Tony Stark… He doesn’t want you to find anything, so you are not going to… What about Jarvis? This isn’t…” He gave up, not even finishing his sentence, because he knew that it was useless.

Time was passing again. Rogers pulled out his own phone, trying to reach Tony or Banner. Again it was pretty much useless. Loki’s patience was running thin, awaiting an attack or something to happen.

“Sir, I am sorry… Stark did a very good job at erasing all these files. We can save a little bit, but it’s pretty much nothing in the big picture and there is no way of telling if it’s something we could use.”

The shadow on Fury’s face grew darker. Had he really thought he would gain something out of this? They were treating Tony like an idiot and that made Loki’s blood boil. Nothing made him more furious than people looking down on intelligence when they were so clueless themselves. “Fine… get whatever you can… expand the raid to the rest of the tower. Clear the rooms, there is no way he got rid of everything that could tell us something.”

“I would strongly advice against that.”

Loki’s head flung up… just like everyone else’s. They had been in the tower for so long, nobody had expected to this voice anymore and there it was. The tech on the screen flinched and started glancing around, probably searching for whatever machine was still working to transmit Tony’s voice.

“Stark, you’re…”

“Shut up, Fury. I don’t want to hear a single fucking word coming out of your mouth. Not yet. To the goons, if you enter another one of the rooms of this penthouse you will deeply regret it. Not one step you’ve taken so far hasn’t been watched and if you do another one, I will send the Iron
Legion. Because you are idiots and mindless minions, I will make things pretty clear. There are still things of my dead boyfriend in this house. The man you murdered. You touch any of his stuff, you die.”

Loki felt like the hole inside of him was opening up, Fury was about to respond, but Rogers took a step forward. “Tony, please… let them get out of there and we talk about this. Your terms.”

Fury shot Rogers a dark glance that was completely ignored.

“I am done talking, Cap. You chose your side, stick to it.”

“Stark, do you fucking realise what you’re doing? None of our agents touched your boyfriend and you would know that if you used the part of your brain which hasn’t been completely destroyed by alcohol. You are murdering innocent people and closing your eyes when it comes down to facts.” Fury was growling, Rogers was shaking his head and Loki was feeling so cold.

You could hear people breathing in this room for several seconds until Tony was responding. Loki was afraid to hear what he might say and he had no idea why. “And what would those facts be?”

The rattle in his voice was a clear threat and Rogers was grabbing Fury’s arm, whispering sharply. “Don’t! It’s going to set him off!”

Fury ignored him and Loki could partly get it. From his point of view Tony was weak and let himself be used by someone else. Even if… he was ignoring the obvious danger, but was walking right into it. A child playing with matches. “Romanoff told you what she found out about your boyfriend. You are supposed to be an intelligent man. Didn’t you look him up? You are being played. A pretty face, a ‘fuck you all’ attitude, falling willingly into your bed. Also multilingual, highly intelligent and a past with more holes than a Swiss cheese. We could help you with this, Stark. Back off and let us find out who he was and who set him on you.”

Rogers closed his eyes in resignation. The last spark of hope had now been extinguished and Loki counted the seconds.

“Sir!” The agent’s voice resembled a squeal and Loki felt the old disgust rising inside of him. “Somebody is trying to get into our system!”

Fury’s fist connected with the table top. “Stark!”

The next time Tony spoke Loki had trouble recognizing him. So deprived of all joy and brightness. It didn’t sound like him at all. “Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. This is Tony Stark. I will be honest. I am putting you out of business. You are going to lose your jobs and if you get out of the place where you are right now, that’s all you risk losing. Every system S.H.I.E.L.D is controlling is going to crash. Three major bases are about to be destroyed and it’s not going to stop until I have the people on my list. I am sure you already know who I have with me, so you know I am not joking.”

“Tony…”

Rogers didn’t have the chance to say another word, because the lights started to flicker and Loki’s body was tingling. This was the beginning. A common sigh of relief went through the room when the lights stayed on.

“You’re scared yet? Great, let’s talk about Loki then.”

It wasn’t the hand around his neck, but the hole inside of him. Pulsing and the cold was spreading from it, running through his veins, crawling towards his heart. Slowing it down instead of speeding
Confusion was etching on Rogers’ face and he turned his head to Fury, looking for an answer that he wasn’t going to get.

How? What had he… Loki’s felt his own features hardening when he understood.

Thor…

“After New York Romanoff handed over his staff. I know you are fooling around with it. It’s now on my list, I want it. You have done enough brain washing, don’t you think, Nick? You remember Thor? He isn’t too thrilled about that… Bruce isn’t too happy about the fact that your snipers were trying to shoot him. And me…”

“Sir, we’ve lost…”

Now the screens were flickering and the images of the broken lab faded away, being replaced by…

“This is my agenda.”

Loki saw an illusion, a marvellous work by a great, unmatched sorcerer. Planned and executed perfectly. Cold and calculating. Yet that wasn’t what they saw. Not what the Captain saw. A scared man, young, attractive, running and calling out a name. Then he was shot. The white t-shirt turning red and he fell to the ground. After the fatal shots the camera angle changed and it showed the man’s face. The blood on his lips, his wide eyes and the fear inside of them. A soft light slowly disappearing and Tony’s whispered promises that it would be alright.

Lies. All of it.

Loki was still here. Loki hadn’t died. But Tony had…

“God, please, stop it…” Rogers wasn’t addressing anybody, he was merely doing what Tony wanted him to do. He was a human being, unlike the rest of them.

His plea was answered and all the screens went black. The ones with a little bit of humanity inside of them were glad, but it couldn’t last. Black screens meant that they weren’t under their control anymore.

A shiver ran down Loki’s back and he closed his eyes when he felt it approaching. Too late, he had been distracted. Everybody began to move at once, talking loudly, over each other, but Rogers and Loki still made out the one fatal information that was transferred by the radio.

“All communication to the outside has been cut off! Contact with the other bases has been lost. Last message from the headquarters…”

“What?” Fury got a hold of said agent who swallowed. “… it has been infiltrated…”

Inside of him Loki’s magic was starting to pull, to tear at him, but he couldn’t leave. The screens went back on and with them the alarm sirens.

“He’s here…” Rogers’ whisper got lost in the chaos, but everybody knew what was going on anyway.

“Cap…” Fury wasn’t giving an order, but his eyes still didn’t let room for any doubt. He was expecting Captain America to go out and fight the intruder now shown on the screens by the
security cameras.

Rogers hesitated, frozen to a spot. He had been preparing for Tony to come here, but he hadn’t been ready to watch a person die in the arms of their loved one. Not ready to understand something of that pain. The pain of a friend.

“Captain?”

Shaking off his trance Rogers looked around and all eyes were on him. So hopeful and yet demanding, Loki raised his hand and his magic was pooling at his fingertips. Their helplessness and their open display of it made him want to slice their throats.

Unable to stand their glances and their implications Rogers lowered his eyes and turned away. Not saying a word he headed for the door, his steps heavy, but still fast and straight.

Captain America knew that he wasn’t going to war. He was about to face a friend who wouldn’t stop until Rogers had killed him.

There was nobody else but him able to do it.

He would do what he had to do.

Everybody had to play their part. Even Loki and his part was to stand beside them and watch them destroying each other. Like he wanted them to… With them dead there would be nothing left to tie him to this world, to this terrible, vulnerable, unnatural state. Loki would be free… it wasn’t about satisfaction or justice anymore. Loki just wanted to be free. Free of them and free of the pain.
Hello everybody,

A little later than usual, but I'm still pretty fast I think :D

I've seen Civil War for the third time now and... god, Tony gets fucked over so badly in this movie. I feel bad for him, but that's not going to change anything that's about to happen or has already happened in this story.

So, the chapter... it's quite... Civil war-ish :D

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

Well, I never saw it coming
I should've started running
A long, long time ago
And I never thought I'd doubt you,
I'm better off without you
More than you, more than you know

Over you ~~ Daughtry ~~

_________________________________________________

Darkness had claimed the halls of the base. Merely every now and then a small blinking red light was illuminating a tiny space, but mostly they served as a reminder of the state of danger and helplessness which had entered these walls along with the darkness. The floor beneath Loki’s feet seemed to be vibrating. It made his body tingle and inside his chest his heart was beating faster than usual. Not an unpleasant feeling, Loki would rather call it excitement, although he was surely the only person in this compound who felt this way. His spirits and powers were fuelled by the chaos and as the base and the people were slipping deeper into it, Loki was feeling stronger.

It was the confusion, a bit of fear and the perplexity. Nobody in here had an idea what to do now despite knowing that their enemy would stop at nothing. They had seen his motivation. Time was working against them. No contact to other forces, no energy to secure the building, by now even the security cameras had turned out to be completely useless.

In front of Loki there was Captain America walking down the hallway. In full gear, shield in his hand, looking proud and righteous only at first glance. The fact that he wasn’t running said pretty much everything. Rogers didn’t want to do that and he wasn’t proud, nor feeling especially righteous at the moment. From here it would only get worse.

This was it.
Tony had come straight into the lion’s den. Everything had to end now, today and Loki was already confronted with disadvantages. All his targets were here. Or at least the ones that mattered. Fury and Romanoff. This time Tony wouldn’t leave with them still being alive this meant he was going to meet most of the resistance. They were here, Fury had to protect himself. His best asset to do that was Rogers, but if Fury was only half as cunning as he pretended to be, he knew that he couldn’t count on Rogers to go all the way.

Was it even possible for Tony to push Rogers that far? Captain America would do anything to avoid killing a bad person, a criminal. Did he even have it in him to kill his friend even if said friend became a danger for everybody else? If Loki were in Fury’s place, he probably wouldn’t rely on him. Not completely.

There were few ways to kill a god. Like Thor or Loki… or Rogers. There were unlimited ways to kill a mortal as soon as you had peeled the armour off his body. It wasn’t a trap, Tony had imposed his terms on them. Yet he was only one man. Behind his desk that didn’t make a difference. Using his mind and a computer Tony could easily rule this little world. In combat he was still only one man.

Thor should have arrived here first.

Too late for that now.

Rogers turned around another corner, speeding up his steps and Loki exhaled softly. No matter what they were going to do from this moment on, Loki was going to make sure it would turn out in his favour.

Another corner and the sounds of a fight were coming closer. The sizzling sound of something being hit by Tony’s energy beams. Rogers slowed back down, pressing his back against the wall, raising his shield. A loud bang resounded and suddenly they weren’t alone anymore. A body was tossed down the hallway, landing in front of Rogers’ feet. Instantly crouching down Rogers checked the man’s pulse and judging by the relief on his face the agent was still very much alive, merely unconscious. It was a definitive sign to stop losing any more time.

Getting back up Rogers made the last few steps, another corner and then the hallway ended in some kind of control room. The current state it was in reminded Loki of Tony’s workroom. Chairs and tables flipped over, smashed computer screens and several blinking alarm lamps. Two highly armed agents lying knocked out on the floor. None of that mattered in the least, since Loki’s and Roger’s eyes were fixed on the menacing figure in the middle of the room, towering above the two neutralised threats.

Loki blinked, not sure if the darkness was playing a trick on him. Three bright spots, seemingly floating in the air which turned out to be the suits eyes and the arc-reactor. After another second it became clear why it looked so different, why these lifeless and yet so bright eyes seemed to close in on them. There was no red or gold left to simulate any kind of warmth. The suit was completely black. Not one sprinkle of colour. Loki had always wondered why Tony had chosen such bright colours that draw attention to himself. Unwanted attention from enemies. Finally he had dismissed the question as unimportant, deciding it had to do with Tony’s ego and flashy personality. Sometimes things were as simple. As they were now. No more games, no fooling around. Tony wanted to kill people in obscurity, so he wore a black suit to become one with it. To disappear.

Silently Loki moved to the side, to get a better view, to capture the one man’s face which wasn’t covered by invisibility or a mask. Instead Rogers was wearing conflict and that terrible weapon of his, determination. “Tony…”
There was not a hint of resentment in Tony’s distorted voice, quite the opposite, he almost sounded pleased. “Looks I am definitely in the right place.”

“Tony, you are my friend. I saw what you showed us today. I will help you to find out who did this to him, but you have to stop this before it’s too late.”

After so many failed attempts Rogers still wouldn’t stop pleading and it didn’t bother him at all. Humiliation didn’t exist for him, not when a friend was involved. Not when it wasn’t about him and it was never about Rogers.

Not once.

Ever so slowly Tony raised his arm. The bright light in the palm of his hand was pulsing and yet it seemed cold. “Get out of my way, Steve. Final warning.”

“You know I can’t.”

Even through the armour Loki could hear Tony sigh. “I didn’t want to do this, but if you insist…”

A flash erupted from the light in Tony’s palm and Rogers hoicked the shield. The beam hit it with full force and it was spilt apart, sent into several different directions at once. Loki decided that it was smarter to back up a little bit.

It was the wrong fight. It shouldn’t be them, but this way the outcome couldn’t be a disaster. Both of these men didn’t feel the slightest urge to hurt or kill each other. One was an obstacle to tear down, the other one a storm of destruction that needed to be stopped. Rogers was the first one to deliver a punch and Tony didn’t miss a beat, firing another time at the shield, causing Rogers to falter. That mere second was enough to hit him in the face and the Captain stumbled. Without hesitation Tony fired another blast and sent Rogers gasping to the floor.

“Just stay down, Steve. Stay down.”

A simple request that could never be granted. Effortlessly Rogers got back up, shaking his head. Loki expected him to make another plea, to try another time, but it didn’t happen. Instead he threw the shield at Tony, who used his arm to toss it aside. The Captain was instantly there, both of his legs hitting Tony in the chest.

Even for such attentive eyes as Loki’s it was becoming harder and harder to follow every movement. Such a high speed and they weren’t pulling their punches, neither of them.

It wasn’t supposed to happen like that. Not that way. Both of them neutralising themselves while the ones Loki wanted dead were watching.

Another flash illuminated the room and Rogers was knocked back against the wall. He was breathing hard, bringing up his shield when Tony used his blasters to rush towards him. Next thing Loki knew was that shield coming down on Tony’s head, the sudden und fierce impact bringing him to his knees.

Loki gritted his teeth and Rogers proved he was worth all the titles they bestowed upon him. Not holding back the Captain’s fist connected with Tony’s back and this time it was the black Man of Iron on the ground. Familiar warmth spread across Loki’s arms, especially in his hand, limitless energy pulsing in his fingertips.

None of this was right.
“Tony, if you just…”

The energy blast perfectly hit Rogers’ shoulder and he was knocked back against a broken desk. Tony was on him, continuing to hit him and Loki couldn’t tell when it happened, but there was blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. Metal hitting metal made an atrocious sound and this time sparks were flying. Loki balled his hands into fist, trying to stop his magic from flowing out, from settling this once and for all. His fingernails marked his own skin, causing such fleeting pain that he barely noticed.

Rogers’ last punch had brought more distance between them and they stared at each other for about one second, before Tony was storming back towards Rogers who did the same.

Even before they met Loki felt a sting in the back of his neck and he knew it was too late. As usual the physical pain didn’t mean anything, but the fact that he hadn’t seen it coming hurt Loki more than steel or magic would ever be able to. The force of what seemed to be an explosion threw him to the floor and his ears were ringing. If he hadn’t seen it coming, neither had they…

Raising his head Loki was sure that his eyes played a trick on him. The big, bright star was tarnished by dirt and sot that turned him black. Rogers’ arm was slightly shaking, the effort clearly visible, but not pulling him down. Behind him Tony straightened up from his crouched position, leaving the shelter the shield had offered him. Both of his outstretched arms released an energy beam, hitting the three agents of the other side on the room and their ridiculous over-sized gun.

They had used it on Tony. To kill him. Rogers had put his shield between Tony and that projectile. His magic was leaving his body, wanting to wrap itself around their throats and squeeze the life out of them, because it was the one thing they deserved. One time Tony was faster than him. The first wave of energy tossed them away like a child would do with his toys and then Tony raised his other arm, probably to deliver another beam that would be fatal.

Yes…

Suddenly Rogers’ hand was on Tony’s arm and not once would his honour leave him be. “Tony, don’t! You knocked them out!”

Do it!

Tony turned his head, the bright slits in his helmet staring at Rogers. Finally he was pushing him away, taking a few steps back himself. Loki got into a sitting position, his eyes following the scene, while his mind was still having trouble to keep up with it.

“Why, Steve? Fucking why?!?”

Not even the suit was able to cover those screams. The anger and the need to understand what was happening. Why it had come to this and why Rogers was on the wrong side?

Because Loki had made a choice…

Still breathing hard Rogers didn’t bother to reach up and wipe the blood off his face. “You are my friend. Just like Natasha. I am not going to let anyone die today.”

“Didn’t you see it?! What they’ve done to him?! What they’ve done to me!?”

Rogers was actually closing his eyes for a second, collecting himself before giving an answer. “I know you loved him and it… hurt terribly to see what… you showed every agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.
But I have no proof or inclination to think that they had anything to do with it. It’s your word against theirs.”

“I am your fucking friend! I’ve never lied to you! I am not pulling your strings, telling you to dance! I am not trying to keep you under control!” The faceplate was pulled back and Loki’s magic started pulsing. Lifeless slits of white could never be that intimidating. Not like those brown orbs that were burning with desire, rage and so much desperation.

A haunted man. Just like the one Tony had shown him on those video tapes.

Unlike him Rogers seemed sad, almost grief-stricken. Caught up in a fight that he was still trying to refuse. Yet he was stern. “Nobody is trying to control me.”

A joyless laughter escaped Tony’s throat. “Captain America is fucking idiot. Is that what you tell Sharon?”

Just the mere mention of her name turned Rogers’ body into stone. Everything but his face. His mouth dropped the slightest bit open, his eyes widened and there was this second. A fleeting moment when Captain America didn’t know what was happening to him. “What did you say?”

“Pretty ironic, isn’t it? They’re doing their very best, forging every fucking document they can find to make Tommy look like what? A secret double agent to infiltrate my life? Where do you think they get that idea? It’s in their own fucking textbook!”

“Tony, whatever you…”

“Sharon fucking Carter! Niece of Margaret ‘Peggy’ Carter, the only woman in Steve Rogers’ life. Did she forget to mention that? I wonder why. They probably thought it would turn you off like it would any decent human being.” Tony spat the words and when all Rogers could do was staring at him, he continued. “So Sharon Carter, alias Agent 13, moves into an apartment two weeks before Steve Rogers takes the one right next door. Did S.H.I.E.L.D get you the apartment? No need to answer, I’ve read it all in the files. They chose her, because they were hoping that you would see in her the same thing you’ve seen in her aunt. She’s been working for them for three years and since she’s been living next to you she’s been sending daily reports to S.H.I.E.L.D. They aren’t happy with her though, because you still won’t sleep with her. They’re not particularly interested in information like… you loving apple pie, what your apartment looks like or that you have trouble using the washing machine. They want fucking control over every aspect of your life. They lie! All they fucking do is lying to us and when we don’t dance to their tune, they kill us or the ones we love!”

Tony’s voice was bouncing off the walls, ringing in Loki’s ears and he realised that Tony had found the pieces that he had missed. Even crueller than Loki had thought. The niece. That’s why they hadn’t chosen someone who would have been more adapt for the job. Fools had hoped to recreate magic with a similar looking tool.

Every little piece of information that Tony had thrown at him had directly hit his target. Roger only hinted at shaking his head and Loki could see it in his eyes. Now they had succeeded. Taking another piece from him. So he would feel even more alone and lost. If it hadn’t been her but William, this reveal might have actually ended the fight. Maybe Rogers would have just dropped the shield and turned his back on them.

It hadn’t been William though. William was still out there, thinking of Steve. William had promised his friend that he was going to be alright and Loki kept his promises.
“How could you… Where do you know that from?”

Neither his nativity nor his willingness to trust was able to upset Tony. Not anymore.
“S.H.I.E.L.D’s files. It’s all there. Plans how to use Loki’s stick to re-enact the brain washing.
Only way they could find to stop Thor from acting out. Or how to make him act out in the first
place. Plans to create weapons to kill Bruce. Plans to get you under the control of a double agent
and plans to kill Tommy! It’s all there!”

The screaming put a strain on his voice and Tony released a long breath before he focused on
Rogers again. Despite the darkness Loki could see the glimmer in his eyes. The Widow had been
right. There was no pleasure, but he would not stop. “Just get out of my way.” His voice was
wavering, the pain all too obvious. A silent plea. “Just let me do this!”

A second passed, melting into another and Loki could hear them breathe. For a short moment
Rogers lowered his eyes, but when he looked back up his whole body language changed. What a
pity… Straightening up Rogers put all his strength on display, looking determined and ready to
fight. “I am sorry, Tony. Even if… even if everything you said is true, I can’t let you kill people.
There are other ways.”

Instantly the faceplate slid shut again. “You are not going to stop me.”

“We both know you can’t beat me in a fist fight, Tony.”

“I don’t have to beat you. I just have to get passed you.”

“Not an option.”

Instead of saying another word Tony fired and Rogers dodged the attack.

“I guess you are right, Steve. I can’t beat you.” Raising his arm Tony released another blast and
parts of the ceiling were coming down. Rogers used his shield to protect himself and Loki felt the
anger taking a hold of him when he heard the faint rumbling. “But he can.”

The dust hadn’t cleared yet when Thor landed right next to Tony, Mjölnir in his hand.
Overwhelming desire and fury became one, dying to do what should have long been done before
Loki realised that this was his own plan. What he wanted and a better man than him would do it.

“Thor, listen to me. I know…”

Loki winced at the wording. Thor was never listening, he wasn’t capable of doing that. Not paying
any attention to Rogers’ plea, Thor turned to Tony who nodded softly.

“I am sorry, Captain Rogers, but you are blocking our way.”

As usual no further discussion was needed. With a firm grip on the hammer Thor advanced
towards Rogers who resigned himself to his fate, raising his shield. “Tony, please, don’t!”

At least Thor was smart enough to not go directly for the shield, but for Rogers’ shoulder. Fists
were flying and Loki could hear Rogers screaming for Tony to stop, but it was useless. While
Rogers was impressively fighting off Thor’s attacks Tony slipped past them, down the hall and
Loki felt like being torn apart. Even with all his powers and abilities Loki couldn’t be in two places
at once.

Watching the great soldier taking down a false god.
Keeping the promise he had given the man who had chased the monster away.

Going after Tony to…

Loki’s heart was racing, his head swimming and he felt the weight of a dead, cold body in his arms. His hands sticky with blood.
Hello everybody,

I love this chapter, so I hope you're going to have fun with it. Now it's all drama and no pause, I hope you can deal with that :D

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Yo vivía tan distinto
Algo hermoso, algo divino
Lleno de felicidad
Yo sabía de alegriás
La belleza de la vida
Pero no de soledad
Pero no de soledad
Eso y muchas cosas más

Yo jamás sufrié, yo jamás lloré
   Yo era muy feliz
   Yo vivía muy bien

Hasta que te conocí ~~ Maná ~~

(My life was so different
Something beautiful, something divine
Full of happiness
I only knew about joy
The beauty of life
But nothing about loneliness
But nothing about loneliness
And so many other things too

I never suffered, I never cried
   I was so happy
   I lived a wonderful life)

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Loki wanted to move, to leave, to be at two places at once and therefore he couldn't move. His feet were planted to the floor and his magic was pulling, tearing, trying to make a rock move. His mind was racing. Every problem Loki had ever encountered, he had been able to solve with his mind. It was all about figuring out where he was needed most, weighing the risks, finding flaws, strengths, weaknesses…
Attentively his eyes followed Rogers’ elbow that was being rammed into Thor’s stomach. A swing of the hammer that barely missed Rogers’ jaw. Godlike but still a mortal. Mjölnir was going to break his bones. Could break his bones. Rogers could do the same. Also he was a better strategist than Thor. He could…

There was a reason why Loki had chosen him. Captain America was their most dangerous weapon. He would be a deadly tool if he only found it in him to draw blood. Loki had wanted this to happen. Exactly like that. The person he needed against Thor was Rogers, because he was the only one who could take him down. Hurt him. If he had to.

This way Thor would feel the punches, the pain and Tony wasn’t getting in the way.

Tony was going to search the Widow and Fury. If Fury was even still here. The Widow was no danger to him, their last meeting had proven that. There were others though. Lots of them. With their weapons and with no regard for honour or fairness. Did that matter? Tony wasn’t playing fair either. What could they possible do to him when he was in his suit? When he knew how to disable their weapons and this entire base? So many of them were cowards, only in for their own life. Some would run away, leaving the sinking ship. The only person who could stop and endanger him was caught up fighting Thor. Tony wasn’t up against anything he couldn’t take…

Something cold. Inside of him and it was spreading. Not the kind of cold that Loki dreaded so much, but something else. Dark and poisonous. It was dread.

Shaking his head Loki caught a glimpse of Roger rolling across the floor, grabbing his shield, jumping back up on his feet with surprising elegance. The shield was being slammed against Thor’s chest and the corners of Loki’s mouth twitched. Yes, this was what he wanted to see. Thor’s breath getting caught, stumbling a few steps back and the Captain wasn’t faltering. Taking advantage of the situation Rogers came closer as Thor tried to withdraw, his fists accompanying his steps. A sinister desire inside of Loki was relishing this sight, relishing the fact that it was finally being fulfilled. Having him seen suffer and now seeing him being punished. This was it.

Loki wouldn’t miss it for the Nine Worlds. What was revenge good for if you couldn’t be present to taste its sweetness? To take it all in. Tony was perfectly capable to take care of himself and whoever he could come across, Loki was hardly as interested in them as he was in Thor.

A few drops of blood hit the floor and a pleasant shudder was running down his back. Not making him feel whole, but alive, content.

So many years Loki had lived and some of them had been filled with battle, war even. There was barely anything he didn’t know about warfare or combat. He had seen people getting hurt, soldiers dying and armies marching over cities. Even if Loki had lacked all of that knowledge, he would still have known that he was witnessing something special. Almost beautiful. Like separating Thor’s head from his shoulders.

“Thor… this isn’t our fight…”

Loki was tempted to let out a long sigh. Still trying to talk, to find a way out of one battle to get to another. Unfortunately Thor was never going to go for this. “It is my duty to keep you occupied as long as needed.”

“Then I guess I’ll have to speed things up.” Gritting his teeth Rogers freed himself from Thor’s grip and thrust his elbow in his face. The sound of a nose being broken was lovely. Wincing in pain Thor swayed the slightest bit and Rogers had clearly decided to skip this fight altogether. Loki knew it was in vain before the Captain had even started running. Grabbing Rogers’ shoulder Thor
forcefully turned him around and Loki could see the trickle of blood running from his nose. It must
be so upsetting. When had Thor encountered the last time a person who could actually hurt him
with one single punch? No mortal was capable of doing that. Except for this one.

Loki had always known he was special.

Sadly Thor was still a combatant that you shouldn’t underestimate or turn your back to. He was
easy to outsmart, but you weren’t allowed to forget about his incredible strength, combined with
hundreds of years of experience. Did he really need them though to slam his hammer against
Rogers’ chest?

For some reason Loki’s fingers started to twitch when the impact threw the Captain against the
wall. Rogers slid to the floor, a groan escaping his lips and behind him a big crack was spreading
across the wall. It would have broken anybody else’s neck.

Narrowing his eyes Loki watched Thor crossing the short distance and how he grabbed the
Captain, pulling him back up to his feet. Loki made a step forward.

“Or you could put down your shield, Captain.”

“Not going to happen.”

Rogers almost moved too fast for Loki to see. Fist, elbow, knee and now it was Thor who landed
on the floor, the whole room seemed to be shaking. Wouldn’t it so much more satisfying to just
pick up a knife instead of the shield? Ramming it right into Thor’s forehead, watching it enter his
skull.

Just this once, Steve… you promised me to be there for me. To be my friend. So do it for me…

Of course, he didn’t, but the next time their fists met it became clear that Rogers was realising that
he wouldn’t be leaving this room anytime soon if he was going to continue to hold back against
Thor.

“Please… let me pass. I have to stop Tony. I don’t want to harm him, I just have to stop him.”
Rogers’ breath was staggered, his eyes emphasising his plea and yet his voice was firm and
determined.

There was no twitch, no wince, Thor didn’t even blink, but Loki could see it anyway. How it
clicked. A button had been pushed, an object had been set into motion that could not be stopped
anymore. Loki tilted his head to get a better look and it was all there. Blue eyes that hardened, a
tensed jawline and the fingers tightened around Mjölnir. Rogers couldn’t have known, he couldn’t
have chosen worse words.

Stopping somebody you cared for, but without harming them…

Loki’s magic was rebelling, starting to interact with the objects around him. Pieces of rubble on the
floor, moving, shaking and Loki had to fight down his anger, his rage about the betrayal to make it
stop. Luckily they were too wrapped up in themselves to notice. Once again Thor was losing his
mind over something he had done, but here was Rogers, pronouncing the words, reminding him…

“I am not going to allow that…”

Although Rogers tried to hide the deception Loki could see his shoulders going up, readying
himself to continue the fight. It was one second too late though. The hammer was thrown again,
hitting Rogers’ shoulder and Loki’s ears had to suffer an atrocious sound mixed with a scream of
pain. The shield dropped to the floor and Rogers quickly brought his other hand up to fight off
Thor’s next attack. Loki had to start moving around to avoid getting caught up in the fight.

They seemed to be equally matched, but one of them had a clear advantage. One blonde, blue-eyed
god didn’t want any of this, still pulling his punches and trying to come up with a way how to just
leave and abandon this fight. The other one wanted to hurt him. Plain and simple. A simple goal,
much easier to focus on.

A growl escaped Loki’s lips and again his magic began fighting his grip on it.

Just pay him out in his own coin, Steve… Everything about you is superior, he is just a selfish fool
and a murderer. Death and pain is the only justice he deserves…

No matter how much Loki longed for Rogers to leave Captain America behind him and to treat the
people how they were treating him…

It was never going to happen.

Loki felt it approaching, fast and strong. By the time he raised his head it was already too late. He
couldn’t even create a force field around him to protect himself. The hammer connected with the
shield and an unstoppable wave of energy was released, not caring what stood in its way. Loki did.

It brutally lifted him off his feet and tossed him against the wall. The air was knocked out off
Loki’s lungs and a sharp pain spread across his head. This time Loki wasn’t able to control it. Not
his magic, but his body. His voice reacting to agony. It was a mere moan, escaping Loki’s throat
and it was enough.

Loki hadn’t been the only who had been thrown to the floor. Yet the Captain completely forgot
about his own situation. His head flung up and his eyes bore into Loki’s. Still not seeing him, but
there was no denying it. Rogers had heard him.

“What…”

Once again Thor had to destroy everything. For the first time this was working to Loki’s advantage
and it filled him with dread.

Crouching down next to Rogers Thor hit him in the face. And again. And again.

Loki felt the blood pulsing in his ears, the anger rising inside of him, but not able to keep up with
his magic. Push him off, rip him apart and make him pay.

“Stop it!”

These words weren’t directed at him, but Loki’s magic rushed back anyway. Getting back up to his
feet Loki stared wide eyed at Banner. When, how had he gotten here? When had all of them…

It dawned on him so awfully slowly that Loki felt disgusted with himself. Tony didn’t take any
risks. The second he had seen the Captain, he had realised that this base was holding what he was
looking for. Jarvis must have contacted Banner and Thor, telling them where to go… The attacks
had been simultaneous and Tony had been lucky to be in the right place.

All of them were present except for the archer…

“Thor! Let him go!”
Even the fearless, dumb-witted Asgardian prince knew that it was absolutely necessary to do Banner’s bidding. Especially when Banner’s voice had this dark edge to it, clearly supposed to be menacing. The sight of two of his friends beating each other with such ferocity enraged him. So from now on it was a dance on a thin rope above a deep, dark abyss.

Still Loki was surprised that Thor even noticed Banner. His hand froze in mid-motion and Rogers spit out blood. The red colour splattered across the floor and Loki screwed his face up in disgust. Thor hadn’t let go yet, his other hand fist in Rogers’ suit, turning his head to Banner. The reason why the Beast hadn’t come out up seemed rather obvious. At the moment Banner’s anger couldn’t be compared to Thor’s and his eyes deprived of light and every hint of joy. “I have to make something right…”

The sheer arrogance was unbearable. A scream was building inside of Loki. There is no way to make things right! You killed him! Then you killed me! You pushed me into darkness!

Slowly Banner was coming closer, holding up his hands to show that he didn’t mean any harm despite all of them knew that he was most dangerous person in the room. His voice was soft, almost sweet and Loki’s balled fists were trembling. “Thor, this won’t change anything about what happened to Loki.”

Listen to him, it changes nothing. You killed me. Then you didn’t look for me, didn’t ask me what happened, how I survived. Then you put me into the chains and gave me to my enemies… only to kill me again.

Thor let out a breath that sounded like a bitter laugh becoming a sob. “I let them hurt him. I helped them. I was supposed to protect him… from you. From myself… but I didn’t.”

Rogers coughed, blood smearing around his mouth and Banner took another step forward. “None of this is going to bring him back. No matter what Tony is going to do… he is not going to get Thomas back. Please, let go of Steve… it’s not going to change anything.”

Gentle words spoken without menace and Rogers knew better than to move, to breathe. Thor’s eyes darted from Banner to Rogers, his hand shaking. “I owe it to him…”

You owe me your death and your pain, I have no use for anything else…

Suddenly there was silence filling the room except for the heavy breathing. The conflict was clearly visible of Thor’s face and Loki could barely keep standing still. Then Captain America once again couldn’t keep his mouth shut. Even worse, he meant the things he was saying. “I am sure your brother loved you… What happened to him wasn’t your fault.”

There was not a single part of Loki, no matter how small, that wasn’t screaming. Even the most hidden spot of his soul which might still hold some compassion for any of them was instantly taken by this pure, uncontainable rage, claiming all that there was of Loki. Becoming Loki. His magic was overcoming any restraints he had ever put on it and liberated itself to destroy everything in its way.

It was leaving Loki’s body so abruptly that he felt like it was ripped out of him by force. A sudden pain spread through him and Loki fell into a dark hole. For a few seconds all of his senses seemed to be gone, there was nothing but his rage and the betrayal.

Metal hitting metal. Swords clashing. Moaning. Screams of pain. The sizzling noise of magic in all forms. Being used to hurt, to kill and to protect. Loki knew the sound of a battlefield. It was all around him and he felt himself moving. A dagger in his hand, entering someone else’s body. Loki
quickly dismissed of his dead enemy, his left hand forming his magic to his will, sending it out to fight several at once. More cries, growling, people dying and slaughtering.

“My prince…” Somebody carefully yet hastily grabbed his arm. Loki turned around, his dagger ready to do its work, but then he recognized whoever was talking to him. “What is it?” His voice sounded impatient, his breath rattled.

“My prince, we are in need of you! You have to come…”

“The battle is still…”

“Your brother has been gravely wounded. Our soldiers were able to bring him to safety behind the frontlines, but he is in desperate need of a healer! You have to come with me, please, my prince.”

Loki remembered a feeling of dread, having nothing to do with all the death and horror around him. Concern. Looking around Loki’s eyes had been searching for something, someone. “I can’t leave now, not when…”

A soft voice reached his ears, feeling completely out of place and everything he had been hoping for. “Go. Save Thor. He needs you. Go!” Fingers briefly touched his wrist and then Loki left, not saying or another word, without protest. Because the Vanr was right.

Someone was yelling at him and Loki’s head was spinning, he felt like falling again and then there was Thor. A young, beautiful, blonde boy looking at Loki with a cruel smirk on his lips. “When I am king I’ll hunt the monsters down and slay them all.”


The future king disappeared, faded away and there was nothing was darkness. Loki felt so drained and weak. As if he had just used and spent a considerable amount of magic, driving himself to the edge of a breakdown, but he was feeling content. Until he saw something… or someone. Whatever it was, it tainted his happiness, evoking confusion. “Thor is going be fine. I have to leave, I have to get back to… What is going on? Why are you looking at me like this?”

Then realisation and horror

“Tell me what… No. No! Where is he? Tell me where he is!”

“Prince Loki, I am sorry… he fell.”

An unknown form of desperation came over Loki, a feeling he had never known and from the second it was there Loki couldn’t imagine it ever leaving again. It claimed all of him, his body, his mind and his soul. Not a thought, not a movement, not a word he was saying wasn’t accompanied by the despair that drove its claws into him. Unfortunately it didn’t have enough mercy to rip him apart, but made sure he would feel the pain in every breath, every step, thinking that it was about to kill him.

Yet it didn’t kill him, wouldn’t kill him. This would be his life from now on. Nothing but searing, intense, burning pain that wouldn’t let up and still refused to end him. Loki was damned to live with it when he felt like drowning, tasting the water in his mouth, not letting him breathe. His lungs were burning, pulsing with pain, fighting to get some air and when he finally thought release was coming to him… Loki could take a breath, a single one and then drove right back into the pain. It was never going to end.

The darkness vanished and Loki was dangling over the abyss, no ground beneath his feet, the
Bifrost gone and Loki was barely holding on to Gungnir. His grip was weak and the pain so fierce, eating on him… and there was something else. Inside of him. Dark and twisted. Clawing at him. So cold.

“When I am king I’ll hunt the monsters down and slay them all…”

Thor was right above him and Loki felt the cold starting to spread inside of him, mingling with the pain, making it unbearable. He was talking about Loki. Loki was the monster. Without a face… there was no Loki…

The memory faded into another and Loki’s voice had died after screaming for hours, days, for an eternity while falling. Endless darkness and mind-numbing silence engulfed him and he was barely holding on. A moment from another life, on a beach with… A burning and yet cold blade was rammed into his skull and then yanked back out, doing even more damage than while entering. Loki tried grasp what it was taking from him, but it was no use. A soft spark of light and joy that disappeared in the nothingness and then Loki could finally hear something. He would take anything to fill the emptiness…

“When I am king I’ll hunt the monsters down and slay them all…”

No… please no…

Trying to cover his ears with his hands Loki had to find out that it was useless. Thor’s voice was in his head, reminding him over and over again. Of the monster he was and that he couldn’t escape the ice.

Thanos was leaning over him, his face torn apart by a maniac grin and Loki did not care. Whatever he was going to do to him, a monster didn’t deserve any better. A monster nobody was looking for.

The face of the mad titan dissolved and Loki found himself in a familiar place. Bright, soft daylight filling a room and it still felt cold against Loki’s skin. His eyes hurt, probably from shedding so many tears, Loki couldn’t tell and he didn’t care. Nothing about his appearance, the state he was in or the wetness of his cheeks mattered to him. The only thing of importance in this room, which he had always called his home, was the blue piece of garment between his fingers. Loki held it with care and affection. Slowly he trailed his fingers along the wrinkles only to find that long, ugly rip.

Once again his breath got caught, the claws bore deeper into his flesh and Loki raised his head, didn’t find the strength inside of him to look at the red stains.

The lonely silence Loki had sought out was suddenly ended. Voices were carried through the air, entering his room. They sounded… joyful. Alienated Loki slowly got up from the bed, his feet only hesitantly carrying him towards the balcony. Because he didn’t quite dare to step outside Loki hid behind one of the green curtains, still enjoying a perfect view over the courtyard beneath him.

There was Sif and the Warriors Three. Thor was joining them, still wearing a bandage around his torso which wasn’t even necessary anymore. That wasn’t everything. His lips formed a bright a smile.

Loki’s fingers tightened around the tunic in his hands.

Sif pulled him in a tight embrace and Loki could see his brother’s face. The smile lingered, bright and happy. Pressing the tunic against his chest Loki turned around, resting his forehead against the column, but this time he wasn’t drowning. Inside of him the pain was raging and the immense power of his magic pleading him to be put to use. Every part of his being was still dominated by pain, but now there was also something else growing inside of him…
Tearing himself away from the memory Loki blinked and he was back in his body, back on Midgard, in this tiny, pathetic little base. Still the same moment, the same second, but Loki had brought something with him. There was nothing left but his hatred and the desire to make him pay, to tear him to pieces and rip him apart. A desire so pure, honest and crude.

It all manifested itself in his magic which was raw and untamed. The connection of Mjölnir and the Captain’s shield was put to shame. Thor was violently pushed off the Captain, thrown against the wall. Just like the other two. As if they were puppets. Rogers kept motionlessly lying on the floor, but Loki didn’t even glance at him. He was radiating with power and rage and now he was going to end this betrayal once and for all.

Casually he walked over to Thor, not paying attention to the scream Banner let out while scrambling back up to his feet, trying to fight it while his skin was already turning green. Pressing his hands together Loki put everything into it, not bothering about fine artwork or grace. The web between his fingers wasn’t beautiful or elegant, but it would serve its purpose. Reaching out Loki buried his right hand into Thor’s hair, yanking his head up and violently pushing the strings beneath his skin. When he let go Thor fell back to the floor, gasping for air and the Beast behind Loki was growling. Kicking Thor in the stomach Loki couldn’t help but scream. “Did you ever say that you’re sorry?! For killing him?! Killing me! Taking my face! Taking everything from me!”

Thor rolled over onto his back and Loki wanted to spit at him, but there was one last thing Thor should do for him. Taking a breath Loki crouched down and let the web do its work. His slave just needed a few instructions.

“Kill the beast. It hurt me, it broke my bones and you did nothing. You owe me. Kill the beast and then kill the rest of them. Don’t stop before you or all of them are dead. Just die finally.”

The Beast roared and Thor’s eyes fell on it. Loki watched how he got back up, calling Mjölnir and then lancing himself at the Hulk. Walls started crumbling, debris coming down and it was time for Loki to get away. Time to find Tony.

All he managed to do was one step. Not even the sounds of two mindless brutes fighting and destroying the room around him could wake Rogers up. Glancing absently at Thor and the Beast Loki knew that he could be doing anything without attracting their attention, without being noticed. Kneeling down Loki picked up the unconscious Captain and tucked him beneath the glamour. Without looking over his shoulder Loki walked down the hall, turning around some corners before putting Rogers back down.

The sight of blood on his face was repulsing, so Loki brushed his fingers over Rogers’ forehead, his magic curing the superficial wounds and making sure that there was no permanent damage. It was Captain America, of course there wasn’t. Standing up Loki kept the glamour, hiding Rogers from all eyes but Loki’s. As soon as Rogers would wake up the glamour would collapse.

Loki had made a promise and he was going to keep it.

With a graceful gesture Loki created a force field around the Captain, making sure no harm would come to him in his vulnerable state. Not on purpose and not by accident.

“Goodbye, Steve…”

A mere whisper before Loki disappeared into the shadows.
I was hung from the tree made of tongues of the weak
The branches were bones of liars and thieves
Rise up above it, high up above and see

Night of the Hunter ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

Not batting an eyelid Loki stepped over the passed out agent on the floor and continued to walk down the dark hall. By now the base had completely sunken into chaos. One of Loki’s best and oldest allies. A considerable number of agents had already fled from the scene, abandoning their positions and S.H.I.E.L.D. The ones who were still loyal enough and didn’t care too much about staying alive remained here, distracted by the Beast and the god who were destroying the place while trying to destroy each other. They wouldn’t stop and there was no way for mortals to stop them, which meant they were busy. Perhaps even too busy to pay attention to the real danger that was sneaking up on them. The trace of unconscious and hurt agents Loki had been following was proof enough.

Tony probably didn’t care about any of this. He was searching for his main targets and he was on the right way. Stopping next to another agent who had been tossed away. Loki sighed softly and closed his eyes. When he tried to close his hands into fists, he realised that they were shaking. Despite having majorly interfered with the events and having brought the Captain to safety by using delicate and powerful sorcery… Loki wasn’t really here. Most of his mind was still caught up in his memories as if he was living them for the second time.

The ones which had been taken from him still only consisted of sound and touch. Loki couldn’t see anything and even the voices sometimes mingled together, becoming one, so it was hard for him to tell who was talking. Yet Loki knew exactly what had happened and it made him tremble with anger.

No, not now.

Thor was going to pay for it. He was paying right now.

Loki had other things to do and he knew where to go. His magic did the trick and when Loki looked around himself he was in the sick bay. Another abandoned place, dark, flickering lights and
an empty bed where the Widow had been not so long ago. His short waiting time was filled with
the sound of fighting and bodies being slammed against cement. A few seconds and that should be
everything. She couldn’t be far.

A tall, menacing figure appeared in the doorway, bright lights breaking the darkness, but they were
still cold. Tony let his gaze travel across the room, his arm slightly raised. Always prepared, ready
to fire at any time.

“Romanoff, I know you can hear me. You know that there is no getting out of here. You are
definitely going to make this harder than it has to be. Whatever. Maybe it won’t be as bad if you
tell me where Barton is.”

Cold like the blade of one of Loki’s dagger. Not trying to trick her into anything. This was going to
end with blood and everybody knew that, no need to make up pretty lies.

The silence was deafening, but there was no doubt that she was listening. There was no running
away today, because then she would have to run again tomorrow. Or the day after that. Tony
would not stop. Not ever.

They had to settle this today, here and now, she knew that.

Ever so slowly Tony was walking into the room and Loki didn’t even want to imagine what was
going on in this armour of his. Scanning the room, taking in every little detail except for Loki. He
would find anybody in a matter of seconds, but this was her. Sometimes she could make herself
invisible like Loki.

“Your hand isn’t good for anything anymore. We both know you are screwed. Just come out and
tell me where Barton is.”

Loki’s eyebrows went up in surprise. Tony hadn’t found him yet? Naturally it could be a lie, but
what for? What would be the purpose? Loki didn’t see it. The Widow didn’t know where Barton
was, even if she did, she wouldn’t give that information up. No, Tony was probably saying the
truth. Surprising… Loki hadn’t been looking for Barton, because he had been sure Tony would
take care of that. Barton must have cut all his ties if even Tony couldn’t find him with the help of
all his databases. Alright, Loki would gladly look into this and search him out for Tony. Until
then… it was time to take care of the Widow.

“So you expect me to come out to let you kill me?”

Loki’s head flung up and he instantly localised the voice. It was coming from a corner of the room
which was lying in darkness.

Something was so obviously wrong with that and Tony knew it too, he only made a single step
forward, his hand still raised. No doubt about it, Tony would fire without hesitating for a second.

“Why not? You didn’t have second thoughts about killing Tommy.”

Loki’s eyes fell shut and he felt a strange sting. It quickly faded, but the pain was there
nevertheless. A different kind of pain and yet familiar.

The Widow’s voice resounded again and she was putting Loki on the edge, causing him to ask
himself if he should intervene. “I am not going to tell you another time that you are wrong.”

Now her voice was coming from the other side and Loki knew that Tony wasn’t moving, except
for turning his head. “Not a word…” It was a clear threat and not one to be taken lightly.
Then again she was with her back against the wall, it was all over nothing. She could do anything she wanted, it wouldn’t change Tony’s intentions.

“Why? You want to kill me because of a lie and I am not allowed to defend myself?”

Another corner and Tony had evidently made a choice, since he was walking towards it. Loki didn’t know what to think of it. She hadn’t had a lot of time to set this up, but she was skilled and that possibility of Tony coming for her, even here, was nothing new.

“Stop talking.”

Another step forward and the lights of Tony’s repulsors were chasing the shadows in that corner away. Neither of them was surprised to see a little electronical device lying on a small counter. It was transmitting the Widow’s voice. “I guess you are right. We have talked enough.”

Loki saw it coming, admittedly only a few seconds before it actually happened, but he didn’t move. He had already interfered enough. Something was being fired at Tony. It wasn’t magic or some kind of explosion, but something more Midgardian. Electricity.

It was an awkward sight, to see the armour being grabbed by its force, being shaken by it. A mere moment that he was immobilised, but it was enough. Loki could hear her footsteps resounding on the floor, fleeing from the room.

Loki watched her passively, unwillingly admiring her determination. Sometimes the urge to stay alive so desperately seemed odd to him, perhaps because they were so fragile and Loki had stopped being afraid of death so long ago. He couldn’t tell exactly when it had happened, but it only seemed natural. Why should such a powerful being that was going to live for another 4000 years fear their own mortality?

Loki didn’t, but she was holding on to that feeble, worthless life and therefore she was running. In vain. Tony wasn’t going to let that happen. The effects of her attack were already wearing off and Loki could hear him cursing under his breath. A strange desire was spreading inside of Loki, creeping up on him and he didn’t know how to take it. He wanted to see Tony’s face. To see the emotions on his face, the anger and to just… see him. Straightening back up Tony turned around and his boots lifting him of the ground and he flew after her. Movements so fast he was gone within the blink of an eye.

This wasn’t the perfect setting though. Tony’s suit was designed for a grand spectacle, for the sky, to fight monsters all over a giant city. Not for tight hallways that barely allowed you to take advantage of your ability to fly. It wasn’t like Loki didn’t trust or know that Tony would easily make the best out of this situation, but he still thought it was a pity.

Blinking softly Loki told his magic to bring him there, he wouldn’t miss this for the world. The sizzling of the repulsors was filling the hallways and then the explosions, small ones. Loki couldn’t tell, perhaps Tony was firing at her or trying to block her way by destroying the ceiling or the walls.

She was nothing more than a shadow and rushing through the halls, using her agility to overcome every obstacle within her way. Most of them were knocked out agents. Loki didn’t bother to check if any of them were dead or merely hurt. His eyes followed Tony who was still behind her. Approaching a big sliding gate that was… closing. Huh… maybe Tony hadn’t managed to completely cut the power off after all. Or the Widow still had a few things up her sleeve. Another energy blast hit the gate, but the Widow reached it, slipping through it just in time before the gate closed behind her.
This time there was no cursing, not even a reaction, Tony just continued to fire at the gate with both hands and whatever S.H.I.E.L.D was hiding behind it must be important, because the gate could withstand quite some damage. That couldn’t fool Loki into thinking that it wasn’t just a question of time until the metal wouldn’t be able to stand the attack any longer. Loki didn’t care for walls, he had never had to. Not since he had been a child.

When his magic had brought him to the other side of the gate Loki got a single glimpse of the Widow before the room sank into complete darkness. She had used her gun to destroy a fuse block. Where was the sense in that? Tony could see perfectly in the darkness. This room also didn’t look like it was going to offer her a lot of opportunity. It seemed to be some sort of training or workout room. With different levels, stairs, ropes to climb up and a lot of space. Yes, there were niches and some columns to hide behind, but this was rather the place for a confrontation, not one for hiding.

Loki wasn’t a fool, neither was Tony. Whatever she intended to do, she had a plan and she wanted Tony here. Inside.

Her arm was in a sling, her face was painted with black colour and her hair was bound back. She had planted the audio devices in the sick bay to distract him, to lead him here. No matter how angry, how furious Tony might be, no matter how much he was craving for blood, Tony would never forget to watch his back. Loki was sure.

Unfortunately Loki needed a few seconds to adjust to the darkness and that was enough for her to slip away. Loki didn’t care, because Tony would see her. His suit would allow him to.

Making a step forward Loki wrinkled his nose, appalled by a sudden, stinging scent. So… not a mere training room. It definitely bore some surprises. The air was penetrated by whatever gas she had released. What danger did it contain for Tony when he was in his armour? None… but Loki knew now that he shouldn’t judge too quickly. Realising that the gas wasn’t transparent Loki realised what it was good for and that exact moment the gate gave into Tony’s fierceness. Sparks, fire and Tony climbed through the hole that he had burned into metal that had been built to withstand any attack.

“Nice trick…” Tony looked around, his hand always ready to launch another attack whenever it would be necessary. “You’ve always liked to use repugnant methods…” Making a step forward Tony continued to scan the room, but he had pretty much admitted that the gas was damaging his sight. Another thing that would pay her a little amount of time.

“Did you do it? I know you were in on it, because you are his right hand, so we both know how this is going to end anyway. By the end you will all be dead and by the end I will know who did it.”

No answer, but instead Tony advanced further into the darkness and Loki knew that she was stalling.

“Get out! You killed him like a coward!” Tony was screaming and although the words so clearly weren’t directed at him and still Loki felt like he was talking to him. Because Loki had wanted to kill Thomas, desperately had wanted to kill him and he had tried to, only to discover that this man had never existed. Loki hadn’t just fooled all of them but also himself.

“Don’t fucking die a coward now!”

What if he was too caught up in his rage after all? What if he couldn’t…

Loki heard the noise before he sensed it and for the second time he had to get to safety although
nobody was aware of his presence. Shots were fired at an incredible speed, they were coming from different directions and Loki’s magic brought him to another part of the room which wasn’t affected by the attack.

There couldn’t be more people in the room, Loki hadn’t seen any when he had entered the room. Then again the Widow couldn’t be in different places at the same time or use several guns with only one functioning hand. Whatever or whoever they were usually training in here was supposed to resist a lot of gun power.

Most of the bullets bounced off Tony’s armour which made clear that he had to deal with average machine guns. No Vibranium involved and Loki released a breath that he hadn’t realised he had been holding.

The repeated force of the impact by hundreds of bullets caused Tony to stumble a little bit before he started take actions into his own hands. Two energy blasts were hitting the wall where the guns were installed, disabling some of them. Using his boots Tony took off into the air, but the still functioning guns adjusted to the change of direction and were still hitting their target.

Gritting his teeth Loki watched passively how Tony took out the rest of them, yet before he was done some of the bullets had succeeded in doing actual damage. One had entered the armour at Tony’s armpit and Loki could see the sparks flying. Done with taking care of the guns Tony kept hoovering in the air, taking a look at his own arm and Loki cursed himself for being so weak. All this power, all these abilities and he still wasn’t capable of reading another person’s thoughts. He wanted to know what was going on in Tony’s mind.

Inside of him there was a desire to hear everything Tony might have to say, not just the words Tony was actually voicing for the Widow. “Is this all you’ve got?”

No teasing, not even mockery. It sounded like an honest question, wanting to know if her life didn’t mean more to her. That she didn’t come up with a better way to protect herself.

“Did it ever occur to you that you might be wrong? That you will hate yourself when you find out that you killed people that didn’t mean you any harm?”

Tony spun around, but it was another trick. Several speakers were transporting her voice through the room. Still trying to hide and it was so obvious for a reason. She was again stalling. Loki wasn’t going to get involved which didn’t mean he couldn’t search her in the darkness.

“No harm? How aren’t you choking on these words?”

This time Loki did sense it and so did Tony. The armour abruptly moved to the side and Loki could know hardly see now that some gas had mingled with the obscurity. Until the small missile which had clearly missed Tony hit one of the walls, the explosion lightening up the room for a second.

“Even though we weren’t friends, we still respected each other. We fought together. You think I would do something like that to you?”

Another one, another one. Tony dodged them, fired at them and it didn’t look like he was in serious trouble. So Loki walked the shadows, looking into corners, only to notice how good of a job she had done, hiding herself.

“I saw your resume, Romanoff… you’d do anything to anyone if they are on the wrong side… and it’s you who decide which side is the wrong one.”

Stepping through the black mist Loki saw the dark metal stairs right in front of him. No teleporting
this time, Loki wasn’t going to risk missing something. Slow steps carried him a level higher while the sounds of the explosions and the repulsors followed him. Walking along the railing of the platform he had now reached Loki lifted his head to see Tony avoid another projectile, then destroying the device which had been launching it.

“S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t do it. You are just a pawn in this. Whoever he was, he has been playing you… he is still playing you and you are falling for it.”

Loki stopped, feeling like he had been hit by one of these missiles, but Tony didn’t miss a beat. “Shut up!”

Projectiles were still rushing through the air and Tony used a particular powerful blast to blow some of them up before they were even close to him.

“You are killing your friends and allies on a mere assumption.”

“Shut the fuck up!” Tony was losing his focus, the next one only barely missed him, because he moved too late. A blast hit the next one, so close to him that the explosion threw him back against the wall. Loki had never known that the sound of metal hitting concrete would hurt his ears. The platform was empty so Loki teleported to the next level.

There she was.

Crouching in the shadows she was leaning against the railing, the whole setting and demeanour of her body clearly put her determination on display. That wasn’t the one thing that caught Loki’s attention though. Her still functioning and deadly hand was on the trigger of a sniper rifle. She was looking through the scope and Loki knew who he had in front of him. A cold killer with a particular skill set who wouldn’t let a broken, shattered hand stand in their way. This was it.

Even without any knowledge about Midgardian technology or weaponry Loki would have known that there was something different about it. Tony’s armour had just proven that hundreds of bullets at once weren’t able to take it down. What could a single bullet do even if it was fired with precision?

An unexpected sickness was overcoming Loki when he remembered the false corps lying on the table in Tony’s lab. Banner and him trying to get them out. The proof of who had done that. Proof that Loki had planted there, that he had had gathered beforehand, stolen from S.H.I.E.L.D.

Vibranium bullets

Strong enough to pierce the Iron Man armour, Loki had heard Tony say so.

With such a weapon and armour like this as the target you only had one shot. A single one. She couldn’t afford to make a mistake and Captain America had already had to realise that Tony would not stop. The Widow knew that.

One single shot and it was intended to kill the Man of Iron.

Loki was convinced that she would do a better job than the phantom that had murdered Thomas. She wasn’t going to need three bullets.

“You don’t get to talk about him! You are scum and you can’t imagine that other people aren’t.”

Tony had recovered and the attack from the missiles seemed to have come to a halt. A very telling silence before the storm.
“I am sorry you see it that way, Tony. I am sorry, because I thought you smart enough to see what is right under your nose. To realise that somebody is only putting up with you to get what they want. He definitely chose the best way to get to you through your bed…”

The most potent blast yet hit one of the speakers, then the next one and rage turned out to be anything but Tony’s friend. It was something she hadn’t done before. Directly insulting Thomas. It was so obvious Tony shouldn’t have fallen for it… but she had known that he would go for it.

The remaining launchers sent out their missiles at the same time and though Tony succeeded in fighting one off with the repulsor he reacted too late to do anything else about the other two. One hit him in directly in the chest, the other one brushed his arms and the armour began to spin, crashing down.

Loki watched it hitting the floor. There was no time to take a breath. The Widow showed her last card. Not a new one though. A horrible crackling noise filled the room and Loki couldn’t deny the dread he was feeling when he saw the electricity grabbing the armour, taking a strong hold of it.

It was the floor. Completely immobilising him, keeping him in place. Not forever but long enough. Exactly where she wanted him.

“Steve would never put an end to this…”

Loki found himself standing next to her, looking down at her and her finger on the trigger. Her eyes were covered by strange glasses, but there still wasn’t any room for doubt. She wasn’t going to hesitate.

One second. Passing so quickly and yet more than enough to experience 1000 things at once. Although it hadn’t been gone Loki suddenly felt like he was being pushed back into the pain. A hole gaping inside of him, his hands itching to wipe the blood off and his stomach turning because of the feeling.

“Prince Loki, I am sorry… he fell.”

He hadn’t been there… because of Thor…

“… I am sorry… he fell…”

They killed him…

“You are a monster.”

Abruptly the pain was gone, being formed and reshaped and Loki’s hatred took a hold of him. He had never been happier to give into it.

The Widow’s finger was on the trigger, about to move, but Loki’s fingers were around her throat. It felt so good to finally touch, to make sure things were happening the way they were supposed to.

Beautiful eyes went wide and Loki took in all of the shock and the terror that he could see in them when his glamour faded and he ripped off those glasses. Just enough. Her gasp and struggle for air sounded sweet and appeasing. Casually Loki tore the rifle from her with his free hand, lifting her up like a puppet. No more games, no more stalling.

No more blood on his hands…

“You were right, Agent Romanoff.” Loki leaned close to her ear, whispering the last words she
was ever going to hear. “I am a monster…”

Tossing her over the railing Loki turned around and stepped back into invisibility. He didn’t need to see her fall. Even if she didn’t break her neck, the electricity would take care of the rest.
Hello everybody,

Yeah, I killed Nat... Do I stop there? Who knows... In a world where Cap is a Hydra agent, nobody is safe :D

Anyway, you guys are awesome for so many comments and kudos and everything, so you get the next chapter early.

Have fun and... don't cry :D

_________________________________________________

Rindete entrégame tus armas
   Sin condición
Que no hago prisioneros
   En mi corazón

Para decirle adiós ~~ Alejandro Sanz ~~

(Give up, hand me over your weapons
   Without condition
Cause I don't make prisoners
   In my heart)

_________________________________________________

A few seconds. That was all. Slowly the disturbing sound subsided and Loki picked up the little remote control that had fallen to the floor. After pressing some buttons Loki tossed the object aside and looked over the railing.

Tony was on his hands and knees, slowly getting back up, but this time Loki wasn’t actually looking at him. A body with twisted limbs was lying next to Tony, face on the ground. Loki definitely liked her better as a corpse. Way better. Her or Tony. She should have been smart like Barton. Running away instead of pointing a deadly weapon at Tony.

Loki could feel the vile grin spreading on his face and there was finally was some satisfaction. Mingled together with a feeling of release that Loki couldn’t quite explain, but that didn’t matter to him. For this short moment Loki was content. The fact that she had stopped breathing made him breathe easier. It was about time…

Attentive eyes followed Tony who put his hand on the Widow’s shoulder, rolling her over on her back. No gentleness to be found in that gesture. The darkness, the distance and the black paint on her face didn’t allow Loki to make out any details, but that wasn’t necessary in the first place. He knew a corpse when he saw one. She had fallen into her own trap and she had had it coming for a
long time.

You couldn’t try to play Loki’s game and hope to succeed. Not when you were only trying to be a liar. There was so much more to it.

Tony looked up, at the higher platforms, at Loki. No, he hadn’t done this for him. He preferred Tony to the others, but mostly he still needed him to get things done.

Taking a step back Loki waited and a fleeting moment later Tony joined him on the platform, his repulsor ready to fire at any time. Not moving Loki watched how Tony checked out the rifle lying on the ground and then scanning his surroundings. “Jarvis, what the fuck happened here? Give me something.”

Disbelief

Of course, Loki hadn’t exactly been subtle. What else could he have done? He had been so ready and so desperate for some blood. A thirst that needed to be quenched.

Swallowing a sigh Loki couldn’t deny his discontent. He would have loved to hear whatever Jarvis had to say. There wasn’t a trace of him that he could possibly register, but Loki still wanted to have all the same information and he wanted it instantly.

“What the fuck do you mean with that? She didn’t fall by herself! Someone has to be here!”

Yes, Loki was here, right next to him, but it was better if Tony never knew that. Loki didn’t think he would appreciate. Anyway, how much time was going to lose over this? She was dead. A corpse that was soon going to turn cold and be forgotten. That happened to dead things. Nobody cared for them.

“Shit…” Tony didn’t leave, but started to search every little corner of this room, determined to find whoever had done him favour. Naturally he wasn’t capable to let this go. Hopefully he wasn’t going to lose too much time over it. After all two forces of nature were still fighting within these walls, likely to make them collapse sooner or later. Obviously there was a chance that Tony didn’t know about this. Loki wasn’t going to start worrying, there was still enough people on his list, on top of it Fury. It was out of the question that he was going to stay longer than necessary. Tony wasn’t going to risk anyone getting away and in his mind Fury was the one behind all of this. Strangely enough he wasn’t completely wrong and all of them deserved what was in store for them. Or in the Widow’s case… what had already happened to her. This was still about Loki’s revenge, about them humiliating and torturing him. Tony’s pain was just as real, but it wasn’t about him.

Loki didn’t care what happened to him. He had saved the Captain, because he had made a promise. One that he shouldn’t have given, but now it was too late to take it back. He was done with it…

够all that hesitating and feeble decisions. Loki would comfortably lean back and watch them killing each other. He had already interfered too much. Tearing the Captain off Tony, getting the Captain out of danger and now… it had been about him. Tony had nothing to do with it.

Teleporting to the lower level Loki walked up to the body lying on the floor. Empty eyes were still wide open and looking at nothing. They weren’t marked by the terror of her last moment and that was one more thing that Loki didn’t care about. He knew that she had seen it and that during these few seconds she had started to understand. A realisation that didn’t serve anyone, least of all her.

Too bad she hadn’t screamed. Loki hadn’t expected it, but it would have fuelled his enjoyment. Not even Loki could have it all, as badly as he wanted it… at times he didn’t even know what he
wanted. Therefore it was all the more liberating to have this experience. To have it confirmed. That it felt good. Just a few more and Loki could leave. Going back to be himself.

The sound of metal clicking made Loki raise his head. Tony was back again, standing right next to Loki. Both of them looking at her and probably thinking about how unspectacular her end had been. Quite fitting for a spy who had been working in the shadows. Somebody who had never shed a tear for anyone shouldn’t expect to have tears shed for them.

Why couldn’t Loki see Tony’s face? Hidden behind that black shell of metal. Loki wanted to see it. Wanted to see what it meant for him. If it brought him any release or comfort. Or if he was upset about it not being him who did it.

Eventually Tony turned away and headed towards the hole in the gate. He was done here. A name off the list. Several more to go. Tony would tear it all down. The ones who had thought they could imprison Loki, treating him like an average criminal when he was a god. Superior to all of them and yet they had hurt him.

They hadn’t seen that he had already been hurt enough… more than they could ever imagine.

Tony disappeared through the hole and Loki kept looking at her. The very same thing had happened to him. Dying without anyone seeing it. Without anybody caring. It was only fair. She wouldn’t be lying here as long as Loki’s corpse in the Dark World. A mere illusion, but Thor hadn’t cared to send anyone looking for it. It had Odin. Sweet irony.

A rumbling sound brought Loki back to the present and he sighed softly. Perhaps he was wrong. If this whole cement structure was going to collapse because of Thor and the Beast nobody was going to get her body out from all the rubble. At least for a very long time. There would be other priorities. Or Steve would do it… He would be crazy enough to get them all out. Driven by his foolish principles and sense of honour. Sooner or later he would die because of it. Not today though. There would be enough blood for Loki to satisfy his thirst. Some of it had already been spilled and it was lovely.

Loki wasn’t finished yet and neither was Tony.

Calling out to his magic Loki teleported outside and the sounds of impending doom were instantly getting louder. Still a distant rumbling, but Loki knew what it meant. What were the chances that Thor would get the job done before the whole architecture became unstable? Not that Loki wanted him to, he’d prefer the Beast to do the deed. It would continue to tear the place down. Before that though there was still time for the final act.

The gunfire did nothing to impress Loki and he was sure the same applied to Tony. Nothing new.

Doing the same as before Loki followed the noises and a trail of subdued agents. Less than before. Loki had created quite a distraction. Either they were trying to stop the Beast and the god or they were fleeing from them. Actually Loki didn’t think that there were many left to protect their leader. This whole base was a death trap, it was better to leave as long as it was still possible.

Tony was getting close, Loki realised. It was the right direction, the command centre was just down the hall. After the Captain had left they had sealed the doors. Similar to the gate to the training room. Except that this one was guarded. A hail of bullets was raining down on the suit, but Tony wasn’t going to be stopped when he was this close. His agility made it almost impossible for them to hit him and since Tony was far beyond the point of caring if he hurt anyone in fight. Only a few weeks ago that would have been different. The energy blasts were so much more powerful than they used to be. Throwing several agents against the wall and knocking them out. The
remaining ones weren’t using normal Midgardian weapons, but similar to the ones they had developed years ago with the help of the Tesseract.

Were they hoping to surprise him like that? Tony had Jarvis going through their files and databases. Weaponry would be the first thing to look into if you wanted to invade a base and kill some of the highest members of this organisation. Tony knew what they had in store for him.

They had the chance to take one or two shots before Tony released some kind of shockwave from a repulsor that instantly disabled the weapons. Loki smirked at their bewildered expression before one of them threw his gun to the floor and made a gesture to show his willingness to surrender. Tony still held them at gunpoint and slightly moved his head, indicating them to disappear. “Fuck off…”

They put their legs to good use and Tony instantly forgot about them. “Jarvis, do I get an invitation or do I have to knock?”

This time it wasn’t necessary to hear Jarvis’ answer. The doors opening in front of Tony was good enough. Last line of defense and it wasn’t looking good. Most of the agents had already been neutralised, inside of this room were only Fury and the ones operating the computers, desperately trying to get them to work for them again. Fruitless efforts.

Some guns were still pointed at Tony, but they looked rather unimpressive.

Tony wasn’t even looking at them. At the other side of the room was Fury. Behind a large metallic desk that was probably able to control the entire base and yet it didn’t offer him anything to do. One person here was clearly in charge, an unleashed storm.

“Last chance. Everybody but the big bad gets out. You have three seconds. Don’t test me.”

The ones who weren’t fighters but scientists, technicians, informatics, they didn’t need to be asked twice. Some of them had the nerve to look somewhat guilty for valuing their own life. Fury didn’t even glance at them while the three armed agents stood their ground. Empty faces, not different from the black mask that was staring back at them.

“Stark, it’s time for this madness to come to an end.” A calm tone and Loki couldn’t imagine what game he was trying to play here. Every word leaving his mouth must feel like a knife being rammed into Tony’s guts.

“Five seconds are up.”

It happened at the same time. Shots were fired and Tony released three beams which perfectly found their target. Three more men unable to move.

Fury didn’t bat an eyelid. If he wasn’t completely out of his mind, he must have considered this outcome. This fight had been lost from the very first second. What could one do against a person with a mind able to do things others could only dream of? A deeply troubled individual which had been driven to the breaking point and which wanted to destroy itself, but it wouldn’t go alone. It would take the ones with them who had brought him here.

Loki walked further in the room, getting a better look of the situation. Fury’s hands were empty, but he hadn’t moved. Still behind that desk. Tony’s hand wasn’t shaking, the repulsor pulsing with energy and this whole thing could already be over. The fact that it wasn’t told Loki that Tony still longed for something. Something else. Knowledge. Understanding. A new name…

“Who did it?”
Not a hiss, not a snarl. Words so even and monotone, yet sharp enough to cut through skin.

In response Fury straightened up, obviously trying to show that he wasn’t intimidated or that he would face death like a soldier. Loki didn’t know. “What have you done to the Captain?”

“Nothing. He is busy. Who did it?” Now with a little more intensity and Fury’s face betrayed him for a second. Loki couldn’t help but smirk when he saw the fear etching on his features. A moment later he disguised them with a blank expression. “You are wrong, Stark. Somebody made you their pawn and now you are doing exactly what they want you to do. S.H.I.E.L.D didn’t…” His words turned into a scream of agony when Tony had enough of them.

A small energy beam and it hit the director’s shoulder. Again, perfectly placed. Instantly his hand came up to cover the wound, he was groaning in pain, but the indifference was gone. Now he was looking at Stark with pure, uncontained hatred. “You…”

“I can continue like this. Little by little. Piece by piece. Or I can make it quick. Who did it? Who shot him? Who did you send?”

There was so much pain. Most people wouldn’t be able to imagine it if they hadn’t experienced it. Loki had and therefore he was barely able to stand it.

“I don’t know who killed him!” Fury was pressing the words through gritted teeth, it was clearly costing him effort. “Perhaps the people he worked for. Perhaps who ever tried to gain something from you. Whoever wanted you to tear apart S.H.I.E.L.D.”

When the second blast hit his second shoulder he didn’t scream. Loki was sure Fury didn’t want to give Tony the satisfaction, but he was feeling none anyway.

“For the last time – who did it?”

Loki thought he could hear Tony’s heart beating, his brilliant mind trying to finally get the answer that he wanted, that he needed so bad. Only Fury wasn’t going to give it to him, the one thing he could hope for was resentment. “I don’t know, but you’re not going to find them here.”

What would he give to see these brown eyes? The gold sparks inside of them and their strength. So much more powerful than the despair.

“Fine.” The light of the repulsor suddenly began to glow brighter and all three of them knew what that meant. “Then I will have to go through my list.”

The energy was forming, about to be released when a loud, but hollow sound filled the room and Tony’s arm was yanked aside, his attack only hitting the wall. Loki flinched, taking a step back to avoid the shield that was skidding across the floor. Tony was reacting quicker than Loki which should not be possible. Turning his body Tony kept one repulsor fixed on Fury, the other one on the Captain who was standing in the open door.

How many times was he going to surprise Loki? It was so hard to fight down this feeling of awe rising inside of him. Also there was anger. Loki had saved him, Loki had protected him. Rogers should have stayed there. He had been safe beneath the force field. He should have left.

“Steve! Get out!”

The monotony was gone. Replaced by anger and all composure was gone within the blink of an eye.
Unfortunately the Captain didn’t listen, shaking his head. His costume was torn, stained with blood and his mask had disappeared. Thanks to his own magic Loki knew that he wasn’t seriously hurt, but the exhaustion was so clearly visible. “Tony… it’s enough.”

“It’s enough when I know who did it! When I killed them!”

Loki could feel the words on his skin, little cuts all over him.

“I’m not going to let you become a killer. You are going to regret this. Please, stop…” Everything about it was perfect. The softness in his voice, the silent plea and blue eyes that weren’t even trying to hide how much this meant to him. Rogers wasn’t in for it, because he thought it was the right thing, but because it was hurting him that Tony was walking down this path. Tony mattered and Steve cared. Not just saving anyone, he was saving a friend. Or at least he was trying to.

How could somebody who also cared not be moved by this? Another reason why the faceplate was setting Loki off.

“I’m not going to sleep another night as long as they are still breathing. He ordered them to kill him. So they murdered him.”

Despite the pain Fury opened his mouth to deny this once more, but Rogers shot him a glance. A clear warning. Your life is on the line here, just do what I tell you. “Are you sure? Are you absolutely sure that S.H.I.E.L.D is responsible? You are in pain and I promise you that I am going to help you to bring the ones who did it to justice… but you have to be sure.”

Tony was screaming and Loki wanted to close his eyes.

“I know that they did it! I found the fucking order to kill him, to get the bracelet I made for him!”

“Such an order was never given!”

The light of repulsor threatened to blind them, so the Captain jumped forward. Loki expected a punch, a shove, some form of violence to stop Tony from releasing the power. Rogers merely put his hand on Tony’s shoulder. Loki couldn’t figure it out, no matter how hard he tried to understand. Was Rogers too tired to fight? Had his body taken more harm than Loki had expected? Or had the Captain really abandoned the idea of settling this dispute with his fists?

“Tony… talk to me. To me. Not to him. You know I’m not going to lie… I just want to understand and… the right thing to be done. Please… I am going to believe you if you just take a second to tell me about the things Natasha found. About the holes in his history… You found that order. Is it impossible that they also found something?” A strange softness, Rogers’ words were so lithe and his eyes were entreating.

“Because they made it up!”

It was tearing him apart to even talk about it. To explain it again, to say out loud what they were doing to the man he loved. That they weren’t going to stop.

Loki held his breath, he could feel it. In a few seconds all of this would fall apart. Something terrible was going to happen. Tony was going to lose it and it would end up in a catastrophe. Just like Loki had wanted all the time.

Steve was still trying though. Not using desperation but kindness. Whatever weapon at his disposal. “How can you be so sure?”
An honest question. No reproach. Unlike everyone else.

Slowly Tony turned his head, looking at Rogers and Loki got his wish. Tony’s eyes were beautiful. They were full of life, hardened by force, burning with pain and glistening with tears which weren’t going to fall. “How I can be so sure? How can I be sure he wasn’t a fake double agent like Romanoff?”

There was no response and Tony clearly didn’t expect one and Loki felt something cold. Hard and adamant all around him. It was slightly harder to breathe and again there was this pressure on his throat. Loki knew that every following word was going to make it worse and yet he wanted to hear them. The truth in them clad as lies and if Tony had been able to see them. If he hadn’t… maybe they had been lies all along and Loki could turn around give this place to the flames. Listening to their screams.

“Because I could sleep because of him. After New York I couldn’t even close my eyes, then he showed up and I could finally sleep. Because everything about him was straightforward and real. He was so… flawed.”

Once again Loki had been wrong. The tears were falling and dread was creeping up on Loki, engulfing him in its dark arms.

“He was fucked up. Just as badly as I am. Maybe even worse. He didn’t talk about it, but I could see it in his eyes. Sometimes he was dreaming… and his face… Something happened to him that fucked him up. He was dealing with it, on his own. I wanted to talk with him about it… I wanted to ask him what had happened, but he fucking bled to death before I could.”

No. Nobody had ever seen it. Nobody had ever cared. Nobody had ever bothered to ask. Why? Why would Tony of all people see it?

See the pain like Loki did now.

“Sometimes I thought he was the only real thing in my life. He never wanted anything, he never asked for anything. Not for information, not for money, nothing! He could have asked for anything and I would have given it to him. He never was anything but himself and the only thing he tried to hide from me was the fact that he actually started to like me… He was so mad at himself for liking me, because he didn’t want to…”

Exactly, Loki didn’t want any of this. He wanted to shove every single word back to where it had come from and then forget about them. They were meaningless. Things a mortal would say who had no idea what this was all about. Who didn’t know anything. It was all without meaning. Blood was the only thing Loki cared about. So there would be blood…

“… because he didn’t want to…”

“No!”

Someone had once asked Loki if he could slow down time. He didn’t remember who… which probably meant that it was a beautiful memory that the void didn’t want him to see. The answer was yes. Loki could slow down time. It was an incredible strenuous process that could not last longer than a few moments. Time wasn’t something to be messed with, but it was possible.

Loki wasn’t using his magic now, but he still felt like time around him was stopping, collapsing even. He could see Rogers grabbing Tony, using his entire body to push him to the floor. He could hear the sound of a gun being fired. No bullets. Something else. He could see that the table top of
the metallic desk had been removed, serving as the door to a secret safe. Clearly the place where the weapon in Fury’s hands had been hidden. Later on it was all so obvious. A golden blast of energy reminding Loki of all the things he loathed most.

Irony was an odd thing. The man Fury had counted on to protect him from Tony had now ended up saving the Man of Iron. Twice. Not without a price though. Loki could hear metal being torn apart and the smell of burned skin filled his nose.

The Captain threw his shield before a second shot was fired and even before Loki could free himself from this paralysing state. Impeccable aim. It hit Fury’s hand who instantly dropped the weapon and the Captain got up, rushed towards him while Tony was struggling to his knees. A part of his armour had been torn off. It was gone. Wires visible hanging out. A hole in his torso, but Loki couldn’t see any blood.

No, he didn’t see any, but he longed for it. Inside of him all his power was welling up, almost out of control, craving to cut, burn and kill. Yet Loki shook his head. Only another fight and in the end Rogers would still throw himself right into the knife. No, it was time for one last trick. The one he had saved until now.

Fingers tingling and sizzling with magic reached into that layer where Loki had hidden it. The Captain was busy kicking the gun away and yelling at Fury when Loki slipped past him. Right in front of him lay the open safe. A few other items were still inside of it, waiting to be used, probably of unlimited value for S.H.I.E.L.D. Loki didn’t even glance at them, instead he added his own.

“It’s enough! No more! Did you hear me? Both of you! Enough!” Parts of his costume were burned into his flesh, making the Captain’s shoulder hard to look at. Loki had no doubt that he was in agony, but still trying to be the hero for the good cause.

“He is going to kill every single person in base!”

“No, just you…” Tony was back on his feet, both of his arms stretched out, ready and so willing to finally end it. “Steve, get out of my way.”

The Captain was doing the exact opposite, he took a step forward, gesturing Fury to get behind him. Like this Tony would had to kill them both. “This has to stop. It…”

They could all see his blood running cold and Loki moved away. Rogers had seen it. Loki was very familiar with betrayal of all kinds and he knew its effect. It was all over the Captain’s face. Another thing that he had believed in shattered into pieces, ripped from his hands. Not saying a word Rogers reached out, his hand disappearing in the safe and taking out the bracelet.

Tony had known it all along, so there was no reaction while Rogers was staring at it, not believing that such a small thing could change everything that he thought he knew about the people he was working with. Once again he was alone and it was too much. Rogers had seen him die and he had seen what it had done to his friend. His fingers formed a trembling fist around the bracelet and the soft features of his face faded away. “You killed him and you sent me to fight Tony…”

“Cap…”

Shaking his head Rogers made a dismissive gesture and suddenly Loki wondered how could still be standing upright. So tired of the fight. Leaning down Rogers picked up his shield and… walked away.
“Captain!”

Not turning around Rogers kept walking and the reason why Fury was still alive was Tony’s disbelief. His eyes were fixed on his friend and when Rogers walked past him they shared a glance. They both knew that they were broken.

The Captain’s steps carried him towards the door, Tony activated the repulsors and Loki smiled. A dreadful noise delayed Tony’s revenge once more and the Captain’s steps suddenly stopped. When he turned back around to face them his face was white as chalk and the white star on his chest was torn to shreds. Red blood was sipping from the wound and besmirching the last spots of white.

“Steve!”

Just like any common man Captain America collapsed to the floor. The blood wouldn’t stop surging, Tony was screaming and Loki thought he was too.
Hey everybody,

I know it's a little late (at least where I live) but I just finished chapter 94, so you get number 91... strange feeling to see this story almost finished...

Yeah, what am I even talking about... you want to know about Steve - here we go

Have fun :)

_________________________________________________

I believe in nothing
Not the day and not the dark
I believe in nothing
But the beating of our hearts

100 suns  ~~ 30 seconds to Mars  ~~

_________________________________________________

“Could you please stop touching it…”

“I thought warriors were proud of their battle scars.”

“It’s not a battle scar and it reminds me of my failures.”

“It’s almost invisible. Some of my finest work.”

“I guess… I still hope you won’t get to add some more.”

“Not going to happen…”

Slowing down time. It needed preparation, concentration and so much power. Way more power than most sorcerers would never possess. Even if you had it, all you could buy were a few short moments. Nothing to actually change the events that were happening. It only enabled you to react a little bit faster.

Rogers’ knees hit the floor and the second shot resounded.

Loki never made a conscious decision. Deep inside of him he knew that he had been here before and that he had failed. That would never happen again. All of Loki’s power, all of his abilities, all of his sense craved to do only one thing.
So he did it.

It all came natural, but the strain on his muscles and mind was instant. The amount of power and energy he had to access and to release in less than a second was immense and it felt like several pieces of him were ripped out. He didn’t care, there was no time to care.

Loki could see the speed of time being altered. Rogers’ body slowly falling backwards and the next bullet entering Fury’s chest. Several others were still traveling through the air, but they wouldn’t reach their target. Magic was freely flowing from Loki’s hands, mingling together to form a wall to stand between Tony and the projectiles. Bullets. Vibranium. Energy beams, made from magic. So many of them and Loki felt every single impact.

The effort became unbearable, threatening to overwhelm Loki, so he had to let go, liberating the river of time, letting it flow at its natural speed. Still holding onto the force field that served its purpose. Bullets were crashing into it, some of them being burned to dust and others dropping to the floor. The beams starting to tear holes into it, an energy that felt familiar and strange at the same time. Breathing heavily Loki held the field up, feeling his strength slipping away.

Tony was spinning around, lancing his attack and Loki broke down. Along with him the force field collapsed and nausea washed over him. Gasping for breath Loki tried to at least stay on his knees, but he had to support himself on his hands. Noises all around him and there was nothing he could do.

Barely raising his head Loki could make out black figures storming into the room. Mortals. Not S.H.I.E.L.D. Masked faces. Weapons. Different kinds. Vibranium and… something else that Loki had never seen before. Something was happening that Loki didn’t understand and he couldn’t do anything about it, because he was so drained. A foolish move to make to save Tony when the real attack only started now.

Trying to force himself to his feet Loki was again confronted with his weakness, his arms buckled and Loki ended up lying on the floor. No. This couldn’t be it. Everything falling apart with Loki being too worn out to do anything about it.

From where he was lying Loki could see Rogers. A puddle of blood was rapidly spreading beneath his body and Loki had failed him. Terribly so. Loki had promised him that he would be alright. That he would be fine. Now he was lying here in his blood and Loki hadn’t been able to protect him. But he had promised… and had failed.

Again…

Closing his eyes Loki searched for his power, but he already knew that he had used too much of it way too quickly. It would take minutes to regenerate enough to use magic and since Loki had no idea what was going on or who was leading this attack… he didn’t know if he had minutes. Or seconds.

This wasn’t going to happen again. Loki could only take so much…

“Get your hands off him!”

A voice that drowned out the sound of the fighting and a second later it all subsided.

“Enough for now.”

Biting his lip Loki pressed his hand flat against the ground and pushed himself up despite still feeling so drained and feeble. Take in everything there is to see. Analyse the situation. Search a
way out and kill them all as soon as you can.

Eight…

Three of them were already down, but whatever weapons they were using were better than whatever S.H.I.E.L.D had had to offer until now. The proof to that was the state of Tony’s armour. The metal was damaged, cracks were showing and at first glance Loki could tell that one of the repulsors in Tony’s palms wasn’t working anymore.

What if that cocoon of metal was only hiding some physical wounds?

All of their guns were pointed at Tony. Steady hands clad by black garment. Deadly. Had Loki made a mistake? Had the force field been a rash decision?

Tony’s didn’t even look at them, his still functioning repulsor aimed at one of the intruders who was kneeling next to the Captain’s body. “Get away from him!”

It was the same cold, raging anger that Loki was feeling. It was there in Tony’s voice and Loki wished he could find to strength to get up and rip that man’s arm off if he should only lay one finger on Rogers.

Whoever he was he didn’t seem to be bothered by Tony’s words, but he got up nevertheless. Very slowly. The blood stained bracelet in his hands. “Oh, don’t worry. He is dead. Surprisingly easy after all, isn’t it? Even Captain America can’t take a single bullet to the heart.”

A curse placed on his sharpest, barbed dagger, so it caused agonizing pain when he would cut that man open and pulled out his entrails. Maybe Loki would use his magic to keep him alive to prolong his misery. Cutting him into little pieces.

“Somewhat disappointing.”

“You fucking dirtbag!”

“Ah, I can understand your anger, Mr. Stark. Nevertheless I want to express my gratitude. You have been a wonderful help. I notice your suit isn’t as shiny as it used to be, but it was still a brilliant distraction. You kept them quite busy…”

Loki felt his anger mingling together with his slowly re-awakening magic. Good, like this Loki would tear them apart. If he could they would all be dead by now…

Tony wanted to do the same thing, Loki knew and he could do it. Unlike Loki he wasn’t helplessly crouching on the floor, hoping that nobody was stumbling over him by accident. Or that his invisibility would fade away.

“Who the hell are you?!”

Their obvious leader didn’t even think it was necessary to look at Tony, instead he was contemplating the bracelet in his hand. “Oh, I would love to continue exchanging pleasantries and to introduce myself, but I have a schedule to take care of. Thank you very much again. Without you none of this would have been possible.”

He was mocking Tony and Loki balled his hands into fists, his short fingernails pressing into his skin hard enough to draw blood. Just a little more, then Loki would be ready to make them regret to have ever crossed their way. If he could only get back up to his feet, he would crush their skulls with his bare hands and spare his magic for the one taking.
“Unfortunately I have to leave now and since you aren’t going to leave this room alive, this is a goodbye. Sorry about your boyfriend by the way, he seemed nice.”

There was no more talking, Tony let his actions speak and everything went to Hel.

An energy beam hit the leader in the chest, he was knocked back, but Loki doubted that there would be much damage due to the heavy armor all of them were wearing. The fire restarting Tony used his ability to fly to his advantage and Loki cursed his weakness. Time to get up. If his body didn’t betray him.

One of the intruders walked past him, surely to get a better shot and Loki was having enough. With a jerky movement Loki’s hand moved forward, closed itself around the man’s ankle and brutally yanked him off his feet. Before he knew what was happening to him Loki had rammed his dagger into his neck. Blood was surging from the wound when Loki pulled the blade back out. One less…

Raising his head Loki looked around, but obviously nobody realised what had just happened. Chaos has always been one of Loki’s closest allies. Still he couldn’t rely on it for too long. Not with this technology that contained unknown power. It reminded Loki of the tesseract, but it seemed like whoever had created these weapons had dedicated more time to them, to make their attacks more precise and their effects more devastating. Also a lot faster.

This factor combined with their superior number forced Tony into a defensive position. In this small space that barely gave him any options he had to move around to avoid being hit by bullets or these beams which felt so terribly familiar to magic. There was hardly any time to lance an attack himself. No matter how good he was doing, it was impossible to keep this up very long.

After all this time and after all he had done it should come to an end like this.

Loki wouldn’t let that happen.

Even in this feeble state Loki was still a god, he was superior to this entire race and not even their little guns were able to stop him. Ignoring the pain in his tight and yet worn out muscles Loki got to his feet, trying not to waver.

“Get back you fucking bastard!”

Their leader was fleeing and Loki wanted to go after him, to torture every little bit of life out of him. Another thing that he couldn’t do, not yet. Not before he had wiped this vermin from the surface of the earth.

Glancing at the body on the floor Loki moved to the next one. The gun dropped from the minion’s twitching fingers when Loki slid his dagger between his rips. Another body falling to the floor and Loki wiped the blood off onto his armour.

Six…

Stalking forward to continue his dirty work Loki was about to stab the one in front of him when both of them were thrown off their feet. Moaning in pain Loki landed on his back, feeling the blast and force of the repulsor all over his skin. What were the odds of Tony and him attacking the same person at the same time?

Next to him the mortal moved and Loki realised in horror that their legs were touching. There was hardly a way to misinterpret this. Due to the dark mask Loki couldn’t see the other’s face, but he was clearly looking at him. Not seeing anything. Which wasn’t necessary, because their legs were touching. The pain was searing and sudden. Loki bit his lip, not making a sound. He still felt the
Vibranium bullet entering his side when Loki reached out and wrapped his hand around that weak neck. A short, pathetic struggle, but then it was over.

Loki’s blood was dripping to the floor and his healing powers weren’t going to set in anytime soon. Too much magic had been spent and the wound was deep. Still Loki couldn’t afford to pay any attention to it.

There were only two of them left, the others had joined the bodies on the floor. The one second Loki needed to take in the new situation was one second too long. Tony was now in the same spot Fury had been mere minutes ago. One arm of the armour was missing, other parts of it were clearly severely damaged and Loki could see how Tony’s shoulder was rapidly rising and sinking with every breath he took. Way too fast.

The light of the repulsor was flickering.

Inside his chest Loki’s heart was beating rapidly and the pain in his side was stinging. There was no time left and Loki had already failed twice. His hands were covered by so much blood he wouldn’t add any more.

Chaos had always been Loki’s ally and it wasn’t going to let him down now. The attacks were launched simultaneously and Loki was going to make sure that they were the last ones. Enough of it finally.

Searching for his magic inside of him Loki sent it out. Letting it join Tony’s energy blast. Their forces mingled together, creating something stronger, bigger. Tony’s enemies were tossed aside like toys by a little kid and then there was finally silence. Only torn apart by Tony’s panting.

The faceplate slid up and Tony’s eyes were fixed on the Captain. Just another body on the floor. Releasing a breath Loki looked down at himself, blood was dripping to the floor and Loki winced. Deeper than he had thought.

Loki could take care of that, there would be time. Now he just needed to breathe, to take a moment and to… understand.

“Steve…”

Tony’s voice was nothing but a rattle, his face white as chalk and Loki felt his throat constricting. Trying to make a step forward Tony stumbled, raising his hand and then Loki witnessed how the remaining parts of his armour just fell off him. Useless pieces of metal lying on the floor and Loki’s hands were trembling.

Something was wrong…

Dark rings were visible beneath Tony’s eyes, his lips were white and suddenly his knees were buckling. The scent of blood was floating heavily in the air and for the first time in his life, it made Loki nauseous. A feeling that quickly faded away and was replaced by cold terror.

The flickering of a soft blue light about to expire.

Tony’s back hit the floor and Loki started running. There was no conscious decision, not a single thought was put into his actions. It all just happened. Loki felt the invisibility falling off him and a new glamour slipping over his skin. He had no idea which one it was, something he had used before, just another skin. Something for Tony to look at, because Loki would have to touch him.

Dropping to his knees Loki hastily took in the sight, forcing him to ignore the pain, the fatigue and
the agonizing fear, to concentrate on analysing the situation. He couldn’t. It was too much, too familiar, too wrong. Tony was struggling to breathe, his eyes had lost that intense brown but were clouded by a lithe veil. Loki perfectly knew all the signs of life leaving a body, he had seen it so many times and it had only scared him as a child. Now fear had its arms wrapped around him so tightly that Loki couldn’t remember what it felt like to be without it.

As the arc-reactor flickered again a hoarse and weak moan passed Tony’s lips and Loki’s eyes settled on his dark tanktop. The garment around the reactor was burned, just like the skin beneath it. No blood, no bullets. This was the work of the tesseract’s energy and Loki knew exactly what it could do. It’s only purpose. It was killing Tony.

The large doors to the halls were opened and the servants bowed their heads, not daring to look at Loki. He barely noticed. With slow steps he walked into the dark hall. It was a strange sensation, wanting to be here and wanting to run.

Nobody else was here, nobody would dare to cross his way now. Loki didn’t care. All he wanted was to find out that he had been lied to. That somebody else was lying on this stone table. Then they could just leave. To Midgard or wherever he wanted to…

Loki thought he would scream, but he didn’t. Not a sound escaped his lips when the shadows parted and Loki saw him.

Pale and cold…

The only thing stronger than the pain and the sensation of drowning was the desire to hold him. To not let go, like he should have done.

Closing his arms around him Loki cradled the cold body against his chest and sank to the floor. From the very first touch Loki could feel the wetness of blood on his hands. Still not making a sound Loki felt himself mercilessly being torn apart.

“Tony… it’s going to be alright…” Loki slid his arm around Tony’s upper body, pulling him against himself and placed his hand on the burned skin. There was no reaction, Tony’s eyes merely darted to his face, but they seemed unfocused, confused and… moribund.

Pressing his hand hard against Tony’s chest Loki searched for the damage inside of it. Tony screamed, his body weakly struggling to escape Loki’s grip. The sound was cutting into Loki’s skin, into his soul and he pressed his eyes closed. Nevertheless he saw Tony’s pale, withering face right in front of him and the screams burning themselves into his memory.

“I am sorry… I am sorry… I have to…” His magic rushed out, eagerly slipping beneath Tony’s skin. The power of the arc-reactor wasn’t calling him anymore, Loki barely felt its presence. A soft tremble took control of Loki’s hand when his magic showed him what they had done to him. Ripped him apart from the inside, broken bone, cuts, fractures, fissures and blood everywhere.

Loki could feel Tony’s life slipping through his fingers, he just needed to grab it…

Trying to reach out for it Loki almost fell over, nausea threatening to make him lose consciousness. Suddenly Loki became aware again of the blood still seeping from his body. The healing wasn’t setting in, because he had drained himself and if Loki couldn’t even heal himself… there was no way he could save Tony….
The scent of his hair was still sweet, so familiar and soothing. Loki nuzzled his face into the curls like he had done so many times before. Everything else was different though. No arms were coming up to wrap themselves around him. No soft voice was whispering words to him. No ‘my prince’. No ‘Loki’. Nothing…

Chocking back a sob Loki put his hand on one of the cold cheeks. His thumb was caressing the soft skin and Loki cursed the Nornes and all the Nine Worlds. For causing him so much pain, for ripping out a part of him.

His grief mingled together with unknown rage, poisoning him. Angry at himself for not being there to protect him.

Furious at him for not… Holding him tighter Loki mumbled, not recognizing his own words. “Why didn’t you remember the pain? I told you to remember the pain…”

Loki would not have to remember it. He knew that it would never leave again. Now it would always be like this… because Loki hadn’t been able to protect him…

Loki hadn’t been there. If he had been there… all of them would have been ripped apart… for hurting him…

Inside of him Loki could feel his magic raging. Burdened with sorrow and anger. It wanted to wrap itself around him, keep him safe and… to destroy. Something was different though. It felt like a door was being opened. His own body felt like on fire, an unknown power pulsing inside of his veins. Loki could feel it everywhere, raw, unused and he knew that there was hardly anything that he couldn’t do… Set a world on fire, kill an entire army, create a whole new world to his liking…

So much power and Loki didn’t care about it.

The body in his arms was cold and dead. There was nothing he could use that power for. Letting the tears run down his face Loki kissed the soft hair, ignoring the limitless power inside of him, begging him to be used… there was nothing to use it for.

Yes, Loki remembered. How he had realised what he was capable of. If he only wanted it badly enough… the Vanr had already been dead. It had already been too late for him. Not for Tony though.

“Listen… Tony… you are going to be alright. I promise…”

Brown eyes were looking at him, sliding shut, then partly opening again. Loki didn’t take the time to take a breath or to concentrate, he directly reached for his magic. He could form it in any way he wanted, do with it anything he wanted and he wanted to give it to Tony.

Again nausea was threatening to overcome him, the effort of accessing all of his magic despite his feeble state caused him to shiver and tremble. Magic flowed from his fingers, sipping into Tony and it hurt. Instantly Loki had to bite his tongue to stop himself from screaming. He needed to start pushing since his body was refusing to let go of his magic. A natural resistance, self-preservation. After all he was still losing blood and his body wanted to use his power to heal himself, it fought against giving it away.

This time it wasn’t the void. Loki himself was cutting out a part of himself.
Tony moaned softly when Loki finally felt the burns and the fissures. Rather gently his magic slid over them, cooling the burns, healing the wounds and putting the pieces of bone back together.

Trying to ignore the strain Loki pushed himself over the edge, staring at the blue light next to his hands. Wishing for it to stop flickering, wanting it to shine brighter than it had ever done before.

There was Tony’s heart. Loki could feel it beating beneath his fingers, his magic was touching it and for a mere moment they were one. Two lives wrapped around each other, two hearts beating together and then exhaustion overwhelmed Loki. Pushing him out, leaving him panting and in pain.

His hands were still resting on Tony’s chest, illuminated by soft blue light.

A body was in his arms, radiating with warmth and Loki’s lips formed a little smile, so easy to miss.

Turning his head Loki dared to look at Tony’s face, because he had to. Tony was looking at him, his eyes still heavy with fatigue and agony, but he was looking at him.

Dry lips parted voicing a single word “Tommy…?”

Slowly shaking his head Loki wanted to reply, but a slight movement sent waves of pain through his body, reminding him of the gun wound. He had to…

Steps were coming down the hall, someone running towards them and Loki had to get away. This way they were both vulnerable. Teleportation was impossible. Maybe he could change the glamour for invisibility… like this he had best chances taking care of whoever was coming for them.

Tony was reaching for his wrist and Loki quickly moved away although he didn’t want to. Placing Tony gently back on the floor Loki got back up to his feet, barely standing upright. Making two steps back, he became one with the shadows, leaning against the wall, his dagger in his hand.

“Wait… please…”

Ignoring Tony’s plea Loki raised his dagger, listening to the steps that were coming closer with rapid speed. Fast and lithe. Loki would try to get behind them as soon they were here, stabbing them from behind. Whoever was going to…

A dark shadow crept into the room and Loki’s hand froze in mid-motion. Seemingly unfazed by the bodies on the floor he walked further inside, arrow and bow ready. The Hawk’s grey eyes were carefully examining the scene and Loki stared at him in disbelief. Unsure what to do. What was he here for? Nobody had known where he…

“Shit… Cap? Cap, you hear me?”

Raising his dagger again Loki watched the Hawk crouching down next to the Captain. “Cap?... Fuck… I’ve found Cap! I need paramedics in the control room! Fucking yesterday! Cap is down. I repeat Cap is down!”

Loki had trouble to keep up with what was happening, his vision started to blur and the stinging pain in his side became more prominent.

It was Barton. Barton. He should be anywhere but here. By now the Widow’s corpse was probably nothing more than cold flesh. Tony was lying there, just a few steps away and Loki had seen the darkness in Barton’s eyes. He wouldn’t hesitate. Loki had pushed him so far and now he’d do it.
Exactly when all strength was leaving Loki’s body with his blood.

“Clint…”

Don’t speak. Be like me and play dead. It keeps you alive…

Barton’s head flung up. Instantly his eyes had found Tony who hadn’t moved yet. Why talk at all? Why?

An arrow was pointed at him and Loki tried to push himself off the wall he was leaning against. Breathing was getting more and more difficult. If he didn’t sit down to rest, his magic wouldn’t have enough time to regenerate and… Loki would bleed out.

“Stark… I really need my hands for something else, so just one question. You’re with him or with them?”

Loki didn’t understand, the question seemed oddly weird and specific. Barton’s voice was cold and Loki tried another step forward, almost falling over.

“Steve…” Tony was coughing, still not moving. “… they shot him in the back… like Tommy.”

Barton looked at him, a blank stare on his face, but he made a decision within a single second. His bow was put aside and Barton’s hands were on the Captain’s chest. Loki’s field of vision was too dizzy to make out what exactly he was doing. Supporting himself on the wall Loki tried to keep his head up, so the vertigo wouldn’t get worse.

“You’re hurt? I’ve already called the paramedics, you gotta wait for them, I can’t take my hands off him. He already lost a shitload of blood.”

What?

“They… said… he was dead…”

“He will be if those fuckers don’t hurry up! You guys heard that? I have Captain America bleeding out on me!”

Sliding down to the floor Loki touched his side, his hand sticky with blood, but it was only his own, so it didn’t matter.

Out of the corner of his eye Loki could see Tony slowly sitting up. The movement was obviously a struggle. However, he was breathing, he was going to live.

“What… happened? What is going on? Who are these guys?”

Barton grunted and Loki could only guess what he was doing since his eyes had fallen closed. “No fucking clue. All bases are being overrun. Fucking great timing they have and I shouldn’t even fucking be here…”

How was this possible… Even with his eyes closed Loki felt like he was stumbling, the floor was moving and he wanted to fall over. To sleep.

“Did you see him?”

“Who?”

“The guy who… He was here… and… I don’t know…”
“There wasn’t anybody… Here! Come on, he’s…”

The voices and steps turned into noises that Loki couldn’t tell apart. He could feel Tony’s heart beating beneath his fingers. Strong and full of life, pulsing with energy and the warmth of a blue, soft light fell on his skin. The dead Vanr was in his arms, the sweet scent of his hair was fading away, becoming a memory. Just like the Vanir.

A hand made of ice touched his wrist and Loki realised that he was ice himself. Loki didn’t have green eyes that would haunt the Vanr forever. Loki didn’t have pale skin like the Vanr had never seen before. Loki wasn’t beautiful. Loki didn’t possess the face the Vanr had come to love. Loki didn’t have a face.

These were the only thoughts going through Loki’s mind when he was hanging over the abyss. His grip on Gungnir was weak and Loki wanted to let go. The Vanr was dead and the person he had loved was an illusion. All the time he had been looking at someone else.

Thor was begging him, pleading, screaming, but Loki didn’t listen. He should have died so long ago.

So Loki let go.
Hey everybody,

I'm depressed. You know what happens when I'm depressed? I update :P
Although I'm not finished with the next two chapters, that's a first one, but we're so close to the finish line, I guess it doesn't matter...

Have fun (and yes, we finally find out if Steve lives in this one)

_________________________________________________

No, I'm not saying I'm sorry
One day, maybe we'll meet again

Closer to the edge ~~ 30 seconds to Mars ~~

_________________________________________________

Loki tasted metal on his tongue and a sharp pain in his skull. Obvious proof that Loki was still alive. Instinctively his hand went to his side, his fingers brushed over the hole in his armour and then touched the hard scar tissue. It had been a close call…

Forming a fist and opening his fingers again Loki felt his fingertips tingling with magic. It had saved him once again.

Tony…

Raising his head Loki hastily looked around. The bodies were still there, all those disgusting little creatures, but Tony and Steve were gone. So was the Hawk.

Barton and Tony…

The Hawk was the only one of Tony’s top three who was still alive. There was a good chance that people were going to think that the Widow had died from Tony’s hands. Loki had to get to them and make sure… His magic refused, chained him to this place and Loki moaned. By saving Tony Loki had deprived his body of his healing powers, pushing himself to the brink of death and now his body refused to take the backseat a second time. His injury hadn’t yet completely disappeared, he was still healing and if Loki teleported right now, it would reopen…

He was stuck.

Why had Barton come here and what had happened before that? He had said they were being overrun. By these disgusting creatures that were now covering the floor with their blood. Theirs and Steve’s. Barton had said that he was still alive? Perhaps… he could be dead by now anyway. Like Tony… Why shouldn’t they blame him for everything? It would make sense to do so…
Yet Barton had put his arrow aside... the one carrying the most rage inside of him. Because he had more information on the newest events than Loki. For the first time in months Loki didn’t know what was happening around him, their motivations seemed unclear and Loki had to set things straight.

He had created this scenario under the pretext that most of them would die and it wouldn’t matter if they realised that they had been manipulated or that most pieces didn’t fit. Now they had to be able to put them together or... Loki didn’t know yet and his ignorance was almost more painful than his injury.

No matter what he was going to do, Loki couldn’t afford lying here. Teleportation didn’t work, so he had to do it the old fashioned way. Slowly getting to his feet Loki took a deep breath which only hurt a little bit. A sting in his side, he could take that. First he needed information, so he could plan his next move.

For the first time paying actual attention to his surroundings Loki examined one of the men on the floor. Using his foot Loki turned him onto his back and checked out the gear he was wearing. All black. No insignias that could help to identify any of them. Pulling of the black mask Loki only found an average face that didn’t seem familiar at all. There was nothing here to help him.

Leaving the room Loki listened to the silence which was unsettling. The halls should be filled with the sounds of destruction. What about Thor and the Beast? Nobody was able to stop them and they wouldn’t cease the fighting on their own. Another thing Loki should go after, another thing that he didn’t have the time for.

Walking down the hall, urging his magic to do a faster job of healing him completely Loki finally found the piece of information he needed. A still breathing body on the ground which definitely wasn’t a S.H.I.E.L.D magnet. He was in a bad state though, left to die. Loki still found enough mercy inside of him to help him with that. Crouching down next to the intruder Loki removed another mask and faced two icy blue eyes. They were covered by the same veil that Loki had seen with Tony. “Who are you?”

The man coughed, merely staring at Loki, his gaze filled with hostility. Unfortunately Loki didn’t have the time to be annoyed or to start playing with this feeble individual. Grabbing the man’s hand Loki gave it a quick squeeze, for once not hiding his true strength. Delicate bones immediately broke and a scream ripped the silence apart. Loki gave him a short moment to whimper in agony before he repeated his question. “Who are you?”

“Go to hell!” The man pressed the words through gritted teeth and Loki would have given in to some sort of admiration, if he hadn’t more pressing matters at hand. Closing his fingers around the wrist Loki continued this most effective form of torture, pulling some more groans from the man’s lips. “I can continue like this and I can also keep you alive as long as I want to. To continue like this. Who are you? Why are you here?”

Sweat was dropping from this pale face and Loki didn’t attempt to hide his disgust. He wanted answers and needed them now. “I am a rather impatient man.” Strangely enough at any other moment this would have been a lie. Moving his hand up to the intruder’s elbow Loki finally didn’t have to break another bone.

“It’s too late… there is nothing you can do... S.H.I.E.L.D has fallen…”

A man who liked to talk, but he didn’t say anything. So Loki broke his elbow after all, ignoring the whimpers. “I do not care about S.H.I.E.L.D. Who are you and why are you here?”
His question was answered by a growl and eventually the intruder acted with the courage of a forsaken man and spat into Loki’s face. An insect, vermin, nothing that could ever move or really enrage Loki. Casually he wiped the saliva off his cheek and put the same hand and the man’s wrist. Just a spark. Loki could do without the tiniest spark of magic and it was enough to put one bone back together. This little act was rewarded with an intense and disbelieving stare from the intruder and Loki answered with a cold smile. “Why so surprised? Didn’t I tell you what I am going to do?”

Not letting him catch his breath Loki re-broke the bone and his face turned to stone. His other hand grabbed the man’s jaw, stopping him from screaming. “I can do this again and again and again. Until I have what I want and I always get what I want.”

The man was in too much pain to ever call Loki’s bluff. In fact he couldn’t do it again, not a single time, Loki wouldn’t waste his magic on this. Fortunately his future informant didn’t know that, but he definitely had realised that Loki wasn’t human. Even without his magic Loki had plenty of ways to hurt him, cause him pain he had never dreamed of.

Finally he started talking, the words freely falling from his lips and Loki listened. With every single one of them things started to make more sense, they were falling into place and Loki’s anxiety that he still tried to bury deep down was shoved aside. Replaced by anger. How could this have gone by unnoticed by him? There were no eyes more attentive than Loki’s and still he had had no idea about this. His attention had been focused on other things and this turn of events was his fault. Fortunately Loki knew exactly how to make it right.

First he cut the intruder’s throat and got back up to his feet while the blood was still surging from the wound. Walking down the corridor Loki willed his magic to regenerate quicker. These people were Tony’s chance of a complete rehabilitation, he would be able to live his life the same way as before, without agents and governments coming after him. Loki would ensure none of this would happen.

Yet this new information also bore an immense risk. It gave them an explanation for the holes in Thomas’ past. A terrible and dark reason for all of this that would taint Thomas’ memory and that assumption would shatter the last bit of sanity that Tony had left. Loki would prevent that from happening. All he needed was a little bit of magic to make things right.

Reaching for his wound Loki noticed with relief that the scar tissue already felt a little bit softer. Good… Loki couldn’t help but notice that his body felt strange, his heart was beating a little bit too fast and his skin was crawling. Worry was a sensation he hadn’t experienced in such a long time and he hadn’t missed it. Loki worried and for once he didn’t know about some things that were going on around him.

If they had drawn the right conclusion and would leave Tony alone…

If Steve was still alive…

There was nothing he could do but wait until he had enough power to end this scheme and to make sure that…

Shaking his head Loki turned around a corner and kept searching for a room still functioning computers. Every second he was still spending here was putting him on the edge, but he couldn’t leave… Steve could be dying. Tony in prison or being tortured for what he had bone…

Now his heart was racing in his chest and Loki forced himself to ignore these thoughts. He was a strategist, he was always planning things before acting. His plan was completely worked out, he was only depending on his magic to be strong enough to go through with it.
Seconds, minutes, maybe even hours were passing, Loki had no idea. Finally he was sitting in front of one of these Midgardian devices that he still didn’t really appreciate, but he knew what it could do to help him. Every single moment was agony and pain, because all he could do was sitting there in an abandoned place and wait for his magic to flow as powerful as it always used to.

They lived. Both of them. Loki was sure…

He had let go…

Loki had risked his life to save a mortal…

No longer able to control his impatience Loki put his hand on the screen, not pushing, not rushing, but calling his power. It was a small trick. All he needed to do was to plant a seed. Perfection wasn’t needed this time. Someone would find it and they would come to the conclusion Loki wanted them to. Nevertheless Loki broke a sweat and that simply act exhausted him more than he had thought possible. The deed was done. Now he could leave, find them and… then Loki would see what was going to happen. How he was going to let things evolve…

Leaving this room Loki’s steps carried him towards the exit. Along his way the state of the base became worse and worse. The traces of fight between monsters were all over and the silence was gnawing on Loki. Something was wrong and even the fact that this building was still standing made him nervous. Loki just didn’t know what to expect and… the hall in front of him just ended. Debris was blocking the way and Loki gritted his teeth in frustration. He had to climb through a hole in a wall and advance even slower.

When he was about to start worrying if there was no more way outside Loki stopped dead in his tracks. Almost the entire structure of the room was gone, the floor covered with rubble and between that grey mass Loki easily spotted a red piece of garment sticking out. His approach was still slow and his wish to leave and to see… someone else was dominating his rage. Maybe Loki was just too drained to feel anything at this point.

Thor was partly covered by pieces of the wall, blood was sticking to his face and he looked as broken as Loki would ever see him. His chest was rising and falling with steady breaths and Loki’s hand drifted to the dagger hidden his armour.

It would be so easy. He was here, right in front of him and Thor had of course failed once again. The Beast was gone and Thor was still alive. Bloody and beaten, but still alive. Miserable creature that wouldn’t stop breathing, regardless of how much he deserved to die.

Loki complemented the blade in his hand, it was shiny and spotless steel. Enchanted and cursed to cause pain beyond the physical. Just a mere scratch would send the person into a world of agony. How much Loki longed to ram into Thor’s heart, yet at the same time his hand didn’t move.

He had made a promise…

Inside of his mind Loki could see a mangled body, tortured and taken apart until there was nothing left of it. So much work for his dagger to do and it just wasn’t destined to do this to Thor.

Loki had let go…

Looking down at his hand Loki traced the lines with his eyes. His skin was so white and pale. No blood visible, but Loki could still feel it.

“It will be strange to not see you in the library every day, brother?”
“You’ve never been to the library anyway.”

“I go there when I am looking for you... I will miss you.”

“You still know where to find me.”

“Yes, it will still be odd to know you far from Asgard. Are you sure you’ll be happy?”

“I am.”

“Then I am happy for you...”

Had they ever left for Vanaheim? Loki didn’t know. Perhaps Loki would never know, maybe he would remember some time. Loki remembered other things quite vividly.

The smile on Thor’s face. The blood on his hands. The voice in the void.

Watching Thor lying there, completely at his mercy Loki realised one thing – there were more important things than Thor. Yet he couldn’t deny the hatred he was feeling and the desire erase this part of his past and from his future. Rid his life of this person who may not have always brought him pain, but who had opened the door for the darkness to take a hold of Loki.

He would bring it to an end now.

Slowly sitting down next to Thor Loki’s eyes closely examined his face, not spotting anything that he hadn’t seen before. Still as despicable. This wasn’t worth losing more time over it.

Leaning in Loki brought his lips close up to Thor’s ear. The calmness in his voice surprised Loki himself. “I know you didn’t push me. Not with your hands anyway. It does not make a difference. I still haven’t forgiven you and I never will. You don’t deserve it. I want you to know that and you will live with that knowledge. Return to Asgard and don’t come back. Not ever. You will live, knowing that you are responsible for what happened to me. I want you to live with the pain...”

Loki’s heart was beating slowly and steadily, he wasn’t feeling a thing. Not for this person here. Standing up Loki left without looking over his shoulder, finally abandoning this part of his life which had abandoned him so long ago.

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Any other time Loki would have described this sound as monotone, annoying probably even obnoxious. In this moment though the steady beeping turned out be rather easy on the ears. Almost sweet.

Relief and guilt were fighting a fierce battle inside of Loki and whenever one of them seemed to gain the upper hand, the other one wouldn’t stop until the tables had turned once again.

Steve’s skin had taken on a sickly grey tone, there were dark shadows beneath his closed eyes and they had put some mask on him to help him breathe. Robbed of his physical strength Steve appeared as fragile as he was feeling inside most of the time. Everything about this sight was wrong, but the fact that Steve was alive and therefore it was beautiful.

It didn’t matter how he was doing now, if there was any permanent damage Loki would make it disappear as soon as he got the chance.

At the moment all he could do was wait and observe the situation. Looking at Tony and his brown
eyes filled with the exact same sensations Loki was going through. Sitting next to Steve’s bed, not saying a word, just looking at him. He was unharmed, they hadn’t hurt him and Loki suddenly felt so much lighter. A weight was being lifted off his chest and he could breathe. A fleeting moment until he was again filled with a ridiculous desire which he instantly pushed away.

Loki couldn’t afford to get lost in this illusion. Not when he still saw a broken man in front of him, hurting more than before and all seemed so pointless. So this was the aftermath Loki hadn’t cared about. It was more unbearable than anything that had happened before.

“Hey… I got what you wanted.”

Wincing Loki turned around, spotting Barton who had just entered the room and closed the door behind him. The darkness wasn’t gone, it was still situated right behind his eyes and Loki couldn’t figure out how to feel about him. Somewhere inside of him he knew that he would deeply enjoy to see him bleed and breathe out his life and yet… Loki didn’t feel inclined to do anything about it.

Tony didn’t move, his eyes fixed on Steve. “Any news from the doctors?”

“No, he’s still going to be fine, Stark. Yes, it was fucking close, they said it’s a fucking miracle even considering that he is Captain America…”

Almost… Loki wondered if the remains of his magic from his first attempt to heal him had protected Steve. It didn’t matter…

Slowly nodding Tony finally turned his head to look at Barton. Two men which should be so incredibly different were equally cold. “What happened?”

With his face still made of stone Barton tossed Tony a small pad which probably contained the information he was talking about. “I knew something was wrong, I felt it. I couldn’t put my finger on it… It was a complete take-over from the inside. We still have no idea who was all on it, but… let’s say they knew exactly when to attack. All bases at once. You’re turning around and the guy next to you shoots you in the head. Like this they brought the places under their control and killed the highest agents in command. Including Fury. They also hijacked the entire data system, destroying half of it, stealing the other half. So everything went to shit within one hour. Quite a record, but it hugely worked in their favour that S.H.I.E.L.D was busy fighting off you. Best distraction in the world.”

None of it was uttered as a reproach, Barton seemed to tell a tale that had nothing to do with either of them. Not a word passed Tony’s lips, his eyes darted from the pad in his hands back to Barton. Loki could see the realisation in them and soon it would be alright, Barton just needed to give him that one detail.

“By the looks of it S.H.I.E.L.D was filled with sleepers. Maybe even fucking hundreds of them. They’ve been working on this for quite some time and you were right about something – they were trying to kill us. The warehouse in New Jersey. The Hulk incident. The remaining guys that are still there to pick up the pieces found some data that proves it. Hell, if you ask me they also were behind the robots. It makes sense…”

Tony closed his eyes for a moment and Loki swallowed his sigh of relief. Just a little more. Say it, Barton. He needs to hear it. He needs it.

“What about Tommy?” A whisper and although Tony’s voice was so weak, the importance of these words was all too clear. All this time he had been so sure and Loki still couldn’t hear any doubt, but Tony still desperately needed it. To clear Thomas’ name for everybody.
Barton didn’t back off, he easily held Tony’s gaze. “They found fractions of some notes… it looks like it was supposed to be a set-up. They killed him to make you believe it was S.H.I.E.L.D and they obviously succeeded. Pretty much everything worked out the way they wanted to. Except for five of us still being alive.”

Ice spread inside of Loki’s chest with rapid speed and the weight was back. How could he have forgotten about…

Not able to stand Barton’s gaze Tony turned away and looked at the still unconscious Captain. Suddenly the rage was gone and Loki could see the brown filled with so much ache that made it hard to believe that Tony was actually still able to have a coherent thought. It was all that suffering Loki had wished for, even worse so now that the burden grew even heavier with the added guilt. Thor should carry it. Barton. Anybody, but not Tony. Loki wanted to lift it off his shoulders, cast the shadows away that he had now Tony in their firm grip.

It was Loki’s fault…

“I am sorry…”

Loki remembered him laughing, joking, refusing to take pain and desperation seriously, because there was just so much to enjoy in life. It was gone. That loud, bright voice had been replaced by something broken and low.

Grey eyes bore into him and Loki remembered the words he had whispered into the Hawk’s ears. What he had seen in his mind, how he had taken it apart. Barton wouldn’t hesitate, he had been pushed to the edge far too many times before. Tony and him couldn’t change roles now…

“Did you do it?”

Still monotone, but this time the question bore a clear threat. The cold spread across Loki’s arms and his fingers curled around the dagger. He hadn’t had a chance yet to make it right, Barton wouldn’t take it from him. Loki wouldn’t fail again. Barton wouldn’t hurt him.

Tony was swallowing and Loki wished for his anger. For screams, cold eyes, a hard face, anything but the pain and the guilt which dominated his features. Finally he met Barton’s gaze again, not looking intimidated, just shattered. “No, I didn’t. But I wanted to.”

Stoic, anything but cold and Barton shifted slightly. Could he feel Loki standing right behind him? The cold blade placed right between his shoulder blades. A single move and he would drop dead to floor. One corpse more, but it wouldn’t be the wrong one.

Loki felt the seconds slowly passing, every single one weighing heavily on him and he could hear their breathing, holding his own, ready to end it at once if Barton forced him too.

“Okay.”

Barton visibly relaxed and nodded slowly. All menace suddenly gone and he was wearing that face without any expression, hiding the darkness inside.

“Why did you come back? Why did you leave at all?”

Backing off Loki slipped the dagger back into his armour and leaned against the wall while Barton was answering the question. “I was sick of all of this. I still am and I could see things going down. I had no idea what was going on, but I could… I believed it when you said they were out to get us and I wanted to get out. I know how to disappear. So I disappeared. I asked Nat to come with me,
but she refused. S.H.I.E.L.D actually meant something to her. She considered it the only good thing she’d ever done… she was probably right about it… at least she was right about S.H.I.E.L.D not trying to kill us. I decided I was out and when I heard about… your little list I came back and… as soon as I was there I heard about what was really going on… by then it was already too late to do anything but damage control… S.H.I.E.L.D is gone within a single day and I don’t understand half of it…”

“Any word from…?” Tony trailed off as if he was afraid to actually voice the question and Barton merely responded by shaking his head, looking disinterested. “No… not a trace. Gone. But I might have… something on your mystery guy.”

Loki’s heart skipped a beat and Tony merely continued to look at Barton. “I didn’t see anyone, you know that, but… the report says that some of the guys in the control room had been stabbed. Knifes aren’t your style and Cap doesn’t use them too, so maybe you didn’t imagine him after all… That’s all I’ve got.”

Another man’s story, Barton didn’t sound like he cared.

“Are you going to stay?”

No hesitation, no saying he was sorry, merely shaking his head. “I am out. We all should have been out a long time ago.” Shortly he looked at Steve, then his eyes lingered on Tony and Loki was in awe. All that darkness. There should be no more room for compassion. He shouldn’t be capable of it. Like Loki. “Take care, Stark.”

This was it, turning around Barton headed for the door and his hand was already on the doorknob when he stopped for another second. “Sorry about your man… he seemed like a jerk, but he clearly liked you.”

Then he walked out of their lives and Loki let him, forgot him as soon as he was out the door.
Hey everybody,

Well, here we are... and I am 99% sure that chapter 95 is going to be the last one... how did we get here?

Have fun... although this is pretty depressing

_________________________________________________

Close your eyes so you don't feel them
They don't need to see you cry
I can't promise I will heal you
But if you want to I will try

Eternity ~~ Robbie Williams ~~

__________________________________________________

Only two nurses had access to Captain America’s room. Nobody else was allowed in there, apart from his doctors. Loki couldn’t tell if Tony even had the permission to be here. He hadn’t left once. Sitting next to Steve who still wasn’t moving, lying there with his eyes closed and now breathing on his own.

When Loki wasn’t watching them he was out in the hall, studying the routine of the hospital staff, making sure he knew all the corners, doors, so he would notice if something was off.

Soon Loki would have to leave and this time nothing would be left to chance. His blood thirst was getting harder to bear by the minute and Loki knew exactly what to do about it.

A deed that needed to be done and yet Loki felt like he was making up excuses. To leave and to stop looking at Tony and his empty eyes. Which were always fixed on Steve. Sometimes he was talking to him, apologizing, because it was all his fault and it made Loki’s skin crawl. Yes, he didn’t want to confront this strange feeling, Loki perfectly knew that he was fleeing from it, but what he was about to do was absolutely necessary. It was only a question of time until Tony decided to do it himself and risked another incident… and losing his life.

When the guilt couldn’t outweigh the rage any longer he would go there, in an attempt to destroy them and himself. For now there was one thing more important than getting his hands on those murderers, one reason that kept him from putting on his armour one last time. A friend lying right in front of him in a state that didn’t fit him. The mere thought of Steve in a hospital bed was deeply unsettling, something that just wasn’t right. As if somebody had figured out how to achieve the impossible. Achieving an impossible task that didn’t fill you with wonder but dread and Tony was taking the blame for it. Although nobody was accusing him but himself.
“You’ll be out here in no time… you’ll be jumping around and probably hate me for what I’ve done… or maybe not because you are an idiot… I am so sorry…”

Loki wanted to yell at him for feeling this way, for being ridiculous. The ones who had done this were about to pay and at least that burden would be lifted off Tony’s shoulders. Hesitantly Tony reached out, his hand hovering above Steve’s, slightly shaking. He seemed frozen, indecisive. Was he afraid to touch him? That Steve would instantly wake up and pull away? No, Steve had thrown himself between Tony and a bullet twice. When he had walked out on Fury Steve had made a decision, he had chosen Tony. Nevertheless Tony pulled his hand back and Loki turned away.

A sinister, dark sensation woke up inside of him and Loki couldn’t put his finger on it. Nothing entirely new and yet Loki threatened to be overwhelmed, because he didn’t know how to react.

Tonight he would come for them, then it’d be easier to cope with. Before Loki could leave though, he had to make sure, so no more harm would come to them.

Tony had fallen asleep before the sun had set. His arms and head were placed on the bed next to Steve, not touching him. None of them aware of the person standing next to them, nor of the cold steel in the person’s hand.

Closing his eyes Loki started murmuring, giving himself to the darkness in his words. Beneath his skin Loki felt the power surging, strings of magic, burning hot like the fires of Muspelheim. It wasn’t enough though, no chances, no risks. With one determined gesture Loki sliced the palm of his hand open. Forming a fist Loki let his blood soak into the strings, combining them while whispering the chants. One single purpose and it would do anything to serve it.

Touching the wall next to him Loki watched his magic spread across it, slowly filling the whole room, hiding in the ceiling, the floor, everywhere. Loki was still far from done. Turning back to the bed Loki put his hand on it, again whispering the chants and he felt the strain, but he didn’t stop until the curse had settled. Loki had created it from his own blood. Any mortal who would try to enter this room with the intention to harm them would be attacked by the curse. Torn apart from the inside. Not enough to hold back an army, but it was a small room. If they sent anyone it would be a silent assassin, someone to move in the shadows.

By the time Loki would be back, there would be nobody left to come for them.

After taking another look at them Loki teleported away, outside of the city. Sitting down into the soft grass Loki closed his eyes, concentrating on sending his magic out. Searching for them…

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A rattling sound escaped the throat before Loki squeezed and felt the bones breaking beneath his fingers. Disgusted Loki discarded of the body, throwing it to the side. The screams and the shooting had stopped quite some time ago. Loki’s clothes were drenched in blood, the floor covered with bodies and some torn off limbs. One of them was still moving, uttering agonizing whimpers. Getting to his knees Loki rammed his dagger into that still beating heart. Casually yanking the blade back out Loki turned around and contently took note that there was only one breathing person left in this room. The one he had saved for last.

“What do you… want?” He was spitting blood, leaning weakly against the wall. Loki had broken both of his legs, he wouldn’t go anywhere.

How different his voice sounded now. No more spite, no more patronizing. Obviously it made quite the difference if you were pointing several guns at one single person or if you had just
watched a single man slaughtering dozens of trained assassins. Some had probably run, Loki didn’t care, he had delivered his message. Now he only cared for this one.

“I want you to die…”

That was it. No desire to draw it out, to torture or to fill his heart with even more pain. Loki merely thought of the moment this man had taken the bracelet from Steve’s fingers and how Loki hadn’t been able to do anything. With a calm hand Loki slit his throat, watched until all life had left those eyes and then got back up to leave. He was done here and he needed to get back. To make sure.

His magic ran down his body, wiping away the blood and all traces of what had just happened. Loki didn’t need anything more to put this behind him. Unfortunately he didn’t feel any lighter. Some weight was weighing heavily on his shoulders and even the elimination of this threat didn’t change anything about it.

Why?

There was nothing left to fear. Nothing to worry about. Steve was going to live and Tony could walk away from it. The corpses all around Loki were considered responsible, not the Man of Iron. They were safe.

Loki should be done. It was time to leave this damned world behind… there was nothing left for him.

Yet Loki found himself unable to walk the branches of the world tree. The weight on his shoulders was keeping him here and Loki didn’t even want to leave.

Loki closed his eyes and let his magic pull him away, knowing exactly where it would take him.

Days had passed and things had changed. Steve was sleeping. The oxygen mask was gone, the colour had returned to his face. He was lying on his side, face partly hidden in the cushion and Loki could hear him breathe.

It was no surprise, because he was still Captain America, he would be healing faster than any moral could hope for. No, Loki had more or less expected this, but he still couldn’t deny a feeling of content. The sight of Steve in a hospital bed couldn’t end soon enough, there was nothing right about it.

Tony was still sitting next to the bed and it was easy to spot the proof that he still hadn’t left the room once during Loki’s absence. His handsome face was unshaven, he was wearing the same clothes as last time. The state he was in would let anybody know that something terrible had happened to him. A person who was known to take a lot of care of his physical appearance. Loki didn’t care about it. Yes, he registered it, but his attention was quickly focused on Tony’s eyes.

They were still marked by emptiness, deprived of the golden sparks that had made them shine. Like they had done when he had made one of his stupid remarks or showed off his newest inventions.

The weight was dragging Loki down and he longed for some kind of spell, a trick that could undo it. Wiping his mistakes and failures away.

Yet there was nothing Loki could do. Except for staying with them, because something was binding him to this place and Loki couldn’t shake his shackles off. Nor the pain or the despicable feeling of guilt. So Loki would stay in the shadows as long as it would take to find out what he had to do. To stop feeling like this.
Loki saw all of it. He listened to every word. How Steve was telling Tony that he could go home, that he didn’t have to stay at the hospital day and night to which Tony replied that he couldn’t. Steve’s frown made clear that he didn’t understand what Tony meant by that, but Loki did.

Tony had nowhere to go.

The fight was done and the one thing that had kept Tony upright and driven had simply vanished. All that was left was the knowledge that Thomas was still dead and Tony had been used to bestow even more death and pain.

What were supposed to do when you were only living by the fight and the fight was done? Loki didn’t know. He was in the exact same situation and he felt like his life had just stopped. Or had it stopped when he had let go of Gungnir, falling to the void?

“Tony…” Steve reached out, trying to touch Tony’s hand, but the engineer quickly pulled away. Judging by the expression on Steve’s face he wasn’t hurt by Tony’s action, but it had an impact. He was pitying him, feeling sorry and because it was Steve, he even shared his pain. Noble and useless. It didn’t help either of them.

“Do you…” Tony muttered lowly under his breath, his voice sounding strained and so unlike him that it was hard to understand what he was saying. Also he seemed hesitant, barely looking at Steve who nevertheless tried to smile at him encouragingly. It was awkward and for the first time ever Loki felt like he shouldn’t be here. His eyes should not be hearing the doubt in Tony’s words. None of this was meant for him.

Steve remained silent, content to smile, waiting for Tony to gather up the courage to say whatever he wanted to say. Most probably he somehow knew that it wouldn’t help if he interrupted him.

“Do you… the tower is a big place… and… you could stay there until you’re done recovering… I’m sure you want to get out of this place and… the tower is definitely more comfortable…” None of his former charm was found in these words, but at least Tony found himself able to voice them.

Their conversation still seemed one-sided, because only one person was actually looking at the other one. Steve’s eyes lit up a little bit and they painfully reminded Loki of the fact that Tony was drowning. While planning and acting out his revenge he had still be holding on, but now he was merely waiting for the waves to cut off his air. Tony’s eyes weren’t going to light up for anything.

“Yes, I’d like that… thank you, Tony…” The smile was soft, not officious and nevertheless Loki felt like it was too much. For Tony and for him.

They left the hospital the very next day and Loki awaited them at the tower. The repair work on the penthouse wasn’t finished yet, so they would settle for one of the lower floors.

When the doors of the elevator opened Tony and Steve slowly stepped out and filled the room with an uncomfortable silence. It was impossible to miss the tense way Steve moved and Loki was convinced that this had nothing to do with his healing injuries. Had they even talked on their way here? What was there to talk about?

The way Tony kept an obvious physical distance between them clearly stood out to Loki. That wasn’t everything. Exactly like in the hospital Tony’s gaze was directed towards the floor, not at the person next to him.

Clearing his throat Tony eventually spoke up. “So… it’s all yours. I made a few calls, the fridge is
stocked, new sheets on the bed and Jarvis is there to take care of everything you need…” Tony put down the bag he had been carrying which probably contained Steve’s belongings that he had brought along.

“Thanks… it’s very nice…” This time Steve didn’t smile and Loki felt his chest tighten and the weight threatening to bring him down to his knees. “You want to… stay a little bit?”

Tony answered Steve’s question by shaking his head. “It’s late and I really want to get some sleep… in a real bed. You should do that too… you’ve been out of the hospital for about two hours…”

“I guess you are right…” Despite admitting that Steve sounded disappointed and he didn’t even attempt to hide the concern he was feeling.

“Night, Steve…” That was all Tony said before getting back into the elevator and pressing one of the buttons. Loki was standing next to him when the doors slid closed and nothing about Tony’s behaviour changed when Steve couldn’t see him anymore. The same expression marked by empty eyes.

This wasn’t Tony… but a dead person…

Loki couldn’t help but feel a tingle of surprise when he realised that the elevator wasn’t going up but down. After the penthouse had been destroyed they had moved into the second highest floor. So Tony refused to go there alone. Or to get close to any bed that Thomas had slept in.

The elevator stopped and Tony walked out, Loki one step behind. Another floor that served as a perfectly nice apartment, but Tony didn’t take a single look around. He headed directly to the kitchen, opening a cupboard and taking out a bottle of scotch. With bottle in his hand Tony returned to the main room, sat down on the couch and opened the bottle. No glass, no attempt to make this look pretty. Tony took a long gulp directly from the bottle and then stared into pace. A pattern that started to repeat itself. Not a word was spoken, Tony didn’t even seem to be looking at anything in particular. All he did was sitting there and slowly emptying that bottle.

Loki had sat down on the floor, right in front of him, staring up at him and finally gave up fighting the sensation of suffocating. It didn’t make it better, Loki was hurting over and over without experiencing any physical pain.

Again Tony brought the bottle to his lips and Loki balled his hand into a fist, wishing he could at least feel angry at himself and not so beaten, broken into pieces.

You expect me to break down? To hide myself in a corner and drink myself to death? Don’t worry, Bruce. I plan on doing that…

Like so many times before Loki’s magic started reacting, protesting, urging him to do something. Sitting there Loki felt the desire to comply, to act, to pull the strings like he had done the entire time, but there was nothing he could do. The weight kept him exactly where he was, his hands felt bound and above all that was that horrible knowledge that allowed the ice to spread across Loki’s soul. Here was no place for him. There never had been.

Therefore Loki could only sit there and watch the result of his own work.

***

Steve did the best he could, sincerely trying to help his friend without knowing how to do that. Tony refused and Loki began to ask himself why he had invited Steve to live in the tower in the
first place. Tony’s entire daily routine consisted of avoiding Steve at all costs and getting drunk.

Those empty eyes which had looked so lovingly at Loki were now constantly bloodshot and not looking at anything. That mouth which had driven Loki to the edge of madness in more than one way had stopped talking. And those hands which Loki had come to admire for the wonders they could create were now only used to hold a bottle of liquor.

Loki was watching the shell of this brilliant man slowly killing his body so it could follow his already dead soul.

With every sip Loki’s magic was screaming at him, rebelling inside of him and it only made it worse. Loki couldn’t give him Thomas back, he couldn’t even provide an explanation for what happened, because he would put Tony through even more pain, although that hardly seemed possible.

This was what he had wanted all along, wasn’t it? Loki had brought a person to the point where he only had to watch them destroying themselves. Only to find out that it didn’t bring him pleasure but suffering.

Loki wasn’t the only one though.

At first Steve made careful attempts to get Tony to do something. Anything. Get out of the tower, go for a walk, watch a movie, anything. Every single proposition met deaf ears. Steve sent Pepper which made Tony tell Jarvis to block the elevators, he didn’t want to see anyone. A try to remind Tony of his love for technology also failed miserably, he had lost all interest for working on his suit and didn’t even want to pick up a single tool. To replace the bottle with anything else was not an option for Tony and while he slipped more and more into an everyday alcohol delirium Steve grew more and more desperate.

Since time had lost all meaning Loki couldn’t tell when he finally couldn’t take it anymore.

“Tony, I want to talk to you…” Gentle and attentive, trying to hard not to cause any more pain.

Sitting in a comfortable chair next to one of the huge windows with a gorgeous view over the city Tony kept ignoring Steve and instead continued focusing on the bottle of vodka in his hand. By now, it didn’t matter at which time you showed up and tried to talk to him, Tony would definitely already be under the influence of the alcohol. His days had come to this, drinking until he passed out and continuing to drink as soon as he woke up.

However Steve’s luck hadn’t left him completely, since Tony was still capable of realising that somebody was talking to him. “Go away, Steve…”

No, don’t send him away. He is a hero. If anybody can help, it’s him…

“I am not going to leave. I’ll be honest, Tony… I don’t know what to do here. I have never experienced what you are going through and I’ve tried… I am scared for you. You continue like this and you will kill yourself…”

No… not like this. The wrong thing to say. Scream at him, don’t take it. Show him that you care and that you won’t take his shit…

“That’s the plan…” Tony croaked, taking another sip from the bottle and Steve’s lips formed a thin line before he forced himself to take a breath.

“You are my friend and it’s not like I don’t see why you are doing this… why you think… This
doesn’t help you.” Steve gestured towards the bottle in Tony’s hands. “All you’re doing is… trying to numb the pain, but you have to face it before it gets better.” Still gentle, but now firm. His usual determination, a man that believed in what he was saying.

Loki would have felt relieved if Tony had snarled, sneered or shown any kind of emotional reaction like he used to. Instead he turned his head, expressionless eyes looking at Steve. “I don’t want to get better.”

“I want you to get better.”

“I want you to leave!”

Steve didn’t care about what Tony said, but he definitely gained a little bit of hope through the fact that Tony had raised his voice. That meant some part of him was still there. He wasn’t just a shell. “It’s time to put that bottle away, Tony. We need to talk about what happened that day and before. About the guys who are responsible for all of this. About Bruce, Natasha, Thomas…”

“Shut up!” Tony gritted his teeth, the hand that wasn’t wrapped around the bottle formed a trembling fist and Loki bit his lip. It was good to see that he was still reacting to anything at all, but Loki couldn’t see this helping. There was so much pain, too many scars that weren’t going to heal.

“No, I am not going to shut up. I backed off several times, because you are my friend and I see you suffering and I don’t want to cause you any more pain, but I am not going to back off now. Your boyfriend was killed and other people died during the attack on the S.H.I.E.L.D bases. I know you feel guilty about…”

“Guilty?” Tony let out a dry, joyless laugh that reminded Loki of himself and he felt a cold shiver running down his spine. “Do I feel guilty about something that’s my fault?”

“You didn’t kill anybody, Tony. They were using you…”

“I was fucking wrong! You told me! Everybody told me that they didn’t do it, but I walked in there anyway, tearing the place down…” Darkness and anger and yet they barely reached his eyes.

Steve made another step forward, probably wanting to Tony in any kind of way, giving him support. “They wanted you to believe that… and remember? At the end I believed it too. It’s not your fault. You didn’t go in there randomly kill people… they did.”

It wasn’t enough, it wasn’t going to be enough.

Tony’s knuckles turned white and his jaw was tensed when he finally dared to actually look at his friend. Loki knew that expression. When you desperately wanted somebody to hate you as much as you hated yourself. This was never going to happen.

“And what about Natasha? I didn’t kill her, because somebody else was faster than me. I would have. I wanted to. I desperately wanted to…”

Even Steve needed to a moment to process this, to find something to reply. “You didn’t do it and you weren’t just talked into it. It was perfectly orchestrated… They killed Thomas, you didn’t…”

Every word was pushing the blade deeper inside Loki breathed through the pain.

“Don’t!” Suddenly Tony was on his feet, the bottle slipping from his grip, falling to the floor and bursting into pieces. Nobody even looked at it. “Don’t talk about him. Don’t.” His voice was shaking and what should have been threatening only ended up sounding desperate.
Raising his hands Steve tried to show that he didn’t mean any harm. How could he? “Tony, please… allow yourself to grieve. What happened with S.H.I.E.L.D isn’t your fault and Thomas also isn’t…”

“They killed him because of me!” Tony was screaming, his eyes wide and for once not empty. There was nothing but guilt.

“Tony…”

“No! Fuck you! You don’t know anything! You’ve never made a single mistake! You didn’t get the people you love killed!”

Loki wanted to yell at Steve for not holding Tony back when he ran past him, towards the elevator. Not even a single word to tell him to come back. So Loki had to follow him. Tony was shaking, pacing around in the small space, forcing Loki to press himself into a corner, so Tony wouldn’t touch him by accident. When the doors opened Tony stormed outside and then instantly stopped dead in his tracks. Loki was one step behind and held his breath as soon as realised where they were.

Three large boxes were placed on the floor right in front of Tony. They had never been moved. The most beautiful gift Loki had ever received.

Tony was just standing there, frozen to a spot, staring at them, all energy suddenly sucked from his body. Loki wanted to run. To Vanaheim. Anywhere but here.

Go… just leave… it has nothing to do with you… You let go… you fell into the void because you had let go… you shouldn’t even be here…

Dropping onto his knees Tony let his fingers run over one of the boxes and Loki shook his head. He didn’t remember that softness in a touch, nor that care. Ever so slowly Tony opened the box, almost as if he was scared it would break beneath his hands. Loki didn’t bother to even glance at the books, but watched Tony’s fingers brushing over them.

A noise passed Tony’s lips, like he wanted to say something but his body refused to. His shoulders started shaking and Loki cowardly turned away. It was useless since he could still hear the sobs. Tony was crying.

Not once. From the moment Thomas had died in his arms until now Tony hadn’t shed a single tear and now he was here, his hands clutching at a book while he wasn’t able to control his frantic sobs. Or he didn’t even try.

The claws were back, tearing at Loki and his magic was screaming so loudly and yet all he could hear was Tony’s despair. Kneeling there, right in front of him and falling apart, because of what Loki had done to him.

Putting his bones back together and healing his wounds hadn’t meant anything, Loki had hurt him so much deeper. Just like himself.

All his pain and all that anger became meaningless when Loki only wanted to reach out and touch him. Brushing the tears away and heal his soul like he had done with his body. Fill these eyes with life and give him back the desire to create miracles. To laugh and to spite.

But Loki couldn’t. Loki had let go and should have died in the process. Loki didn’t have a part in Tony’s life.
Every devastating sob made it harder to stand there, to observe what he had done and to feel it. How often could he be torn apart and why did it now feel like the very first time?

“Tony…”

Loki’s head flung around, his body trembling and only now saw Steve sitting down next to Tony, tenderly putting a hand on his shoulder.

“No, you…” His sobs made it impossible to talk. Tears were freely running down his face and still he could muster enough power to at least try to push him away.

“Don’t… I’m not going to leave.” Ignoring Tony’s futile attempts Steve closed his arms around him. Not trying anymore to make him talk, just holding him and Tony still fought until he dropped his arms, his forehead resting against Steve’s shoulder.

Next to them Loki could only watch them staying like this for minutes or hours. Until Tony’s sobs had subsided and his body had stopped shaking. Even then Steve wouldn’t let go of him.

Loki had no place here. The Vanr had died and Loki had let go of Gungir. He should have died back then.

It was time for him to leave and to make things right. Or at least try to. Loki wasn’t able to do that, but maybe somebody else could.
Hey everybody,

Can you believe it? Only one chapter left...

Good lord...

__________________________________________________________________________

_Pero mi loco amor es tu mejor doctor_
_Voy a curarte el alma en duelo_
_Voy a dejarte como nuevo_
_Y todo va pasar_
_Pronto veras el sol brillar_
_Tú más que nadie mereces ser feliz_

_Día de enero ~~ Shakira ~~_

(But my mad love is your best doctor
I will cure your mourning soul
I will leave you as good as new
And everything will go by
Soon you will see the sun shining
You more than anybody deserve to be happy)

__________________________________________________________________________

“He couldn’t stand you…”

Rather confused Steve looked up, clearly surprised that Tony had started talking and that rather out of nowhere. They had been sitting on the couch for quite some time now, in complete, not uncomfortable silence. Tony was still making sure that him and Steve weren’t touching, but sitting close together.

“I liked that about him…” The faintest smile was dancing around Tony’s lips. So out of place and yet perfectly fitting. “He was the only person I’ve ever met that didn’t immediately love you…”

That hadn’t been true. At first, yes, but now… Loki didn’t want to think about what had been and what was happening now.

“He was very straightforward about that, yeah…” Steve shared his smile, but it was still too soon. It quickly faded away just like Tony’s.

“No, he didn’t like you, but he still… knew that you were a good guy. That you could be trusted… I knew that too. I didn’t agree with most of your opinions but… I knew you were my friend and I
didn’t… not for a second… I did never think that you…”

“Tony, you don’t need to explain…. I understand.”

“No… this whole… thing just proved again that you can’t trust anybody. I got screwed over by pretty much everyone in my life and then it turns out that even S.H.I.E.L.D… not really but parts of it and… people we fucking worked with… trying to kill us. Killed Natasha… I had Tommy. He was full of spite and distrust himself… but I knew I could trust him. Now he’s dead and that leaves only… you. What I’m trying to say is… you should get the fuck away, Steve. As fast as you can. By now it’s pretty clear that the people around me end up dead or hurt…” Tony’s words were soft, barely audible, but Loki could tell that they had been chosen carefully. Inflection and tone couldn’t change the fact that Tony meant them. A devastating realisation and it was impossible to deny the truth in it.

Fortunately Steve had never been afraid of facing the truth or of pointing out a lie. “Don’t say that… it’s not true…”

Tony shot him a glance, finally filled with some emotion. Only a person who was still breathing, living could feel anger. It wasn’t enough to raise his voice though, but it made Loki hope. “Tommy would still be alive if it wasn’t for me. They killed him, because he was my boyfriend. That was the only reason. You were shot because of me and Bruce…”

That wound was still too fresh and the guilt lying too heavy on his shoulders. Too much for a single person to bear and no matter how much Steve wanted to carry some of it, it wouldn’t help.

“It wasn’t your fault, Tony. You couldn’t have known how things would turn out. Somebody else was in control of the situation who we knew nothing about.”

“He was there because of me.”

Determinedly Steve shook his head, Loki could see the longing in his eyes. His wish to take that burden off Tony’s shoulder. To cast some of his demons away without the help of a bottle. “Bruce is your friend. He wanted to help you and he made that decision himself. It doesn’t matter if I agreed with your decision or not or if it was the right thing to do or not. You didn’t force anybody…”

Tony lowered his eyes, staring at his own hands. The action clearly showed the shame he was feeling and Loki bit his lip. All about it was wrong, a person like Tony shouldn’t feel this way. He was supposed to be all smiles and jests, completely unafraid. The way Tony had got to know him… before he had everything in his power to destroy this man. Now Steve was so desperately and honourably trying to pick up the pieces and put them back together. Loki was aching to help him and he would do it, but it would take time and until then Loki depended on Steve. A man who would never let him down.

“I didn’t? I told him he could leave, but I also told him that I needed him… I knew that he would help me if I asked, so I asked. He wanted to help me and now he’s… we have no idea where he is. Because of me.”

“It was his decision to leave, Tony. You can’t hold yourself responsible for everything. It’s Bruce… I am sure he is fine. He knows how to take care of himself and… he made another decision on his own. Maybe he’ll come back, just letting things calm down and… maybe he’ll try to get in touch…”

Tony’s hands formed fists and Loki could hear him taking a deep breath. “Did you… hear
anything? From anybody who’s still around?”

His tone wasn’t hopeful, he was beyond that, but at least he was still asking question. Tony still wanted to know.

Sadly Steve shook his head. “No… there is barely anyone left to report to me and…”

Probably even Loki wouldn’t be able to teach Steve how to lie or how to keep a secret. Even Tony could tell that things were being left unsaid. His eyes darted back to Steve’s face. “Just tell me… how can it get any worse?”

Steve quickly accepted that Tony wanted to hear the truth or whatever detail he wasn’t telling him. “The guys… who invaded the main base… most of them are dead.”

“How?”

“I don’t know… I got a call from a former S.H.I.E.L.D agent… they found a hide-out… it was full of corpses. They identified them as former agents, top people… It looks like the guy who…” Steve took a second and looked down at himself. “… shot me was among them. They could tell by the weapons they found. Apparently they… designed some bullets especially for me. They are all dead. Stabbed. It sounded… pretty messy.”

A flattering description. Loki had left a bloodbath behind which hadn’t brought him any satisfaction. They were dead, he had delivered a message.

Once again Tony didn’t show a physical reaction. That once so expressive face was still a mask, unable to read even for Loki. “Stabbed…”

“Yes… like the ones in the control room. We have no idea what happened… no bullets against dozens of armed men…” Steve seemed indeed clueless, but at the same time Loki got the feeling that he didn’t care so much about this event. Or he didn’t care as much as he used to.

Loki felt a little sting in his chest when there was this soft spark in Tony’s eyes. A sign of life and interest. Ever so small, but undeniable. “They hit me… I could feel it. By the time there were only two of them left… I was barely standing upright. I was dying. I could feel it… it felt like they had ripped me apart from the inside.”

Steve didn’t respond and Loki turned his head away. He couldn’t tell why, but he didn’t want to watch them while they were talking about him.

“I was lying there and… there was only pain until… there was this guy. He touched me, I think and… he did something… it hurt… I’ve never felt something that I could compare to this… not even taking the arc reactor out… and then… I was fine. I have no idea how, but… I was fine…”

“Tony…” Steve cleared his throat. “The doctors said you were okay… except for some bruises and…”

“I know, but I was fine, because he did something… I have no idea what, but… I was dying, Steve… I couldn’t breathe, my vision was… blurry and I couldn’t really make him out… when I was feeling better I thought that he was Tommy…” Loki didn’t want to see the pain, but he could hear it well enough. A terrible sound which just wouldn’t fade away… not until Loki had made it right and it would take time…”

“He disappeared and… it wasn’t Tommy. Like I said… everything was blurry and fuzzy… when I felt better I could see him better… I asked Clint about him, but he didn’t know an agent who
looked like that… at least not the ones who were sent in to take the base back… They also didn’t find a corpse that fits my description…”

Closing his eyes Loki shook his head. It was so unimportant.

“What did he look like? Obviously I didn’t see the back-up troops, but… I knew a lot of the people in the base… so maybe…”

Loki should be happy that they were talking at all. Everything about this was progress, but they should stop talking about him.

“It was so quick… He had… brown hair, very curly… Very dark eyes… almost black. He was pretty… soft features… I don’t know, it happened so quickly. There was something… his hair. It was falling into his eyes… it was long. Agents don’t wear it that long, right?”

“No, of course not. You’re supposed to cut it short, so it won’t get in the way in a fight. So people can’t pull it or that kind of stuff… it’s unusual but not impossible.” Steve legitimately sounded sorry that he couldn’t provide some better information and Loki was sick of him feeling guilty. Would he never get tired of carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders?

A few minutes of silence followed and Loki wished for someone to speak. To do anything. To act like people who were still alive and had things to live for. Who still cared. Yes, Steve did, but Tony didn’t. Steve making him talk didn’t mean anything. I made no difference.

“I know you don’t believe me. You think I imagined him… that I got hit on the head or… whatever… but he was there and he did something to help me… I know that…” Tony sounded thoroughly convinced and Steve didn’t respond. Maybe they were communicating by looking at each other.

“We should eat something…”

“No.”

“Tony, please…”

“I don’t feel like eating.”

“Have you looked in the mirror lately? These clothes are getting too big for you… Please. You need to eat… and to drink something else than booze…”

It was over. Steve ruined it while having the best intentions. Who was Loki to think that he could keep this conversation up without trying to do the things that needed to be done? Steve was a saviour, a care-taker and when he saw a problem, he was going to confront it. Plain and simple. He knew that the psychological wounds needed time to heal if they were ever going to. Yes, they could kill Tony, but only in the long run. The more pressing issues were physical. A person that kept drinking and refused to eat was purposely damaging their body.

Steve wanted to fix this, had wanted to do that all along and only now Tony had started talking to him. Too soon, way too soon. Tony had wanted to share his guilt, maybe he hadn’t been able anymore to bear the pain alone. He had been caught at his weakest moment and therefore he had given into Steve, knowing he could trust him.

Telling somebody why you had given up on life didn’t mean that you would let them save you.

“I just want to catch some sleep…”
“Tony…”

“See you later…”

Ever so slowly standing up Tony left the room and Steve did nothing to hold him back. Because he knew he couldn’t. This was a losing battle.

Reopening his eyes Loki watched Steve sitting on the couch, clearly lost in thought. Just as lost as some weeks ago. Still completely alone and although there was somebody right next to him. Unable to reach them. Someone like Steve… Loki shook his head, discarding this ridiculous thought. There was nobody like Steve, not a single person on this miserable planet compared to him. Steve wasn’t able to watch somebody else suffer, least of all his friends.

Tony was the last one…

Reaching into his pocket Steve pulled out his phone and Loki didn’t miss him letting out a long sigh. A look of devastating sadness haunted his eyes and Loki was tempted to turn his head away.

Steve pressed a few buttons and waited. A quick spark of hope quickly vanished into nothingness. “Hey…” While talking to Tony Steve had sounded completely different, confident, ready to comfort somebody in need. Now the tables had turned, he was the one who needed a shoulder to lean on. “I still can’t reach you… I have no idea why, but I… it’s been weeks and I really need to talk to you… I miss you. I am feeling helpless. All the time. I can’t do anything to change things, to make them right. I couldn’t do anything to help my friend or to stop these things from happening to him… I’m trying to pick up the pieces, but I can’t put them back together. Will, I’d really like to talk to you… Or just hear that you’re alright…”

No goodbyes, Steve hang up and for a fleeting moment Loki wished that he could give him his friend back. To be that friend. Something that wasn’t possible anymore. Will was nothing than an illusion and Loki couldn’t go back to him, not even for a second. Especially not considering what was about to follow.

Loki wasn’t going to wear another skin anymore.

Yet Steve deserved better. Especially since he was now even lonelier than before, still trying to save another person. Loki needed Steve to save Tony… just long enough. But who would save Steve?

It was time. Loki had already wasted too much of it.

Loki’s eyes followed Steve when he got up from the couch, his movements still as slow as on the day when he had come here from the hospital. It was fairly obvious that Loki wasn’t the only one carrying a weight on his shoulders. He had put it there himself.

So Loki would tie up some lose ends before he would leave. No scheming. Just a phone call and some written words.

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The bottle was still untouched. It was standing right in front of Tony and judging by the expression in his eyes he considered it both his saving grace and his doom. Which probably were synonyms for him by now.

Loki hadn’t moved in minutes, just like Tony. The latter’s eyes fixed on the bottle, Loki’s on Tony. It was torturing Loki that he had no idea how this battle was going to end. The battle itself was
reason enough to be grateful, Loki hadn’t been sure what Tony’s reaction would be. The second he had turned to the bar Loki had felt the urge to push him to the ground and to slap him, but he couldn’t.

His compassion and pain was mingling with anger. Tony was so much stronger than this. A man with such drive, intelligence and passion should not end up in such a state of dependence. To Loki it was a sign of weakness and unworthy of him. Why suffer when there was somebody right next to you whose only desire was it to get you out of these shadows.

Tony’s fingers closed around the neck of the bottle and Loki gritted his teeth. Anger and pain still fighting for dominance and his magic was rebelling. Wanting him to do things although there was nothing he could do. Nothing to make an impact or change anything.

Loki couldn’t.

Steve had to do it, so Loki could leave and then… everything would be different.

Until then Steve had to take care of him… if Tony only let him.

Please, just let him help you…

Standing up Loki walked over to the table, stopping right next to Tony. Another overwhelming desire building inside of him. Maybe even stronger than his thirst for revenge, Loki couldn’t quite remember. Not only his magic but every fibre of his being was yearning to touch Tony. Even Loki wasn’t able to voice his intentions, because he didn’t know what he wanted.

Slapping him across the face, pulling him into his arms, throwing the bottle against the wall, yelling at him, squeezing his hand…

Loki didn’t know, so all he could do was standing there, only needing to reach out to touch Tony. But he didn’t, he couldn’t. What was there left to do? What else than pleading him? If Tony stopped hurting, maybe there was a chance that Loki would get through the pain too. Just long enough…

Once again Loki’s hand moved on its own to touch Tony’s shoulder, his fingertips tingling with want and need. Yet Loki stopped half-way, knowing that he couldn’t do this. It would only make things worse.

Tony let go of the bottle and wrapped his hands around the edge of the table. The features on his face hardened even more and Loki thought he could see his lips moving though he was not making a sound.

Just go, please… you know you want to talk with him about it…

“Fuck…” Tony’s fist collided with the table before he turned abruptly around, heading for the elevator and Loki let out a breath of relief. Yes. The first time you turned for somebody for help was the hardest. Next time was going to be easier… Steve was going to make it easier.

Teleporting to Steve’s floor Loki took a look around. His lips curled up into a half-hearted smile when he spotted Steve lying on the couch, reading a book about the 1970ies. It was very hard trying to understand a world that wasn’t your own. The second Steve heard the elevator’s doors opening he put the book away and got up to his feet. He didn’t bother to hide his surprise and Loki could tell that he was about to smile when Tony entered the room. The difference between them couldn’t be more obvious. One so beautiful and determined to not give up on hope, while the other one still looking for a reason to keep standing upright when the possibility to let go and drown
seemed so tempting.

“Tony, hey…” Again he sounded so soft, so careful to not make a mistake. As if a single movement could scare Tony off.

“I’m…” Loki could see him balling one hand into a fist, then instantly uncurling his fingers. “I thought…”

Tell him, ask him to be there for you. He wants you to, he needs you to…

“Why don’t you sit down? I will get us something to drink…” Steve was unsure, didn’t know who to act around him.

To Loki’s surprise and relief Tony nodded softly before sitting down on the couch, waiting for Steve to come back from the kitchen area. He returned with two glasses of water and joined Tony on the couch, still so attentive to not touch him.

“Thanks…” Tony took the glass, but didn’t bring it to his lips. Steve’s eyes watched him closely and Loki waited. If he needed some time, Steve would grant it and Loki had enough time as needed.

One moment faded into another and Loki could see how Tony was looking for the words, sometimes opening his mouth, then instantly closing it again. What finally made him talk was Steve’s encouraging smile. Not demanding, he would take what he could get.

“I got a call…” Tony’s breath sounded rattled and he closed his eyes. Not wanting to hear the words he was saying. “Not me but… Jarvis… and then Pepper… It’s been weeks and… people at work had noticed and filed a missing person’s file… Pepper has talked to the authorities… and kept them off my back, because…” Tony trailed off and Steve wouldn’t understand. He had no idea that Thomas’ body was still in this tower. “She… said she got a call from his notary… I’m supposed to…”

His voice left him again and Steve didn’t miss a beat. “Oh… I can go there with you… if you want to?”

Slowly shaking his head Tony lowered his eyes. “No… I already know that he… it’s not about the testament… or it is… I need to take care of the funeral…”

Steve visibly swallowed and unlike Loki he suddenly wasn’t afraid to touch Tony anymore. His fingers brushed over Tony’s wrist, then closing around his lower arm. “I can try and help you… only if you want to…”

Tony didn’t respond, his gaze lingering on Steve’s hand on his arm.

“It’s been a couple of weeks… what about…”

How were you supposed to talk about this? About the fact that this body should already be rotting away. Wherever it was…

Steve’s hand tightened around Tony’s arm when the latter flinched, shaking lightly. “He… I… He’s still here. I had everything in the lab to… stop… I couldn’t even think about giving him away, but when we got back… I couldn’t… I wasn’t up there since we got back… I don’t think I can do this, Steve… I can’t bury him. Then he’ll be gone completely…”

Loki rammed his fingernails into his own flesh. As hard as he could. To feel anything else but the
pain inside of him. The guilt and…

“I am so sorry, Tony, but…” Steve didn’t even have to try, his tenderness and care came all naturally. Because he was real. “… he has been gone for quite some time now. A funeral won’t change that, but maybe… it would help you to come to terms with it. It’s… He deserves a proper funeral.”

“All of his stuff his up there in the penthouse… I wanted him here… I couldn’t even stand Pepper here half of the time… but it was so easy with him and now I am supposed to read a piece of paper where he wrote down how he wants to be buried… I can’t even go up there and look at… I am all alone now. I’ve always been but… now I don’t I think I can take it. I can’t bury him knowing I put him there…” Tony was shaking and Loki closed his eyes, not wanting to think about the irony.

He had let go… He had seen the abyss beneath him, his father and brother above him, reaching out to him and it had meant nothing. The Vanr was dead. Loki didn’t have a face, nor a name. Loki was a monster… and he had been supposed to die on a rock of ice…

Tony hadn’t done anything… he had been nothing but kind…

Ever so slowly Steve started talking again, choosing his words carefully, so Tony would definitely understand how sincere he was. “I’ve seen you with him… Granted we didn’t spend so much time with each other, but I saw what he meant to you. You did everything you could to protect him… and it’s unfair, but sometimes… we can’t do enough. Sometimes we’re helpless and I am so sorry that it happened to you… but you have to do this. It’s important. You need a ceremony, something to help you let go, to go on… and to heal…”

“I hate these phrases… let go… heal… as if he was just some… minor, tragic event I have to get over… and later on I will be as good as new… waiting for the next guy to come around and then everything will be alright… I don’t want to be alright. I don’t want to heal. I want Tommy… But he’s dead and… I can’t, Steve…” Tony shook his head, turning away and burying his face in his hands.

Steve reached out for him, but stopped himself and only now Loki could see it in his eyes. The disappointment and the longing.

Tell him, Steve… please… you need to take care of each other when I’m gone… and I can’t stay much longer…

Loki knew what he asked of him. Opening up completely to another person when his best friend had just walked out on him. Maybe it would help to bring them closer together… or Steve would finally learn his lesson and stop putting his trust in people. Not this time though. Loki needed him to be the person he was, forgiving, kind and sweet.

“I…” Licking his lips Steve hesitated and Loki almost expected him to turn away, but he was courageous and kept looking at his friends, although he felt clearly uncomfortable. “There is no way saying this without sounding selfish… so I won’t even try. I need you… You are my friend and I want you to get through this and… I got a letter from my best friend… I haven’t heard from him in weeks and… he pretty much asked me to try not to get back into contact with him… I… he gave me a long explanation, telling me that he is sorry. That he had thought I was dead and that he couldn’t bear the thought of going through something like that again. Thinking I was hurt… or dead… He wrote he was being selfish too, because I deserve better… and… that he can’t be the person I need, he would like to be, but he can’t, because… he can’t even look in the mirror. I… I don’t get it and then again I do… I guess I am selfish too, because… I am alone too. You are all I got now and I don’t want to lose you…”
When Tony raised his head he saw tears glistening in Steve’s eyes and finally Loki could see a little part of Tony. “Your friends is a jackass…”

“No, he isn’t… I guess he is scared… like us. I know people walked out on you and… you’ve lost Tommy and you think you’re alone, but you aren’t. I am here and I won’t leave. You’re all I’ve got…” It was the truth and despite the sadness and the tears there was still some hope in Steve’s voice which he wanted to share with Tony. Since he was the reason why it was still there.

Tony didn’t reply, but let the words sink in and Loki prayed that he would see it. That they needed each other, to comfort and to protect each other until Loki had had enough time to pay his debts and to change fate. Replace darkness with light.

The doubt lay heavily on Loki’s shoulders. He didn’t know he could do it, if he was capable of somewhat undo the damage he had done, but he would try. Loki would spend the rest of his life trying. A life that should have ended so long ago…

“Can you… help me to make a few calls…” Tony hesitated, struggling with the words. “It would be wrong to just let… Pepper or Jarvis take care of it… but I don’t know if I can do it alone…”

“You don’t have to…”

That was all Loki needed. Them knowing that they had each other and Steve would help him in a way that Loki wasn’t able to. The pain would not go away, but Steve would take care of Tony and therefore of himself too. Knowing that Loki could leave and fulfil the promise he had given them. They were going to be alright. Not just surviving but living. This was now Loki’s purpose. A decision he had made.

Steve and Tony would be alright and Loki would strip himself off the pain, the guilt and the memories. All of them. Then Loki would maybe finally find peace.

It was time, so Loki turned around and left to stage his final play.
Chapter Notes

There we are.

Good lord. I can't believe it's finished. Yeah, heard that right. This story is finished. During the course of writing it, I came up with several possible endings. A few months ago I listened to the song "Bright Lights" in my car and I was like - "Yeah, now I know which one it's going to be". So here is the ending, the longest chapter of the story.

Thank you guys so very much for sticking around, for your nice words and your appreciation. I'm humbled. It was a blast.

Now let's say goodbye :-)
“Why do you think my request odd? It’s a gift so rare, only a handful of people in the Nine Worlds possess it. I can hardly think of anything more fascinating… Except the look on your face when Thor gets one of your jokes…”

Loki remembered laughing and he felt how the Vanir tangled their fingers. More than a spark. A soft tingle and so incredibly familiar. Loki wasn’t able to tell if it came from the Vanir or him. Or both of them.

“That only happened once…”

“At least once a week…”

“Not possible. I was merely wondering why you are interested in my way of wandering between the worlds when you are always contemplating my illusions.”

Now Loki felt his constricting when he remembered the Vanir smiling at him. A smile without a face.

“Perhaps it is just my personal preference… I admire what you can do with the different veils, but I… am not fond of it.”

“What? My greatest talent and you are not fond of it? It was the first thing we ever talked about. You have complimented me on my illusions more times than I could count. I demand an explanation, my lord.”

“I prefer your real face. It’s quite lovely… but you know that… So I do not like it when you put on another. I am far more intrigued by the possibility to go anywhere you want by blinking your eyes.”

“I don’t need to blink.”

Another laugh, soft and pleasing. Maybe a little bit frustrated. Fingers were brushing over Loki’s cheek. “I know… Will you try anyway? To teach me? I know I will never be able to jump between the worlds like you do, but I would like to learn anyway…”

There it was again. That energy running between their hands. Surprisingly strong and fierce. Coming from both of them. Loki remembered the feeling of magic. His own and the Vanir’s. Searching each other’s presence, mingling together.

Loki remembered being happy. Through and through. His magic had been singing a song that had long been forgotten.

“Then we’ll do that… but I have to warn you. I am a very impatient teacher.”

“I am sure I will be able to deal with that…”

Soft pressure against his lips and Loki couldn’t take it anymore. That glimpse into a past that wasn’t glorified or idealised, but real. Life had been like this. Knowing who he was and having another person who knew as well.

Now Loki was deprived of all that knowledge. Without a face, without a family, without a name… without a name.
The Vanr was still kissing him and Loki wanted to push him away. To ask him his name. Again and again until he had an answer.

“What’s your name? I don’t remember. Please, tell me your name. I need to know….”

It was a memory, not even Loki could mess with it or change anything about it. So the Vanr didn’t tell him his name and Loki shook his head to escape the memory. To escape this other life, he knew that it had been his at one point. So long ago, the things that he had been missing, that were supposed to make him whole again. If it hadn’t already been too late...

Loki had let go… he had made that decision. What else should he have done? There hadn’t been a place for him. Not anymore. It had been brutally taken away from him, more than once. Ripped from grasp and there was no way to ever get it back.

Loki had let go and he had been falling… until it had suddenly stopped. Which it shouldn’t have. No, Loki wasn’t supposed to be here, but now he was. He had burned the earth he had touched and now…

It was not in Loki’s power to fix what he had broken. Somebody else would put the pieces back together and heal the wounds which would nevertheless leave scars. All Loki could do was sending this someone on their way. Loki would join the Vanr.

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The pencil was scraping over the paper, its sound had a reassuring and calming effect on Loki. It was the very first step, but he had taken it. Loki knew it wasn’t going to be the hardest and yet he felt indifferent to it. One last time and Loki wouldn’t settle for anything less than perfection. Something real, something free of malice and lies. Tony deserved as much.

Contemplating his work Loki didn’t feel any conviction. Another face. Beautiful, of course, they all were, but this one was so much more important. Every detail needed to be designed with care and attention. Loki had thought that he would automatically know when he had found the one. Until now he had felt nothing, drawing dark lines on white paper, creating faces that all looked different and were all the same. It had to serve a purpose, just one. Too much resemblance would alienate them and at the same time Loki didn’t dare to not include any similarities. Thomas’ appearance had pleased Tony, so Loki would keep some traits. If he only knew where to start…

_Poderia ajudá-lo...

Maybe he had been right after all, maybe he could help Loki. With his black hair and dark eyes… a little bit like the one Tony had seen when Loki had healed his wounds. The young man on the beach had been beautiful, had it been him who Loki had been imitating? No, Tony had mentioned curls, the Portuguese’s hair had been straight and short.

Taking a new sheet Loki began sketching a head. Its form not so different from his own. Curls. Dark. Soft. If you brushed it a few times you’d be able to straighten it out somewhat and one hour later the curls would be back. Completely black, even in bright daylight, not a spot of brown. Easy to run your fingers through it.

Small eyebrows just as dark.

Loki hesitated when he reached the eyes. Thomas’ had been blue. Out of the question. Closing his eyes Loki tried to picture them. More than eyes that you see every day when people were passing you by on the street. Special. Easy to memorize. Beautiful.
Light brown… and green… Nobody would be able to define the colour by just one look. Intense but warm…

His hand seemed to be moving on its own, bringing the image in his mind to paper and the result was gorgeous. A rather sharp but small nose and Loki had no more control over his fingers. They created a face, blessed with beauty and incredibly expressive eyes. Yes, Loki felt good about it, it wouldn’t be hard to wear. Easy to look at, chances were good that Tony would like it.

Nevertheless it was just a face. It didn’t matter half as much as one might think. Words made a difference, actions engaged people or pushed them away. Loki needed to create a mind, a personality behind this face. Write a whole story

If Loki only knew where to begin.

Different. That was the only word he could think about. Loki couldn’t make the same mistake he had made with Thomas. He had to be different or in the end it would still be Loki. The person who had no place and no right to still be here. Who had no right to be here and to maybe end up… happy again. Did he even want to?

Part of him. The other part just wanted to let go.

Putting the paper down Loki closed his eyes. This should be coming to him so easily. A whole lifetime he had done nothing but creating figures, personalities, people…

None of them had been supposed to last, to actually mean something… Yes, he had created persons who had been exactly that what his target had needed… to obtain Loki what he had wanted.

This wasn’t the case now and… Loki was afraid of making a mistake…

His magic pulled Loki away and he looked around only to find the room empty. It took Loki a long glance out of the window to even realise that it was night time. Tony’s usual chair was empty, so maybe Steve had already made a difference.

Of course he would…

Slipping through the hallway Loki stopped in front of the bedroom door. There was no place for him here and he shouldn’t go in. For his plan it was necessary to stay away, it could only work if he stayed away.

But he still had to make sure that they would be fine until Loki was done. Until he was ready. Until he would let go.

After teleporting into the room Loki’s eyes fell on the bed. Since his return to the tower Tony had barely slept at all and definitely not in a bed. He was still dressed in jeans and a worn out T-shirt. The blanket was lying on the floor. Tony’s face was partly hidden by pillow and yet Loki could see that he had been crying.

No smell of alcohol in the room, nothing out of the ordinary and Tony was sleeping. Good signs. Loki should just leave it at that and be gone.

There was no place for him here and he needed to leave for his plan to work.

Again Loki couldn’t lift his feet off the floor. Soon he’d be here less and less, then he’d be gone forever. So he should just leave now, get used to it.
Soon enough…

Loki lay down on the bed, next to Tony, watching him and thinking about names. How Loki didn’t have one. How Tony never knew his. How Loki didn’t know the Vanr’s and he still had to find a name for the one who would make it right.

_________________________________________________

I'm leaving, gone yesterday
Brutal, laughing, fighting, fucking
The price I had to pay

_________________________________________________

It was a beautiful face. Pale, delicate and yet sharp features. Intense green eyes that could convey any kind of emotion if Loki wanted them to. Yes, it was beautiful, but Loki wasn’t here to look at his own face, but try a new one. Figure out if it felt right. If it was good enough.

Reaching up Loki ran fingers through his hair, feeling his shorten slightly. Wrapping loose strands around his finger Loki created the soft curls before running his hand down his face. Dark emerald eyes turned into light brown ones with soft green sparks. A slightly smaller nose. The pale tone of his skin disappeared and it was suddenly sun-kissed, a naturally darker tone.

Tipping a finger against his shoulder Loki created a little scar. Reminder of a motorcycle accident. Running both hands down his arms Loki changed their form. Just a bit more muscle. Turning around Loki watched his side before running his fingers over it. Slowly black lines were sipping from his fingertips, forming new shapes on his skin. The tattoo reached from his hip to his armpit. A rose tendril was climbing up his side, dark petals and sharp thorns. It was artfully done, but Loki still adjusted some of the roses, placing them higher or lower until he was content.

Some other details. Loki didn’t change a lot about his height, this was still a tall, lean body with delicate fingers. Not the hands of a person who was doing a lot of physical work. Quite the opposite. They were made to create art. Like the tattoo.

Turning around Loki walked back into the living room, getting used to the new skin and the new body. It was easy to wear, Loki felt quite content with it. A good chance that he could keep it this way.

Sitting down Loki wasn’t bothered by his nakedness. Ignoring the sheets scattered all over the place Loki picked up his sketching block. Art was subjective. Tony was an artist, but the things he created weren’t just pretty things to look at. They served a purpose and were yet full of creativity and imagination. It wasn’t about creating something nice to look at. Rather something intelligent, something of use. Craftsmanship.

Being an artisan and an artist.

Nothing easier than that.

So Loki drew even more drafts, images, pictures, various parts of a new life.

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While entering the building Loki passed a mirror in the entrance hall and hesitated for a moment. Black curls and green eyes with brown, golden sparks. New but beautiful. Confident. Loki had worked out the details like he had done so many times before. Yet it was different. Loki was here, so there was no turning back. Second step – making things official.

Walking towards the reception desk Loki put on a smile. “Good morning, my name is Aleixo Pereira. I have an appointment with Mr. Hamilton.”

The receptionist returned the smile. “Good morning, Mr. Pereira. Just give me a second, I will call Mr. Hamilton and tell him that you’re here.”

She did just that and her boss was ready to see him about 15 minutes later. Mr. Hamilton was a middle aged man with a balding head, but a lot of charisma, even Loki could admit that.

“Mr. Pereira, nice to meet you.” While shaking his hand Loki spotted his resume lying on the table in front of him. “Thanks for giving me the opportunity.”

Only a few seconds of small talk then they got right into it. “Your references are impressive and I like the style of your work. It is definitely European though… I can see its potential in the United States. You haven’t worked here before, so I would like to know why you’ve decided to work here. It must be quite different…”

Loki knew his answers. They all came natural. He had a story to tell. The new story of his life. Every single thing he said made sense, it corresponded with his past and with the paper trail he had left behind. It hadn’t taken days but weeks to create it, to make it perfect, to seal very single loophole there might have been. What had happened to Thomas wouldn’t repeat itself.

No. No thinking about Thomas. To him he had never existed. So no thinking about him.

Instead Loki continued the conversation with the charm he had bestowed on Aleixo. He knew how to sweet talk people, he was confident and very smart. Anything else wouldn’t be interesting.

Half an hour later Loki left the building and he had a job. Not very surprising, not with his credentials and his talent. Walking down the street Loki tried to ignore his inner urge to just teleport back to Henry’s apartment. Aleixo didn’t possess any magic. He was an average mor-human being who was too reasonable and logical to even waste time thinking about such things.

Nobody could force him to walk though, Loki called a taxi and thought about how he needed to get a car soon… and another apartment.

Back at Henry’s place Loki dropped the glamour, there were still so many things to take care of, so he could still go back to Loki. Only limited time though.

Sitting down at his desk Loki got back to work. Photographs needed to be framed and organised and most importantly memories needed to be created.

Holding out his left hand Loki let the fingers of his right hand run along his lower arm. Pulling little strings of magic until they mingled together in his palm. Loki played with them, enjoying the feel of it, because it was him. His tower and he wanted to savour it, especially since it would soon be gone.

Ignoring that thought Loki gently moved his fingers almost as if he was playing the piano. The green light spread across the room, painted the walls of the room and eventually Loki saw a young woman standing in front of him. She looked very similar to Aleixo. Naturally, she was his sister.
Closing his fingers into a fist Loki watched the illusion dissolve before he captured the light and bound it to the paper in front of him. She was smiling at him, her face partly covering her hair, making it obvious that this was a snapshot. Natural. Real.

Again Loki continued like this for hours, putting the pieces together, writing a tragic story which wasn’t that much out of the ordinary.

It made him think of the Vanr and then of Tony.

How long had it been since he had been at the tower? Loki should know, but working day and night had him made lose all track of time. Yes, Loki shouldn’t go there. The farther he stayed away, the easier it would be. The better for everyone.

Aleixo had started existing today. Loki needed to take the backseat.

His magic was of another opinion. Its desires were clear and urging.

If he could check… just to make sure that everything he was doing wasn’t going to be in vain? That Steve was taking care of him… and therefore taking care of himself.

Just a glimpse…

Now he could still do it… in a few… days Loki wouldn’t be able to anymore.

Giving into his desire Loki cloaked himself and walked the branches of the world tree. Not that far.

The noise and the soft light were a harsh difference to the silence of the apartment. “… don’t see it.”

“Then I can’t help you.”

“I just don’t… get the appeal.”

“Fine… we can watch a political thriller if it makes you feel better. I just want you to know that your disrespect for 80s action movies is insulting…”

“Political thriller? Can’t we just watch a comedy?”

“You are so tame… Jarvis, you know what to do.”

Steve reacted with a little smile when his wish got granted and Tony still pretended to be offended. His eyes were bright, wide awake and there was something playful about him. Not quite how it used to be, but how could it?

He had seen enough. They were doing fine. Loki should leave. Get back to work. Every minute he spent here as a shadow but still as Loki was going to make it harder. No more taking risks.

Loki didn’t move. He was merely standing there, frozen to a spot. Tony and Steve were watching another movie, sometimes talking to each other, whispering words although nobody was there but them. Not how it used to be. Always afraid that this fleeting moment of light-heartedness might be brutally taken away from them. It had happened so many times before, so why should it be different now.

Because Loki would make it different and therefore he had to leave. So much work still needed to be done and Loki was wasting time. They were fine. He hadn’t been here in weeks and they were fine. It would be months until he would come back… if at all.
Loki closed his eyes and when he opened them again he was back in the apartment. Picking up one of the many photo albums on the floor Loki opened it and looked at the pictures he had created. He had stopped at school. Classmates. Friends. Excursions. First romances. Growing up.

A lot of work.

Only the feeling of hunger made Loki look up from what he was doing. Strange. He had lost perception of time so long ago, but if he was feeling hungry, he must have been sitting here for days. Weeks even? No, not that long. Rubbing one hand over his eyes Loki got up and tried not to feel to upset by the fact that he should actually leave the apartment to get something to eat. No magic for everyday tasks. Time to get used to it.

Other things were more important though, Loki couldn’t go outside like this. He was in need of a shower and new clothes. About twenty minutes later Loki out on the street, walking comfortably in his new skin. His work wasn’t done, so he decided to get take out. There was a small Thai just around the corner, so Loki decided to go there. They quickly took his order and then he had to wait a little bit. Well, his life would consist of a lot of waiting now. How could these mortals even stand it?

Mortals… another word he needed to scratch from his vocabulary…

“Sir?”

Raising his head Loki looked at the nice lady who was handing him his meal in a plastic bag. At least that was something he wouldn’t get used to.

“Thank you…” After taking it Loki turned around, a bit too fast obviously or the person behind him had walked up too closely. Anyway Loki softly bumped into them and instinctively murmured an apology. “Desculpa…”

He was about to simply rush past the man without even glancing at him when he heard the response. “Não tem nada que desculpar. Você é português?”

This was surprising, unexpected and Loki hadn’t scheduled these things yet. Social life. Something to work on later, but... wasn’t this better? It was real. Like Aleixo was supposed to be. Like he would be. Very soon.

Loki took a second to let his eyes run over the man in front of him. Dark hair, tanned skin, brown eyes and a three-days stubble. Unfortunately he hadn’t been paying attention to his accent, so it was impossible to tell where he was from. However, Loki decided that he had a friendly face. Aleixo was a careful person, life had shown him that it was wiser to let people earn your trust than just giving it to them. Nevertheless he was always polite and he expected other people to do the same.

“Sim... De onde você é?” The other one smiled and told him that he was from Lisbon, but he had been living in New York for several years now. “You are not coming here regularly, right? Because I’m here like every second day and I guess I would have noticed another Portuguese person around.”

Actually Loki considered this a little bit strange, since this was a restaurant and not a bar, but it would be nice for Aleixo to speak his mother tongue. “No, it’s my first time being here. I just moved here...”

“I see... I’m Flávio.” The stranger held out his hand and Loki shook it, again voicing his new name. “Aleixo. Nice to meet you.”
They continued talking and when Flávio’s order came up, they sat down at one of the tables instead of leaving with their meals. So this was how real people met? When you hadn’t planned the whole thing out? Flávio’s company was pleasing. It was easy to tell that he had wit and smarts, both things that Loki appreciated and Aleixo did too. He seemed like a person who was constantly seeking to make new friends and actually knew how to do it. To ask questions that made the other person think that he was seriously interested without going to far. So yes, Loki could see this work.

“There is a rather big Portuguese community in New York. If you want to, I can introduce you to some people. Or if you want to check out some places on your own, I can give you the name of some places. Mostly bars...” Flávio shrugged and discreetly looked at his watch. Of course, Loki noticed, but would Aleixo? Yes. He was attentive, a perfectionist. Obsessed with details. “If you have to leave...”

“No, I still got some time on my hands. I have a piano class in about an hour. I’m a music teacher. You said you’re here, because you got a job. What do you do?”

“I’m a civil engeneer, but I’ll only start working in a couple of weeks. So there’s still other stuff to do. I’m looking for a decent place to live by then.”It didn’t feel like practice. Loki wasn’t going through the motions, hitting story points to see if they were working. They were having an actual conversation. About 30 minutes later Flávio said goodbye after giving Loki his phone number, telling him to call if he wanted to meet up with more Portuguese people.

Heading back home Loki wondered how this had happened. Getting a social life, making friends was part of his plan, of course. Not now though. Also he hadn’t thought that it could be that easy. Sure, it had only been a talk with a friendly stranger, but Loki intended to take him up on that offer.

So Aleixo had a life now and he had to live it too.

_________________________________________________

Bright lights, big city
She dreams of love
Bright lights, big city
He lives to run

_________________________________________________

“Two bedrooms, two bathrooms, walk in closets, wooden floors… and everything else you asked for. Look at the...” The estate agent kept talking, babbling about all the sublime things that one could find in the apartment, but Loki wasn’t really listening. His eyes were attentively checking out his surroundings. She was right about one point, the apartment lived up to his expectations. Spacious, bright colours, lots of light and beautiful parquetry and big windows. Yes, Loki liked it and Aleixo did too.

It was a good place to start over.

She was still praising the kitchen when Loki turned around. “I’ll take it.”

***

“Oh hey, you’re Alex, right?”

What a wonderful start. A person butchering his name in the worst possible way and Loki was
trying to ignore it, because that would happen a lot of times. So Loki reacted with a polite smile. “Actually it’s Aleixo… it’s Portuguese.”

“Yeah, I thought I got that wrong, sorry. Anyway, I’m Michael. Looking forward to work with you.”

Michael was only the first one. During one single morning Loki met all of his new colleagues and most of them seemed like decent people. For now his favourite was a guy named Jared. He had a wicked sense of humour and obviously didn’t care what people might think of him when he said what was going through his head. The office was hoping to be selected in a call of tenders that the city administration had launched to build a bridge. Loki got to work on this project, something he was actually interested in. Also he had fun showing of his knowledge and talent. Both things he enjoyed.

“I’m going to save you from food poisoning, because the cafeteria is fucking atrocious. Great Italian place just around the corner. Come on.” Jared caught his attention by knocking at the open door of Loki’s office and didn’t bother to even step inside. Obviously it seemed out of the question for him that Aleixo should refuse the invitation.

“Food poisoning?”

“Yeah, people died. Also I know for a fact that you European guys can’t stand the food over here anyway. I’m looking out for your wellbeing, because I’m a nice guy… and I’m planning to make you do a lot of my work. You’ll start moving anytime soon?”

Loki decided that Aleixo would be amused by this behaviour and put the draft aside he was currently working on. “Fine, but I hope the so called great Italian place is indeed great. I’m very picky when it comes down to food.”

Luckily the Italian served some excellent pasta and Loki was honestly entertained by Jared’s antics. He thought it was absolutely necessary to tell Aleixo all the misdeeds of their co-workers, made up or not. Jared knew how to tell a story and that was something Loki valued very much.

“So why did you leave Portugal? You don’t look like the type who’d want to chase the American dream?”

“Several reasons… I guess there was nothing left to keep me there.”

Despite his wit and cheekiness Jared knew how to interpret the tone of his voice and the look on his face. He didn’t ask any further and instead they talked about architecture. Yes, this had been a choice…

***

“No, you are kidding me… You moved in three weeks ago? I wouldn’t be able to make my place look like this if I had a whole year.” Flávio kept looking around while Loki handed him a beer.

“I had very clear ideas about what I wanted…” Loki shrugged while Flávio turned to look at the bookshelf in the corner of the room. Lots of literature about architecture and history books. Then he turned to check out the pictures on the wall. There were lots of them. Nicely organised, Aleixo had obviously put care into it.

“Pretty girl. Your sister? You have the same curls…”

Loki felt a soft sting in his chest which both surprised and pleased him. This far gone already? It
had only been a couple weeks, right? Maybe it made all the difference if you were this willing to lose yourself.

“Yes, that’s Carolina. We look pretty much the same…” Aleixo failed to smile and took a quick sip from his own beer.

Flávio nodded, continued his little tour before coming to a conclusion. “Your place is really nice. I like it… That guy your brother?” Frowning at one photograph that showed Aleixo and a young man Flávio took a step closer. They looked so comfortable with each other which probably had made Flávio think that they were related. Couldn’t be further from the truth.

“No, that’s Rui. My ex-boyfriend.”

It was interesting to watch Flávio’s reaction. Not awkward, but he looked a bit embarrassed. Loki wasn’t sure if it was because the past relationship with a man or because he had mistaken a romantic partner for Aleixo’s brother. “Oh, sorry… So you’re gay?”

Loki couldn’t help but laugh. These stupid labels. “No, not really… I’ve had my share of girlfriends.” He finished with a shrug and Flávio grinned amusedly. “Well… they didn’t leave that much of an impression, I don’t see any photos of them. What’s up with the photo anyway? I don’t know anybody who has a photo of their ex on the wall?”

“We’re still friends and I don’t see any reason to put any of the stuff away from our time with each other… You want to hear more about my past relationships or are we going to watch the game which was already started by now?”

“The game definitely. We’re so going to kick your ass. Porto is going down.”

“You wish…”

_________________________________________________

Demon, where did my angel go?
Vacant, vapid, stupid, perfect
You are the one

_________________________________________________

“You have a million faces and I’m afraid that one day you might prefer another one to your own. Or that you might forget what it looks like. That face I’ve come to love. That one day… I might be looking at another person…”

Loki jerked awake, only hearing the sound of his heart racing in his chest. Something inside of him was screaming, contracting, fighting with all its might. Fighting the skin he was wearing. The skin he had been wearing for months now.

“The face I’ve come to love…”

Stumbling out of bed Loki rushed into the adjoining bathroom staring at the mirror in front of him. Aleixo looked back at him, out of breath, obviously confused. Inside of him his magic was surging up, wanting to destroy the face in the mirror. It was fighting, insisting. Reminding him of who he
was. Pure magic. Loki. A sorcerer with unlimited power. He was anything but a common mortal.

But Loki didn’t care.

Yes, he still needed his magic. For one single deed. One single task still to achieve.

The memories were fading, he felt more and more comfortable with Aleixo, so it was only natural for the strongest part of him to start protesting. Refusing to fade away into nothingness. So afraid of being replaced by Aleixo who was doing just fine. Who had a life. Who had a job, friends and a reason to get out of bed every morning. Loki didn’t have a chance to compete with that. He who should have died so long ago. Loki had let go… because Loki couldn’t live without a face. Without the face the Vanr had loved so much. Without the Vanr…

Shaking his head Loki raised his hand, looking at it intently. So much power pulsing underneath the skin. Whispering to him, telling him who he was.

Loki didn’t care.

Maybe the time had come for one last trick.

Looking up again Loki met Aleixo’s eyes. He had never said goodbye to his own face. It was gone now and Loki hadn’t even… No, it didn’t matter. It hadn’t been his in the first place.

Aleixo’s face was beautiful and Loki had gotten used to it.

He was starting to forget, so his magic was protesting, fighting. In vain.

Turning the lights back off Loki returned to his bedroom, sliding beneath the covers. It would be so easy to forget everything he had gone through, everything he had seen. Loki would gladly leave it all behind. Only the thought of once again forgetting the Vanr made him want to go right back to the pain.

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“They better throw us a party. With fucking champagne. You think it’s too soon to ask for a raise?” Jared took a bite from his hotdog, glancing at Aleixo who shrugged. “They definitely owe us a party, that’s for sure. About the raise… nah.”

“Damn… at least I’ll get a party. I’m so getting drunk and I just made you the designated driver.”

“Fine, I’ll drive myself home and leave you at the party.”

The city had given their bureau a major assignment after they had delivered some fantastic drafts and Jared was right, they deserved a party. Right now they were on their way back to the office after getting some hotdogs and Jared hadn’t been quiet about his demands. Admittedly, they had done a great job. Jared and him had been involved in the project from the very beginning and Aleixo was fairly proud of it.

“Wanna see the new Godzilla tonight? I haven’t been at the movies for some time and I think I would dig a monster tearing up half of the city…” A smirk was playing around Jared’s lips and Aleixo was instantly game. “Sure, sounds good to me. We could…”

The words died on his lips when they walked past a newsstand. Loki caught a glimpse of some magazine that was up for sale. If there was one thing that he didn’t care about it was gossip, but this was different.
Tony Stark – first public appearance after 9 months

“Wait a second…” Pulling some notes out of his pocket Loki handed them to the man selling the newspapers. Jared didn’t comment on him buying the magazine and instead continued talking about the movie they were going to see.

Back at the office Loki checked out the article which wasn’t that informative. After disappearing completely from the public eye 9 months ago Tony had visited a charity gala last night. No interviews. No answers to any questions the reporters had yelled at him. No hints if they were ever going to see Iron Man again.

Loki doubted it.

There was this proverb – a picture is worth a thousand words. Nonsense. Photographs captured moments that were shorter than a second. They weren’t able to tell you a story. They weren’t even able to show you a tiny part of it. This photograph showed a handsome man in a suit who hid his eyes behind sunglasses despite being indoors. Was he happy or sad? Did he attend this event because he wanted to or had he been talked into it? Impossible to tell, this photograph didn’t tell Loki anything.

It would tell Aleixo even less.

Nevertheless Loki put the magazine into the drawer of his desk.

His magic was raging, but Loki ignored it. Instead he got back to work, Aleixo was very dutiful.

__________________________________________________________
A new day
A new age
A new face

Aleixo turned down the radio to be able to better concentrate on the street. He didn’t know this part of town and Flávio hadn’t given him too many details before the empty battery of his phone had ended their call. Eventually Aleixo spotted him standing next to a street light, his hands dug deeply into his pockets. He was obviously freezing and happily jumped into the car when Aleixo pulled up next to him.

“Shit, thank you, you’re saving my life!”

“No problem, but I want to hear the whole story. When I get called in the middle of night and told to drive across the entire town I like to know why.” Grabbing an extra jacket from the backseat Aleixo handed it to Flávio before driving off.

While quickly sliding into the jacket Flávio let out a loud sigh. “I’m sorry for making you come here. It’s fucking embarrassing. I was on a date with the girl I told you about. Turned out that she was crazy… she drove us out here to some party. Full of crackheads and… you know the drill. I am too old for this shit. She got furious when I wanted to leave, so I left alone with no fucking clue where I am and I definitely didn’t want to go back there. Thanks again for picking me up…”
“That’s the stupidest story I’ve ever heard… and it wouldn’t have happened to you if you had acted like a decent guy and had picked her up at her place instead of letting her drive.”

“Oh, believe me, that’s never going to happen to me again… Fuck, this is so embarrassing. Please, don’t tell anybody about this. I’m too old to call my best friend in the middle of the night to pick me up, because I don’t know how to get home.”

His embarrassment was amusing, Loki couldn’t help himself. “My lips are sealed. I’m perfectly content if you make a fool out of yourself in front of me.”

“I aim to please…”

“You mind crashing at my place? Honestly, I don’t want to drive again to the other end of town to get you home. It’s too damn late for that…”

“Perfectly fine. Me and your couch are already best friends anyway…”

-They were having cof-fee on said couch the next morning and despite still feeling tired Loki didn’t miss the serious look on Flávio’s face. “Something’s up.”

“Yeah, last night before falling asleep I was looking at your photographs and…” He paused, meeting Loki’s eyes and he looked insecure which happened rarely. “You don’t have to talk to me about this. You absolutely don’t if you don’t want to. Still… you’re my best friend, the type of guy I can call in the middle of the night to pick me up because I did something stupid… I was wondering… would you tell me about what happened to your sister?”

The slight uncomfortable feeling faded away and was replaced by an unfamiliar painful sensation. Not physical, it was too intense to be in any way related to his body. Aleixo remembered his sister. Her smile and the little wrinkles around her eyes.

Yet there was still Loki, slightly wondering if any of this was real.

“She… died in a car crash. It was one of these things that… just happen out of nowhere. One day she was suddenly gone and since our parents had already died years ago… I wasn’t the only reason I left Portugal, but it played a part. I don’t like talking about it… it was a rough time…”

Every word was the truth, there was pain to prove it.

Flávio nodded softly. “Sorry, I didn’t want to…”

“It’s okay. It makes sense that you would want to know about that… It’s okay…”

Instead of saying anything Flávio reached out and awkwardly touched his lower arm. Obviously he didn’t quite know what to do, but it was comforting nevertheless.

_________________________________________________

A new face
A new lay
A new love
A new drug

_________________________________________________
Jared had come up with the flu, so Aleixo felt a little bit lost at this event. Yes, it was for a good cause and he appreciated it, but it was weird. The official opening of a new youth centre and there were politicians all over the place, trying to look good. Not the crowd he preferred. Unfortunately his office had also worked on the designs of the buildings… for all the wrong reasons. It was a prestige project, the city had only green lit it, because Captain America had been involved.

This room couldn’t be filled with more hypocrisy. Sipping on his wine Aleixo let his eyes travel around, taking in the different people which all looked pretty much the same in their suits. Kind of ironic that these were only middle aged white men, but it was the opening party for a youth centre. Anyway, he’d probably had to hang out here for only one hour more, then he’d go home and watch some Netflix.

After finishing his glass and listening to another business guy who didn’t give a shit about any social project, Aleixo felt in desperate need for some air. And maybe a cigarette. Sneaking through the crowd Aleixo easily found the quickest way to fire escape. It always helped to know the blue prints of a building. He had picked up a smoking habit a few weeks ago and he was trying to lose it again, but tonight was the wrong time to do that.

Lighting himself a cigarette Aleixo sucked the smoke into his lungs and cursed these idiots which were making the event insufferable.

When he was about halfway done with his cigarette, the sound of the heavy door being opened caused him to turn back around. Something happened then. Loki couldn’t describe it, but he suddenly felt warm despite the cold night air.

“Oh sorry, I didn’t know somebody was…”

“I guess there is enough space for the both of us.” Aleixo smiled and Steve returned it after a second, closing the door behind him. “I needed some fresh air…” He sounded apologetic, as if it was necessary to justify himself for leaving the party. Aleixo wondered why more people hadn’t run away yet.

“Same feeling here…” For some reason he felt the need to make him feel comfortable. Admittedly it was a weird situation to find himself with Captain America on the fire escape, but at the end of the day he was also just a guy who needed a break from too much bullshit. Nevertheless his body language seemed kind of tensed. Still smiling Aleixo offered his hand to shake. “Aleixo Pereira.”

“Steve Rogers. Pleasure to meet you.”

Aleixo took a drag from his cigarette and he didn’t miss how Steve’s eyes followed his movement. Captain America didn’t appreciate cigarettes, obviously. “I liked what you said tonight.”

Steve’s eyebrows went up, surprised that the other one was trying to start a conversation or that he was talking about his speech. “You did?”

“Yes. Why does that surprise you? You talked about giving underprivileged kids a chance to do something with their life?”

The smile on Steve’s face became a little bit brighter and Loki could see a bit of the tension leaving his body. “I’m glad to hear that… when I practised my friend told me that I was reciting clichés…”

“Oh, you were… but I liked it, because I could tell you meant what you were saying. Unlike the
other ones…”

“You think they didn’t mean what they said?”

Watching him intently Loki chose not to give a direct answer. “Did you?”

A slight hesitation and then Steve shook his head. “No, not really. Just a lot of nice words that people wanted to hear… but this place here got built and it will help people. That’s what matters to me.”

Aleixo definitely agreed with that and he decided that he could get behind this way of thinking. “Do you like the way it turned out? We did our best to make it look nice.”

“You’re one of the architects? Yes, I do like it… it’s very bright and warm. Something to come home to… It looks like it’s indeed made for kids and not some… modern, cold building.”

“Glad you like it. I would take the credit for it, but I didn’t have too much to do with it. I’ll the guys though, they will be proud that Captain America likes their work.”

The next time Aleixo took a drag from his cigarette Steve couldn’t leave it uncommented. “It’s none of my business and of course you know that, but… you shouldn’t do that.”

Looking at the cigarette in his hand Aleixo sighed. First he ran away from the hypocrites and now he was being lectured by Steve Rogers. “I guess you are right.” So he dropped the cigarette and took a deep breath. “Mind if I ask something that also none of my business?”

That question alone caused Steve to frown. “I guess, but maybe I won’t answer…”

“That’s only fair. Did you come out here to get away from all the self-adulation in there?”

For a moment he thought that Steve wouldn’t answer, that this was something too personal or too blunt. To his astonishment Steve let out a soft laugh and shrugged. “That’s pretty much it, yeah… I don’t like these kinds of events, but it’s for a good cause and… sometimes it turns out that I meet somebody I can have an actual conversation with, so it’s not that bad.”

Then Steve smiled at him, Aleixo felt some kind of connection with him and Loki knew it was time.

________________________________________________________________________________________

A new me
A new you

________________________________________________________________________________________

It was harder than he had thought. To take control again. Only to burn all the bridges. Over half a year he had lived every single moment as Aleixo and even now when he was fully aware of who he was… he didn’t feel like Loki anymore.

Somewhere in the back of his mind he remembered the anger he had felt. Which had slowly taken a hold of him until he had felt like he actually belonged in his clutches. It was gone and Loki couldn’t quite grasp why it had been there in the first place.
There had also been love.

It had been the source of his wrath and it had also vanquished it. Now it was gone and still present, pulsing inside of him. Even Aleixo could feel it, without knowing what it was.

Closing his eyes Loki tried for the very last time. Most of his past life was gone by now, but that part of him which was still Loki was desperately hoping. To find that little piece. To see just a glimpse of him. Or to hear his name. Just once.

The missing pieces didn’t hurt anymore, since so many other parts of his minds were covered by mist and darkness. So many memories out of reach and Loki didn’t care for them. He had let go of them willingly. All he wanted was to see him.

*I just want to be Loki’s…*

Nothing else. No name. No face.

He had wanted to be Loki’s and Loki was ceasing to exist. It was time…

Opening his eyes Loki looked at the dagger in his hand. It had meant something to him, he was sure of that. Now it was just a blade. Enchanted with the most powerful spell he had ever created. With a steady hand Loki put the tip of the blade against the inside of his lower arm. There was no turning back after this and yet Loki didn’t hesitate when he began cutting his skin open. Blood was surging from his wound and he was only putting the dagger away when he had reached his wrist. His blood was warm, red and full of magic. Strong and vital.

Loki might forget who he was, but his magic wouldn’t. Way too powerful to ever fail him. Therefore Loki had to use it against himself.

Running his fingers over the edge of the wound Loki gently pulled strings of magic from it, wrapping them around his fingertips, feeling their power. Gathering all his concentration Loki pulled his power from his own blood, formed it and put all his desire, all his regret and all his pain into it.

The green web around his fingers was his most beautiful creation and it was gruesome. During his former life it would have filled him with fear and anguish. Now it was the only way.

Loki took a second to contemplate his work, but then he pressed the web into the wound. The sensation was ardent, burning, tearing him apart from the inside, but Loki kept pushing and started mumbling the enchantment.

“She hereby I curse your blood, Loki. Son of Laufey. I curse your flesh to wither with age and your senses to dull. You shall not live longer than any ordinary mortal. I curse you…”

It wasn’t necessary to voice all the details he had woven into the curse, Loki could already feel it working. Nobody else in the entire Nine Realms would have been able to do something like that to him. Only Loki had the power to rob himself of his own abilities. Inside of him his magic started eating up his defences and Loki was screaming. From now on Midgardian blades would be enough to pierce his skin, Aleixo would grow old like all his friends around him.

But his magic wouldn’t leave him. It would remain with him until his death to keep any kind sickness away from him. Aleixo would die an old man with all his mental abilities, but he would die.

The curse was spreading, like fire running through his veins, burning away parts of him. A process
that could only be described as agony and Loki’s body convulsed in pain. Minutes full of torture went by and even then Loki kept lying on the floor, taking slow breaths and a smile spread across his lips.

He was almost there. Finally he’d be at peace and then he could be with him…

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“Ouch! Filho da puta!” Aleixo gritted his teeth, the pain was racing through his leg and he even thought he saw stars for a second.

“Merda! I’m so sorry. You okay?” Flávio was instantly right next to him, looking deeply worried although it had been him who had brought Aleixo down. “Fuck, you should be happy we’re playing without a fucking referee… Shit, that hurts like a bitch…”

It was football and they were Portuguese, of course there were fouls, but it sucked to end up on the receiving end. The rest of the two teams were quickly gathering around them and Aleixo hated it to be the centre of attention. Especially when he was lying on the ground and in pain, because his best friend had fouled him.

“You want to take a minute?”

Normally he would have continued playing, but right now he would like a moment to breathe. “Yeah…”

Flávio who so obviously had the worst guilty conscience in the history of men helped him back on his feet and then Aleixo limped to the edge of their improvised pitch. He sat down next to his backpack and waited for the pain to subside while watching his friends continuing the game.

Of course his team was now going to lose. What were they supposed to do without him even for a minute? Aleixo smiled at his own stupid thoughts and was suddenly pulled out of them when his phone started to ring. Hurrying up to get it out of his backpack Aleixo answered the call. “Hey Steve.”

“Hey, how are you doing?”

Right now? Feeling better… “Great. I’m out with the boys playing foot… soccer. I would invite you over, but I guess the other team would complain about it being unfair.”

Steve responded with a soft laugh. “I can hold back, you know? Anyway, the reason I’m calling… You have plans for tonight? I’d like to invite you to dinner… and maybe talk some business.”


“I’ll tell you all about it tonight, but it’s about some project for Stark Industries. Tony wants to build production facility right outside the city and he has some very specific ideas and wishes, I don’t know. However, his looking for designers and architects and I might have mentioned your name? You’re interested?”

“Are you kidding? Of course I am interested! Thank you, that’s amazing. I’ll definitely come and I’ll bring some apple pie. You deserve it.”

Steve was still laughing. “Don’t thank me too soon. See you tonight then, I’m looking forward to it.”
“Me too. Bye Steve.”

When Aleixo hung up he realised that his heart was beating a little bit faster than it should. Way faster…

Stark Tower was impressive from an architectural, technical and general point of view. Aleixo had always lived a very comfortable life, but this place was reeking of money. The doors of the elevator opened and Aleixo found himself face to face with Steve. “Hey there.”

“Hey… how are you doing?”

“Great, thank you. This place is amazing… Thank you so much for the invitation.”

“Sure thing. How did the game go?” Steve was smiling, even more so when he noticed how Aleixo grimaced. “My best friend almost broke my leg and of course my team lost. It was brutal.”

“Sounds like it.” Chucking softly Steve led him into the dining area of his apartment. “I hope you like seafood. I recently figured out how to make it perfectly delicious. I am not exaggerating. It took me about 20 tries, but now it’s great.”

Somehow it was hard to imagine Captain America cook, but Aleixo appreciated the effort and by now he knew Steve well enough. He knew that he put a lot of care into these things. “Definitely, I’m Portuguese… We’re fine with anything that comes from the sea.”

It was sweet how relieved Steve instantly looked, eager to please him. “Cool…” He gestured towards the table which was laid for three persons. “Tony was supposed to be here too, but… he called me five minutes ago that he’s still in the lab and that he won’t make it. I guess he’ll show up later.”

A strange feeling of disappointment that Aleixo quickly dismissed. “Okay… so then it’s just the two of us. Means more apple pie for us.”

Five minutes later the thought of Captain America cooking didn’t seem so strange anymore. “This is delicious. I’ve just decided that you have to invite me over for dinner all the time.”

“Gladly. I told you I got good at that… If you had tasted one of my earlier tries, you have died of food poisoning.”

“Now that would be bad press, wouldn’t it? Captain America kills poor immigrant with seafood.”

Steve was kind enough to laugh at his weak joke. “Well, I’m not sure if a successful civil engineer would count as a poor immigrant, but I will not take any risks.”

It was funny, as always when they got together. Another thing that had surprised him quite a bit. Who would have thought that him and Captain America would get long or end up being friends? In
retrospect it seemed rather obvious, Steve was the nicest person he had ever met and constantly
trying to make the best out of every situation. That was something Aleixo knew to appreciate and
he was glad that things had turned out the way they had.

“I gotta do this thing next week… public library… making kids read more… The same stick, a list
full of important people and I’m already dreading going there alone…”

How he refused to simply ask him made Aleixo smile. Steve never asked for favours and yet
Aleixo clearly got the hint. “I can go there with you if you want to.”

“That would be amazing, but you don’t have to and you clearly have better things to…”

“Deus… Just tell me when and where and I’ll be there.”

Shaking his head Steve gave up pretending that he wasn’t happy about Aleixo’s offer. “Thanks, I
appreciate it…”

“No reason to thank me. It’ll be fun and if we get bored or frustrated we’ll check out the fire
escape.”

They were still laughing about that shared memory about how they met when Aleixo could hear
the doors of the elevator opening again. By the time he had turned around in his seat the new
arrival had already started talking. “Sorry, I was busy revolutionising technology as we know it.
Any leftovers?”

It was so different from seeing him in some magazine. Tony Stark had beautiful brown eyes.
Bright and lively and yet Aleixo could see hints of profound sadness inside of them. Still beautiful.

“Sure… Tony, this Aleixo. I’ve told you about him. Aleixo, Tony.”

Realising a bit too late that Steve was introducing him Aleixo quickly got up from his chair and
suddenly Tony Stark’s eyes were on him. Aleixo could feel them on his skin and his heartbeat was
speeding up.

“Right… you are the Portuguese architect…” Tony’s gaze was fixed on his face, taking in his
appearance and Aleixo thought that being looked at so intensely should make uncomfortable, but it
didn’t. Quite the opposite. Only his heart was beating a bit too fast. “I’m Tony…”

A lithe smile was dancing around his lips when he held his hand out and Aleixo quickly shook it.

“A nice to meet you…” For some reason his voice sounded a little bit hoarse and the smile on
Tony’s lips got a little wider.

The last pieces fell into place and Loki could feel his feel his grip on them loosening. He saw the
expression in Tony’s eyes and it was enough to know that he had made it right. Now Loki could
finally let go and fade away.

_________________________________________________

Time to live, time to love
Time to live, time to love

_________________________________________________
Chapter End Notes

P.S. - Just a little detail which is only hinted at in the story, but I want to share it with you. The glamour Loki subconsciously used while saving Tony's life was the Vanr

Works inspired by this one:

- "You've Got a Friend in Me" Cover by MarInk, The Devil Within - Tony/Loki by MarInk

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