Isla Nublar
by Milesy

Summary

The trip to Costa Rica was years in the planning, but now it's finally happening. Two couples on a ten-day trip over Christmas, to the world's most exotic resort and theme park.

What Darcy didn't plan for was her boyfriend breaking up with her only weeks before the once-of-a-lifetime, non-refundable trip. It's just a good thing she knows someone else who wasn't even invited. Her new date for the trip may be going out of his way to be as obnoxious as possible, but he's not even close to the worst thing about this vacation from hell.

–

Loki/Darcy fake dating, Odinson family drama, and dinosaur carnage.

Notes

As with nearly everything I do that has multiple iterations of canon, the Jurassic Park side of this fic draws from all sources, even when they contradict. The general park layout comes from the website, but a lot of the actual dinosaur information comes from the books.
There are no characters from Jurassic Park or Jurassic World in this fic, unless you count the dinosaurs themselves. Jurassic World is used entirely for backdrop and plot elements.

Inspired by this gem of a Craigslist post: loki-of-sassgaard.tumblr.com/post/122472901819
Chapter 1

It was officially all set. Tickets booked, hotel reserved, Fast Passes purchased, and only three weeks to wait before getting up at oh god o'clock to catch the plane. Darcy even found herself surfing Wikipedia to get ready for the trip, making a list of all the attractions she wanted to visit first.

For four years, it had been a pipe dream. The sort of thing they always talked about, but never actually expected to do. It wasn't like going to Disneyland, where you could at least save a little bit of money by staying in an off-resort hotel. There was only one hotel on Isla Nublar, and it was the Jurassic World Resort Hotel.

Between the hotel, and the resort admission, and getting to Costa Rica, and having enough left over for actually eating and doing things, it was never going to happen. Except, it was. It totally was. When they went from broke-ass college students to actually making real money, they kept their crappy little apartment and saved up every penny to make their pipe dream happen.

Somewhere along the line, their trip for two became a couples trip when Jane's boyfriend decided he wanted to come along. Not that Darcy minded. She had her hot, dorky, sexy English boyfriend as well, and was more than glad to spend a week in South America with him, looking at dinosaurs. And now he'd called her and said he had something important to talk about, and wanted to go out somewhere to talk about it. Darcy didn't even want to think about what he might want to talk about, because if it was what she thought it was, she worried she might just get so nervous and giddy that she'd actually puke.

And if she got her hopes up for nothing, she thought she really would puke.

Darcy climbed the stairs to the apartment and dug her keys out of her bag, stopping when she got to the door. Someone's keys were already in the lock. Sighing the annoyed sigh of someone who regularly had to deal with unwanted guests, Darcy pulled the keys from the door and stepped inside.

"Who gave you this key?" she asked, holding the key ring up. She couldn't actually see Loki where he was no doubt sprawled out on their sofa, but she could see his humongous black dog licking its balls in front of the TV.

"I don't know. Why?" asked Loki tiredly.

As Darcy moved toward the kitchen, she could indeed see him sprawled out on the sofa, with his ratty, holey sneakers up on the arm rest, and his wild black hair half-covering his face. Darcy didn't know what he did for work, but apparently whatever it was, it took him into Brooklyn frequently. And when Loki was in Brooklyn, he always decided to stop by.

Darcy worked her apartment key off of his key ring, swearing to herself that she would murder whoever kept giving it to him. "Because it's not yours," she said. She tossed Loki's keys to him, taking his stolen key back to her bedroom to hide with the others she'd liberated from him. He wasn't getting them back from her, because they were all still in her jewellery box, so it must have been either from Jane or Thor. And neither of them tolerated him being around even half as much as Darcy did.

"We're not supposed to have pets," she said flatly as she walked back out to the kitchen to plug her phone in and drop off her bag. Actually, she wouldn't mind him being around hardly at all, if he didn't keep trying to get them evicted with 150 pounds of shaggy dog.
"You don't. I do," Loki said.

Darcy had to hold her breath for a few seconds to keep from shouting at him. "Jane will sue you if you get us evicted," she said instead.

Loki laughed. "And she can have every one of my eighteen dollars."

"And your big, stupid van," Darcy chirped, knowing they probably wouldn't get any more than a grand out of it. "Where is it, anyway?"

"Parked outside," Loki said. "Didn't you see it?"

"That ugly thing? It's impossible to miss. Was it double parked?" Darcy asked him.

"Fuck!" Loki leapt up from the sofa and ran out of the apartment, followed close behind by his dog.

As soon as they were both gone, Darcy calmly walked over to the door and shut it, latching every one of the locks to make sure he stayed out, leaving only the chain unlocked in case Jane got home early.

With Loki gone, Darcy turned off the TV and went to run a shower. Not even Loki breaking in and eating all their food while he watched crappy reality TV distracted her from her upcoming date. She showered quickly, skimping on her hair so she had more time to focus on getting everything else clean. Ian's request for a date had been incredibly last minute, and dealing with Loki cost her the time it normally took her to wash her hair.

She got out of the shower and began making her way to her room, wearing nothing more than a loosely-wrapped towel. As she stepped into the living room, she was glad she'd bothered to put on even that much, since the apartment was once again not empty. Thor stood in the living room, glaring at everything as if he had walked into the scene of a horrible crime.

"Oh my god!" Darcy shouted, grabbing the towel around her chest and making sure she wasn't flashing Jane's boyfriend. "What are you doing here?"

Before Thor could answer, Darcy ran into her room to put some clothes on. It was the fastest she'd ever got dressed for a date in her life, partially because she was already on the verge of being late, and partially because she was sick of men who weren't her boyfriend being in her apartment.

"Are you decent now?" Thor asked with a laugh as Darcy stepped back into the living room. Like his brother, Thor had an odd accent that couldn't be placed, because it wasn't actually from anywhere.

"Yes," she said sternly. "Don't sneak up on naked people. It isn't nice." She shook her finger at Thor's face as she walked back to the bathroom to fix her hair and make-up.

"I saw my brother outside on my way up. Was he in here?" Thor asked, ignoring Darcy's scolding.

"Yeah. Was he throwing a tantrum because the Van Halen Mobile got towed?" asked Darcy as she painted her eyeliner on.

"Perhaps. He seemed angry about something, but I didn't stop to ask," said Thor. He watched her from the door way, the same way he watched Jane when she put on her make-up; not with any kind of admiration, but with the unease of somebody who expected to see someone poke their own eye out at any moment.

"I don't actually mind him being here, as long as he's supervised. I mean, he wasn't even watching
porn today or anything," Darcy said.

"He's dangerous," Thor argued.

Darcy knew that if it wasn't for their mother, Thor would have abandoned his brother a long time ago. But there was family drama, and then there was their family. Darcy didn't know the full story, other than apparently after dragging his kids all across the world until they were old enough to finally get a permanent residence of their own, their dad got unexpectedly sick, and somehow, everyone blamed one another for it.

"Then find out how he keeps getting keys to this place. I've got more keys than jewellery in my jewellery box right now," Darcy said.

She finished her eyeliner and touched up the dark spots under her eyes with a concealer stick, before contemplating her lips, puckering her face up as she looked at herself in the mirror. A few shades lighter than usual, she decided. It seemed a little too cold for the dark red she usually wore, somehow. Probably because it was the same shade of red as the stupid vest Ian always wore when it was cold.

She wished she had more time to get out of the house, so she could put a little more effort into looking nice for Ian and whatever big thing he had to talk to her about. Trying not to feel too giddy, she finished her face and put all her make-up away into her drawer by the sink.

"Darcy, next time he comes in like that, call the police on him. He won't do it again if you do," Thor told her as she came out of the bathroom.

Darcy didn't even begin to know how to respond to that, so she looked for a good pair of shoes and changed the subject. "How's your mom doing?" she asked as she dug around the bottom of her closet.

"She's well," Thor said, sounding sad. "She still spends more time at my father's side than she does at home, though."

Darcy realised her error in changing the subject. She'd assumed Thor's mother would have moved on a bit more by then, but it seemed she was mistaken.

"How long's it been?" she asked, finding a pair of low mules that might work.

"Two years, next month," said Thor. "The doctors say there's little chance of him waking, but mother still holds out hope."

"Sorry," Darcy said, feeling stupid for bringing it up.

Thor shook his head. "She does as she wants. If it makes her happy to pray by his bedside, then who am I to take that from her?"

"Well, I'm still sorry," Darcy said. "I know it's gotta suck for all of you."

She looked at the clock on the microwave and swear under her breath. Surprisingly, Thor laughed.

"Running late?" he asked.

Darcy rushed out to the kitchen to grab her bag and her phone. "Very," she said. "Sorry for getting all heavy and then having to run out on you like this."
"No, it's fine," Thor assured, sitting down and turning the TV back on. "Go. Don't be late."

"Wish me luck," Darcy said as she made her way toward the door, grabbing her heavy black coat on the way out.

"For what?" asked Thor.

Darcy shrugged. "I don't know, but I feel like I'll need it."

Thor laughed again, wishing her good luck as she rushed out of the apartment and back down the stairs. By the time she got outside, Loki was gone, leaving no trace that he was ever even there. Grateful that Ian had asked to meet only a few blocks from her apartment, Darcy made her way down to the little Indian place he liked so much. There wasn't any snow on the ground, but small flurries fell from the sky every few minutes, making Darcy almost wish she had called a cab. But waiting around for it would have only made her even later than she already was.

Ian was already there, waiting in a seat by the front window. He was wearing that stupid puffy vest of his, and looked like he hadn't even bothered to pick up a comb all day. Any hopes Darcy had still been holding onto were dashed in an instant, because nobody ever proposed to their girlfriend looking like that. Nervous all over again, Darcy sat down in front of him and took off her coat, letting it hang over the back of her seat.

"Hi," she said, reaching out for his hand. "What's up?"

"Uh," said Ian awkwardly. "Do you want to order first?" he asked.

"No," said Darcy, suddenly suspicious. "What's going on?"

Ian cringed dramatically. "Well. Uh. The thing is."

Darcy wondered how long he was going to dance around whatever it was he wasn't saying. "The thing is what?" she asked.

"The thing is, I'm going back to England," Ian said slowly.

"What?" Darcy almost shouted. "When?"

Everyone in the restaurant was looking at them, but she didn't even care.

"Two weeks," said Ian with another cringe.

"But you're coming back, right? The trip is in three weeks. Everything's already booked." She'd paid for most of his portion herself, and it was entirely non-refundable. If he didn't go, that was a lot of money she'd never get back.

"Darcy," Ian said, looking around as if trying to make everyone else stop looking at them. "We both knew my visa was running out anyway."

"In the spring," Darcy reminded him. "It's December!"

"I know," Ian said, looking pained. It just made Darcy want to shout even more.

"Darcy, listen. My visa was good until the spring because that's when I was supposed to graduate. But I took those summer courses, so I could go on this trip and not have any classes to miss. Which means I technically graduate at the end of this term. Which means I'm not a student."
"Oh, come on," Darcy said bitterly. "You can hide in someone's basement for a week, and go to Costa Rica with us. Who's gonna care if you're here an extra week?"

"The government," Ian said.

Darcy scoffed. "Well, are you coming back?" she asked.

Ian went strangely silent at that.

"Are you?" asked Darcy, suddenly desperate to know.

"I don't know," said Ian. "And I don't want to ask you to wait for me, in case I can't."

Darcy wished she had a drink, just so she could throw it at him. "So, you're breaking up with me. You asked me on a date so you could break up with me?"

Ian cringed again. Darcy used to think it was cute, but now it was just obnoxious. Shouting loudly, Darcy turned and stomped out of the restaurant, getting half a block home before she even realised what she was doing.

She got a full block away before she realised Ian hadn't followed after her. She wasn't sure what was worse; that he wasn't following, or that she was mad that he wasn't following. She stomped all the way home, trying to huddle up against herself to keep warm since she'd left her coat behind, and didn't want to go back to get it, and have to see Ian again. It was only a coat. What was $100 when she'd already dropped almost five grand on the Costa Rica trip? The apartment was empty when she got home, which she decided was the first good thing to happen all day. She turned on the TV, grabbed her phone, and ordered some of the greasiest Chinese food she could get her hands on.

When someone knocked at the door ten minutes later, Darcy got up and wondered how big of a tip to give the world's fastest delivery guy.

Instead, when she opened the door, she found Loki standing in the hall with his dog sniffing at the neighbour's door.

"Not supposed to be here," Darcy reminded him flatly.

"I can't get my van out of impound, I don't have enough money to get back to Yonkers, and it's really cold outside," Loki said. "And it's getting dark. Can I come in?"

Darcy sighed. "Well, at least you asked this time," she said, stepping out of the way. "You still got your eighteen bucks?"

"Yeah," said Loki as he walked around her. "Why?"

Darcy took her seat back before Loki could take it. "Good. You can pay the Chinese guy when he gets here."

Loki sat down on the floor with his dog and took off his jacket. The dog, for its massive size, was at least well-behaved. Darcy had to give it that. It never pissed on anything or chewed on anything, and generally just seemed to follow Loki around like a giant, furry shadow. Darcy always thought it looked kind of like a husky, if huskies were completely black and the size of a Great Dane. It sat down on the floor and immediately started panting, while Loki pulled out his phone and started texting someone. They stayed like that, everyone minding their own business until another knock came at the door. Loki automatically got up and answered it, giving the last of his money to the delivery guy.
"I'm four dollars short," he called out.

Darcy grabbed ten bucks from her bag and brought it over, eagerly taking her dinner away and spreading it out on the coffee table.

"Do you want some?" she asked, pulling the paper-wrapped chopsticks from the bag and offering a pair to Loki. "You did pay for it."

Loki took the offered chopsticks and sat down on the floor again. "Do you always get dressed up for the Chinese guy?" he asked as he pulled his sticks apart.

Darcy snorted. "Only when my boyfriend asks me out to break up with me," she said bitterly, before stuffing her mouth full of over-spiced orange chicken.

"Want me to beat him up?" asked Loki, completely without irony.

Considering he'd once stabbed a guy in a bar, Darcy assumed he was serious and shook her head. "He's not worth it," she said once her mouth was empty. She sighed, still not sure what she felt. "I mean, it wasn't supposed to be serious or anything. I knew he was only here on a student visa. I guess I just thought he'd stick around somehow." She stuffed her face with more chicken so she'd stop talking. Loki didn't need to know any of this.

They got halfway through the lo mein and an episode of *Dirty Jobs* when the door opened and Jane and Thor came in.

"Hey," Jane called out as she stepped inside and shed her coat.

"I thought you were going out," Thor said, stopping in his tracks when he saw Loki. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Eating dinner," Loki responded, pointing at what was left of it with his sticks.

"Get out," Thor demanded, stomping toward them.

"He's fine," Darcy protested, but like always, she went ignored.

Thor pulled Loki up by his shirt and picked up his leather jacket on the way to hauling him to the door, with Loki's dog following them both and growling loudly. Pissed off, with its hackles raised, the dog seemed even bigger than usual,

"Yes, throw me out to the street when I have no way home. I'm sure mother would love to hear about that," Loki protested, trying to squirm out of his brother's grip.

Thor let go of him violently and pulled his wallet out. "Here," he said, thrusting a handful of bills into Loki's hand. "That goes in a cab. Not your arm."

"I don't put anything in my arm," Loki argued as he put his jacket back on.

"Between your toes, then," Thor said.

Loki glared at him murderously. "Go fuck yourself," he said, throwing the cash back in Thor's face before storming out of the apartment and slamming the door hard enough to make the dishes in the cupboards rattle. Everyone stayed silent for a long moment after that, not knowing what to say or do in the wake of the sudden explosion.

"I told you to call the police the next time he showed up here," Thor said, sounding like he was
trying not to sound angry.

"He was stranded and it's trying to snow out," Darcy argued. "His dog might have a fur coat, but he doesn't. I wasn't gonna just leave him outside. And he bought most of my dinner."

Thor and Jane retreated to Jane's bedroom, leaving Darcy once again alone. She could hear them talking angrily about something, and even with the door closed between them, she had a good idea of what. She looked at the remains of dinner spread out on the coffee table and sighed, picked up her handbag, and rushed out the apartment and down to the street. She spotted Loki walking down the street, huddled into his jacket as tightly as possible against the steady snow that fell now, and caught up with him.

"Here," she called out to get his attention.

Loki turned to her as she dug through her bag and pulled out her last two twenties. "Will this get you home?" she asked.

Loki took it and shrugged. "It might get me to Manhattan."

Darcy didn't think being stranded in Manhattan would really be any better than being stranded in Brooklyn. "Uh. Here," she said again, pulling out her phone. "What's your address?" she asked.

She punched it into her phone as Loki gave it to her, and pulled up bus directions. She showed the screen to Loki and screencapped it. "Text that to yourself," she said, passing him her phone.

Loki quickly sent the picture to himself and handed the phone and one of the twenties back to her.

"You'll have to get change," Darcy told him as she slid both into her bag. She pointed up to the corner. "The bus stop's just right up there. Sometimes, if you ask them to let you off at a certain stop, they'll let you know when you get to it."

"Thanks," said Loki, looking down at his dog and sighing. He pulled a ratty old leash out of his pocket and attached it to the dog's collar, almost reluctantly. Darcy wasn't sure if they'd let the dog on the bus, but she wasn't sure what else to offer him, either.

"Good luck. Sorry your day sucked," she said as she turned to walk back home.

"Sorry yours sucked too," Loki said, taking his dog to go find a place to break a twenty dollar bill.
Chapter 2

Jane came out of her room some time around midnight. Darcy still hadn't gone to bed. She sat up in front of the TV, eating a bowl of Cap'n Crunch, and trying to figure out what the hell she was going to do.

"Hey," Jane said, walking carefully around the edge of the living room and into the kitchen.

"Hi," Darcy said blandly.

"I kinda got the feeling something happened today, but we never really got to talk about it. What's up?" Jane opened the refrigerator door and looked inside, but didn't find anything worth pulling out.

"Ian broke up with me today," Darcy said. "He's going back to England, and we can't get our money back from anything we've already paid for."

Jane gaped, standing up straight with the refrigerator door still held open. "That little shit. He could have at least waited until next month."

"That's what I said!" Darcy agreed.

Jane let the fridge door shut heavily. "I could actually kill him."

"I think Loki offered to," Darcy said, half-joking. She didn't think an offer to beat someone up was really the same thing as actually killing them, but it could be close enough.

Jane didn't seem to hear the insincerity in Darcy's voice and groaned. "What was he doing in here, anyway? I'm really not comfortable with him in here."

"I know," Darcy said. "But his van got towed and it was snowing, so I told him he could stay inside if he bought me dinner. He's not that bad. When he's not jerking off in front of my laptop."

Jane groaned again. "Well, Thor says he's dangerous."

"It was like, eight years ago," Darcy said, realising she was actually defending the guy who kept breaking into their apartment.

"What was?" asked Jane.

"When he stabbed that guy," Darcy said. "People change. Or grow up, I guess."

"He stabbed somebody?" Jane gasped.

Darcy had always assumed that was what made Jane so uncomfortable. Now, she regretted saying anything. "Uh. Yeah," she said slowly. "He didn't kill the guy. It was just a bar fight." She wasn't sure why she was still defending Loki, especially since it seemed like there was more questionable behaviour she hadn't heard about.

"Well, there you go. Thor says he's dangerous."

"No, what's dangerous is screwing us out of the cost of a trip to Costa Rica and leaving the country," Darcy corrected. "I've been trying to figure out all night if we'd be able to sue him."

"Probably not. If he's going back to England, and we didn't put anything in writing," Jane pointed
out.

Darcy sighed. "The plane ticket's in his name," she said hopefully.

Jane sighed as well and sat down on the sofa next to Darcy. "I'm really sorry. That was a seriously rotten thing to do. He didn't break up over a text, did he?"

"No. He asked me out on a date and tried to make me order dinner first," Darcy said. "I was so pissed off, I accidentally left my coat. I'm gonna go back tomorrow and see if they still have it."

"Wow," said Jane. "That's... I'm kinda pissed."

"I'm very pissed," Darcy said. She picked up her phone and pulled up the calculator app. "Tickets are what? Twelve a day? Plus the eleven for the flight. Plus the five hundred a night for the room? It's like, seventeen grand. Plus all the spending cash I put away, but that at least isn't sitting on hold in a frozen account." She sighed and tossed her phone onto the sofa. If it was just her money, she thought it might have stung less. If she hadn't asked Jane to help pay for his part, she wouldn't have felt so guilty about the money. Money it had taken them years to save up, even with Thor chipping in to the fund once the trip turned into a couples thing.

She was so mad and sick about the money, that she barely even cared about Ian. If not for the trip, she would have been heartbroken; doomed to spend the next few weeks in her pyjamas, eating gallons of Greek yoghurt and watching *Love Actually* on constant repeat.

"Well. Think of it this way," said Jane. "You get that really nice room all to yourself for ten days."

Darcy snorted. Jane sometimes had a gift for the silver lining. Even if they were out the price for the flight and the park admission, that hotel room was at least still being used.

She rubbed her face with both hands and turned off the TV. "I shouldn't even be up right now. I'm working another double tomorrow, and need to be up early."

She took her empty cereal bowl to the sink and set it down inside the basin, already knowing she'd be in no mood for a long shift in the editing room. But as well as going a long way toward financing the trip, all her long shifts meant she was getting really good at her job, really quickly. And the station was willing to give her all the overtime she wanted. There was always something happening that needed to be turned into a cohesive story with just the right slant on it. Which worked out just fine for Darcy, because it meant they always needed people standing by to do it.

She gave Jane a meagre wave in lieu of a proper good night on her way to her room, set her alarm, and tried to sleep.

–

The only thing about the long shifts she truly disliked was that she had to get the bus home from Manhattan in the dark. At least when she was on the bus, there was a driver right there, who would probably step in if something happened. But the walk home, even if it was only a couple of blocks, was nervewracking. It was cold and snowing again, so nobody else was out on the street. She wasn't even sure which was worse: when there were other people out, or when she was completely alone. But either way, she held her bag tight against her side, and kept one hand in her pocket, gripping her taser tightly. She never let go of it, until she was in the building, up the stairs, and right in front of her door.

The door which was, of course, locked with the chain. The door was never supposed to be locked with the chain when one of them was out.
"Let me in," she called through the crack.

She could hear Thor's heavy footsteps on the floor, no doubt driving the downstairs neighbours insane. He had no idea how to walk in an apartment.

"We had an unwanted guest," Thor said as he let Darcy in.

"So call the cops on him," Darcy chided as she hung up her coat and put her handbag and phone in the kitchen. There was a bottle of Advil that had a permanent home by the sink, and Darcy took two pills from it and poured herself a small glass of water.

"You know, I really wish twenty minutes of every half hour of programming wasn't focused on violent street crime," she complained. She took off her glasses and rubbed her temples, wondering if it was possible to get a brain tumour from staring at a screen for too long. "It makes getting home at night really suck."

Jane laughed. "You say that every night."

"Well, it's true every night," Darcy argued. "But! This was my last double shift ever. My next paycheque after this one is going into the bank, and only coming out again for rent."

Jane made a gaspy little sound. "So, we're officially covered for everything?"

Darcy joined Jane and Thor in the living room, taking a seat in the empty chair in the corner. "Officially covered for everything. I did the math today on my first lunch. With this cheque, we'll have five grand in the spending cash account, which fucking better last us ten days."

"Yeah, well. I hear they charge seven bucks for a small soda, so we'll see," Jane said cynically.

"You're still going?" Thor asked suddenly.

"What?" asked Darcy.

Thor seemed genuinely confused. Even more confused than Darcy felt at that moment.

"Well. I thought since Ian wouldn't be coming, and we planned it as a date thing--"

"Woah, no," said Darcy, cutting him off sharply. "Of course I'm still going. I didn't bust my ass working nine million hours of overtime for the last three years for nothing."

"It just seemed like--" Thor was cut off again when Jane smacked him in the chest and gaped.

"Just stop," she said.

"Are you trying to say you'd rather I didn't go, since I'm single now?" asked Darcy.

"Darcy, no," Jane said.

It took Thor a moment to answer, as if he were trying to think of the least tactless way to arrange his thoughts. "I just assumed you might not want to be the third wheel," he said finally.

"Really not helping!" Jane said loudly.

"Wow. Okay. I'm going to bed now," Darcy decided, getting up and walking toward her room. "Don't go to Costa Rica without me."
"Darcy," Jane pleaded.

Darcy ignored her. She was tired, and had a headache, and didn't want to be in the same room as Thor anymore. She vaguely realised he probably didn't mean it the way it came out, but she was still pissed off at him for saying anything at all. Even with the door closed, muffling the sounds of Thor getting a serious ass-chewing, Darcy seethed. She was pissed off enough at wasting the money on Ian's share. Like hell was she going to throw the other half of it away, too.

Sometimes, very rarely, Darcy could see why Thor's brother hated him so much. Because he really could be the most naively self-centred person on the planet. The whole trip wasn't even meant to be a couples trip in the first place. It had only become one when Thor decided he wanted to go as well. And when Darcy had started seeing Ian, she agreed to pay for his way, since he was living on student grants, and she was already working all the overtime anyway. She didn't even care, because she thought it would be fun to go on a double-date to Jurassic World.

A thought that wouldn't have even occurred to her, if Thor hadn't invited himself along in the first place.

As her thoughts swirled and circled around, she managed to convince herself that, when it came down to it, the lost money was kind of Thor's fault. After all, the trip was originally only supposed to be her and Jane, and could have happened a full year earlier if not for the guys going along.

But thinking about it only made Darcy even angrier. She was too tired to deal with it, and would have her entire day off to seethe about it.

Still not quite able to let it go, she changed into her pyjamas and flopped down onto her bed. Lying there, on top of the covers, she almost wished her break-up with Ian had been typical. Being pissed off at him might have been a hell of a lot easier than being pissed off about everything else.

Eventually, she managed to fall asleep. Without her alarm to wake her, she didn't wake until almost noon. She looked out her window into the alley to see the snow piled slightly deeper than it had been when she got home the night before. Looking at it, she couldn't wait to get to Costa Rica. A warm Christmas seemed like such a novel concept. She'd always wanted to spend Christmas poolside at some tropical resort, instead of huddled into three layers of coats on the subway.

Imagining what it was going to be like, Darcy grabbed her keys and walked down the stairs to the mailboxes. As she sifted through the junkmail, something outside caught her eye. She looked, and saw Thor's car parked outside, with Loki trying to break into the back seat. Dreams of poolside lounging forgotten, Darcy opened the door and called out to Loki.

"What are you doing?" she asked when he looked up.

Loki pointed into the back seat of Thor's car. "My wallet," he said.

Darcy stepped close enough to look into the back seat, and sure enough, Loki's wallet was right in the middle of the back seat. She'd seen it before, when he left it in the apartment; scuffed and beaten black leather, with a Metallica logo stamped into the front. It had a tendency to fall out of his pocket whenever he sat down, which Darcy had begun to suspect was deliberate, so he'd always have an excuse to come back.

"What's it doing in there?" she asked.

"Our mother made him take me to go get my van. He makes me sit in the back seat," Loki said.

Darcy laughed, only able to imagine how their morning went. "Well, he might be upstairs, if you
want to try your luck. But I'm not talking to him right now, so it's all you."

She opened the door to the building, waiting for Loki to follow her inside.

"Why aren't you talking to him? I thought you liked the big ape," Loki said.

Darcy groaned and shook her head. "If I start, I'm never gonna stop," she said.

Now, Loki laughed. "That bad? I thought I was the only person he ever pissed off like that."

Darcy bit her tongue, refusing to start on the rant she knew would go on for an hour. She'd already given Loki a good earful of it the night Ian broke up with her, and he really didn't need to know the rest. Instead of saying anything, she let Loki into the apartment, and headed back to her bedroom, dropping the mail onto the table on her way.

"Good luck," she said.

As she got dressed, she could hear the guys getting into their usual argument. It was always the same. Loki wasn't supposed to be there, Loki needed something, Thor was sick of doing things for Loki, Thor only ever did anything for himself, Loki brought it all on himself, I hate you, go fuck yourself, slamming doors. It was a particularly odd iteration, considering the entire argument was about Loki needing his wallet out of the back seat of Thor's car.

Darcy waited until it sounded like the living room was clear before leaving her bedroom to grab her things and leave. If Thor was hanging around the apartment, Darcy didn't want to be there with him. She thought that maybe if she went out for a quick something to eat, he'd be gone by the time she got back, and then she could spend her day off in peace.

Thor was gone by the time she got downstairs, though. Or at least, his car was. So she assumed he'd gone with it, since Loki was trudging down the sidewalk again, kicking up snow as he went.

"He didn't even take you back down there?" Darcy asked as she caught up with him. "Rude."

"I just want to..." Loki made a fist and held it up. "Punch him really hard in the nose." Darcy got the impression Loki wanted to say something entirely different.

Darcy laughed. "I kinda know that feeling," she said.

Loki shoved his hands into his pockets and shook his head. "So, you're not going to tell me what he did?" he asked.

"You sure you want to hear about it?" Darcy returned, still not sure Loki needed to know any of it.

"Oh, very much so," said Loki.

Darcy inhaled deeply. She didn't exactly not trust him, and she definitely didn't believe everything Thor said about him, but there was still something off about Loki. Something almost completely unhinged and unstable. A tiny voice in the back of her head told her that maybe Thor was what made him that way. After all, terrible people didn't usually spend the last of their money to buy someone dinner.

"So. Ian," Darcy said.

"Sure you don't want me to beat him up?" Loki asked.

"Pretty sure," said Darcy. "But, last night was my last double shift, probably ever. I've been
working double shifts probably three or four times a week for like, the last three years, to pay for this trip. Which is why Ian pisses me off so much. It's not that he broke up with me, or how he broke up with me. It's that I've busted my ass for three years to pay for him to go on this trip for me, and now all of a sudden, he's not going. He acts like he's going to get arrested if he's not out of the country on the day he graduates, but like, Jesus Christ. Nobody's going to care about an extra week."

"So it's already been paid for?" asked Loki, actually sounding interested.

"Some of it," said Darcy, struggling to keep up with his long-legged gait down the frozen sidewalk. "Technically, I don't get charged for the non-refundable hotel rooms until the day of the reservation, whether or not we actually check in, but that was almost ten grand for two rooms, on top of the five we already paid for the non refundable plane tickets. And his non refundable fast pass, and his park admission. Non-refundable. That's like, seventeen grand, just on him, gone. We're never going to see that money again."

"That's more than some people make in a year," Loki pointed out.

"Uh-huh! So you can imagine my reaction when Thor says last night that he thought I wouldn't want to go, since it's a 'couples thing'," Darcy said, almost to the point of shouting. "He actually uninvited me from my own fucking trip. Do you know how that feels?"

Loki shrugged. "I wasn't even invited," he pointed out.

They'd passed by the café Darcy had intended to stop at, but she kept walking with Loki anyway. It felt weirdly good to be able to just unload about the whole thing. Especially to someone who wouldn't try to defend the people she was bitching about.

"Neither was Thor," she said. "Seriously, just one day, he apparently assumed he was going, and asked how much his share needed to be. That was the whole reason I invited Ian. Because I knew if it was just those two and me, they'd be making their lovey face at one another the whole time, and I'd be wandering off alone. Which I'm going to be doing anyway, for double the cost it would have been."

They walked in silence for a few moments, Darcy right back up to peak levels of rage.

"You said everything's non-refundable. Is it transferable?" Loki asked suddenly.

"The only thing with Ian's name on it is the plane ticket, and those can only be cancelled," said Darcy.

"So, really, you could take anybody you wanted. You wouldn't even have to go alone," Loki pointed out.

"At the cost of a new plane ticket, yeah," Darcy said, looking up at him suspiciously. "What are you suggesting?"

Loki shrugged casually. "It would certainly piss off my brother. The only source of joy in my life, these days."

Darcy thought about it. If nothing else, having Loki around would prevent that constant lovey face from happening. And she wouldn't feel like she'd worked so hard for nothing. It even kind of helped that she was so angry with Thor, the idea of him being pissed off on their vacation kind of appealed to her. And she could even use it as an opportunity to get back at Ian, in a petty, childish way. After all, this was all his fault for breaking up with her.
"Okay," she said, nodding. "I'll make you a deal. If you can pay for your plane ticket, you can take Ian's place. I'm talking strictly platonic, but I kind of want to pretend it's not, so I can flood my Twitter with pictures of all the fun I'm having with my new fake boyfriend."

Loki laughed. "I like the way you think. How much is the flight?"

"Our tickets were all eleven-hundred, but they might be more, since it's so close to our fly-date," Darcy said as Loki pulled out his wallet. She could see inside as he thumbed through the huge stack of cash that hadn't been there two days before. "Holy shit, where'd you get all that?" she asked.

"I sold some snakes," Loki said, nodding to himself and putting his wallet back into his pocket. "You should have seen Thor's face when I put them in his car."

"Snakes?" asked Darcy.

"Three clutches. A little earlier than I like to sell them, but I needed the money to get my van," Loki explained.

"You sold some snakes?" Darcy asked, still stuck on the first part.

"It was the only job I could find straight out of prison," Loki explained. "I started out helping this other guy. He had this huge operation, and needed someone to clean the habitats."

"You sell snakes," Darcy repeated. "To who?"

"Pet shops, mostly. Some private sales," Loki said, starting to laugh. Darcy realised she probably sounded like an idiot. "Depends on the morph."

Darcy had no idea what that meant, and was still too hung up on the snakes to ask. Then, suddenly, something else he said finally caught up with her, and she stopped in her tracks.

"Hey, wait a minute. Can you even go to Costa Rica?" she asked.

Loki shrugged. "I get into Canada, and they get twitchy if you had a joint on you in 1985."

Darcy shook her head, still baffled. "Okay," she said. "Well. Let's go get your van, and go to the airport to get your ticket. I have to cancel Ian's anyway."

As they walked along, looking for a cab they could hail, Darcy began to wonder if this was wise. She did want to irritate Ian, but she wasn't entirely sure they'd all make it through a ten-day trip with both Thor and Loki.

But something also told her that Loki would have otherwise been spending the holidays alone, with his dog and his snakes, which gave her a strangely unsettling feeling. And not letting all that money go completely to waste did make her feel a lot better. She was only out $1,100, instead of $17,000, and that smaller amount was much easier to live with.
Chapter 3

In order to get through security, they had to be at the airport at six in the morning. Or, that had been the plan, when they were expecting to travel with Ian. As they left Thor's car in the long-term parking and began making their way to the terminal, Darcy wondered if they should have given themselves an extra few hours. But it was a topic she never brought up with Thor or Jane, because she knew if she did, they'd have never made it out of the house for all the inevitable shouting.

Darcy expected to find Loki waiting for them at the ticket counter, but he wasn't there. Nor did they find him anywhere between there and the security line. She was tempted to call him, to make sure he wasn't still in bed. If she got bailed on a second time, she'd have to be held back from choking his lights out. But instead, she just held onto her annoyance, letting it simmer and getting ready to swear off all men forever.

Darcy never understood why they told you to give yourself two hours for security. Especially for early flights. They got in line, showed their IDs and boarding passes, took off their shoes, and were through in under twenty minutes. With an hour and a half to kill, they made their way slowly to the gate, stopping every now and then to look through the windows of all the closed shops.

Just as she was about to give up on letting her annoyance simmer, and pull out her phone, Darcy was grabbed suddenly from behind. She let out a startled shriek, immediately drawing Thor and Jane's attention. The look on Thor's face when he saw Loki there in the airport, with his hands on Darcy's waist, was worth the wait.

"Where have you been? I was just about to call you," Darcy said, glad to finally see Loki with them.

"Stuck in security for two hours with some guy's hand up my ass," Loki said flippantly. "I'm the reason they tell you to get here early."

He messily kissed her in a particularly ticklish spot on her neck, making her squirm.

They'd agreed on a set of very firm ground rules after buying his ticket. He was allowed to kiss her and grab her ass, as long as Thor was present. Her boobs were strictly off-limits, and when they were alone, he was to keep his hands and face to himself. Loki had agreed readily, apparently going on this trip entirely to piss off his brother.

And it seemed to be working already.

"Get your hands off of her," Thor demanded, reaching to pull Loki away. Jane quickly stepped between them, making sure they didn't get into a fight right there in the airport.

"What are you doing here?" Thor asked.

"Going to look at dinosaurs," Loki said cheerfully. "Isn't that what we're all here for?"

"I invited him," Darcy cut in quickly. "It had all been paid for already, so I didn't want it to go to waste."

Even Jane was glaring. "Why him?" she asked.

"I thought this was a couples thing," Loki said with an innocent shrug.
Thor lunged at him, and the two darted off, leaving the women alone.

"Seriously?" asked Jane. "How long?"

Darcy cringed, trying to look as guilty as possible. "Ian and I were never really serious," she said.

Jane deflated a bit. "I thought you were taking that really well," she said, throwing her hands into the air. "This explains so much. Where'd the ticket money come from? Since I assume you had to buy a new one."

"He paid for it," Darcy said quickly. "That was the sole condition of him taking Ian's place. He had to buy his own plane ticket."

Inhaling slowly, Jane nodded. She crossed her arms over her chest and looked over to where Thor and Loki were no doubt having a similar argument.

"All right. Fine. You're right; it was wasted money anyway," Jane agreed slowly, as if she didn't agree at all. "But he's your responsibility. And if he gets in trouble, we're not bailing him out. If he goes to jail in Costa Rica, he stays in Costa Rica."

Darcy nodded. "He won't, but okay. I promise he'll be good."

"Okay," said Jane reluctantly. "Now let's just get Thor to make the same promise."

Darcy stepped over to Loki and pulled him away from Thor, leading him to the other side of the wide corridor.

"Jane's not happy, but she's agreed to let you come," Darcy said quietly, looking over to where Jane and Thor were quietly arguing. "Are you sure we can't tell her? I feel bad."

Loki shook his head. "You know she can't keep a secret. Especially from him. She'll probably figure it out anyway, and then Thor will rip my head off."

Darcy kind of believed it. She was pretty sure the only reason he hadn't actually thrown any punches was because they were in the airport, surrounded by cops and security guards just looking for an excuse to shoot somebody.

She laced her fingers with Loki's and walked with him to their gate, leaving the other two behind. Darcy only had her handbag and her laptop with her, having checked the rest, but Loki had a large backpack slung over one shoulder. It seemed a little big to carry on, but if he'd got through security with it, she figured it must have been okay.

"Can your snakes be left alone for this long?" Darcy asked curiously.

"Yeah, I've got a friend taking care of them. My mother has the dog," Loki said. "It gives her something to do."

Darcy nodded, remembering what Thor said about their mother at the hospital than she did at home. She wondered how often Loki left his dog with her, and whether it wasn't just subtle subterfuge to make her stay home for a few days. Behind them, Thor and Jane were still arguing in whispers, and not about Loki's dog. Darcy still felt bad for lying to Jane, but she was also still angry enough with Thor that it felt worth it. She wasn't sure if it had always been the case, or just felt like it after what he'd said to her, but she didn't really want him coming along either. At least if he'd bailed out of the trip, the money lost would mostly be money that he'd put in, and not money that Darcy and Jane had nearly killed themselves with overtime to save up.
She glanced back, realising that they'd also stopped making their lovey face at one another. That seemed to make it worth it right there.

"Okay, I have a job for you," Darcy decided suddenly, tugging on Loki's hand to get his attention.

Loki looked both concerned and intrigued. "A job?" he asked.

"You are not allowed to let me be grumpy on this trip. This is supposed to be fun, so you need to make sure that happens," Darcy said.

"That's a big ask," Loki said.

"Well." Darcy shrugged. "There's gonna be dinosaurs. I'm pretty sure they'll do most of the work for you."

The trip was expensive, and had taken a lot of time to plan and save up for, but Darcy knew it was going to be worth it. Actual brontosaurus and pterodactyls. It truly would be a once in a lifetime experience, and $1200 a day just to get in already felt worth it.

"I can't believe we're actually doing this," she said giddily as they finally reached their gate. There were several other groups there as well, most with young children with dinosaurs on their shirts, and little stuffed dinosaur toys.

Thor and Jane sat on the other end of the waiting lounge, putting as much distance between them and Loki as possible.

"I'm not sitting next to him, am I?" asked Loki, looking at the way Thor was still glaring at him.

"I think you're behind him on the way to Florida, and then across the aisle from him on the way to Costa Rica," Darcy said, trying to remember the seating arrangements.

Loki laughed. "I am not going to survive this flight," he said.

He leaned back in his seat and pulled Darcy close against his side. For a split second, she tried to move away, before catching herself and playing along. She rested her face against his shoulder, the leather of his jacket feeling almost clammy against her skin. Sitting so close to him, she could smell the old leather; not like the pleasing leather of old books, but like a jacket that hadn't been washed in years. And there was something else as well. Something that smelled like an animal, but not like a dog. It was the sort of animal smell that said, "Go away," and she couldn't help but obey it.

"Did something pee on your coat?" she asked, sitting up a bit.

"What?" Loki grabbed the lapel of his jacket and sniffed against the lining. Then he grabbed his shirt and sniffed it. "Oh. One of my girls made a mess of her cage this morning. I had to clean it out before I left. It's probably that," he said.

Darcy laughed, twisting her face up at the idea of snake poop. "Gross." She pulled out her phone and sat up as she opened the Twitter app. "Here, smile."

She held the phone out and took a quick selfie of the two of them, before posting her tweet.

*Waiting for our flight to #JurassicWorld! :D*

She wondered how long it would take for Ian to unfollow her. Or if he'd even see the tweet. When it didn't seem like he was going to respond in a timely manner, she put her phone away and watched
as the waiting lounge filled up.

--

Darcy looked out over the water below as they flew over the Gulf of Mexico. The snack cart was coming around again, but Darcy wasn't sure how many M&Ms and pretzels a person could eat in a day without throwing up, so she ignored it. When the lady with the cart moved past them, Loki very obviously leaned into the aisle to leer at her.

"Loki," Thor scolded, hitting him in the arm.

"I can look," Loki argued.

Darcy chose that moment to join the conversation. "Look at what?" she asked innocently.

"Nothing," said Loki.

Darcy smiled, feigning obliviousness. Thor just glared sourly.

"I would have a word with you once we land," Thor said.

Loki sighed and looked at his watch. "You might want to go out for lunch once we land, because I am not getting through customs in any less than two hours."

Which was exactly what had happened. As soon as they stepped into customs, Loki was pulled aside by one of the security guards. Managing to look more vindicated than annoyed, he waved them on before being led away.

Though having to wait for Loki didn't really change anything. They had planned on spending their first day in San Jose anyway, taking in at least a little bit of Costa Rica proper before heading to Puntarenas to catch the ferry to the island. Darcy had Loki's phone number, and he had hers, so they'd at least be able to meet back up once they finally let him go, if he didn't feel like waiting around at the airport for the shuttle.

If they let him go, she thought. She realised peevishly then that Thor and Jane both looked openly relieved to be rid of him. Darcy didn't even think he was being overly obnoxious on the flight, and she'd been sitting next to him the entire time. In fact, he'd slept almost the entire flight to Florida. By the time they got on the plane painted to look like a giant T-Rex, Loki had finally woken up and began taking an interest in their vacation. But now that he was gone, it was as if the other two had finally begun taking an interest. Darcy couldn't help but feel a little annoyed.

It didn't last long, however. As soon as they were in the cab, she remembered that they were in Costa Rica, starting a literal vacation of a life time. They took Loki's advice from the plane, and found a charming little restaurant, packed with tourists. Even so, they were quickly seated and given menus, before the busy waitress rushed off to help someone else.

An early investment Jane and Darcy had made, once they knew the trip was going to be an actuality, were some basic Spanish lessons. Even though the resort was American, on a privately-leased island, they knew they'd be spending some time on the mainland. However, Darcy still struggled a bit with her menu, having spent more of her time focusing on learning how to talk to people, rather than learning the nuances of Spanish spelling. She squinted at the words suspiciously, determined to make it work. Before too long, she sorted out the vowels and prevailed, at least well enough to order the *chifrijo*, even though she wasn't entirely sure what it was. What she got was a large ceramic bowl full of crispy pork, salsa, and avocado, with a large amount of tortilla chips on the side, which she devoured.
When they were done, they just decided to wander down the road a bit, window shopping and taking dozens of pictures. Darcy sent a few of them to Twitter and Instagram, vaguely wondering how many times she'd have to empty out her phone onto her laptop to make more room for photos.

They were just beginning to contemplate heading back to catch their shuttle when Darcy's phone finally rang. She hadn't even realised they'd been out for so long until Jane's alarm beeped one hour before their shuttle left, just as Darcy answered her phone. Darcy felt bad for not realising Loki had been away for so long until then.

"Please tell me you haven't been kicked out of the country," Darcy said as she answered the call.

"No such luck," Loki said cheerfully.

"Well, we're just heading back now, I think. Why don't you just chill out in the shuttle terminal, and we'll meet you there," Darcy told him.

"Uh. Yeah, okay," Loki said distantly. He sounded like he was holding his phone away from his head. "Where is it?"

Darcy laughed. "I don't know. Find it and let me know."

"Okay. This call's expensive, so I'm hanging up," Loki said, ending the call before Darcy could respond.

Not for the first time, Darcy wondered how badly this trip would wipe out Loki's finances. When he agreed to pay for his ticket, she'd actually expected to have to meet him halfway, even after she knew he was, for the moment, good for it. She had a feeling his snake money was supposed to last him a few months, but between getting his van out of impound and getting his plane ticket, more than half of it was already gone.

"Is he going back home?" Thor asked, sounding hopeful.

"No," said Darcy, feeling peevish again as she slid her phone back into her handbag. "He's gonna meet us at the shuttle terminal."

Thor's expression soured again, but Darcy didn't care. Suddenly, she was too overcome by weird second thoughts and guilt. Even though Loki did seem to want to be there for more reasons than just irritating his brother, Darcy still felt responsible for his money problems. Even if they were pre-existing, she knew she had added to them by letting him come along.

But that was stupid. He was an adult, and it was his money. He didn't have to spend it on this trip. He'd chosen to.

She continued to feel bad about it all through the cab ride back to the airport. The sun was getting lower in the sky, though it didn't seem to be getting much cooler. Darcy was glad she'd only worn a hoodie, instead of her big winter coat, because she wasn't sure she'd be able to carry it, her handbag, and her laptop. The hoodie at least tied neatly around her waist.

They arrived back at the airport with about twenty minutes before their shuttle, giving them just enough time to find the terminal and make sure their checked luggage had been properly transferred over. Loki was waiting for them, taking up as much room as possible in his seat, with his legs stretched out in front of him and his arms draped over the backs of the seats next to him. Darcy sat down beside him, invading his space as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Thor and Jane went to wait elsewhere.
"How'd it go?" Darcy asked sweetly.

Loki rolled his eyes. "Usually I have to pay to get some of that done to me," he said.

Darcy snorted unattractively. She leaned up against him, still able to smell the snake on him, when she noticed his shoes. They were the same Chuck Taylors she'd seen him in before, with the long tears along the sides.

"Why'd you wear those shoes?" she asked.

Loki twisted one of his feet to look at his shoe. "What else was I supposed to wear?" he asked in return.

Somehow, Darcy had expected an answer like that, and again felt bad about bringing him along. Christmas was in three days, and here Loki was, looking like Tiny Tim had joined a heavy metal band. Darcy couldn't help but glance over at Thor. His shoes were new. His shoes were always new. So was everything he wore, as well as the Mercedes he'd driven them all to the airport in. She was pretty sure she'd only ever seen Loki wear three different shirts, and she was almost certain that the backpack he had with him was the only luggage he'd brought for the ten-day trip.

"Can I take you shopping for Christmas?" Darcy asked.

"No," Loki said.

"Are you sure?" Darcy asked. She'd put enough spending money away for her and Ian to be able to buy way too many things on this trip. She could afford to buy Loki a new pair of shoes and a few shirts.

"I don't want you to take me shopping," he said, his voice oddly firm. Darcy took it as a cue to drop the subject.

There were so many things she wanted to ask, but she didn't feel like she knew Loki well enough to ask any of them. Instead of talking about something he clearly did not want to talk about, Darcy leaned against him again and waited for their shuttle bus to arrive.

The ride from the airport to Puntarenas was about an hour and a half, and even though Darcy wanted to watch Costa Rica go by out the window, she fell asleep only a few minutes after they started going, leaning heavily against Loki's side, despite the smell of snake on him. She was embarrassed when Loki woke her at the port, and as she got off the bus, she could see Jane giving her a strange look, though she was too tired still to decipher it.

When she found out that the travel plans to the resort included a ferry, she had expected to see some huge, lumbering cargo ship. Instead, it was an enormous white and blue Catamaran, with multiple decks and hulls. And when it got going, it definitely did not lumber. Isla Nublar was 100 miles off the coast from Puntarenas, so Darcy had expected to be on the boat well into the night. But as they cruised toward the setting sun, kicking up spray from the ocean, she knew it was going to be a much shorter boat ride than she'd anticipated. But it still wasn't exactly a short trip, either. But the ferry was big, and thus well-equipped, with several cafeterias. Darcy was getting hungry again, and she imagined Loki must have been starving after spending lunch being interrogated by underpaid security guards, so they found a place to eat, sitting next to a window with their $14 Subway sandwiches.

Not too long after they sat down, Jane found them and sat down next to Darcy.

"Where's Thor?" Darcy asked, looking around Jane.
"Puking his guts out," Jane said, unimpressed.

Loki laughed, and nearly choked on his sandwich.

"What?" Jane asked.

Loki swallowed, and wiped the side of his mouth with his hand. "He always gets seasick. We went to Coney Island once, and he puked on me on the roller coaster."

"Who pukes on a roller coaster?" Darcy asked.

"Thor," said Loki, before taking another ravenous bite of his sandwich.

Jane shook her head and turned to Darcy. "Well, the park closes at ten, which is probably about what time it will be when we finally get up to the hotel. I was gonna suggest we go out for dinner, but then Thor started puking, and it looks like you guys have already got a head start on that anyway."

"Sorry," Darcy said. "But we'll still go if you want to. This is all he's eaten all day. He'll probably still be hungry."

"Right," Jane said. It sounded to Darcy like she hadn't expected them to take her up on the idea of dinner. Or at least, hadn't expected Loki to come. "I will see what Thor wants to do, and let you know."

Darcy had at least expected her to stay, but she got up and left. Darcy sighed, realising it was actually starting to bother her. Darcy watched Jane leave, shaking her head in dismay.

"If I have ever behaved like that to you, I am so sorry," Darcy said.

Jane didn't even know Loki. She'd never got to know him at all. And yet, she acted like he'd run over her kitten.

Loki just shrugged and shook his head. "You meant it at the time," he said.

For a moment, Darcy couldn't quite believe what she'd heard. And then she decided that no. She absolutely could believe it, because he always seemed to know exactly when to expect Thor, and timed his visits accordingly. He never showed up when Thor was out of town, or busy all day, which always made his visits as violently explosive as possible. It was only after he'd slipped up a few times and missed Thor completely that Darcy had begun to realise that some of his more annoying behaviour was an act for his brother's benefit. It hadn't been until then, when she was too tired after working a long double shift to kick him out of the apartment that she had even really properly realised that he wasn't an annoying thing on her sofa, but an actual person.

Feeling guilty all over again, Darcy shook her head and finished her sandwich.
Chapter 4

A monorail took them from the ferry dock to the hotel, riding high above the terrain at an amazing speed. Jane had been right. It was nearly completely dark by the time they got there, and Darcy couldn't see anything out the window. The park would be closing just when they got to the hotel.

But Darcy had decided that was just fine. She was exhausted and jet lagged, and couldn't believe it wasn't even 10pm yet. Not even meaning to, she leaned against Loki's side, watching her own dull reflection in the window.

The monorail took them straight to the hotel, where there was a sleepy shuffle to disembark and go get checked in. Fortunately, the queues at the check-in desk were short, since there were about a dozen people at computers, waiting to get everybody into their rooms. Key card ready, Darcy took Loki by the hand, lacing her fingers in his, and led him toward the elevator. They were both tired and slow, and didn't even wait for Jane and Thor to follow them. They'd got adjoining suites, but something told Darcy she wouldn't be seeing much of the other two in the evenings.

Once at the suite, Darcy felt like she could have just fallen straight into bed. But there was a problem she hadn't quite considered. She had completely forgotten that the rooms were both single bed. At the time she had made the reservations, it had made sense. But she was no longer actually dating her date. She looked slowly across the room, trying to formulate a plan.

"I'm assuming I'm on the sofa," Loki asked, just as tired as she was.

"Yeah," she said, liking that idea. "If you don't mind."

Loki shook his head and made his way toward the long, tan sofa against the wall. Darcy left her big suitcase by the door and walked over to the bed, ready to just climb right into it. Like any hotel bed, there were too many blankets, especially for the warm weather, so Darcy stripped off the top duvet and tossed it messily to Loki. "Here," she said, tossing him one of the pillows as well.

"Thank you," he said, already getting himself set up.

"Yep." Darcy didn't waste any time after that. She went back to her suitcase just long enough to find some pyjamas, changed quickly in the bathroom, and went immediately to bed. She could hear Loki still shuffling around for a few minutes after that, before the lights went out and the room went quiet.

Darcy woke early the next morning. Earlier than she had expected to. Between being several hours behind what she was used to being at, and being excited to go see real, live dinosaurs, she was up and wide awake at six in the morning.

The same could not be said for Loki. Darcy learned, rather abruptly, that he slept in his underwear. He had kicked the blanket halfway across the room in the night, and sprawled out face-down on the couch. Even his hair took up as much space as possible, and for a second, Darcy thought he might actually choke on it.

But he seemed fine, so Darcy left him where he was and finally went to take care of her suitcase. She unpacked quietly, not really paying too much attention to what clothes she put into which drawer. When she was done, she found an outfit that would be better suited to the weather, and took it with her into the bathroom so she could shower and dress. It was such a strange feeling to know she'd be wearing shorts in December, which only made her realise it had been about a month since
she'd shaved anywhere. She'd been sort of putting it off on account of the cold weather anyway, but she realised that once Ian broke up with her, she'd completely quit caring.

Now, suddenly, she did care. She spent way too much time in the shower, making sure she didn't look like some kind of small ape walking through the park when they finally got out there. When she was done showering and shaving and generally waking up, she dressed and walked back into the main suite to find Loki still face-down on the sofa, snoring quietly.

"Hey," she said, carefully poking his bare shoulder with one finger. She'd never seen him without his clothes on before, and wasn't sure which was more unexpected: that he was barely wearing any, or that he had a bunch of weird, kind of tribally-celtic tattoos on his shoulders and back. "Hey, dude."

Loki slowly stirred and looked up blearily at her. For a second, he seemed confused, like he couldn't remember where he was, but it passed quickly.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Darcy wondered why that was the first thing he thought to ask. "Nothing. Do you want to go out for breakfast?" she asked.

Loki sat up a bit more, looking around the hotel room through the wild mess of his hair. Shifting his weight to rest on one elbow, he rubbed his face and nodded. "Give me a few minutes," he said, before getting up and finding his backpack. Darcy looked away quickly, realising at once that the tight little boxer briefs he wore left nothing to the imagination.

"Okay," she said, trying not to laugh.

Loki took his bag and shuffled into the bathroom, stopping in the doorway to look at all the steam left on the mirror, before finally going inside and shutting the door behind him. Only then did Darcy let herself laugh nervously.

This had all been a mistake. A terrible, awful mistake, and Darcy realised she regretted it already. Loki wasn't mean, and for the five minutes they were both awake the night before, he had kept his promise about keeping his hands to himself, but they were both exhausted and jetlagged. But now, knowing that he was planning on sleeping practically naked, Darcy wasn't sure she could trust him to keep that promise at all.

But she wondered if maybe she wasn't being unfair. They were, after all, tired and jet lagged, and Loki had already had a more difficult trip than any of them. Maybe he was just too tired to remember that he was sharing a room with her, or else too tired to realise sleeping in underwear that did nothing to hide morning wood wasn't acceptable.

As Darcy tried to figure out which answer was the right one, a light knock came from the door adjoining their suite to Thor and Jane's. Darcy rushed over, realising the door was still locked from her side, and opened it to find Jane on the other side.

"Up early too, huh?" Darcy asked cheerfully, stepping aside to let Jane in. To her surprise, Jane actually followed.

"Yeah, well. I am usually at work by now," Jane pointed out. She stepped around the blanket that had been thrown to the middle of the room and sat down gingerly on the sofa.

"Where's Loki?" she asked, looking around the room.
Darcy pointed toward the bathroom. "Shower, I think," she said.

Jane nodded. "Okay," she said, sounding like she wanted to say more. When she didn't, Darcy spoke instead.

"We're going to go out to breakfast before the park opens. Do you guys want to come with?" she asked.

"Yeah. Yeah, actually," Jane said, sounding a little more easy. "I was actually going to ask you the same thing."

Darcy smiled and sat down on the couch, kicking Loki's discarded t-shirt closer to the bed. Jane watched, and sighed like she still wanted to say something. Still, she said nothing.

"What's up?" Darcy asked curiously.

Jane inhaled deeply and fretted with her fingers. "I kind of want to talk," she said, looking back toward the closed bathroom door.

Darcy looked at it as well. "Right," she said. "Well, he just went in there, so..." She didn't mention that she suspected Jane had as much time as it would take Loki to jerk off in the shower, to say what she had to say.

Jane sighed oddly and nodded again. "Okay," she said. "I just. Is he... Is he good to you?"

It wasn't the question Darcy expected to hear, and she took a moment to realise what had actually been asked. "What? Oh. No, yeah. Most of the time, he's a complete gentleman," she said, knowing that in a strange way, it was completely true. It was a dirty little secret she'd found out when Ian broke up with her.

Jane didn't look convinced, though. "And the rest of the time?" she asked.

Darcy nodded toward the couch they were sitting on. "He hogs the bed, so I kick him out," she said.

Jane nodded again, fidgeting with her fingers some more. "Well, I'm going to be honest with you, but he scares me, and I don't want to see you get hurt."

There was a moment when Darcy couldn't believe she was getting this talk. And then she realised that she should have expected it. "I don't put up with people who don't respect me," she told Jane. "And I promise, you will be the first person I go to if he does ever cross a line. But I don't think he will."

Jane still didn't look convinced, but this time when she nodded, she seemed ready to drop the subject. And just in time, because they could hear the water in the shower stop running. Jane put on a forced smile and stood up, casting a quick glance toward the bathroom door.

"What do you know about their dad?" Jane asked quietly.

Darcy shook her head. "Not much. Why?" she asked, wondering what their father had to do with Loki being dangerous.

"Thor wants to talk to you about that, and I think you should let him." She glanced at the door again, put her forced smile back on, and walked back toward her own room. "We should be ready in about fifteen minutes," she said.
"Okay," said Darcy, feeling very lost. She watched Jane disappear behind the door, just as Loki stepped out of the bathroom, his wet hair combed back and pulled into a pony tail to keep it off his neck.

"What was that?" he asked, looking toward the room Thor and Jane shared.

Darcy resisted the urge to ask Loki about his father. "They're going to breakfast with us," she said. "And I got The Talk from Jane."

Loki blinked. "The Talk? As in babies and disease? Didn't your mother do that?"

Darcy almost laughed. "No. The other Talk. The battered women talk. She doesn't trust you at all, and I really want to tell her. I kinda feel like this pretending was a mistake."

Loki seemed to realise something. "Right." He dropped his bag to the ground and rubbed his face with his hands. "God, I hate him," he muttered to himself, before falling down on the bed.

Darcy didn't have to ask who. "Do you still want to go to breakfast?" she asked.

"Will Thor be there?" Loki asked tiredly.

"Yeah," Darcy said.

It took a while for Loki to respond. "Ugh," was all he said.

After another moment, he hauled himself back to his feet and picked up his bag from the middle of the floor. After digging through it for a few moments, he came up with a crumpled, half-empty pack of cigarettes and walked out to the balcony. Darcy watched, not sure what she was supposed to do or say, as Loki pulled one of the cigarettes from the pack, held it in his mouth, and fished around his pockets before coming to a sudden realisation.

"Damn," he muttered.

"What?" asked Darcy.

Loki held his mouth in a flat line as he stared at the wall next to him. "I didn't even bother trying to get a lighter through customs," he said.

Darcy tried not to laugh. "I'm pretty sure the whole island's non-smoking anyway," she reminded him.

Loki just continued to look annoyed, saying nothing for a long moment. Finally, he shoved the cigarette back into the pack, and shoved the pack into his pocket before walking back into the hotel room. While he sat back down and pulled out his phone to mess with it, Darcy wandered over to the shelf near the door. There was a packet there she hadn't noticed the night before, and when she opened it up, she found two park maps and brochures, two blue, chunky rubber bracelets, and a handful of small plastic dinosaurs.

The bracelets, she soon realised, were their fast passes. She snapped hers around her wrist and took the other one over to Loki.

"Here," she said.

Loki looked up at it with wary confusion. "What's that?" he asked.

"Your ticket for the rides and stuff. It lets us skip the long lines, and get on rides first," Darcy told
him, modelling hers.

Nodding, Loki took his and snapped it onto his own wrist. He shook his hand, letting the bracelet slide around for a moment before apparently deciding that it wasn't going to insult or annoy him somehow.

--

Twenty minutes later, as they were seated in an already crowded restaurant, Darcy was paying more attention to her park brochure than she was to her menu.

"So, it says that the Hammond Creation Lab is a good place to start. It explains the history of the park, and how they make the dinosaurs and stuff," she said.

Loki leaned over to read what she was reading. "I want to see that," he said.

"If it's a good place to start, don't you think everyone will be starting there?" asked Jane. "It might be kind of packed."

Darcy shrugged. "Yeah, but what if some of the other places don't make sense without it?"

"I don't think any of it makes sense," Thor said, looking at the dinosaurs painted on the walls. "They're probably all just fancy robots or something anyway."

"Nobody asked you," Loki said.

"Nobody invited you," Thor shot back.

Glaring murderously, Loki picked up his fork and held onto it as if he was trying really hard not to stick it in Thor's eye. Darcy watched nervously, not sure what to do. But Loki took a deep breath and put the fork down before anybody got stabbed.

"Actually, I was invited," Loki said calmly as he picked up his menu. "Unlike you, from what I've heard."

"Hey," Jane said, putting her hands on Thor's arm, as if to try to hold him back. "Let's not do this, okay? I think we should go to the Creation Lab and then figure it out from there."

"Thank you," Darcy said graciously.

Jane nodded. "You're welcome."

After a few moments, Thor quit glaring daggers at Loki and picked up his menu. For the entire rest of the meal, Darcy kept expecting to see somebody get stabbed, and was pleasantly surprised when no blood had been drawn by the end. After, with the bill paid, and a generous tip left, the four of them wandered out to the boardwalk, slowly making their way around the giant lake-sized pool or whatever it was in the middle. Checking her brochure again, Darcy realised it wasn't a pool, but a tank for something living. She peered over the railing into the water, and though she could see something huge and dark moving around in the deep.

"Apparently they do, like, SeaWorld shows here. But with a giant water dinosaur," she said, reading the brochure again.

"Like an alligator?" asked Jane.

Darcy shrugged. "I don't know. It's a Moses...saurus? What's that?"
"Maybe it needs such a big tank because it can part the seas," Loki chided.

Darcy slapped his arm with the brochure. "Shut up."

By the time they got to the Hammond Creation Lab, the doors were just opening, letting in the few guests who were up early enough to be the first group in. They all stood in the lobby, waiting a few more minutes until the staff were completely ready to start. When a young woman came through, she counted off the first thirty people from the group and beckoned them forward through the large lobby, past a statue of an old man with a cane.

"To truly understand and appreciate this park and all its animals, you have to understand where it all came from. This man, John Hammond," she said, pointing to the statue, "was the first person to look at bio-engineering during its rapid emergence and rise in the mid 1980s, and see its true potential. Bio-engineering started in the pharmaceutical industry, finding new ways to benefit mankind. But John Hammond realised the potential of bio-engineering to not only benefit our species, but the entire planet. We lose species to extinction all the time, and with each species that vanishes from our planet, many more become vulnerable and threatened as the ecosystem is disrupted. Through bio-engineering, John Hammond saw the ability to save these lost and dying species, building up current populations, and even restoring those which had already gone extinct."

As the tour continued from the lobby into a corridor, Darcy frowned. "Does that sound like spin to you?" she asked Loki quietly.

"Perhaps," he answered, watching the tour guide closely.

The tour took them into a long room that looked into a laboratory of some sort, where people in white coats sat in front of white computers and typed furiously.

"This is where the process begins," explained the tour guide. "Our geneticists take the samples collected from fossil digs and use an advanced computer system to analyse the gene sequences. Because the DNA gathered is so old, often times, the gene sequence is incomplete. Our system is able to break down the sequence and find the gaps in the code. When the project was first started in the late 1980s, and through the early 1990s, the sequence gaps were filled in using amphibian DNA. In the late 1990s, reptile DNA began being used. Today, we still use a combination of various reptiles to fill those gaps."

It still sounded like some strange spin to Darcy, but she wondered if that just wasn't because her entire job was spin. But when she looked up at Loki, he was chewing on his thumbnail and staring through the window with an almost concerned look on his face. It was a look that never really went away through the entire tour. Even as the tour explained how the eggs were fertilised from ostrich and emu eggs, Loki began to seem almost disturbed by what the tour guide was saying. Darcy wanted to ask him what was wrong, but at the same time, she didn't want to miss out on what the tour guide told them.

By the time they had walked through the entire lab, coming back out to the boardwalk, the petting zoo near the lab's entrance had opened. Dinosaurs the size of baby elephants roamed in a large corral, wearing saddles and bridles like horses.

Jane and Thor walked down along the rail, stopping down at the other end to pet one of the two-legged dinosaurs in the pen, but Loki stopped to watch the triceratops near them, watching it silently for a few minutes.

"These things aren't reptiles at all," he said suddenly, still frowning oddly. Darcy wasn't really sure what there was to frown about when an actual dinosaur was just feet away from them.
"What do you mean?" she asked.

Loki pointed at the triceratops. "Look at the way they're moving."

"Yeah?" It was moving, but Darcy didn't know what was so special about that.

"They're moving constantly. And with their bellies off the ground. These things are warm-blooded."

Loki leaned against the rail, still scrutinising the dinosaur in front of them. Darcy still didn't understand what he was talking about.

"How can you tell?"

"Reptiles get their warmth from their environment," Loki explained patiently. "Usually from the ground, which is why most of them drag their bellies, or walk low to the ground. That's why they bask. A basilisk lizard can run so quickly, it can run on top of water, but it has to bask in the sun for hours to get that energy. And by the time it's on the other side of the pond, it's spent. But look at these things. They haven't stopped moving since we got here. They're more like baby elephants than anything else." He was practically gaping at the animal now, as if its existence was offending him.

Darcy was surprised. She hadn't thought Loki really knew anything about anything. In fact, he'd always seemed kind of stupid, and off in his own little world. But now she wondered if it wasn't all just an elaborate act. The thought crossed her mind that Thor had always said Loki was dangerous, and she briefly wondered if this was what he meant. A person could be dangerous without being physically violent. Dangerous people could also be ferociously manipulative. Darcy realised that Loki had been incredibly quick to jump on the opportunity to go on this trip, and to spend a large amount of what little money he had to do so. At the time, she had assumed that he was coming along to lessen the hurt, and get to see some dinosaurs and help irritate his brother along the way. Now, standing next to him as he watched the baby triceratops with an intensity she'd never seen from him before, she seriously doubted her decision to bring him along.

She looked up at him, and noticed there was something very predatory in the way he watch the baby dinosaur. She wondered why she had ever thought he was stupid at all, and seeing him now, she knew that everything about him was indeed an elaborate act. And then, in an instant, it was gone as he called the attention of one of the animal handlers.

"These animals are warm blooded, aren't they?" Loki asked.

"Yes, that's right," the handler said. She held up the small galimimus in her arms so Loki could reach over the fence and rub under its chin. "Our engineers first thought it was a glitch in the DNA. Have you been to the creation lab?"

Loki nodded. "Yes. They said you use reptile genes to fix those you couldn't replicate cleanly. But these aren't reptiles."

"No," the handler agreed, shaking her head. "There's debate now on what class they truly belong to. In fact, paleontological discoveries were made right around the time our engineers were drawing similar conclusions, that these creatures may have been more closely related to birds, or possibly even egg-laying mammals."

Loki hummed, gave the baby galimimus one more little rub beneath the chin, and nodded before continuing down the length of the fence toward where Thor and Jane still stood. Not quite sure what had just happened, Darcy followed after him.

"What was that?" she asked.
"Just inside, we were told that their engineers started out splicing frog genes in, but then stopped," Loki reminded her.

"Yeah, and they never said why," Darcy remembered. "I thought that was kind of weird."

"Probably because frogs are impossible," Loki said, almost sounding like he was complaining. "They're like sponges. They absorb everything in their environment, which is why they mutate so easily. You get frogs with too many arms, and you know you've got a ground pollution problem."

Darcy had put together a few stories on Hicksville and Shirley, and remembered frogs coming into it once or twice. They never made it into the final cut though, because funny-looking frogs just weren't as important as kids getting cancer from drinking the tap water and sick workers being told to suck it up.

"So, you're saying that the dinosaurs might grow extra legs?" Darcy asked, still not quite following.

Loki shook his head and stopped at another point along the fence to watch the babies some more. "No. It just seems odd that they'd use genes from animals that are both highly mutable, and not even related to the animal they're trying to create. I scrape by on a few snake clutches every few months because I've been able to breed the snakes to the point that they don't even resemble wild snakes of the same species. One of my pairs produces offspring that can bring in a thousand dollars a head. A few years ago, I had one born with two heads, and someone paid fifteen grand for it. That was a pretty good year."

"Jesus Christ," Darcy said.

"It just makes me wonder how many of their clutches fail, or don't turn out like they expected," Loki mused. "And why they're not just using elephant or eagle genes to fill their gaps, if they think these animals are related to birds and mammals anyway."

Darcy thought about that, and realised he was right. She didn't do much in science, but Jane did. She thought maybe Loki and Jane should talk about this, but knew about how well that conversation would go.

She looked back over to where Jane and Thor had been, and found that they'd already snuck off, ditching her and Loki. Sighing, Darcy leaned against the fence to watch the animals some more, a little disappointed that the dinosaurs weren't even real dinosaurs.
The headbutting dinosaurs didn't do anything for Darcy. In a way, watching them fight against one another in their little pit felt like putting two betta fish in a tank just to watch them fight. Sure, it was probably natural behaviour for them, but they would have probably rather been allowed to have a few square miles to themselves instead.

The uncomfortable SeaWorld atmosphere of the park only got worse when they came to the mosasaurus show. Darcy half expected to see a trainer in a wetsuit get into the water with the dinosaur and make it do some tricks. But there was no trainer in a wetsuit. Instead, the woman giving the presentation had more to say about how their single animal has done more for helping scientists understand behaviour in prehistoric aquatic animals than the fossil record ever could. Beyond that, the mosasaurus only had one trick, throwing its huge body out of the water to catch a dangling great white shark.

For a moment, Darcy actually felt offended that of all the food they could have given their animal, they chose a great white shark. But then she remembered the lecture at the Creation Lab earlier, about how the entire resort started because the Guy With The Vision wanted to help preserve endangered species. That shark had probably never seen the ocean in its life. As the stadium seating slowly lowered down to give the crowd an underwater view of the giant dinosaur tearing the shark apart, Darcy realised why the creation lab was probably recommended as the first stop.

"How do you think they clean the tank?" Loki asked suddenly.

The question was so unexpected, Darcy laughed. And then she realised it was exactly the sort of question Loki would ask.

"How do you clean your snakes' tanks?" she asked.

"I put them in a plastic tub on the floor and give them a shoebox to play with," Loki responded. For a second, Darcy thought he was joking, but she quickly realised he was actually serious.

"Yeah, but. How do you get them out without getting bitten?" she asked. "Aren't snakes poisonous?"

All around them, people were shouting and screaming at the carnage in the water before them, drowning out the voice of the presenter.

"No," Loki said. "Some are venomous, but not ball pythons. And if the snake's going to strike at me ever time I try to get close to it, it's not a snake I want to keep around for very long anyway."

It made sense. Darcy watched the dinosaur in the tank finish off the shark, the red cloud of blood slowly dissolving in the water. With a stroke of its massive tail, the dinosaur turned and swam away into the cloudy water.

Darcy looked over past Loki, toward Jane and Thor a few seats away. Jane looked absolutely shocked at what had just happened, while Thor was craning about, trying to see more of the animal.

Darcy kind of wasn't surprised when Jane opted out of seeing the T-Rex feeding a little later. Darcy wasn't too sure how she felt about seeing it either, but she was determined to go to every attraction at
least once. She stood next to the glass in the wide catwalk, peering down into the dense jungle-like enclosure below. A live goat was chained to a post down beneath them, bleating and eating grass obliviously.

"Our T-Rex is one of our oldest animals on the resort," the guide said. "She was part of second generation of animals created by John Hammond's original team, in 1989. The gene splicing that was used to create her, which you can learn more about in the Hammond Creation Lab, did cause some unexpected side effects, however. She's healthy, and probably has at least a few more years in her yet, but unfortunately, she can't see very well. Her vision is based off movement, which makes hunting smaller prey difficult for her. So we're going to help her out a bit."

Suddenly, a red flare fell from the ceiling, landing within feet of the goat. Not long after, the entire catwalk began to tremble in time to massive footsteps, as a dinosaur bigger than Darcy expected moved smoothly through the trees. Suddenly, a roar like a crashing freight train bellowed through the enclosure, and the dinosaur crashed through the final layer of vegetation into the clearing. Panicked, the goat tried to fleet, but it was stuck where it was. The T-Rex bent to pick up the goat, taking the entire animal in its mouth before stomping off into the jungle again.

As it moved, Darcy could see some long scars on one of its shoulders, as if it had been hurt.

"Did something happen to it?" she asked out loud.

"Originally, there were plans to make this island into a safari park, but that structure ultimately proved unsafe for many of the animals. Now, we only allow our animals that move in herds or packs to roam," the presenter said, clearly hearing her.

"Oh," Darcy said. She knew there were tours outside of the main resort, but she hadn't really thought about what the tours would be for. So far, she'd only looked at the sections of the brochure for the boardwalk attractions.

Afterward, she and Loki left the T-Rex enclosure and wandered around the giant lake-like tank in the middle of the resort. Darcy wasn't really sure what she wanted to do, and it was nearing time to go get ready for their dinner reservations anyway. Somehow, they had already run out of day, and they had only seen a few things. Even with their fast passes, they still had to wait in lines for things, and all of the attractions seemed to go on a lot longer than she'd expected them to.

It reminded her of the summer she'd spent with her aunt in California. They'd gone to Disneyland one day, and even though they got to the park just as the gates opened, they only had time to go on half the rides. For a while, Darcy had been wondering if getting the ten-day package was going to be too much, but as she looked at the long line for the spinning egg ride, she realised they still might not have enough time to do everything on the island.

"Thor is right behind us," Loki said quietly.

Before Darcy even registered his words, Loki pinched her ass hard. As she squealed indignantly, he wrapped his arms around her and managed to spin her around so she came face to face with the murderous look on Thor's face.

"Hi," she said, slapping Loki's hand away and rubbing the spot where he'd pinched her. "How was the IMAX movie?"

"Good," said Thor, as if he didn't mean it.

"Good," Darcy responded, as Loki slid his hand into her back pocket while he checked out a woman
walking past them. "I was thinking about going after dinner, but I kinda want to just take a hot bath, I think."

"That's why I came to find you. Jane was wondering if you'd forgot," Thor said.

Darcy shook her head. "Nope. Just slowly making our way back to get changed right now."

Loki frowned and looked down at his ratty shirt, with the holes along the collar. "What's wrong with this?" he asked.

Thor glared again, and then strode off abruptly. Once he was gone, Darcy nudged Loki away, and continued back along their leisurely path to the hotel.

"I think they have a dress code, but I don't really want to eat dinner wearing dinosaur water even if they don't."

Loki shrugged. "I guess," he said.

Darcy looked at his torn shirt again, and then down to his faded and worn jeans, and to the Chuck Taylors that were barely still able to be called shoes. She didn't want to press the issue, because she knew what the answer would be, but she also didn't want to deal with what might happen if he was turned away. She said nothing more as they walked up to their hotel room. When they reached their room, she stopped for a moment before stepping over to the door that joined to Jane and Thor's room.

"I need to go talk to Jane real quick," she said while Loki ignored her and poured his backpack out onto the floor.

The door between the rooms was unlocked, but Darcy still knocked at it before slowly pushing it open.

"We're dressed," Jane said, sounding amused.

"Oh thank god." Darcy pushed the door open all the way and stepped inside. Thor stood in the bathroom doorway, looking at himself in the tall mirror on the closet door while he changed his shirt. Jane had also changed into something a little nicer than what she had worn out on the boardwalk, getting rid of the sandals in favour of something with a closed toe.

"So, dinner. Is there a dress code?" Darcy asked, suddenly nervous about the answer.

"No sneakers or T-shirts," Jane answered. "Why?"

Darcy cringed. "That's... kinda all he has. I'm pretty sure he only owns about four T-shirts and two pairs of jeans, period." She bit her lip and looked back at the door separating their rooms.

"And let me guess. One pair of shoes," Jane concluded.

"Yeah," Darcy said flatly. There were other restaurants at the resort, but they'd made reservations for observatory deck at the Jungle months before, when it wasn't a problem because Ian actually had something to wear for it.

She frowned at a spot on the wall while she tried to figure out what to do. She could leave Loki behind in the room, and let him order room service, but that seemed kind of mean. Or she could stay behind with him, but then she'd miss out on one of the things she had specifically wanted to do during the trip.
Suddenly, Jane sighed, annoyed. "Thor. Please?" she said, looking at him expectantly.

Thor sighed in return, and stomped over to his huge suitcase and began to pick through it. He pulled out a few shirts, before finally deciding on a plain blue one, and picked up his other pair of shoes from the floor.

"If he wears his black jeans, he should be fine," Thor said petulantly, handing the shirt and shoes over to Darcy.

She smiled genuinely at him, surprised at how relieved she felt. "Thanks," she said, before turning to go back to her room.

On the other side of the door, she found Loki standing out on the balcony, leaning over it awkwardly, while he tried to smoke a cigarette without letting the smoke get into the room. She put the shirt and shoes down on the bed and stood in front of the huge, sliding glass door.

"You know, closing the door would probably be easier," she said.

Loki turned around, confused. "What? No," he said, before leaning back over the rail.

Cautiously, Darcy stepped forward as well, and peered over with him. Loki wasn't trying out acrobatics out of any courtesy, but because down below, one of the head-butting dinosaurs had apparently got out of its pen and had wandered down to the hotel. A small group of handlers were trying to corral it, but it charged at one of them, knocking him to the ground with its head.

"Ouch," Darcy said sympathetically. "How long's that been going on?"

"I don't know. I only just noticed it," Loki answered.

They watched together as the handlers finally cornered it and shot it with a dart that dropped it to the ground within seconds. After that, it didn't seem so interesting, so Loki finished his cigarette and turned to go back inside.

"What's this?" he asked, seeing Thor's shirt on the bed.

"There is a dress code," Darcy said. "You can stay here if you really want, but you'll be staying alone. Gordon Ramsay's got a restaurant on this island, and you bet your ass I'm eating there tonight."

Loki glared at Thor's shirt like he wanted to set it on fire, before suddenly deciding on something and shrugging. He pulled off his own shirt and picked Thor's up, considering it for a moment before putting it on. It was a little too big on him, but he tucked it into his jeans and rolled up the sleeves to make it look like it fit him better.

"Apparently, your black jeans would be better," Darcy told him as he reached for his shoes.

Loki looked down at the faded blue jeans he was wearing, and seemed to agree. The black ones were old as well, but they didn't show it as badly. Loki picked them up from the pile he'd left on the floor, and started to change right there in the middle of the room. Turning away quickly, Darcy pulled a black skirt and a nice top from the dresser and ducked into the bathroom to change. She changed quickly, knowing they were already tight on time and that she had to fix her makeup after being in the sun and splashed with dinosaur water all day. When she was done, she stepped out of the bathroom to find Loki fixing his hair in front of the mirror, brushing the curls out before pulling it back into a neat ponytail. It was almost surprising how well he cleaned up when he wanted to.
"Give me your eyeliner," he said suddenly.

"Why?" asked Darcy, wondering if she should be nervous.

"Because I didn't bring mine," Loki said plainly.

Having a feeling she was going to regret it, Darcy grabbed both of her liquid and her pencil, not sure which one Loki wanted. To her surprised, he took the liquid one first, and almost used it, but changed his mind at the last second. He was surprisingly quick with it, and definitely knew what he was doing, drawing just a thin line beneath each eye.

As Loki sat down to put on Thor's shoes, a knock came from the door to Jane's room.

"We're dressed," Darcy called out.

Jane peeked her head through, but didn't step inside. "You ready?" she asked.

"Just about," said Darcy. She turned back to Loki, expecting him to be more ready than he was, but instead, he was too busy unlacing Thor's shoes. "Uh. We'll meet you in the hall," she decided.

Jane watched the two of them for a moment before nodding. "Kay. Hurry up," she said before shutting the door again.

Darcy barely responded, too busy trying to figure out what Loki was doing. "You got a problem there?" she asked.

"Thor's feet are smaller than mine," Loki grumbled, trying to pull one of the shoes on. He grimaced as he got it over his heel, and then pulled it back off, took off his socks, and tried again. After loosening the laces a little more, he tied them and started forcing the other shoe on. He looked almost in pain as he stood, trying to keep his weight off his toes.

"Ready?" Darcy asked, wondering if there was a better way to do this.

"I guess," Loki said. He patted down his pockets, and quickly picked up his old pair of jeans to fish out his wallet and phone before walking stiffly toward the door.

Jane and Thor were already out in the hall, waiting. As Darcy and Loki stepped out as well, Thor's entire posture stiffened as he glared at his brother. Loki ignored him, sliding his phone and wallet into his pockets. As they all walked back down to the boardwalk together, Thor kept his distance from Loki, while still glaring at him the entire time. Loki, meanwhile, kept on ignoring Thor while he played with Darcy's hair copped a few feels.

Out in the evening sun, Darcy realised that his tattoos showed through the light-coloured shirt Thor had loaned him, seeming like dark stains on the fabric. She reached up and smoothed the fabric down over his arm, trying to see the design underneath. She wondered what it was, but didn't want to ask in front of Thor and Jane, since it was probably something she should have already known if she was actually dating him.

"What?" Loki asked, looking down at her, and then twisting his sleeve to see if there was something on it.

"Just looking at your stuff," she said. "It almost looked like a stain on the shirt for a second."

"What did you get on my shirt? It isn't yours," Thor said.
"Lucky for you, I'm not wearing it because I want it," Loki said flatly.

For some reason, that just seemed to make Thor glare harder. Darcy wondered if he already knew the whole thing was a sham, but she wasn't sure why he wouldn't have said anything if he did know. Jane seemed to believe them, anyway. In theory, Thor and Jane were a couple who talked to one another about stuff. But maybe Darcy was wrong.

Trying not to work herself up over it, she took Loki's hand and pointed over to where the mosasaurus in the giant tank was rolling around at the surface of the water. It was enough to distract Loki, but Thor didn't seem too interested.

When they got to the restaurant, there was already a fairly large crowd waiting for the dinner service. Thor used his size to muscle up to the hostess and declare their reservation for four. Thor had insisted the reservations be under his name, and when they were immediately waved through the dining room, Darcy figured that maybe he knew something -- or someone -- she didn't.

The observatory deck was up a flight of stairs, and outside on top of the building. To the north, they had a bird's eye view of the giant tank in the middle of the boardwalk, where the mosasaurus was still rolling around at the surface. To the south, they could see Isla Nublar's golf course, beyond one of the raised monorail lines. Darcy and Loki both immediately walked over to the glass rail to watch the dinosaur, while Thor and Jane sat down at the table.

There were birds flying around the giant dinosaur now. Dozens, maybe hundreds of white and grey seagulls, squawking and circling in a mad scramble. Every now and then, they'd dive down and land on the dinosaur, having only a few moments to peck at its scaley hide before the dinosaur rolled enough in the water that the birds had to fly away to avoid getting pulled under the surface.

"Bath time," Loki said, sounding amused.

Darcy looked up at him. "What?" she asked.

He pointed to the birds. "They're eating parasites and anything else off its scales. It's getting cleaned, and they're getting fed."

Darcy watched for a few more moments, surprised to see that while the birds were diving down and pecking at the dinosaur, it wasn't actually trying to fight back or eat the birds.

"I bet if we watched long enough, it would find a shallow place to bask with its mouth wide open," Loki said. He shifted awkwardly, as if he wanted to watch, but wanted more to get off his feet. Darcy pulled him away from the rail and over to their seats with Jane and Thor.

"What's going on?" Jane asked curiously.

"The seagulls are eating bugs and stuff off the dinosaur," Darcy said. "It's kinda cool." She picked up the small menu and looked at it, realising she shouldn't be surprised at its lack of options.

"Oh," said Jane, looking over at the dinosaur as well. Before long, even Thor was watching the scene play out. They were all so transfixed on watching the animals interact with one another, that none of them noticed their waiter bring their water to them. It wasn't until he came back a few minutes later to explain the specials that anyone had even noticed him at all.

"That seafood ravioli sounds delicious," Darcy decided, handing the menu back.

"With the bisque?" the waiter asked, punching the order into his phone.
Darcy nodded. "Yes," she said.

Jane was still looking over her menu. "I think I will have," she said slowly, reading over everything again. "I don't know. Come back to me."

"Steak," Thor said brusquely.

"Okay," said the waiter as he punched their order into his phone. "And how would you like that?"

"Rare," said Thor.

Loki turned his menu over once more, before handing it back to the waiter. "Sampler," he said.

The waiter nodded and returned his attention to Jane. "Have you decided?" he asked.

Jane flipped the menu over twice and shrugged. "I don't know. What would you have?" she asked.

"The sliders are good," the waiter said.

"I'll have that," said Jane.

"Okay. And drinks?"

"Do you do rum and coke?" asked Darcy.

The waiter nodded.

"Beer," Thor said, sticking to his one-word vocabulary for a while.

"I'll have a wine. Red. Whatever," Jane said, shrugging again.

"All right," said the waiter, poking quickly at his phone as he turned to Loki. "And you?"

"Just water," Loki said, shaking his head.

The waiter nodded again and slipped his phone into his pocket. "I'll be right back with your drinks and starters," he said, before disappearing.

Beside Darcy, Loki shifted in his seat, and leaned over to one side. Darcy looked down to see what he was doing, and noticed he was taking off his shoes just enough to look like he still had them on.

"What are you doing?" Thor demanded.

"Considering chopping off my toes to fit into your precious glass slippers," Loki responded, settling back down and taking a drink of his water.

"Don't ruin my shoes. They're not yours," Thor said.

"Good. I don't want them. They don't fit," Loki said. He sat back in his seat again and looked back out at the tank.

Suddenly, he tapped Darcy on the shoulder and pointed out at the water. When Darcy looked out, the dinosaur was no longer in the middle of the tank. Toward the north end of it, there were several little concrete peninsulas sticking out into the water. The dinosaur had beached itself on one of them, and lay with its mouth open, while the birds buzzed around its head and landed among its teeth to peck out whatever they could find.
"Why doesn't he eat them?" Darcy asked.

"Because if he eats them, they won't come back to clean his teeth tomorrow," Loki said. "He can't exactly pick up a toothbrush."

Darcy laughed at the mental image. Somehow, she pictured a giant dinosaur trying to hold a tiny little toothbrush in its claws, struggling to reach its mouth with its funny, flipper-like arms.

Their drinks were brought around shortly after, and Darcy's lobster bisque a few minutes after that. It came in a tiny little bowl, but it was thick and creamy, and everything she had expected already. When she was about halfway through, Loki stole her spoon and took a few bites, making Darcy conflicted over whether she wanted to fight back for the rest of it, or behave like a proper adult at an expensive restaurant. The lobster bisque won, and she fought back, stealing her spoon back out of Loki's hand.

She didn't even care that Thor was glowering at them from across the table. She was even starting to forget why she'd brought Loki in the first place. If Thor really wanted to be this moody and cranky while everyone else was having fun, that was his problem. Even Jane had started to relax and let her guard down. The only one forgetting that they were in Costa Rica, enjoying a December sunset while watching an honest-to-god dinosaur take a bath was Thor, who just wanted to hold onto his beer and look angry.

When the waiter brought their food, the amount of it covered every inch of the table. Jane's deference to the waiter toward her order had got her six tiny hamburgers, a basket of fries, and a bowl of salad. Thor's steak, ambiguously-ordered, was big enough to have come from one of the dinosaurs in the park, and had enough onion rings with it to feed the mosasaurus, while Darcy's ravioli came with bread sticks, and a bowl of salad of her own. And Loki's sampler had apparently been a sample of literally everything available on the island. Tiny little bites of assorted seafoods, a tiny hamburger of his own, and about eight different sides, all served on their own tiny little plates.

"Wow. Hope you're hungry," Jane said, looking at it all with wide eyes.

Loki shrugged, as if accepting a challenge. Without a word, he reached for one of his onion rings, and dipped it Darcy's ravioli, taking a little bit of her sauce. She almost protested, until she remembered that she hadn't even started to eat yet, after being so shocked by everything laid out before them.

The ravioli was stuffed with oyster and octopus, and was drizzled with an almost bisque-like sauce. She hummed in pleasure as she ate her first bite, trying to savour it for as long as she could. Unfortunately, she was also starving, after having spent the entire day on the go, with only a few quick snacks as they came to them.

"What have you got?" she asked after her second bite, leaning over to inspect Loki's spread.

He looked over everything, and stabbed a breaded clam with his fork, holding it out for Darcy. She bit the clam off the fork without hesitation, and immediately reached for her rum and coke when she realised it was a little too hot.

"Ow," she said, before taking another sip of her drink. "Damn, that's good. But ow."

"Let me try some of yours," Jane said suddenly, holding her fork up, waiting for permission before stabbing at Darcy's plate.

"Go for it," Darcy told her.
Jane did, and made a face that looked like how Darcy felt.

"Told you it would be worth it to come here," Darcy said. She took another bite as well, wishing it would never end.

"Do you think he's here?" Jane asked, looking around the observatory deck.

Darcy shook her head, trying not to be pessimistic in her attempt to keep from getting her hopes up. "Probably not. He owns like, thirty restaurants and does about as many TV shows," she said. "Plus it's Christmas." He was probably filming some special, teaching his kids how to slaughter and cook their own Christmas goose.

Jane shrugged. "Couldn't hurt to ask."

"Maybe," Darcy decided.

She looked out at the dinosaur tank again, but the animal had gone, hiding deep under the water. She was sad to see it gone so soon, but figured it was probably like a whale or something; so big, it probably suffocated under its own weight if it was on land for too long. When she looked back, Loki was watching over the tank as well, either thinking about something, or seeing something she hadn't noticed.

She was about to ask him what he was thinking about, but he turned back toward his food and picked up a little bowl that had an oyster or something, covered in water. Loki picked the morsel out of the bowl with his fingers, but as he tried to eat it, he started coughing violently.

"Woah, you okay?" Darcy asked, sitting up suddenly.

Still coughing, Loki shook his head and held onto the table for support. Even Thor looked mildly concerned, before thrusting Loki's glass of water toward him. After a few more moments of a throaty, choking cough, Loki took the water and drank half of it. Once he caught his breath, he rubbed the palm of his hand against his eyes, and then grabbed his shirt collar to dry his face. Thor slammed his hand against the table, but the other three ignored him, paying more attention to Loki as he steadied himself.

"What the hell is that?" he asked hoarsely, pointing to the little bowl the oyster had been in.

Darcy picked it up and took a sip of what she had expected to just be oyster juice, but was caught by surprise by the eye-watering burn. Had she been expecting it, it mightn't have been so bad, but she could see why Loki had reacted the way he had.

"Woah, that's vodka," she said, setting the bowl in the middle of the table, as far from everybody as possible.

Loki rubbed his eyes with his hands again, leaving black smudges under his eyes.

"Wow," he said, blinking hard.

By then, the waiter had appeared by their table, replacing Loki's water with a fresh glass.

"Is everyone all right?" he asked.

"Yes," Loki said, finally reaching for his napkin to try to clean off his face. When he was done, he picked up the tiny bowl of vodka and handed it to the waiter. "Just a very big surprise for someone who doesn't drink. Is there anything else I should be wary of?"
"Oh," said the waiter, taking the bowl away in a hurry. "My apologies. No, everything else should be fine for you. I'll get this out of your way, sir."

"Thank you," Loki said, wiping his eyes again with his napkin. The waiter hurried off, taking what was left of the vodka with him.

"You okay?" Darcy asked, resting her hand on Loki's arm.

He nodded, and put his napkin back down. "Yeah," he said. "That was... horrible."

Darcy and Jane both laughed uneasily, but Loki seemed fine for the ordeal. Thor was glaring even harder than ever, but everyone continued to ignore him.

"That is my shirt," he said suddenly.

Loki stopped halfway toward grabbing his last onion ring. "Good for you?" he said.

When Thor said nothing else, Loki shook his head and shrugged, before grabbing the onion ring and stuffing it into his mouth. Darcy watched him, and suddenly spotted what Thor wasn't saying. The inside of the shirt collar had been smeared with black from Loki's borrowed eyeliner. To keep herself from laughing of saying something stupid, Darcy stuffed her face with more ravioli and wondered if the whole thing had been an elaborate plan. Across the table, Jane looked at her quizzically, but Darcy shook her head and mouthed "later" at her once her mouth was clear.

A few moments later, the waiter returned with a tray of oysters on the half-shell, and set them in an empty spot near Loki.

"Our apologies again," he said. "It's on the house."

Loki nodded graciously. "Thank you," he said. After the waiter left, Loki fed the first oyster to Darcy.

Chapter End Notes

Go here for chapter notes: https://lokiofsassgaard.wordpress.com/2015/10/12/chapter-notes-isla-nublar/
On the way back up to the rooms, Jane pulled Darcy aside, managing to get far enough away from the men to talk quietly without being heard.

"What was going on in the restaurant?" Jane asked, sounding like she wasn't sure if she expected to hear gossip or impending doom.

"What?" asked Darcy. Dinner had seemed fairly tame, except for the single highlight of the meal. "Oh," she said, realising suddenly. "Thor's probably pissed because Loki stained his shirt while he was choking to death."

Jane sighed heavily and shook her head. "I know that you like him. And he's been... surprisingly nice so far," she said. "But would you please talk to Thor?"

Darcy tried to look back at the other two without obviously looking back at them. "About Loki?" she asked.

"Yeah," Jane confirmed. "I don't really feel like I have the whole story, so I don't want to repeat what was said to me and pass on the wrong information."

"Okay," Darcy said slowly. Behind them, she could hear the other two start to argue already, and assumed it was about the shirt. "This isn't gonna be one of those 'him or me' conversations, is it? Because I hate those."

"I don't know," Jane said honestly. "Probably not. Thor's not really like that."

Jane glanced back again and stopped in her tracks, deflating. Darcy stopped and turned around as well, though she supposed she shouldn't have been surprised. Right there, in front of the hotel, Thor was trying to wrestle his shoes away from Loki, while Loki was still wearing them.

"Dear god, we're dating six-year-olds," Darcy said flatly while she watched the drama play out.

"Yep," Jane agreed. "This could go on for a while. You wanna go upstairs and order drinks?"

Darcy thought about it for a moment, and almost said yes. "How about cake?" she suggested instead. "He doesn't drink, so I don't really wanna be drunk in front of him." After the eyeliner on Thor's shirt, Darcy wasn't even sure he was telling the truth about that, but for the moment, she was assuming he was.

Jane watched the other two continue to fight, and turned back around toward the hotel. "Yeah, let's get out of here," she decided.

They were up in Jane's room, watching the resort's information channel and slowly picking at their room service chocolate cake when Thor finally made his way back up. Darcy knew Loki didn't take his key, so she expected to see him follow Thor through the room to make his way into theirs, but he wasn't there at all.

"Where's Loki?" she asked, craning to see if he was lurking in the hall.
"He left. He said he needed a cigarette," Thor said, sitting down on the long sofa against the wall.

Darcy frowned, knowing Loki had at least a full pack in the hotel room. She wanted to get up to see if she could go find him, but somehow, sitting between her and the door, Thor seemed like a barrier.

"You'll be better off if he doesn't return," Thor said suddenly.

"What?" Darcy asked dumbly.

"My brother is dangerous and not to be trusted," Thor said. He looked at the wall as he spoke, rather than at her. "Whatever he may have told you, he's using you. Likely to get to me. And I'm ashamed to say that it's working."

Darcy suddenly realised that she was having this talk with Thor, whether she wanted to or not.

"Get to you how?" she asked cautiously. "I don't get it. Can we start from the beginning?" She knew that whatever Thor had to say, she didn't want to hear it, but maybe it would be easier to listen to it all at once than try to get through it in stilted bits and pieces over the course of the next week.

Thor sighed deeply and nodded. He rubbed his face with one giant hand and sat forward in his seat, finally looking to face Darcy.

"You know that our father is ill, and unlikely to wake from his coma," Thor said.

Darcy nodded. "Yeah," she said slowly.

"We've not been able to prove anything, but Loki is the one who put him there. Our father was in hospital for a week before Loki bothered to show up, and the only thing he had to say was our father was not his father. The police closed the case in less than a week."

Darcy frowned, trying to piece it all together. She'd been hearing little pieces of this story over the last year or so, and wasn't quite sure how it all fit together.

"I thought you said your dad had a stroke," she said, fairly certain she remembered Thor saying that at one point.

He nodded again. "He did. There were also physical injuries. Whether they were caused when he fell, or if they came before is uncertain. I wanted him charged, but the police said there wasn't enough evidence."

Darcy wasn't sure what to think anymore. Though, everything made that much more sense. She understood why Thor hated to even look at Loki. And Loki's seemingly playful antagonism took on an entirely new colour, if he knew why Thor hated him in the first place.

But at the same time, it made no sense at all. Darcy didn't know much about strokes, but she was pretty sure you couldn't just give one to somebody, no matter how hard you tried. Even though the words hadn't actually been said, Darcy felt like this was starting to turn into a 'him or me' conversation, and she refused to have it.

"I... I have to go," Darcy said as she slowly got up. Taking what was left of her cake with her, she walked into her own room, with Loki's mess still piled in the middle of the floor. There were two packs of cigarettes mixed in with the T-shirts and house keys and various food wrapper trash.

Shutting the door behind her, Darcy wandered over to her bed and sat down on it. She thought about everything Thor had said, and everything she had seen. Though she didn't know all the details
of it, she knew Loki had been to prison for stabbing someone, but that had been about eight years
before. Now he bred snakes and posted their pictures on the internet, and made just enough money
doing it to keep the lights on at home. He'd bought her dinner with the very last of the money he
had, and shared his food even when he was starving.

But he also broke into their apartment and brought his dog over. Although that had stopped once
they decided to go on this trip together. Darcy had texted back and forth with him for those two
weeks, but he hadn't shown up once after they went to the airport to buy his ticket. He'd also so far
kept to their bargain, keeping his hands to himself when they weren't performing for Thor's sake.

Though, the performance now just seemed cruel, if Thor truly believed that the person who had tried
to kill their father was currently using Darcy. Especially since Darcy knew that Loki was there just
to irritate Thor. The dinosaurs were just a bonus. Loki would have probably agreed to being a last-
minute stand-in on a trip to Coney Island if that had been the circumstance.

But that treacherous voice in the back of Darcy's head pointed out that Loki would have probably
jumped on that trip because he probably couldn't even afford that much fun on his own. She
remembered how much money he spent on his ticket, so shortly after saying he'd sold some snakes
just to be able to afford getting his van out of impound. She wondered how much he'd fucked
himself up financially just to torture Thor. She wondered how much he thought it was worth it.

Darcy sighed, and realised she was doing exactly what she didn't want to do on this trip. She was in
Costa Rica, two days before Christmas, to look at dinosaurs. She was not allowed to do anything
other than have fun. She turned the TV on and put it back on the resort's information channel, and
started to finish her cake, only getting about two bites in before someone knocked at the door.

"Darcy! Let me in!" Loki called through the door.

Darcy jumped up without thinking and rushed to open the door for him. He was still wearing Thor's
shirt and shoes, but his hair was down again, and the dark eyeliner smudges under his eyes were
even worse.

"Did you still want to see the IMAX today?" Loki asked. "There's one more showing, and if we
hurry, we can make it."

"Uh," Darcy said, surprised that of all the things he could have said, he was talking about the IMAX
movie. "Yeah. Uh."

She looked around quickly and grabbed her handbag from the table beside the bed, and rushed back
out to the hall with him. Her shoes weren't great for walking fast, and after a few steps, Loki seemed
to realise that as well. He stopped in the middle of the hall and bent over slightly.

"Come on. Get on," he said.

"What?" Darcy asked, realising belatedly what he meant.

"You're too slow," he said.

Darcy shrugged to herself and tried to hop onto his back. Her skirt didn't exactly make it easy, but
Loki managed to hook his arms under her legs, and sprinted down the hall toward the elevator. He
carried her like that through the hotel lobby, and down the boardwalk to the IMAX theater, both of
them laughing loudly in the twilight. He only put her back down once they reached the ticket queue.
Ignoring the looks from the other people waiting in line, Darcy dug through her handbag for her
wallet, and pulled out the card for the spending cash account. When the cashier told her that two
tickets for the movie was nearly sixty bucks, Darcy began to wonder if $5000 in that account was going to be even close to enough to cover ten days. But she still wanted to see the movie, so she handed over the card.

"So, is this 3D, or what?" Loki asked as they walked through the lobby toward the theater.

Darcy nearly stopped in her tracks. "It's IMAX," she said. "Haven't you ever seen an IMAX movie?"

Loki shook his head. "No," he said. "What makes it so special?"

They walked through the lobby and handed the ticket taker their tickets so he could tear them in half.

"House three, to the right," he said, pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the appropriate door.

"Thank you," Darcy said, walking beside Loki to the door.

As they left the corridor and stepped into the dark theater, Darcy wondered why she had agreed to go with him; if sitting in a dark theater with him was the smartest thing she could do. She glanced over at Loki, but he wasn't looking anywhere near her. He looked up at the high domed screen above them, stopping in his steps and blocking the people behind them.

"Come on," Darcy said, tugging on his hand and taking him to find some empty seats somewhere.

Watching Loki settle into the reclined seats, Darcy forgot all about everything Thor had told her, if only for a moment. Loki's odd uncertainty as he leaned back in his seat and looked up at the screen seemed almost child-like in a way, and Darcy couldn't help but laugh.

"You okay?" she asked.

"I feel like I'm at the dentist," Loki answered stiffly. He held onto both arm-rests, as if expecting to either fall out, or have to use them as leverage to leap up and flee at any moment.

For a moment, Darcy thought to see if the arm-rests would go up, but this wasn't a date. She wasn't there with her boyfriend, and there was nobody around to perform for. Instead, she settled back into her own seat and listened to the 90s pop music being played through the house speakers.

The movie started a few minutes later, with no trailers or First Look lead-in you got in most cinemas. The house lights slowly went down, and the projector came on, cycling through the production company credits.

The movie itself was like one of those Walking with Dinosaur shows the Discovery Channel played every now and then, but nothing about it was CGI. It all seemed to have been filmed right there on the island, but some of the shots didn't make sense. High, sweeping helicopter shots above the island showed only jungle. There was no resort anywhere, as if they'd airbrushed the whole thing out to make the island look more natural and un-touched. But even as remote controlled video equipment captured a giant dinosaur with a sail on its back fighting a stegosaurus, something about the entire documentary bothered Darcy. Only when the giant spiny dinosaur killed its prey did Darcy forget about her unease with the movie, becoming instead uneasy at the un-censored images of the giant creature tearing the other animal apart. The narrator calmly pointed out how the spiny dinosaur used one of its feet to hold the stegosaurus in place, while huge, crocodile jaws ripped it apart.

After that, attention shifted to some brontosaurus, with the narrator drawing parallels to giraffes and acacia trees. Which, Darcy realised, did sort of look like a lot of the trees on the island and in the
movie. Tall and spindly, with leaves only at the very top. The dinosaurs grazed just like giraffes, eating what they could reach on one tree, and moving on to the next.

While the movie cycled through shots of the dinosaurs eating, the narrator talked about old theories about the dinosaurs, and how paelentologists once thought they'd need four or five hearts to pump blood up their long necks to their brains. But that was back before John Hammond's technology proved that the animals were warm blooded, with massive, four-chamber hearts capable of doing the job on their own.

Something Loki had figured out just by looking at them, Darcy remembered. She glanced over to him, and was surprised to see him watching intently, absentely chewing on his thumbnail. He was obviously into this kind of thing, and for a moment, she wondered why he had never been invited in the first place. And then, she remembered, she knew. Feeling suddenly uneasy again, she shifted in her seat and turned away to watch the movie.

As the movie ended, fading out over another helicopter shot of the boxy, almost square island, Darcy's uneasiness returned.

"Are you all right?" Loki asked, looking at her strangely.

Darcy hadn't realised she'd been letting any of it show. "Yeah," she said slowly. "I just..." She shook her head, telling herself she was just projecting. "I don't know. It's nothing. Ignore me."

Loki frowned, but said nothing. They waited until most of the crowd had cleared out before hauling themselves out of their reclined seats. It took a moment for Darcy to find her balance again, having got used to down being in the wrong direction for almost two hours. Loki took her by the elbow to steady her, waiting until she was safely on both feet before walking back to the door.

Back outside, the sun was gone, and the boardwalk was lit artificially. All the dinosaurs were inside for the night, and most of the other attractions closed.

Most, but not all.

"So, earlier," Darcy said slowly, trying to figure out how to phrase her question. "You told the waiter you don't drink?"

"I don't," Loki answered swiftly.

"Oh." His answer left Darcy oddly disappointed.

"However," said Loki, stopping to look down at her. "I will happily go with you if you would like to stop somewhere for a while."

"Are you sure?" Darcy asked. "I mean, it seems kind of rude to drink in front of you."

Loki actually laughed. "I'm not in AA. I just don't. There are eight bars on this island. I'm sure you like to visit t least one of them."

"Oh," Darcy said again, feeling kind of stupid. "I guess I thought... I don't know what I thought. Ignore me." She covered her face and shook her head, hoping everything would go away. It didn't, and when she looked back up, Loki was still laughing at her.

"Come along, then," he said with an exaggerated sigh. "Before you choke on your foot."

"Shut up," Darcy said, following him.
The first bar they came across was an obscene tourist trap, modelled after Jimmy Buffett, of all people. Palm fronds and parrots made up a majority of the decor, and the man himself was being played on the bar's sound system. Groaning at the knowledge that she was officially a tourist, she left Loki to find them a table, and went up to the bar to order herself a drink. She felt vaguely like she was expected to order a margarita, or something else tropical and fruity, but she didn't want tropical and fruity. She wanted a rum and coke. Surprisingly, she got one without fuss, and even got a drink for Loki.

"Sprite," she said as she placed the glass down on the table for him.

The table had a map of the island on it, marking out all of the dinosaur habitats in the park. Darcy looked at it while she played with her straw, again feeling wrong about something.

"There's that look again," Loki observed.

Darcy sighed. "So, it's my job to take video clips and arrange them into a story. You get really good at spotting the bias in the reporter or the camera operator. They conveniently leave stuff out. Everyone does it. You film from this angle instead of that, or zoom in a bit too far and only focus on one thing instead of getting the wider shot."

Loki watched her calmly. "That doesn't explain that look on your face," he pointed out.

Darcy traced her finger around the outline of the boardwalk on the map, and followed the monorail lines, and eventually the river off to the east.

"They were lying about something in that movie," she said. "Lying without ever mentioning it. Something was just wrong, and I can't--"

She stopped, looking down at the island.

"Holy shit," she said quietly.

Loki began to look honestly concerned. "What?"

"Look at the map," she said, pointing. "Look at the island. It's like, a tiny little Africa or something. But did you see the island in the movie?"

"Yeah, it looked... square," Loki realised slowly. "That was a different island."

Darcy looked around nervously, expecting to get thrown out if someone overheard them.

"That's why you never saw the resort," Darcy said quietly. "Why didn't they just say that? The guy kept saying, 'here at Jurassic World,' but that wasn't Jurassic World."

"It certainly explains the skeleton outside," Loki said with a shrug.

Darcy knew the one he was talking about. She had assumed it was some kind of deformed T-Rex or something, with its ridiculously curved spine, but it was the giant dinosaur from the movie.

"Why don't they have that thing at the park? Like, a living one?" she wondered aloud.

"Maybe they only had the one, and it died?" Loki suggested.

Darcy took a long drink of her rum and coke while she thought about everything that had happened over the day. The more she saw, the less the island made sense.
"Does this place seem really fucking dodgy to you?" she asked quietly.

Loki looked around at all the tourists, getting drunk and blissfully unaware of everything that went on around them.

"You mean beyond the ordinary mega-corporation skeletons in the closet?" he asked.

"Yeah. Beyond that," Darcy said.

Loki didn't respond. The two of them sat quietly, watching everyone around them. When it became clear that nobody else cared, Darcy sighed and took a long drink of her rum and coke. She paid $20 for it, so she figured she might as well enjoy it.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter notes here: https://lokiofsassgaard.wordpress.com/2015/10/26/chapter-notes-isla-nublar-2/
Darcy was still surprised at how warm the weather was for the middle of winter. She'd had a few more drinks than she'd meant to, but being a little tipsy wasn't everything to do with it. She was in Costa Rica for Christmas, walking along the dark boardwalk with her fake boyfriend, and that fact had suddenly struck her like a punch to the chest. She couldn't even stop herself from laughing, and had to stop in her steps before she fell over from trying to walk in heels that were a little too high all of a sudden. Leaning against the curved railing along the artificial lake in the centre of the resort, she looked out over the smooth, dark water.

"You know what I just realised," she said, looking over at Loki as he stood beside her.

"What?" he asked.

"I spent thousands of dollars to spend Christmas with my boyfriend, away from my family, and he's not even here," she said, shaking her head and shrugging dramatically. She wasn't even sure if she was still angry or not. She knew she should have been. But it was two days before Christmas, and she was in Costa Rica, spending over $60 on drinks. Drinks that weren't even that good. And she still didn't care.

"Is this you not having fun?" Loki asked. "I believe I was tasked with making sure that didn't happen."

Darcy shook her head. "No, I'm... I'm all right, I think. Just confused about the whole thing, I think."

She looked out over the rail at the silent, still water, realising suddenly how easy it would be to climb over the rail and go swimming in the artificial lake. She wasn't even close to drunk enough to try it, but she wondered how many people had in the past.

Suddenly feeling very nervous about standing so close to the edge of the tank, when she knew what kind of animal lived inside it, Darcy stepped away and bumped into Loki before making her way back to the hotel.

"Is it weird to break up with someone and not even care?" she asked.

"I wouldn't know," Loki said, matching her slow pace back to the hotel. "My relationships have all ended very poorly."

"What? Throwing dishes and screaming at each other at three in the morning?" Darcy asked him.

"Something like that," Loki said.

Darcy could actually picture it. And then she pictured his snakes watching the fight like a tennis match and laughed.

"I'm sorry, that wasn't funny," she said, trying to stop. "But I pictured your snakes..." She moved her hand back and forth, trying to simulate their little snake heads looking back and forth, and started laughing all over again.

"You're drunk," Loki said casually.
"Little bit," Darcy agreed, realising the drinks had maybe been a little stronger than she'd thought. She schooled her face into a serious, sober expression and pointed her finger up at Loki's face. "But I'm not drunk enough that you should think you can get away anything."

Loki wore the most insincerely innocent expression Darcy had ever seen. "Of course not," he agreed.

She frowned at him, feeling slightly dubious as they walked into the hotel lobby. "I mean it, mister," she warned.

Loki still looked at her innocently. "Not even once, for the rebound?" he asked.

Darcy pushed him playfully as they stepped into the elevator. "No," she said, digging through her handbag for their room key. "I'll make you sleep in the hall. Don't think I won't."

"Oh, I don't doubt it for an instant," Loki said.

Darcy looked up at him, trying to arrange all her thoughts. She probably should have been more wary than she was, but suddenly, all she could think about was Ian.

"See, that's the thing," she complained more loudly than she'd meant to. "You can at least joke about sex you're not having. Ian just turned kinda purple the second you started even talking about it."

"See, I'm better already," Loki told her smugly.

Darcy swatted at an area about six inches away from him. "Shut up, no you're not," she said.

"Aren't I?" asked Loki as their floor dinged and the doors slid open.

"No. I don't know." Darcy looked up at him as they stepped into the hall, suddenly not liking that smug look on his face. "You're not purple, but I'm not sure if that means better."

She sighed, wondering how this had turned into an argument. She wondered which side of the argument she was actually on.

"Like, Ian was fine. He was fun, kind of. I mean, he was never gonna last either way, really," Darcy said, feeling like she was trying to convince herself more than Loki.

"Why do you say that?" Loki asked.

Darcy stopped in front of their door for a moment before feeding the card into the door. "He was just way too tame, you know? Like. Boring," she said as she stepped inside the room, realising they'd left the lights on in their rush to get to the theatre. She tossed her handbag and the room key down on the shelf by the door and took off her shoes, glad to be out of them.

"I mean, I don't exactly require whips and chains, but a little deviation is nice," she went on, suddenly incredibly irritated that she hadn't realised any of this before. "Mostly, I wound up having to take charge, which is all right, I guess. But sometimes a girl just wants to be thrown down onto the bed. Every time he tried to take charge, he just apologised for everything. Everything."

Without warning, Loki stepped forward and picked her up off the floor. For a moment, Darcy was so startled by it, she could barely remember to breathe.

"Woah, hey!" she shouted, feeling very, very vulnerable all of a sudden.
Loki was tall, so when he dropped her onto the bed, it was a bit of a fall before she hit the mattress, causing her to bounce right back off and onto the floor.

"Ow, what the hell?" she asked, not sure if she wanted to laugh or cry. She looked up at Loki, surprised to see him still standing casually on the other side of the bed.

"You said you wanted to be thrown down onto a bed," he said with a shrug. "I thought you meant right now."

Darcy had nothing to throw at him, so she waved her hand at him instead. "Whatever, douche. You can't just throw someone who's drunk. Help me up."

Loki walked around the bed and offered his hand. Taking it, Darcy pulled herself to her feet, rubbing where she'd landed on her ass. She still wasn't sure how much she actually trusted him, but after a moment's awkward silence when Darcy tried to determine whether or not she was going to have a bruise on her ass, Loki turned away and left her to what had become her side of the room.

"Gah. I should make you kiss it better," she complained, wincing at the persistent ache.

"Do you mean that?" Loki asked facetiously.

"Yeah. Kiss my ass," Darcy told him. She walked over to the dresser and picked up the pyjamas she'd left on top that morning, ignoring Loki's snort of a laugh.

She left him to go change out of her skirt and into something she felt a little more comfortable sitting down in. As she stripped in the bathroom, she twisted to look at herself in the mirror, but didn't see any signs of bruising yet. Knowing it would come eventually, Darcy pulled on her pyjama pants and changed into her T-shirt a little more quickly than was probably necessary. After being thrown down, she felt a little less drunk, and a little more wary about the situation. She still had no idea what Thor had actually been talking about, and she didn't exactly want to ask Loki. If he said something completely contradictory, Darcy was just going to wind up right in the middle of their family feud. If he actually confirmed Thor's story, she wasn't sure what she would even do. Lock herself in the bathroom and cry, probably.

For the time being, she told herself that it wasn't her problem. Loki had behaved, throwing her notwithstanding, and hadn't actually done anything to cross the boundaries she'd set for him. Trying to remember that she was on vacation, and there to enjoy herself, Darcy left the bathroom and tossed her clothes down onto the floor beside the dresser. She flopped down onto the bed and lay there for a few long moments, before rolling over to pick up the remote. She turned on the hotel's information channel, but it had cycled through to the dinosaur trivia she'd been watching with Jane earlier in the evening.

"You wanna watch a movie or something?" she asked, looking over to Loki as he kicked his mess from earlier that day closer to his backpack. He'd already changed back into his T-shirt, putting Thor's shirt in with the rest of his mess.

"What have they got?" Loki asked.

Darcy navigated to the On Demand screen while Loki walked over to the balcony. Even though they hadn't officially divided up the room, Loki had mostly kept to the other side, except when he wanted to stand outside to smoke. While he lit his cigarette and played with his lighter, Darcy scrolled through the surprisingly long movie list, seeing little she was interested in.

"Godzilla?" she asked, not even sure if she wanted to watch it.
"Which one?" asked Loki.


"God no," Loki agreed.

While she scrolled through the list, Loki leaned over the rail and looked out over the dark resort. Suddenly, a loud roar echoed through the air, drawing out almost desperately before fading. Darcy froze, for a moment thinking the dinosaur was right outside the hotel.

"It's the T-Rex," Loki said, looking off in the direction of its pen.

"It sounds angry," Darcy said, still not entirely convinced it was where it should be.

"It's old and blind. I'd be angry too," Loki reasoned.

Breathing deeply, Darcy started scrolling through the menu again, as the T-Rex roared once more. Actually listening to it this time, Darcy realised that it was still far away, and she was mostly hearing the echo.

"That's actually kind of scary," she said, mostly to herself.

"That little one's down there again," Loki said a few moments later. "Look."

Darcy nervously got up and looked over the rail. For a strange moment, she thought Loki was going to throw her over, but he was right. That head-butting dinosaur was down there again, snuffling around the plants that lined the hotel.

"How's it keep getting out? And why's it like it over here?" Darcy asked, watching it.

The T-Rex roared again, sending a chill straight through Darcy. She jumped and backed against Loki, half-expecting to see the giant dinosaur crashing through the line of palm trees below.

"Petco has better animal husbandry practises than this place," Loki muttered as he snubbed out his cigarette on the rail.

Darcy wasn't sure what that meant, but she let herself be led back into the hotel room, feeling only slightly better when Loki shut and locked the balcony door. She sat back down on the edge of the bed as Loki picked up the remote and resumed the search for something to watch before going to bed. Watching the list of movies scroll by, Darcy wondered if the T-Rex had been loud the night before as well, but she had been so tired, she'd fallen sleep almost immediately. She'd probably slept right through it.

"What about Pacific Rim?" Loki asked, still standing at the edge of the bed.

Darcy looked up at him, confused for a moment.

"Huh? No, I don't think I want monsters right now," she said, acutely aware of the dinosaur below their balcony.

Loki kept flipping through the list.

"Snowpiercer?" he asked.

Darcy considered it as she stretched tiredly along the bed. "Sure. I haven't seen that one yet," she said.
"Thirteen bucks," Loki said as he clicked the rent button.

Darcy groaned, already kind of regretting the decision to watch a movie. "You could buy it on iTunes for that," she complained.

She rolled over onto her stomach, surprised when Loki sat down on the floor in front of the bed. He seemed a lot more relaxed than Darcy felt, and for a moment, she wondered if she wasn't just starting to freak out over nothing. She remembered what Thor said, about Loki using her to get to him, and realised that he was right. More than that, Darcy knew it. It had been the entire point of Loki coming, because he wanted to ruin his brother's vacation. At the time, Darcy had been angry enough with Thor that she approved of this plan. But now, full of rum and regret, she knew that bringing Loki for that reason had been a mistake. Everything was tense and uncomfortable, no matter where Darcy went, and once again because of it, she wasn't enjoying her ridiculously over-priced vacation. And worse, she'd spent so much money on going, that not enjoying it was only starting to make her feel guilty. If she'd worked all that overtime, and just saved up the money for something reasonable, like a decent house like an adult, instead of wasting all that money on some stupid trip with someone she didn't even know...

"Fuck," she said, feeling the bile in her stomach rising. Moving as fast as she could, Darcy rolled off the bed and ran to the bathroom. She barely got the lid up in time before three rum and cokes and an expensive Gordon Ramsay dinner all came right back up again. More money wasted, and Darcy felt even worse. She whined like a pathetic puppy, not sure if she wanted to cry or puke again.

"Do you need anything?" Loki asked, sounding weirdly critical.

Darcy didn't even look up at him where he stood in the door. She groaned quietly and shook her head. At least, she thought, he hadn't asked if she was all right.

Loki hung around in the doorway for a few moments longer before turning away and walking out of sight. She thought she could hear him talking quietly, but another wave hit her stomach and she puked up the rest of whatever was left in her. It had been a long time since she'd actually been sick enough to puke, and she'd forgotten how painful it was. Suddenly, everything hurt, and she could taste the bile in her mouth, and all she wanted to do was curl up on the floor and die.

As she tried it, Loki returned to hover in the doorway again. "Do you want to stay on the floor, or go to bed?" he asked.

"I don't know," Darcy groaned, not wanting to move at all, but also acutely aware she was on the floor of a hotel bathroom.

"Too much to drink?" asked Loki.

"I don't know," Darcy repeated, knowing she wasn't sick from what she'd had at Margaritaville. The drinks were strong, but they weren't that strong.

Without warning, Loki stepped into the bathroom and pulled her to her feet with a surprising amount of care. Even more surprising, he picked her right up off the floor and carried her over to the bed.

"No, don't. I don't deserve it," Darcy protested.

"If you say so," Loki said, putting her back down on the bed. "But I didn't want to step over you if I needed the toilet."
Darcy groaned again. "Thanks," she said flatly.

Loki shrugged and walked around to sit down on the foot of the bed before starting their movie again. Darcy hadn't even noticed that he'd paused it. Not that it mattered, since Darcy hadn't actually paid any attention to it, and felt terrible about spending $13 on it.

When a knock sounded through the room a few minutes later, Darcy thought it was Jane at first. But the knock came from the wrong door, she realised, as Loki got up to answer it. Darcy rolled over to see him answering a room service call, and felt even worse. More money spent that should have been saved up for something different and important.

When Loki brought the tray over to her, she was surprised to see a glass, lidded bowl full of soup, and a sachet of pink tablets beside it.

"I don't deserve this either," Darcy said.

Loki gave her that critical look again. "If you don't eat it, I will," he said.

Knowing that not only had he done something nice for her, but also that he was right and she probably should eat it, Darcy slowly sat up and took the tray from him. The first thing she picked up from it was the pink Pepto tablets. She unwrapped them and ate them cautiously, waiting for a few minutes to see if they were just going to make her puke again like the liquid stuff did when she was a kid. Feeling neither better nor worse for it after a few minutes, she took the lid off of her soup and picked up the spoon, still not sure if she really wanted to eat it. But this was a five-star hotel, and the soup she was served hadn't come out of any cans. There were no stodgy noodles in bright yellow broth, or questionable cubes of brown meat. Vegetables and shredded chicken breast and curled egg noodles all looked vaguely appetising, even with her stomach still feeling like it wasn't quite ready to settle down. Ignoring anything solid, Darcy quietly sipped some of the broth, every now and then looking back over at Loki while he watched the movie. Annoyingly, despite probably costing $20, the soup was making her feel a little better. Darcy tried to ignore the room service charge, and focused instead on the movie they'd rented.

"What's going on? I haven't been paying any attention," she said, feeling strangely stupid about it.

Loki explained the train and the passengers, and the extreme cold weather that led to the decision to just put everyone on a train in the first place. It didn't make much sense, but Darcy figured that was probably because she hadn't actually been watching it. Sighing, she dared to eat some of the chicken while making an effort to actually try to look at the television.

"Can I ask you a favour?" Darcy asked, when she realised she still wasn't actually following the movie.

Loki looked back at her, and for some reason, Darcy thought he looked almost suspicious. Assuming he probably expected her to ask him something gross, Darcy ignored it.

"Can we... lay off the PDA a little bit?" Darcy asked, feeling stupid and guilty all over again. "I feel really bad about lying to Jane, and I'm sick of all the fighting. This isn't as funny as I thought it would be."

She looked away, expecting Loki to get angry.

"Is that what this is?" he asked.

Darcy nodded minutely. "I think so," she admitted. "I just feel like I paid a lot of money to piss off my friends."
"It is a lot of money just to piss off your friends," Loki agreed. "You could have hired a hitman with that and just got the job over with."

Darcy gaped, taking a few moments to realise it was just Loki's poor sense of humour. "There's something wrong with you," she said.

"So I've been told," Loki agreed.

Shaking her head, Darcy ate a little more of the soup. She was feeling better, but somehow, she knew it wasn't the soup that had helped. When she looked up again, Loki was watching her almost expectantly, but even when she caught him, he said nothing.

"I don't think I'm gonna puke again," Darcy said.

Loki looked at her a moment longer before nodding. "Good," he said.

She could tell it wasn't what he was expecting, but he turned his attention back to the movie all the same. Rather than watching it, Darcy finished off her soup and set the tray aside on the bedside table. When she lay down on her side to start watching the movie, she was still a little surprised that Loki was still sitting on the edge of the bed, and hadn't gone somewhere more comfortable.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter notes on Wordpress
Darcy woke up, and immediately wished she hadn't. Her neck felt hot and stiff, because she'd slept on top of the covers with her pillow all bunched up under her shoulders, and her stomach was empty and screaming to be fed. She slowly sat up, tilting her head over to one side to stretch her neck. Everything in her neck popped and snapped with an almost electric shock as her body tried to sort itself out after spending all night in a terrible position. Looking around, with her neck still protesting the movement, Darcy realised that the sun was up, the television was off, and Loki was asleep on the couch, once again in his underwear.

As she slid off the bed to the bathroom to brush the taste of death out of her mouth, she was shocked by the deep stab of pain on the left side of her ass. She panicked for a moment, rushing to her feet and finding herself unable to put much weight on her left side at all. Everything from her thigh to her hip felt weirdly tender, and as she touched herself to figure out what was going on, she remembered being thrown onto the bed and bounced off the night before. She quickly made her way into the bathroom and shut the door before pulling down her pants, and was surprised to see very little bruising on her skin. There was definitely some colour that shouldn't have been there, but she wasn't black and blue down to her knee like she expected to be.

Wondering how her night had gone so badly, Darcy pulled her pyjamas back up, grabbed her toothbrush, and started scrubbing every single cell inside her mouth.

She let Loki sleep until she was done showering, only bothering to poke his shoulder from a distance once she was dressed in clean clothes, and her eyeliner was perfect.

"Hey," she said, poking him until he showed any sign of movement.

"Fuck off," Loki grumbled.

"Rude. No, get up," Darcy said poking him some more. "We're gonna go on the safari today."

Grumbling in protest, Loki rolled over from his stomach, and was once again saluting the morning. This time, at least, he had the decency to tuck himself between his legs before getting up.

"I'm getting you some pyjama pants for Christmas," Darcy declared.

"No you're not," Loki told her flatly as he bent to dig through his mess of t-shirts piled on top of his bag.

"No you're not," Darcy said poking him some more. "We're gonna go on the safari today."

Grumbling in protest, Loki rolled over from his stomach, and was once again saluting the morning. This time, at least, he had the decency to tuck himself between his legs before getting up.

"I'm getting you some pyjama pants for Christmas," Darcy declared.

"No you're not," Loki told her flatly as he bent to dig through his mess of t-shirts piled on top of his bag.

"No you're not," Darcy said poking him some more. "We're gonna go on the safari today."

Grumbling in protest, Loki rolled over from his stomach, and was once again saluting the morning. This time, at least, he had the decency to tuck himself between his legs before getting up.

"I'm getting you some pyjama pants for Christmas," Darcy declared.

"No you're not," Loki told her flatly as he bent to dig through his mess of t-shirts piled on top of his bag.

"It's Christmas Eve. You can't tell me what to do," Darcy said.

Loki grumbled again and disappeared into the bathroom. Leaving him to take his time doing whatever the hell he did in there, Darcy went over and knocked on the door joining to Jane and Thor's room. When nobody answered on the other side, Darcy assumed they were either in the shower together, or still in bed, so she turned and grabbed her handbag instead. There had been a gift shop downstairs by the lobby, and Darcy thought that if she hurried, she could get there and back by the time Loki got out of the shower.

The gift shop was bigger than she had expected it to be; it was practically a small supermarket filled with branded toys, shirts, mugs, and bottled water. Remembering Loki's tiny stack of shirts that were
probably all dirty already, Darcy grabbed a few of the darker blue and black t-shirts that looked like they’d be in his size. There were some with outrageously loud and busy designs, with dinosaur skeletons and maps of the island, but somehow, Darcy thought Loki would flat out refuse something like that. She found a couple that said only Jurassic World in small white print on the left breast, and grabbed those. She also grabbed a pair of the promised pyjamas; thin flannel with colourful dinosaurs printed all over them. As she walked into the next aisle, she remembered her plans for Christmas day, and realised Loki hadn't packed for that either. She started sorting through the rack of board shorts, finding a black pair with green scales down the sides. Figuring Loki might actually wear those ones, she grabbed them, along with a pair of flip flops in the largest size they had.

Loki was going to be pissed at her for buying anything for him, but she knew she wasn't going to enjoy her vacation if she had to look at him wearing the same three shirts the entire time. If anything, it would just make her sad.

She took Loki's Christmas present up to the counter, and got struck with an idea she thought he might actually appreciate. She grabbed a lighter from the rack near the register and put it down on top of the pile.

"And two packs of cigarettes," she said, looking at the wall behind the cashier.

"Which ones?" the cashier asked, turning around to look as well.

"Uh," Darcy said, trying to remember what the box Loki had looked like. "The blue ones, I think."

The cashier pointed to a light blue box on one of the top shelves. "This one?" she asked.

Darcy shook her head. "The darker blue, sorry."

When the cashier pointed at the right one, Darcy nodded and pulled out her wallet. Her little trip to the convenience store cost her nearly $150 in the end, but it was money she didn't feel guilty about spending, like she had the night before. With everything in a brown paper bag, she took it all back upstairs and set it down on the coffee table by the sofa, where Loki would see it.

While she waited for Loki to get out of the shower, Darcy started trying to tidy up a bit, realising she'd left everything all over the floor and in the way the night before. She moved the room service tray to the countertop near the door, and picked up all her dirty clothes and shoved them back into her suitcase so she didn't have to keep looking at it. When she was done, she picked up the resort map again, looking at the area they were going to go once everyone was up and ready. As she read about the Gyrosphere, already knowing everything the tiny blurb had to say, Loki stepped out of the bathroom, stopping after a few steps.

"What is that?" he said flatly.

Darcy looked up at the paper bag and smiled. "Your Christmas present," she said, putting the map down. "Part of it is your Christmas present to me."

Loki approached the bag suspiciously. "I told you not to get me anything," he said.

"Too bad," Darcy said. "And anyway, we're going to the pool tomorrow. And your Christmas present to me is that you're going too."

Loki gave her a withering look before opening the bag. His expression changed suddenly as he reached inside.

"Oh," he said, pulling out the lighter and cigarettes.
"Is that the right brand?" Darcy asked.

Loki moved the cigarettes to his backpack. "It'll do," he said.

Darcy smiled smugly and leaned back on the bed. "Open the rest," she said.

Rolling his eyes, Loki picked the bag back up and started pulling the items out, one by one. "Could be worse," he said grudgingly as he held up one of the shirts. "But don't buy me anything else."

"I'm the one with the spending money. You're gonna be regretting that around lunch time," Darcy reminded him.

Looking vaguely annoyed at that, Loki stuffed the shirts and shorts into his bag as well. "You seem to be feeling better this morning," he observed. "I think I liked you better when you were ill."

Darcy snorted at him. "Last night was too much rum and guilt," she said honestly.

Loki seemed almost disappointed that Darcy had remembered that part. "What time are we leaving, then?" he asked stiffly.

"I dunno," Darcy said with a shrug. "When everyone's up and ready to go, I guess. I tried knocking on their door before I left, but nobody answered."

Loki hummed quietly and walked over to the door joining their rooms. Without even bothering to knock, Loki pushed the door open and stepped through into Thor and Jane's room.

"Oh my god!" Jane shrieked.

"Loki, get out!" Thor shouted.

Loki was already ducking back into their side of the room before the other two had finished shouting, and as he shut the door, something slammed hard against it. Loki stood where he was for a moment, wide-eyed and still holding onto the door even though it was shut.

"Let me guess. Not ready?" Darcy asked.

"No," Loki replied.

"How not ready?" Darcy asked.

"Very," Loki told her. He shook his entire body, as if trying to dislodge the images of whatever he had just seen from his brain, and stepped far away from the door.

Assuming he walked in and got a face full of his naked brother, Darcy cackled and fell back onto the bed.

"When the hell did he get that tattoo?" Loki asked distantly.

Darcy had no idea what tattoo Loki was talking about, but she laughed even harder. She didn't even know if he was serious, and mostly suspected that he wasn't, but every time she looked back up at him trying to shake the scarring mental images away, Darcy started laughing all over again.

"Do I even want to know?" she asked.

"No, it was awful," Loki said, stopping and turning to look back at the joining door. "How'd they get a donkey up here?"
"Oh my god," Darcy said, laughing even harder. "They do not have a donkey in there."

Loki pointed at the door. "Do you want to go look?" he asked.

"No," Darcy said, still knowing he was full of shit.

She unfolded the park map and looked at it, trying to decide if there was anything other than the planned rides they'd had scheduled for the day. They'd only picked out three rides to go on, but from the sounds of the wait times, travel times, and ride times, three would be all they'd have time for before returning to the hotel, exhausted.

"So. Do you want to go to breakfast as a group, or just go now and meet back up with them when it's time to get on the monorail?" Darcy asked, realising that the day was going to be full of close contact with Thor and Jane as it was. "We'll have to grab lunch anyway, since we're spending the day away from the resort."

Loki looked over at the door joining Thor and Jane's room, and then quickly checked his pockets and picked up his empty backpack. "Go now," he said without hesitation.

Darcy hadn't expected such a swift response, but she was kind of glad he'd made the decision he had. She folded the map back up and got up to find her handbag, which was still over by the door. With the map stuffed inside, she walked over and knocked on Jane's door.

"We're going out for breakfast. Text us when you're ready to go on the rides!" she shouted through the door, not wanting to risk opening it and getting an eyeful of whatever Loki had seen. Assuming someone on the other side had heard her, Darcy smirked at Loki and made her way toward the door to the hall. "Let's go," she said.

They found a small restaurant away from the hotel and got a quick breakfast there, paying way too much for eggs and hash browns and the smallest pancakes ever. Sourcing their lunch wasn't much better. Finding something that would keep all day basically limited them to cold sandwiches and bags of chips from the fancy convenience store in the hotel, which were all about three times as expensive as they should have been. Darcy wanted to grab a few bottles of water, but when she realised soda was actually cheaper, she went for Coke instead.

She wasn't sure if she was imagining it or not, but all the while, Loki seemed to act like he was waiting for something. He seemed weirdly on edge, but Darcy figured it must have had something to do with the night before, and the promise she made him make while she was trying not to sound as pathetic as she felt. She didn't regret the promise, though. Or anything she'd said to Loki, really. She knew she'd made the right choice then, even if she hadn't before.

Her phone rang just as she and Loki were stepping out of the store and shoving everything into his backpack.

"Hey," Darcy answered, trying not to crush the chips. "Where you at, lady?"

"Just getting out of Cabo Wabo. Where are you?" Jane said.

"ABC," Darcy said. She pulled out one of the Cokes she'd bought and managed to open it without dropping it or her phone. "Picking up lunch, since it doesn't look like there's anywhere to eat up there. Do you want us to wait for you here?"

Loki made a face like he was going to be sick. Darcy ignored him.

"Sure," Jane said over the phone. "That's at the hotel, right?"
"Yep," Darcy said. "We'll be here." She hung up, not wanting to spend a single roaming minute more than she needed to.

"We're just gonna wait here for a little bit," she told Loki. She took a drink of her Coke, and then offered the bottle over to him, somewhat surprised when he actually took it.

"So, what are we doing today?" he asked.

"There's this kind of hamster ball thing that's like one of those wildlife walks. Only you're in a giant hamster ball, probably so you don't get stepped on or something. Then there's a safari, and like, a bird house thing," Darcy explained. "The flying dinosaurs look really cool. I kind of can't wait to see those."

Loki took a drink of the Coke and sat down on a bench outside the shop, looking pensively across the hall at a potted palm tree. "It's not like the bird area at the zoo, is it?" he asked.

Darcy shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe? Why?"

Loki answered only by pulling a sour face. Darcy wondered if maybe he'd been pooped on as a kid in the bird house at a zoo or something. Then again, he apparently got pooped on all the time with his snakes, but it was probably different when unexpectedly fell on you from the sky.

"What's that face all about?" she asked him, almost wanting to hear the story.

But instead of answering, Loki shook his head. "Nothing," he said.

Not sure what else to do, Darcy started to tenderly sit down just as Jane and Thor rounded the corner. Darcy waved, flashing a wide, toothy smile at them. Jane waved back, but didn't stop as they walked into the store and disappeared between aisles of souvenir shirts and stuffed toys. Inhaling quietly and steeling herself, Darcy turned to Loki.

"Let's have fun today. Please," she said.

For a moment, Loki looked like he was going to say something sharp and bitter, but instead, he sighed. "I'll behave as long as he does," he said.

Darcy nodded. "Okay. Thank you," she said honestly.

"Only because you've asked me to," Loki added, as if to deliberately ruin it.

"Hey, what you two do on your own time is your own business," Darcy told him, deciding that whatever their business was, she didn't care, and wanted to stay far away from it. Nothing either of them said or did was adding up, and Darcy was on vacation. She wasn't getting paid to find the story in the footage, and she refused to get dragged in by it.

She looked out across the hall, watching as the trickle of people walking to and from the elevator slowly grew heavier as the park opened. She knocked her knee against Loki's, getting bored with sitting around and getting antsy to get going. She was pretty sure Jane and Thor had spent about a year getting their lunch by the time they came back out, and Thor thrusted the plastic carrier bag in Loki's face.

Backing off, Loki glared up at his brother. "What the hell do I want that for?" he demanded.

"You have a bag," Thor said stiffly.
Loki snorted. "You don't trust me with your shirt, but you trust me with your food? Interesting," he said.

Darcy knocked her knee into Loki's again, this time less playfully. Sighing patiently, Loki snatched the plastic bag away from Thor and shoved it uncaringly into his backpack, before zipping it back up with a little too much force.

"Let's go," Loki said, taking Darcy by the hand and pulling her away.

Darcy struggled to find her feet, having to almost jump and run to keep up with him for the first few steps. Once she caught up, she managed to get Loki to slow down a little bit by refusing to match his pace.

"Where are we going?" Loki asked after a few moments.

"Monorail," Darcy said, shaking her head. "A little less angry walking, maybe?"

Loki slowed down a little more, finally settling into a comfortable pace. The walk through the hotel corridors to the monorail station took them past conference rooms and event halls that probably cost tens of thousands of dollars to book. The station outside was on a raised platform, looking out over a tall hill to the river below. Without even really realising she was doing it, Darcy pulled out the park brochure and flipped the pages until she found the one she wanted.

"Huh," she said as she read over the page. "The river's man-made. It's all pumps and expensive water filters, apparently."

"How needlessly expensive," Loki said.

Darcy laughed, sort of agreeing with him. "It does seem really wide for such a small island, though." From the monorail platform, they could see the river where it formed a small lake, before splitting into two forks that emptied into the sea.

"Do you think there's anything natural on this island?" Loki asked cynically.

Laughing, Darcy looked around for Thor and Jane, finding them on the other end of the platform. Part of her wanted to drag Loki over so they could actually stay together as a group, but the rest of her knew that the only way she'd avoid having to witness another fist fight would be to keep the boys separated. But Loki had promised to be nice, and Darcy missed Jane already, so she took a deep breath and pulled Loki along the platform. Surprisingly, he didn't protest as she took him right next to Thor and Jane, even if Thor did take a step away.

"Isn't this beautiful?" Jane asked, looking over the sloping landscape.

"I know," Darcy agreed. She wanted to tell Jane that the river was fake, but decided not to spoil her immersion. Even if it was man-made, it was still pretty, and the lake sparkled brightly under the late-morning sun, just like a real lake.

"There's dinosaurs in the river," Darcy said, looking back down at the brochure. "Swimming ones like the one in the tank, but a lot smaller."

"How do they keep them from getting into the ocean?" asked Jane, looking over to read over Darcy's shoulders.

Darcy shrugged. "I dunno? Giant nets? It doesn't say."
"They probably can't handle the saline and stay in freshwater on their own," Loki said.

Jane gave Loki a strange, sideways glance, before turning that glance to Darcy for a moment. Before Darcy could respond, the quiet hiss of an approaching monorail car rose from the track itself. Excited to get going, Darcy tried to pick which of the doors would stop closest to them, and taking Jane by the hand, quick rushed inside the car to get a seat together. She watched as Thor and Loki both skulked in, trying to avoid one another in the small space, while also trying to stay close. Not even remotely sorry, Darcy laughed.

"I swear, I just want to ditch both of them," she said quietly.

For a moment, Jane looked like she wanted to admonish Darcy, but her heart clearly wasn't in it. "Yeah, well. You brought him along," she reminded her.

Darcy shifted in her seat, annoyed at how hard they were. She thought that a trip this expensive would a least have comfortable seats in the resort transportation, but apparently not.

"He's been good," Darcy defended. "And this morning was an accident."

Jane's face turned red. "I... don't think he saw anything," she said, sounding entirely uncertain.

The monorail started moving, and even though its departure was smooth, Darcy still felt it through her seat.

"Oh, god. Ow," she hissed, moving in her seat to take her weight off her left side.

"What's wrong?" asked Jane.

Darcy cringed, trying not to rub her own ass right there in the middle of the monorail car. "Loki kind of bruised my ass last night," she complained.

Jane's eyes went wide. "Too much information," she said.

For a moment, Darcy wasn't sure what Jane meant, until she actually listened to the words she'd said. "Oh. No, not like that. He just bounced me off the bed," she said.

"Still too much information," Jane said.

"Not like–never mind," Darcy said, shifting so she was almost completely on her right side. "It's not even that bruised. It's just kind of tender."

Jane laughed, looking at her like she wasn't sure what to say. Suddenly, Darcy realised she wasn't sure either. She caught Loki giving her a strange look from a few seats away, and suddenly broke into laughter.

"I still can't believe we're doing this," she said, feeling strangely giddy about the whole thing. The dinosaurs they'd seen the day before were all either small, or in some kind of a cage or pen. But now they were actually going to go out to look at full-sized, free-range dinosaurs.

"And to think I used to get excited about going to the zoo," Jane said agreeably. "Lions and tigers?" She scoffed. "I could see those any day."

"When was the last time you went to a zoo?" asked Darcy.

Jane shrugged. "I don't know. High school?"
Darcy laughed again. It seemed about right for her as well. She could go see furry animals whenever she wanted, but she didn't. There wasn't even really any reason why. The zoo was always there. It was always going to be there.

Although, after this, spending $25 to get into the zoo no longer seemed like highway robbery. Maybe she would go to the zoo when they got back, just for the novelty and sense of perspective she could get from it.

The monorail glided smoothly over the artificial lake in the middle of the resort, through a narrow canyon, and over low trees, giving a bird's eye view of the wildlife. As they swept over the sloping valley below, Darcy looked out at a herd of somethings that were gone before she could even tell what they were.

The track merged with another, before the car slowly pulled to a stop at the platform. The electronic voice over the speaker announced the stop for Triceratops Territory. Darcy quickly checked the brochure in her hands, ready to spring up.

"Next one," she said, finding their stop on the monorail map.

A few people got off the car to go look at the dinosaurs from a viewing platform, but most of the passengers stayed on. When the monorail car stopped at the next platform, and the electronic voice announced the Gyrospheres, most of the people left on the car stood up to quickly shuffle out and get the best place in the line.

"Glad we paid for these Fast Passes," Jane said quietly as she twisted the hard rubber bracelet around her wrist.

Looking out at the crowded platform, Darcy couldn't help but cringe. "Yeah," she agreed. "This is gonna be Disneyland all over again."

Chapter End Notes

Chapter notes on Wordpress
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After twenty minutes of standing in pretty much the same place, Darcy was beginning to doubt the effectiveness of their Fast Passes. Apparently, the ride only sat two people, and they only had so many of the giant hamster balls available. Even with people in the Fast Pass line getting seated three times as often as the budget line, it seemed like they might only get the chance to do the one ride before everything closed.

Darcy leaned tiredly against Loki as they stood on the trodden dirt path, but it wasn't him she wanted to go on the ride with. She wanted to go with Jane. That was the whole reason for the trip, and so far, they'd eaten some room service and spent a monorail ride together. And that was about it. The rest of the time, ever since the airport, their group had been divided up into couples, because putting Thor and Loki in a space together only ever ended badly. Expecting them to go on a ride together, with no apparent supervision, would only result in someone finding a dead body at the end of the day.

Finally, after what felt like a year, their group reached the front of the line. Darcy leaned against the gate, watching off into the distance to see if she could spot any approaching hamster balls. They hadn't been arriving at any regular intervals, and they didn't even seem to be following a set course. When a group of three of them all approached together, Darcy began to wonder how the ride was even conducted.

As the bored ride operator unlocked the first sphere to let the passengers out and Darcy and Loki in, Darcy looked back over the line behind them and couldn't believe that it seemed to be three times as long as it had been when they first joined it. Glad to finally be on after a 45 minute wait, Darcy settled into her seat and found her seatbelt while Loki climbed in beside her. The sphere was smaller inside than they seemed, with a cramped cockpit and very little leg room. Darcy tried not to laugh as Loki rolled his eyes while he tried to get both legs into the hamster ball without kneeing himself in the face.

"I'm surprised they don't have a maximum height requirement," Darcy said as Loki finally got his seatbelt fastened.

"They do," he said, watching as the ride operator shut the hatch. "I ignored it, and I don't think he cares enough to bother."

Darcy laughed as she tested the joystick between the two seats, sending the sphere lurching forward as Jimmy Fallon started giving an over-the-top guided tour that seemed more aimed at kids. As soon as they left the boarding zone, it became clear that they could take the ride just about anywhere they wanted, since it was entirely controlled from within.

"Bet this explains the wait time," she said, picking a direction and heading off over the bright green grass.

"All the technology in the world, and they couldn't pre-program a route?" asked Loki, looking out at the trees as they passed by.

Darcy inhaled deeply and tried not to think about it. She wasn't there to look for conspiracies or massive fraud cases. She was there to have fun. Ignoring Jimmy Fallon lighting himself on fire,
Darcy followed a worn path in the grass, assuming it would take her somewhere interesting. But as they rode on, the flaws in the system began to become more and more apparent. Mud from the trail stuck to the outside of the sphere, and there was no clear way of cleaning it off from the inside.

"Ew," Darcy complained, moving off the trail and into the grass instead. The grass didn't really help, and only just spread the mud around on the outside.

"Seriously?" she complained, wondering how they were even supposed to see anything now. All she could see was brown smears of what she dearly hoped was just mud, though she tried very hard not to think about what else it could be.

Loki laughed beside her and started poking around at the screen in front of them.

"It's not funny. It's gross," Darcy said, even though she was laughing as well.

"It's a little funny," Loki said.

"We stood in line forever for this, and I can't see anything," Darcy complained.

As Loki poked at everything within reach, Jimmy Fallon was replaced with a virtual map of the area. Their hamsterball was marked at the centre of the screen, with a simple blue dot. Up to the left, a few other lighter blue dots roamed around, bouncing into one another again and again. There were also red dots off to the right, which moved slowly and steadily away.

"If I had to guess," Loki said slowly, pointing at the blue bumper dots, "these are tourists, and these are animals." He pointed at the group of red dots off to the right.

"Let's go see," Darcy said, hoping that moving across more grass would help clean up the transparent case. It slowly worked, first smearing the mud even more until it clouded the entire outside before finally being scraped away by the grass. Darcy only kept half an eye on the terrain ahead, paying more attention to the red dots on the screen.

"There! Look!" Loki said, pointing to Darcy's left.

She stopped the ball and looked to where Loki was pointing, able to see the animals they were following. She gasped at the sight of the herd as it moved slowly away. The stegosaursreuses were bigger than Darcy expected them to be, and even more graceful. They didn't lumber or stomp, shaking the ground with each step. They moved step by step, grazing on low, wide-leafed plants as they went. Darcy wanted to get closer, but they had long tails with huge spikes on the end that looked like they could have easily gone right through the hamsterball. She was so in awe of the creatures that she didn't even notice Loki taking control of the ball until they started moving closer to the animals.

"No, what are you doing?" Darcy said, trying to get him to stop.

"Moving over here," Loki said.

Darcy looked to where he was taking them, realising that he was moving along to their side, to get a better look. Keeping a wide berth, Loki matched their pace as they moved along the plants they grazed on.

"Wow, look at that," Darcy said, suddenly not even caring about the mud on the outside or the dodgy way the ride was run.

This was nothing like going to the zoo and looking at elephants. Seeing dolphins in California kind
of came close, but still not really. These were giant monsters that hadn't been seen on this planet in millions of years, and now they were walking and eating and grunting at one another as if they had never even died off in the first place.

"What's that one doing?" she asked, pointing to one of the dinosaurs that had wandered off to dig around in the ground with its giant front foot. As it dug, it used its beak-like mouth to pick up stuff it found and eat them.

"Looking for worms?" Loki guessed, shrugging.

Darcy quickly reached for the brochure in her bag and flipped through the pages until she found the part that explained the Gyrosphere ride and the dinosaurs in it.

"Oh. Wow, listen to this," she said, finding something that looked relevant. "Sometimes these dinosaurs will eat stones they dig up from the ground or find in creek beds. Don't worry. This is normal! These stones, called gastroliths, help the dinosaurs digest their food since they aren't able to chew up grass and plants well enough to digest them with their single-chambered stomachs. Huh. That's weird. Apparently most of them do it."

"Crocodiles do that too," Loki said. "Some of the oldest creatures on the planet, and they can't even chew their own food."

Darcy snorted. "Maybe that's their secret," she said. Replacing the brochure in her bag, she pulled out her phone and snapped some pictures, trying to get a clear shot through the thin film of mud that covered the perspex case.

A few of the other stegosauruses were digging up rocks as well, using their feet and beaks to pull them out of the ground. Darcy and Loki stayed at a respectful distance and watched for a long while, until the dinosaurs had eaten their fill of plants and rocks and began to move on a little more quickly. Deciding against following them, Darcy started poking at the screen, eventually getting it to zoom out so she could see what else was in the area.

"Here's some," she said, pointing to the bottom left of the screen.

Loki spun the hamsterball around, watching the screen to make sure he was going the right way with it. They came to the second herd after a few minutes, finding triceratopses instead, grazing and lying lazily in the morning sun. There were about a dozen – the same as the stegosauruses – all spread out over a wide area near a stand of short trees and thick bushes.

"Hey, what's that?" Darcy asked, looking at the screen again. One of the light blue dots was sitting still nearby. She couldn't see it outside, but judging by its position on the screen, she thought it might be in the bushes. "Maybe they're stuck."

"Then perhaps we should help," Loki said impishly.

He took the hamsterball away from the dinosaurs, in a wide arc toward the bushes. The plants had broad, wide leaves, but the stems were soft and gave way easily beneath the weight of the machine as they crashed through.

"I don't think we're supposed to be in here," Darcy said, wondering how badly the plants were being crushed.

"Then they shouldn't let these things go here," Loki reasoned.

The hamsterball stopped as it struck the other one in the dense leaves. Through the gaps in the
foliage, Darcy could see the startled teenagers inside struggling to pull up their pants from their prehistoric blowjob in the bushes.

"Oh my god!" Darcy cried, cackling.

Loki laughed right along with her, and even bounced the hamsterball into the other one again. The teenagers quickly gave up on getting back into their pants and reversed away quickly.

"We should get out of here too," Darcy suggested, looking over her shoulder, almost expecting to see park security glaring at them.

"Yeah," Loki agreed, already backing out back the way they had come.

The fern-like plants were a little trampled, but it probably wasn't anything worse than what the dinosaurs did to them.

Darcy expected the ride to get automatically called back after a certain amount of time, but as they explored more and more of the area, it began to become more and more apparent that it truly was a free-for-all. It wasn't until she got a text from Jane that she realised they had been out there for an hour and a half, finding dinosaurs to gawp at, and occasionally other riders to harass. They slowly made their way back to the loading area, struggling to find the way even with the helpful map. Eventually, as they found the small gazebo, Darcy was struck by the sheer size of the line waiting to board the ride. It snaked up the path, clear to the monorail station, and Darcy wasn't surprised at all. Not when she had just spent as long as she had on the ride, without even meaning to.

She had to wait for Loki to get out first, watching him as he tried to pull his knee closer to his chest in order to get his feet out of the footwell. After a few tries, he gave up and just tumbled out head-first, and gracelessly crawling out. It rather put having to climb over the joystick into a strange perspective.

"You okay?" she asked when they were both out of the hamsterball and on their feet.

"Fine," Loki said, pretending that he couldn't hear the crowd beside them laughing.

The people in line were treated to an encore a few moments later, when Jane and Thor's hamster ball rolled up, and Thor wound up having to do the same thing to get out, crawling out on his hands before getting far enough away to get his feet out. Both he and Loki took a good long moment to stretch their muscles before starting to head back to the monorail station. As they passed by a guy about Loki's height, Loki reached out and tapped the guy on the arm.

"Good luck," he said, immediately wiping the grin off the guy's face.

"Did you guys see the stegosauruses?" Darcy asked as they made their way back to the monorail station.

"I can't believe nobody's been killed by those things!" Jane said, wide-eyed. "These kids actually got hit by one."

"Jesus Christ," Darcy said, though she wasn't exactly surprised. The ride had been fun, but it was a giant liability on every front. "I'm going to be putting together a video on this place pretty soon."

"I'm pretty sure we went where we weren't supposed to for a while," Jane said, lightly backhanding Thor in the chest. "There was an open gate, and this one had to go see what was on the other side."

Darcy gawped so hard, she nearly tripped over her own feet. "What the hell?" she asked. "The
shopping carts at Wal-mart don't even let you leave the parking lot. How did you leave the ride area?"

Jane shrugged dramatically.

They climbed the stairs up to the monorail station, trying to shuffle past the crowd of people who were trying to decide if it was worth waiting in line for the Gyrospheres. Darcy wanted to just tell them all to save their time and get there first thing the next morning, but their car was coming and she didn't have time to get past thinking about how to put the words together. The four of them pushed their way through the crowd, barely making it onto the monorail car before the doors shut. Inside was standing room only, making Darcy wonder if the crowd was heavier than normal because of Christmas, or if Christmas actually saw a drop in attendance. She hoped that it was heavier than normal, because otherwise, she had no idea how the park would have coped with more people on the island.

"Where are we going next, Darcy?" Jane asked, almost having to shout over the crowd.

Darcy pulled out her map again, trying to unfold it without elbowing someone in the tit. "Uh. Oh! The safari!" she said, looking for the next interesting stop.

The safari was far more thought out and practical. Rather than being rider-controlled like the Gyrospheres, the safari was more of a guided tour in a giant, ten-seat jeep. As they drove over the hilly terrain, Darcy leaned out through the open side of the jeep, watching a herd of sort of duck-billed looking dinosaurs off in the distance. She kept trying to get pictures, but the jeep was going so fast, all she got was blur, so she gave up.

"It looks like to the left is a small herd of edmontosaurus," the jeep driver announced a few seconds later. "We have two herds of edmontosaurus on the island – one with eight animals, and one with twelve."

Darcy quickly flipped through her park brochure to find more information on the dinosaurs, but the jeep was going too fast even for that, and the ride was far too bumpy to be able to read it very well. Too afraid she was going to lose the brochure to the wind, where it would be eaten and choked on by one of the animals, Darcy crammed it back into her bag with her phone and snapped it shut.

Darcy couldn't figure out why they needed to go so quickly until they came over the next hill, and straight into a stampede of tall, spindly dinosaurs that ran on their hind feet. As fast as the jeep was going, some of the dinosaurs were still faster. One of them ran past the jeep, so close Darcy could see how big it was – taller than the jeep by a few feet, and nearly as long. They hissed and shrieked loudly, the combined sounds of all of them running sounding like an unending thunder.

"Holy shit!" Darcy shouted as another one ran even closer to the jeep, letting out a loud cry. Darcy leaned into Loki where he sat beside her laughing, as if the entire thing were some giant joke.

Able to hear other people shouting in alarm, Darcy didn't feel too bad. She didn't even realise until the dinosaurs turned quickly to run in another direction that the driver was still talking. She had no idea what he'd said at all, and wasn't sure if she was sad to have missed it, or if he was just stating the obvious, like how huge they were.

The jeep followed a path over the field, coming eventually to another herd of dinosaurs, these ones with a single long, curved horn on the backs of their heads. These ones were just as tall as the dinosaurs that had run alongside the jeep, but almost twice as long, and when they heard the car coming their way, they all bolted as well. Again, the ground shook and the sound of heavy foot-beats
and alarmed shrieking from both people and animals filled the air.

As the dinosaurs ran away, Darcy wished they could have got to see them a little closer. Maybe if the jeep hadn't been going so fast, she thought they might not have been spooked into running.

"I wish they didn't keep getting scared away," Darcy complained.

"I wonder how many of them die from stress," Loki said cynically.

Jane turned around in her seat to look back at Darcy. "What was that?" she asked.

"They keep running away from being chased," Darcy said. "I wanted to see them, not scare them away."

Jane gave her the sort of look that said she didn't know what to say.

"I know, stop complaining, we're seeing dinosaurs," Darcy said, knowing she was doing it again, and ignoring the amazing things that were happening all around her just to focus on the not-so-amazing things. "But it just feels like going to the zoo when all of the animals are hiding."

"You're at work," Jane chastised. "Come have fun with the rest of us."

Darcy sighed. "I'm trying," she said.

But Jane was right. Darcy did feel like she was still at work. But it seemed like she'd picked up a lot of hard-to-break habits while working several 16-hour shifts every week for three years. After putting together stories on scandals and conspiracies for so long, scandal and conspiracy was all she was able to see anywhere.

Taking a deep breath, she elbowed Loki in the side. "You need to do your job better," she told him.

"I'd like to know how it became my job in the first place," Loki said.

Darcy wasn't sure if he was being sarcastic or not, but it didn't really matter. He was right about that, too.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Notes on WordPress
The aviary was huge. Darcy had expected it to be like the bird house at the zoo, but this thing made that look like an actual bird house. The dome reached at least ten stories up, all glass and bronze and full of huge trees and viney vines.

Winding through the aviary, all the way up to the top and back down again, was a metal walkway, enclosed in a heavy mesh fence along all sides. Even the floor was a heavy grate letting them see what was below them, but looking down through it just made Darcy's stomach drop to the floor. She kept her eyes almost straight up as they walked along the path, climbing higher and higher into the dome while giant, flying dinosaurs screeched and swooped angrily all around them. Darcy stayed close to Loki, which only heightened her apprehension about being there. She could feel his own tense energy as he walked a stiff path straight down the middle of the bridge.

About halfway up the dome, Loki took a handful of his shirt and pressed it against his face to smell it. Apparently unsatisfied, he buried his face in Darcy's hair and smelled that too. She flinched, trying not to pull away too hard, terrified she might somehow fall off the bridge.

"We reek," Loki explained.

"What?" Darcy asked. She smelled her own shirt, and realised there was more there than detergent and deodorant. It was something she couldn't quite place, acrid and almost harsh. Darcy was surprised she hadn't noticed it before.

"If I didn't know better," Loki said as one of the shrieking animals crashed into the cage before woozily fluttering off again, "I'd say this was a territorial display. And we've spent all day around other dinosaurs that didn't want us anywhere near them either."

Darcy smelled her shirt again, and remembered where she recognised the stink from. She smelled like Loki's nasty leather jacket.

"So, we're in the cage because these things literally want to eat us?" Darcy asked, watching as one of them landed on the cage and tried to get its long, pointed beak through the mesh. She ducked away quickly, backing into Loki and pushing him into the person behind them.

"Oh, not at all," said Loki, watching the animal above them until it flew off in a rage. "Food is the last thing on their mind. They want to murder us."

Darcy looked around, trying to find Jane and Thor, but the group had become so disjointed from so much stopping and starting that they were a full two levels above, having a similar dilemma.

"I wanna go. Can we be done now? I want to be done," Darcy decided suddenly.

Loki looked around, first up at the continuing walkway as it snaked all the way up and back down again, and then behind them toward where they'd come. There was only the single path, with no quicker way in or out that they could see.

"Come on," he decided, turning around to go back in the direction they'd come.

Getting back down seemed to take even longer than getting up had. The dinosaurs were still pissed,
hissing and dive bombing and trying to get their way through the tiny holes in the mesh, but the general flow of traffic was also against them as well. They had to stay closer to the edge to get around everyone who walked in a perfect, terrified straight file down the middle of the cage. Every time the dinosaurs crashed against the side of the cage, Darcy knew their claws and teeth and beaks had somehow got through and torn her up, but when she looked down at herself, there wasn't a single mark on her. They were still far enough away from the edge of the cage that there was a decent gap between them and the dinosaurs on the other side, but all Darcy could see were teeth and claws and giant beaks and wings, all belonging to the dozens of animals that wanted to kill her.

They finally made it to the doors, much to the surprise of the man watching the crowd going in.

"No–The exit's on the other end," he said vacantly, pointing to the door about ten feet to the right.

"Bite me," Loki said as he lifted Darcy up over the turnstile, before jumping over it himself.

The crowd outside, waiting to be let in in small groups, all began looking at one another with a worried confusion, but Darcy didn't care. She just had to get away. The two of them walked briskly down the path to the first bench they could find and sat down. Hugging her arms tightly around her chest, Darcy hunched in on herself and stared straight down at the ground, where it sat comfortingly at her feet.

So far, the day had not been as fun as she had been promised. It had been boring, upsetting, and terrifying, for the most part. Just a lot of waiting in line before trying to look at dinosaurs who didn't want to be looked at, really.

As she sat and tried to catch her breath, she thought that if she were a real journalist, she'd be able to do one hell of an exposé on this place. Nothing seemed to be run with any real regard for safety or common sense at all. It was no wonder the resort had been built in Costa Rica in the first place, really. Darcy was pretty sure there wasn't a single thing about it that would have passed a safety inspection in America.

So far, it wouldn't have even passed an ADA inspection.

Finally feeling like her chest wasn't going to implode, Darcy sat up a bit and reached out for Loki's pack.

"Can I have my purse?" she asked.

Without a word, Loki opened his pack and pulled Darcy's purse out. Taking it, she dug through it and pulled out her phone. She shot a quick text to Jane, letting her know what had happened and where to find them.

"I think we had dinner plans, but I don't know if I want to go tonight," Darcy said tiredly. "I kinda just want to go take a bath and be a bum."

Loki sighed. "I like the sound of that," he said.

Darcy almost wanted to make a break for the hotel right then and there, but she didn't want to leave Jane behind inside the aviary with murderous dinosaur birds. She kept anxiously checking her phone, hoping to see a response from Jane, but knowing there was no way she'd have heard her phone in all the chaos inside the building. Feeling weirdly drained and wanting a nap, Darcy leaned against Loki's side and tried to will herself to forget the last half hour.

Neither of them said anything, and a few times, Darcy felt like she had almost drifted off sitting there on the hard concrete bench. After another forty minutes or so, Darcy's phone made a noise, startling her so hard, she dropped it to the ground. Hissing sharply, Darcy picked it up and inspected it for...
damage, and finding none, turned on the screen to read Jane's message.

"They should be here in a couple of minutes," she announced, stuffing the phone back into her purse, and stuffing her purse back into Loki's bag.

By the time Jane and Thor found them, Darcy was leaning back against Loki's side, with his arm over her shoulders, while she tried to think of anything other than being inside the aviary.

"How'd you guys get out so fast?" Jane asked as she and Thor walked toward them. "I didn't see you guys pass us."

"We turned around," Loki said, standing up before offering his hand to help Darcy to her feet.

Without even thinking, Darcy took it, finding her footing surprisingly shaky.

"It was awful. I couldn't do it," Darcy said meekly, suddenly feeling stupid about it.

Loki took a deep breath as he looked down at her, and then slung his bag over his shoulder. "I think we're staying in tonight. Too much excitement for one day."

Thor gave Loki a suspicious look that everyone ignored.

"Yeah, I kinda feel the same way," Jane said, also sounding tired.

"But we have reservations," Thor protested.

Jane sighed, clearly stuck between being too worn out to go, and being too worn out to debate not going. Shaking her head, Darcy turned and started making her way down the path, back toward the monorail station.

Darcy never thought she'd be so glad to see a hotel room. Looking at the freshly-made bed and clean surfaces, she suddenly became acutely aware of how dirty she felt. She glanced over at Loki while he emptied his pack of her purse and all their junk from over the day, torn between feeling uncomfortable about being gross, and uncomfortable about wanting to hog the bathroom for a while.

Sighing, and feeling a little lost in her own skin, Darcy shrugged to herself.

"Do you want to take a shower or something before I spend a while in the bath?" she asked.

Loki looked up from the pile of trash he was leaving on the coffee table, glancing from her to the bathroom door, before shaking his head. "Go ahead," he said.

Politeness would have dictated she make sure he wasn't being overly polite, but Darcy felt too tired and filthy not to take advantage. Instead, she walked over to dig some clean pyjamas from her suitcase before shuffling into the bathroom and shutting the door behind her.

The bath tub was huge and rounded, with jacuzzi jets along the narrower end, away from the faucet. Darcy wanted to just fill up the bath and soak away the tensions of the day, but she forced herself to draw the curtain instead and undressed quickly before turning on the shower. The warm water fell against her skin, doing more to make her aware of the ache in her muscles than soothe anything. Impatient to be able to relax, Darcy washed quickly with the brand new paper-wrapped soap in the dish, trying to scrub off every place she thought any of the flying dinosaurs might have touched her.

It was only when she was done, feeling almost raw, that she turned off the shower and stopped the tub so it would fill, before flinging the shower curtain open so she didn't feel like she was in a cage.
It had almost seemed a shame to use up so much hot water before she was able to fill up the bath, but she'd have never be able to really truly relax if she thought the water was anywhere near as dirty as she felt. Gingerly lowering down into the jacuzzi tub, Darcy let the water fill up around her, feeling a little too hot, but too tired to sit up to adjust the water temperature.

When the water was high enough, Darcy reached out with one of her feet, barely able to turn off the water with her toes. She felt incredibly lazy about it, but was far too tired to care. After a few long moments of just soaking in the heat and having to try to keep her eyes open, Darcy sat up just a little bit and rolled over onto her right side so she could look at her left thigh. Her skin was red from the hot water, making her look like a boiled lobster, but that was all. Even though her left side still felt a bit tender, it hadn't even really bruised. She realised, suddenly, how glad she was for it, considering her Christmas plans to spend all day at the pool, wearing as little as possible. A giant, ugly bruise would have seriously hampered that plan.

Relaxing once again, she settled onto her back and looked around the wall by her head. About a foot and a half away, just at eye-level, she found a conspicuous switch and flipped it. There was a few seconds of contemplative humming before the jets started, pounding right down the middle of her back so hard, she couldn't help the loud, almost sexual noise she made. Aware that Loki was still on the other side of the door, she covered her mouth and laughed, trying not to make any other sound as the tension in her back was hammered away.

The park may have been poorly planned out, but whoever had designed the hotel had definitely known what they were doing.

Darcy let the jets go until her skin felt numb, giving her an indication that it was probably time to turn them off again. With the jets off, Darcy leaned back into the water again just to relax and forget how the day had gone. She stayed there for a long time, trying not to doze but not wanting to get out either, until Loki suddenly knocked on the door. Panicked and not sure what else to do, Darcy ducked down into the tub as low as possible, covering herself with both arms.

"Yeah?" she called out cautiously.

"I'm going to order room service. What do you want?" Loki called through the door, surprising her a little.

"Uh." Darcy thought for a moment, but realised she had no idea what was even available, outside of chocolate cake and chicken soup. "What do they have?"

Loki didn't answer, and after a moment, Darcy began to wonder if he'd even heard her. She was about to ask again when the door opened just the slightest amount, and a plastic-bound menu flew awkwardly through the air, landing about a foot away from the tub.

"Thanks," Darcy called out as the door closed again.

Making sure it was going to stay closed, Darcy leaned out of the tub just enough to snatch up the menu, and hid back down again. The menu was as extensive as a restaurant's, offering a little bit of everything, much to her surprise. She read over all of her options, holding it close to her face so she could read it without her glasses, suddenly feeling very hungry after the day they'd had, and the pathetic little lunch they'd taken with them. Once she'd narrowed her choice down to about three options, she got up to drain the tub and dried herself with one of the huge white towels on the rack. Already, even as she dressed, she felt like she had some energy back, but just enough to sit up and watch TV over dinner. Wrapping a second, smaller towel around her hair and picking her glasses up off the counter before making her way back out to join Loki and relay her order. She was surprised to find him not only changed into clean clothes as well, even wearing one of the new shirts and the
pyjamas she'd got him, but his hair dripping over his shoulders and onto the floor. He must have seen her confusion in the look she gave him, because he pointed at the door joining to Jane and Thor's room.

"They weren't back yet," he explained.

"Oh," Darcy said, wondering if he'd bothered to let them know that he'd gone into their room to use their shower. If it had been anybody else on the planet, Darcy didn't even think it would have been a big deal at all, but somehow, she could see Thor angry that Loki would even dare. She put the room service menu down by the bed and climbed on top of the covers, before realising the remote was over by the TV.

"Have you ordered yet?" she asked, glaring at the remote until it became clear that it wasn't going to magically shoot across the room into her hand, and getting up to fetch it.

"Not yet," Loki said. He made his way over to the phone, ready to pick it up.

"That mushroom Swiss burger sounds amazing. With the wedge fries and a salad," Darcy said, already feeling like she could taste it. For a moment, she almost thought to order a bottle of wine as well, until she realised she'd be the only one drinking it. "And a Coke, I think."

Nodding, Loki picked up the phone and placed their order while Darcy flipped through the channels, slowly remembering how little the tiny island had to offer. She found the On Demand menu again and began scrolling through it, still not seeing anything that looked terribly interesting.

When Loki finished placing the room service order, he walked around to the foot of the bed and sat down on the floor again. Darcy watched him for a few seconds, wondering why he did that.

"You don't have to sit down there. You can come up here if you want," she told him.

"I like it here," Loki said.

"You're weird," Darcy said, not really sure if he was being serious or not.

They flipped through the On Demand menu, utterly failing to find something they could both agree to watch, taking up enough time arguing over crappy movies for room service to knock on the door. Loki jumped up from the floor to answer the door, stepping aside as the young man wheeled the cart in. Looking at it, Loki seemed caught in a quandary.

"Am I supposed to tip you?" he asked, looking at what now seemed like a surprising amount of food.

"There should be some cash in my purse," Darcy said, before the guy could answer. It was only as Loki picked up the bag and started pawing through it that she realised she'd given him permission to do so without even thinking. Part of her now wondered if he'd use it as an excuse to dig through her bag whenever he wanted.

He pulled out a small crumple of green and looked at it. "Uh," he said, handing it over.

The attendant looked down at it, nodded, and a little too brightly, said, "Thank you," before turning to leave.

"How much did you give him?" Darcy asked, watching bemusedly as Loki shut the door.

"The smallest I could find was a fifty. Or two singles," Loki said.
Darcy almost choked. And then she remembered that she'd so far put pretty much everything on the card, and hadn't touched any of the actual cash she'd drawn out. "I really need to get some smaller bills for the room service guys," she said.

Loki lifted the domed lids on all the plates, snooping through everything before just wheeling the entire cart over to the bed. There was a small table between the bed and the sofa they probably could have eaten at, but Darcy absolutely refused to get out of bed.

Apparently also contemplating the table, Loki chose both. He dragged the table over to the side of the bed and stretched his long legs out in front of him. The bed was big enough that Darcy was able to set her plate and her salad bowl in front of her, still having enough room for Loki's basket of fries, and his other basket of onion rings, and the third basket of chicken strips, while he put his steak down on the table beside him.

Darcy almost commented on it, but she bit her tongue. She's seen Thor do exactly the same thing dozens of times before, and it had been funny then. Somehow, she felt like calling Loki out on it when she knew he probably ate more ramen and macaroni than anything else would only piss him off.

It didn't stop her from stealing an onion ring, though.

"That's mine," Loki protested, entirely without bite.

"Yeah, but you're sharing, right?" Darcy said, biting into it just to taunt him.

"I only share on dates," Loki said.

Suddenly, Darcy realised that technically, this was a date. A long, extended, $17,000 date, and she couldn't stop laughing at how ridiculous it still sounded.

"What?" asked Loki.

Darcy tried not to choke as she forced herself to swallow the bit of battered, fried onion. "I paid for the first one, too," she said, remembering him barging in on her angry Chinese dinner, just after Ian had broken up with her.

Loki paused while he tried to work out her reasoning, but he caught up quickly.

"I seem to remember paying for that one," he argued.

"Yeah, but I paid you back. So."

The look of sudden realisation on Loki's face only made Darcy laugh harder. But it didn't last long, and was soon replaced by something far more devious.

"Since we are meant to be dating, don't you suppose we ought to be putting on a louder show for our neighbours?" he asked.

Darcy nearly choked again.

"No," she protested forcefully. "God, Jane already thinks you did some horrible butt thing to me last night. That's all I needed."

This time, Loki didn't catch up on his own, and only looked confused.

"You bounced me off the bed!" Darcy reminded him. "I'm surprised I didn't bruise. I'd have been so
pissed if I couldn't wear my swim suit tomorrow."

Loki laughed, loud and genuine, and it was infectious. Before Darcy even got to start eating her dinner, a full five minutes had passed.

Chapter End Notes

[Chapter notes on WordPress]
Darcy woke a few times the next morning, each time refusing to get up early on Christmas. It was Christmas, and she was on vacation, and she'd be damned if she was going to do anything other than be a completely lazy bum.

But 10:00 am was the absolute latest her body wanted to sleep in. Reasoning that her body was still on New York time, Darcy finally gave up and reached for her phone.

At some point, after the terrible low-budget indy film they'd finally settled on, Loki had retreated to the sofa and left Darcy in the giant bed by herself. Sitting up, Darcy craned cautiously to look over, trying to see Loki from her angle, and was surprised to see him still wearing the pyjamas she'd bought him, apparently getting her not-so-subtle hint after all.

Darcy continued to laze about for a few minutes, just enjoying the sunlight coming in from the crack in the balcony curtains. It lit up the room with a bright, golden glow, making Darcy forget just for a moment that it was Christmas morning. Realising that fact all over again, she sat up and picked up her phone. Part of the squirrelled-away funds she and Jane had collectively saved up were to cover the no-doubt outrageous roaming bill that was going to be coming up, but Darcy was still a little nervous about calling back to New York. That nervousness quickly passed and she dialled her mother's number, surprised when she didn't answer until after the fifth ring.

"Merry Christmas!" Darcy greeted, trying to sound extra cheery without waking Loki.

"Merry Christmas!" her mother said back. "How's the trip? Is everything going all right?"

"It's pretty good. We're having a lot of fun. Gonna spend today at the pool," Darcy said, deliberately keeping quiet about the previous day's scare.

"Well, have fun. We've still got snow on the ground, but the forecast is saying it'll probably turn to rain by tonight." Something banged loudly in the background, followed immediately by someone shouting at either a child or one of the dogs.

"What was that?" Darcy asked.

Her mother didn't seem to hear her, though. Holding the phone away from her face, she'd begun shouting across the house as well.

"Your nephew's dropped the turkey on the floor. I have to go. Love you. Be safe!" her mother said quickly.

Darcy tried not to cackle wildly. "Oh my god, okay. Love you too!"

Without another word, the line went dead. Darcy covered her mouth and laughed quietly to herself, realising she wasn't even sorry to be missing the madhouse. Just once, she had the chance to be far, far away from the screaming and shouting and general insanity that came with the holiday.

Still not quite ready to get up and going, Darcy dug out her laptop and connected to the hotel's wifi so she could tool around on Facebook for a while. She wasn't even sure what time she wanted to get
going, but even if her ideal plans involved staying at the pool all day, she knew she'd probably get bored and reacting badly to the chlorine before the day was up.

Loki finally started showing signs of life around 11:00 am. Grumbling and growling like some kind of annoyed animal, he made a line straight for the bathroom, and when he came out again – still grumbling tiredly to himself – went straight for his cigarettes, and then the balcony.

"Merry Christmas," Darcy said hopefully as he shuffled past the bed.

"Bah," was all Loki had to say.

Feeling like taking a big chance, Darcy took a deep breath. "Do you wanna call your mom?" she asked.

Loki stopped at the balcony door, his entire body stiff. "It's three dollars a minute. I can't afford that," he said finally, sounding understandably bitter.

Darcy picked up her phone and offered it to him. "I can. Call your mom."

Loki turned his gaze to her phone, looking more contemplative, and less resentful than Darcy would have expected. After a moment, he sighed and stepped forward.

"Thanks," he said, taking the phone and stepping out onto the balcony.

He didn't close the door all the way, so Darcy paid a bit more attention to Facebook than Facebook ever deserved, trying hard not to listen to the conversation being carried on outside. It took her a few moments of studiously ignoring it before she realised that it didn't matter anyway, because he wasn't even speaking English. Darcy had always thought that since both Loki and Thor were born in New York that they had been American, but it suddenly occurred to her there was still a lot she was still assuming about the both of them.

She found herself wondering if there was more to that accent than all the moving around their parents made them do growing up. Worse, she wasn't sure how to ask without sounding like an idiot.

Loki stayed on the phone with his mother a lot longer than Darcy had expected him to. The call lasted almost a quarter hour, but Darcy realised she didn't really care. She wondered if he'd even planned on phoning home at all during the trip, or sent a single text to let anyone back in New York know that they'd landed in San Jose safely.

When he came back inside, Loki gently tossed the phone onto the bed as he made his way over to his side of the room again.

"How is she?" Darcy asked lightly.

"Uh. Stressed, I think is the word for it," Loki answered.

"Because you guys are down here?" Darcy asked.

"Oh, not at all. The damn dog swallowed a toy she'd given him," Loki said, strangely chipper about it.

Darcy didn't see why. "Oh my god. Is he okay?"

Loki bent down to dig through his clothes. "He's a big dog. The toy was small. The vet says he should pass it within a week. The good news is it got my mother out of the house for a few hours."
Darcy snorted unattractively, and quickly covered her mouth. "That's good, I guess?" she said, knowing it was an issue both brothers had with their mother.

"Not precisely what I was going for, but I'll take it," Loki admitted. "I was rather hoping she'd just take him out for a walk or something. The vet is a bit extreme."

Darcy realised that what he was pulling out of his contained mess was some of the things she'd given him the day before, and she watched as he took the board shorts and a clean shirt into the bathroom with him. Realising he was actually getting a jump on her, Darcy gently tossed her laptop aside and quickly scrambled out of bed and rushed toward Jane's door. She knocked on the door, waiting until after Jane called back to open it and poke her head into the room. Jane and Thor were still being lazy in bed as well, Thor still fiddling with the blankets after obviously rushing to cover himself up.

"We're getting ready to head down to the pool in a little bit," Darcy told them.

Jane looked over at Thor, her mouth open as she picked her next words. "I think we'll probably meet you down there a little later," she said.

Darcy gave them a facetious thumbs-up. "Gotchya," she said as she backed out of the room and shut the door behind her.

By the time she got to her suitcase, Loki was on his way back out of the bathroom, dressed for a day at the pool. Pausing as she reached for the zipper, Darcy turned her head to one side to get a look at what he was wearing.

"Looks good," she said honestly, glad that the green and black shorts actually fit him.

He looked down at them as well and wrinkled his nose. "They're not completely horrible," he said.

Rolling her eyes, Darcy turned her attention to her suitcase and began digging through it for the red and brown bikini she'd brought. She only got to wear it about once every other year, and suddenly, holding the thin straps of fabric in her fingers, Darcy was overcome with the sudden horror that it might not even fit her anymore. This, compounded with the acute realisation that her one and only bathing suit covered less of her than her underwear did made her suddenly very nervous to even put it on. Balling it up into one of her T-shirts, Darcy took the bundle into the bathroom to change.

Darcy got ready as quickly as she could, trying to cram her usual morning routine, shaving, and quietly freaking out to herself into about five minutes. Once satisfied that her legs were appropriately lacking hair and any huge cuts, she started playing with a few pool-appropriate hair styles before settling on wrapping it up into a loose bun. Having run out of ways to put off the inevitable, she finally pulled her bathing suit from the pile on the counter and stripped out of her pyjamas. The bottom half of her bathing suit went on just fine, giving her hope for the top. But the straps were all a tangled mess, having to be untied before she could even hope to put the thing on. Balling it up into one of her T-shirts, Darcy took the bundle into the bathroom to change.

Darcy got ready as quickly as she could, trying to cram her usual morning routine, shaving, and quietly freaking out to herself into about five minutes. Once satisfied that her legs were appropriately lacking hair and any huge cuts, she started playing with a few pool-appropriate hair styles before settling on wrapping it up into a loose bun. Having run out of ways to put off the inevitable, she finally pulled her bathing suit from the pile on the counter and stripped out of her pyjamas. The bottom half of her bathing suit went on just fine, giving her hope for the top. But the straps were all a tangled mess, having to be untied before she could even hope to put the thing on. As she tried it on, finding it a little small where it counted, she suddenly remembered why the straps had been tied together, and set about re-tying them into the same knotted mess, using the strap around her back to anchor the straps over her shoulders. It wasn't the most comfortable, putting an awkward amount of weight right in the middle of her shoulder blades, but everything that needed to be covered up was covered up, and wasn't in danger of mentally scarring any parents who might eventually be nearby.

Putting her t-shirt on over top, in a bid of false modesty, Darcy left the bathroom to find her flip flops and her sunglasses, and grab her phone and purse. She looked around the room, trying to think of anything else they might need, and came up blank.

"Got the room key?" she asked.
Loki held up the little plastic card in his fingers. "I don't imagine I can smoke down there," he said, looking at the pack of cigarettes out on the table.

"Probably not," Darcy said.

Loki made an annoyed sound and made his way for the door. Eager to get down to the pool, Darcy rushed after him, her flip flops clacking loudly against her heels. They walked through the hotel in a comfortable silence, past groups getting a start on their day, or coming back to the hotel for a break. They followed the signs to the pool, walking along the boardwalk, far around the giant tank in the middle of the resort. Looking over her shoulder back at the hotel, and then at the sign for the pool pointing in the opposite direction, Darcy stopped in her tracks. They were almost at the innovation centre, and she was beginning to feel more than a little exposed, walking down the path wearing little more than underwear.

"The fuck?" she asked, cautiously following the sign's directions.

The path didn't break off from the main thoroughfare until after the petting zoo, where it continued down an artificially-uneven stone walkway, through large palm fronds where loud, tropical birds made all sorts of noises. Finally, the path opened up again to a wide, sprawling aquatic park, with more slides and rides than Darcy could count from where she stood. It was not exactly the day at the pool she had expected. Though, thinking about it, Darcy wasn't sure why she expected anything else.

"Okay," she said slowly, looking out over the hoards of screaming children in the wave pool before them.

"Lockers," Loki announced, suddenly striding over to a long wall of blue and white lockers. He picked one at random, pulling the key from the lock and handing it over to Darcy to wear on her wrist. They stashed their room key and their shoes, and Darcy's shirt, phone, and purse, making sure the locker stayed locked before turning around to figure out what to do next.

"Is there just a place to lounge in the water?" Darcy wondered aloud, walking along the pool's edge, looking for anything that might tell her where to go. After a few paces, they came to a large map of the aquatic park, hidden in some tall ferns.

"That," she said, pointing at it on the map.

Loki looked at it. "You don't want to go on the three-storey corkscrew slide?" he asked peevishly.

"Hell to the fuck no," Darcy said.

She looked around, trying to figure out where to find an inner tube to even sit in, but she couldn't find anything that wasn't already taken. Suddenly, Loki rushed off, leaving her by the map. Shrugging to herself and shaking her head, Darcy kept walking along the edge of the pool, leaving the screaming kids and the waves behind as she came to the outlet for one of the slides. Someone screamed as they rocketed out of the blue tube, falling gracelessly into the shallow pool. Darcy stood and watched as a few moments later, someone else rocketed out of the second slide that emptied into the pool. Just watching it made Darcy shudder.

She was so involved with watching the people on the slides that she didn't see Loki return, carrying two of the giant, translucent blue inner tubes.

"Let's go," he said, making her jump.
Darcy looked over at him, finding him surprisingly eager to get in the water. Just as eager, she led the way over to the nearest bend of the fake river, stepping down into the cool water. At the edges, it was only about six inches deep, but it seemed to get deeper toward the middle. Darcy took one of the inner tubes from Loki, holding onto it so it didn't drift away in the slow current, and plopped her butt right into the middle of it. Immediately, she began spinning lazily in the water, but made no effort to correct herself.

There were a fair amount of other people riding the current as well, but it wasn't completely packed like the wave pool had been. There was enough room to splash her hands in the water without having to worry about being bumped into or splashing anybody else. She tried to paddle her way closer to the middle of the river before settling back into the inner tube, resting her head back against the inner tube and dipping her toes into the water. Adjusting her sunglasses, she looked over at Loki, finding him a bit more sprawled out belly-down, taking up as much room on his inner tube as he possibly could. All around them, they could hear people shouting and laughing as they played in the wave pool or zoomed down one of the countless slides snaking together above them. But the sun was warm, and the water cool and relaxing, and Darcy was content to just drift around in the slow current.

"This is so much better than going to my mom's would have been," Darcy said, splashing her toes in the water.

"I was just going to stay home," Loki said. "Watch that Christmas movie five or six times."

"The one with the BB gun?" Darcy asked, assuming she meant the one that aired on constant repeat during Christmas.

"Of course."

Darcy wasn't sure if she wanted to feel bad for him, or was jealous because even that sounded better than the nightmare that was holidays with her humongous family.

"Do you always stay home for Christmas?" Darcy asked.

It was a moment before Loki answered. "It depends. Last year, I felt brave enough to face the rest of my family. Thor broke my nose as soon as I stepped through the door."

She realised immediately it had been a stupid question. She didn't know how big Loki's family was, but she'd heard enough from Thor to know that he didn't have many allies left amongst whatever family he did have.

"Okay. You can tell me to piss off, but what actually happened?" she asked finally, deciding she was tired of dodging landmines.

Surprisingly, Loki laughed quietly. "I have to admit, I'm impressed. I expected this two days ago," he said.

Darcy wasn't sure what to take from that. "So, none of my business," she concluded. She expected Loki to do something – get angry and storm off, or start shouting – but it never came.

"What did Thor tell you?" Loki asked.

Darcy sat up as well as she could with her butt stuck in the middle of a giant inner tube, not wanting to have this conversation lying down. Loki, in contrast, gave the impression of being perfectly relaxed, but somehow, she knew he was just faking it very well.
"I..." she said, not sure if she wanted to actually tell him everything Thor said. But Loki just waited patiently, and her curiosity to figure out which parts were less bullshit than the others was getting too much to bury. "He said you're dangerous. He said that you tried to kill your dad."

"Tried? No, if I had tried, he'd be dead. Not lying in a coma somewhere," Loki said, finally letting some of the bitterness out that Darcy had been expecting.

"So, what happened?" Darcy asked softly.

She watched Loki tense up, but he didn't seem like he was actually going to go anywhere. "He lied to me. I was furious. I figured the best way to deal with it was to have one of my famous shouting matches with my father," he said, putting an odd emphasis on the last word. "And we had a lot to shout about. But I do think Thor may be right."

Darcy gaped. "What?" she asked.

Loki looked over at her with a steady, level gaze. "I absolutely put him in the hospital," he said.

It wasn't at all what Darcy expected. "What?" she repeated, running through everything she'd been told, and wondering suddenly what she'd missed.

"Oh, it wasn't intentional," Loki continued, looking away again. "We shouted. I threw a few things, hoping to break something expensive, and left. It wasn't until the cops came knocking on my door a week later that I even knew anything else had happened. And Thor. He's still convinced my absence from the hospital proves my guilt. I had no idea, though had I known, I still would have kept my distance. I was packing, and thought the cops were there to serve an eviction notice, until I realised they weren't in uniform."

"Eviction notice?" Darcy asked.

"The house belongs to my father. Surprisingly few places will rent to a felon," Loki said.

"And you thought he was going to kick you out?"

"I did tell him where to stuff his money and his house. Terribly stupid thing to say, but I wasn't exactly thinking clearly," Loki admitted.

"Wow," Darcy said, not sure what else she could possibly say to any of that. She wasn't even sure if she believed Loki's version any more than she believed Thor's. They both sounded ridiculous and a bit over the top to her. But at least Loki wasn't claiming to have the ability to give someone a stroke at will.

"What were you fighting about?" Darcy asked carefully.

Loki shrugged indifferently. "Nothing important," he said, clearly lying.

Darcy still didn't know what to say. She didn't think he'd want to hear any platitudes, and any assurance coming from someone he barely knew would be meaningless anyway. Instead, she sat in silence, awkwardly trying to figure out what to do next, while couples and kids all around them were gleefully riding the current.

"Can I ask you another question?" Darcy asked softly.

"I might not answer it," Loki said with another shrug.
"Why do you keep bugging Thor if you know he hates you?" she asked, having to look away so she didn't have to see Loki's reaction.

She was a little surprised when he huffed quietly. "Everybody needs a hobby, I suppose."

Darcy took that to mean that he wasn't going to actually answer the question, so she let it go. She looked out over the crowds as the current took them along its path through the aquatic park, and saw off in the distance, a row of little cabana huts that looked like food carts in disguise.

"You hungry?" she asked, realising they never actually stopped for breakfast.

Loki looked up at her, and then at the cabana huts. "Starving," he admitted.

Darcy wiggled and shuffled out of the inner tube, finding the bottom of the little river surprisingly difficult, despite its shallow depth. Once she found her footing in the waist-deep water, she let the inner tube drift along without her, and made her way toward dry land, with Loki following close behind her.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Notes on WordPress
Darcy was beginning to feel like she was being tracked and monitored with all the bracelets they kept giving her. The plasticky ribbon around her wrist felt sticky against her damp skin, making her fiddle with it almost constantly as she tried to eat the most ostentatious shrimp cocktail she'd ever seen in her life. The oversized martini glass had more garnish than food in it, and probably came with its own ecosystem in all the vegetation shrouding the shrimp.

While Loki silently devoured his burger, Darcy watched the crowd around the pool. A couple of kids had a beach ball they tossed back and forth to one another, trying to land it through the centre of their inner tubes. It was hard to believe, surrounded by palm trees as the temperature climbed steadily into the 80s, that it was actually Christmas Day. Usually on Christmas, Darcy was out on Long Island, watching cold, grey skies try to decide if it should rain or snow. Thinking about the brief conversation she'd had with her mother earlier that morning, Darcy laughed, unable to believe her luck.

"Do you know what I'm missing out on right now?" Darcy asked.

"Hm?" asked Loki, barely pausing between french fries.

"When I called my mom this morning, I didn't get to talk to her because my nephew dropped the turkey on the ground," she told him. "It wasn't even noon yet, and they were already dropping the turkey on the ground. I bet my aunt June is screaming about there needing to be a turkey on Christmas, and my uncle Tim is just insisting on doing grilled cheese or something. I hope my mom got some good wine for this year."

"Don't you just love the holidays?" Loki asked dryly.

"The best," Darcy responded, unable to drum up any enthusiasm for them at all. "I think I'm gonna have to find a reason to miss it next year, because everyone will be pissed off at me for ruining Christmas by not being there today." She realised, halfway through, that she wasn't even being as sarcastic about it as she'd meant to be. Aunt June especially was going to be a bitter, resentful mess.

"Canada's nice, but there's a lot of snow," Loki said.

"I could go to Canada for Christmas." Darcy plucked the last of her shrimp from out of its private jungle, gave up on finding the cocktail sauce, and bit into it as it was. "And a hell of a lot cheaper than this place. Fifteen bucks for eight shrimp. Jesus Christ."

She finished the last of the shrimp, throwing its tail down into the cocktail sauce with the rest.

"I don't know about your shrimp, but this is delicious," Loki said, stuffing his face again.

"It fucking better be, for twenty bucks," Darcy told him. "You better eat every crumb of it, too."

"I will," Loki assured her.

"You're an expensive date. Anybody ever tell you that?" Darcy asked him.

"All the time." He took another huge bite, clearly mocking her at this point.
She sneered at her joke of a shrimp cocktail and turned around again to look at the crowd, suddenly spotting Jane – or rather, Jane's giant, ridiculous sun hat – settling into some empty loungers in the fake beach.

"Oh, there's Jane!" Darcy said quickly, trying to decide between leaping up to join her, and running to the locker to return their room key and her wallet. She started to just slide the key into her bikini top, but stopped at the last second.

"Do you want to get a bracelet too?" she asked Loki. "In case you want to get something else later?"

Loki looked down at what was left of his lunch and shrugged. "Might as well," he decided.

Darcy flagged the server over and handed him their room key. "Let's put him on this thing too," she said.

The server nodded and glanced to Loki. "Got your ID?" he asked.

"Nope," Loki said simply.

Nodding again, the server slid the room key through the card slot on his register and punched in a few keys before a drawer opened. Instead of a blue plastic band, like the one he'd given Darcy, he pulled out a yellow one and scanned it before handing it over.

"Come back with your ID to get the twenty one bracelet," he said. He handed the room card back to Darcy and rushed off to help someone else.

"I'll be over there," Darcy said, pointing toward Jane, and making sure Loki saw. "Come find me when you're done."

Loki didn't respond, instead too busy trying to get his bracelet on. Leaving him to it, Darcy slid down off her seat and trotted over to Jane, finding an empty lounger with Thor's shoes sitting right in the middle of it. Moving the shoes onto the ground, Darcy pulled her sunglasses back down over her eyes and stretched out.

Beside her, Jane looked out over the pool from behind her giant, round sunglasses, holding a margarita that held a small jungle of its own.

"Merry Christmas," Darcy said as she got comfortable.

"Merry Christmas to you too," Jane said.

Darcy stared at her for a few moments longer, trying not to laugh. "I can't believe you wore that hat."

"I like this hat," Jane said evenly.

"Because you're a giant dork," Darcy said.

"I still like this hat." Jane moved the outrageous garnish out of the way so she could take a sip of her margarita.

"Bit early, isn't it?" Darcy asked.

"It's Christmas. Everybody starts early on Christmas," Jane said.

Darcy couldn't argue there. Laughing quietly to herself, she leaned back, tilting her head to catch every last ray of sun against her face and neck. After a few moments of total relaxation, she shoved her room key into her wallet, and started looking for a place to safely stash it. She found Jane's purse on the ground between the two seats, halfway covered by one of the white beach towels, and slipped
her wallet inside.

"My stuff's in your purse. Don't let me forget," she said.

Leaning back again, she listened to the sounds of everyone splashing around in the water, shouting and laughing and having fun. It was weirdly relaxing, despite the amount of noise. The pool was crowded and loud, but it was exactly where she wanted to be at that moment.

"Did you call anyone this morning?" Darcy asked curiously.

"Erik went back to Sweden for a few weeks, and Mom didn't answer. It was pretty much right at dinner when I called, though," Jane said.

"Yeah, I should have called last night, before everyone showed up," Darcy lamented. "I got a whole thirty seconds in before Mom had to go."

Jane laughed quietly. "We should do this every year," she said. "Well, maybe not this, exactly."

"Loki and I were talking about Canada next year," Darcy said. She wasn't even sure if he was serious, but it did sound like a good plan.

"Canada's nice." Jane took another precarious sip of her drink, only avoiding getting poked in the eye by a silk fern because of her sunglasses.

Deciding she was missing out, Darcy looked around for someone she could flag down, so she could order her own ridiculous drink. Eventually, she spotted the guy in the white shorts and waved him over, holding out her wrist for him to scan with his phone.

"I want what she's got," Darcy said, pointing to Jane's drink.

"Right away," he said, turning at once to go find one.

As he walked away, Darcy played with all the bracelets she'd managed to accumulate – her ride pass, which she'd grabbed just in case they needed it to get into the pool, the locker key, and now the scannable concessions bracelet.

"All these things they give us to wear, I'm starting to think I'm being tracked," Darcy complained.

Since Jane had kept her bag with her, she lacked the locker key, but she had the other two as well. "Maybe they are," Jane reasoned. "It's a big island. They probably don't want people getting lost."

"What about the people who didn't shell out for the fast pass?" she asked.

"I think everyone gets a bracelet either way. I haven't seen anybody without them," Jane reasoned. "Ours are probably just programmed differently or something. They probably use them to count how many people are getting on each ride."

It made sense, actually. "Yeah, probably," Darcy agreed, twisting hers on her wrist. "I guess it makes sense, especially with all the kids around. Probably makes them easier to find one if they get lost, if they are tracking us."

She looked around, suddenly realising something missing. "Where's Thor?" she asked.

Jane scoffed. "He wanted to go try to body surf in the wave pool. That's the last place I saw him, when I left him there."
Darcy laughed. "Of course he did."

"Where's Loki?" Jane asked.

"Last place I saw him was eating lunch at one of the cabanas. That's where I left him," Darcy said.

The guy in the white shorts returned with Darcy's margarita, holding the tray out so Darcy could pick it up on her own. "Thank you," she said sweetly.

"You're welcome," he said, before zipping off again.

Darcy took a drink, getting more fake vegetation in her mouth than anything else. How anyone had thought this was a good idea was beyond her. As she wrestled with the plants, trying to decide if she should pick them out and throw them somewhere, a shadow fell over her. She looked up to see Loki standing over her, giving her drink an extremely critical look.

"I know. It's awful. What's up?" she asked.

The look on Loki's face vanished as he shrugged. "You said to come find you."

"Anything else?" Darcy asked, forgetting she'd told him to do that.

"I'm thinking about those slides," Loki said, looking like he was trying not to look at the maze of plastic tubes snaking all around.

"Good!" Darcy told him. "Go! Have fun. That's why we're here!"

"Are you sure you don't want to come with?" asked Loki.

"Hell no!" Darcy said.

"Not even the little ones?" asked Loki.

"Oh, just go!" Darcy swatted at him, glad he finally left and took his crazy ideas about water slides with him. Sighing, she turned to look at Jane. "You want to go on the slides with him and shut him up?"

"No," Jane said, just as adamantly as Darcy had. "He's a big boy. He can go alone."

Darcy watched Loki as he disappeared up one of the wooden paths that led to a huge staircase that was going to take at least ten minutes to climb. Glad he hadn't made her go with him, Darcy turned her attention back to the crowd around her, watching everyone as they shouted and splashed in the water. Content to just sit quietly, Darcy sipped her drink and watched lazily.

"What's he doing?" Jane asked suddenly.

Darcy looked up, not able to see immediately who Jane was talking about.

"Who?" she asked.

"Your boyfriend," Jane said. She pointed up the stairs to the slides. Loki stood on one of the landings, looking out over the water park, rather than climbing up to the top.

"I don't know. Having second thoughts?" Darcy said, watching as he turned around and walked back down the stairs.
Jane hummed dubiously, but Darcy continued to pretend that his behaviour was completely normal. As he got lost in the crowd once again, Darcy leaned her head back and relaxed in the sun.

"What are we doing the day after tomorrow?" Darcy asked after a moment.

Jane didn't respond right away. "Not sure," she said finally. "We're doing the river ride tomorrow, aren't we?"

"Yeah," Darcy said. "I think our tour starts at noon, and it's supposed to take like, three hours. I'll have to double check, though."

"Okay. My Spanish sucks, but we can go back to the mainland the day after. Actually see some of Costa Rica," Jane suggested.

Darcy nodded, liking the idea. "Yeah," she said. "That would be fun. Maybe go to an actual beach or something."

She thought back to the park brochure, wondering how much more they still had left to see. But it felt like they'd already done most of it, and would get much of the rest done by the end of the next day. After that, she really couldn't think of many of the exhibits she'd really like to see again, all things considered. There were a few more IMAX movies, but even that had left her feeling somewhat sour. She tried to ignore how she felt about it and took another sip of her drink, feeling like she needed a machete to hack her way through all the garnish. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Jane having a similar predicament, and felt a little bit better for it.

Suddenly, off to the right, there was a loud commotion in one of the shallow pools where a volleyball net was set up. Looking over to the noise, Darcy wasn't at all surprised to see Thor and Loki in the middle of it. Loki was holding onto the volleyball while Thor shouted from the other side of the net to hand over the ball and go away. Loki's teammates all shouted back at Thor, and soon both sides were arguing all at once. Suddenly, Loki threw the ball up into the air as if he meant to serve it across the net, only to instead spike it directly into Thor's face. More shouts and jeers erupted as Thor hurled himself through the water and under the net toward Loki, and soon they were both under the water. It didn't take long after that before angry lifeguards that had appeared out of nowhere were rushing over, blowing their whistles and clearing a path to drag Thor and Loki, still swinging for one another, out of the water. Even as they were dragged away from the pool and toward the main gate, they continued to fight with one another, completely ignoring the stares they got.

"Okay," Darcy said helplessly, watching them go. She looked down at her hands, remembering the locker key around her wrist. Looking quickly over to Jane, and then down at the purse between them she saw the blue spiral bracelet nestled up against Darcy's wallet.

"You gonna go help Thor?" Darcy asked, looking back to watch them get forcibly removed from the water park.

"Nope," Jane said simply. "You gonna go help Loki?"

Darcy thought about it for a brief second, but all at once, she remembered the promise she'd made at the beginning of the trip, and how much she'd been looking forward to her Christmas day plans.

"Nope," she echoed.

They both turned their attention back to the pool, pretending they had nothing to do with the scuffle. Before too long, everything calmed back down again, and the game of volleyball continued on as if
nothing had even happened. Darcy and Jane stayed where they were until their drinks were empty. Taking it as a hint, the two of them got up to explore the rest of the aquatic park. They found a couple of free inner tubes and rode a few laps around the artificial river, before feeling dried out and burnt from the sun and the chlorine. But it was a strangely nice sort of dried out and burnt, completely unexpected for December.

After a quick stop to the lockers, Darcy and Jane walked back to the hotel, having to fight against the huge Christmas crowds that choked the boardwalk. Nobody wanted to get out of anybody's way, making the walk back take even longer than it felt like it really should have. At the pool, in her ill-fitting bathing suit, Darcy hadn't really thought about what anyone else might have been looking at, but walking back, it felt like everyone was staring at her. She wished she had put her shirt back on, and tried to hold her things in front of her chest to keep people from gawping, walking close to Jane as they quickly tried to push their way through the crowd.

Once they were finally back to the hotel, on the other side of the resort, Darcy finally felt like she could breathe. Taking a deep breath, she started digging through her bag early so she could have her room key in hand as soon as she got to the hotel room.

"You'd think they'd put the pool right next to the hotel," she complained quietly as she and Jane walked to the elevator.

"We had trouble finding it," Jane said.

"So did we."

Jane rolled her eyes and shook her head. Darcy agreed. The pool had been everything she'd wanted and more, but getting to and from it was ridiculous.

As they walked the hall on their floor and rounded the corner, they were both surprised to see Thor sitting on the floor, glaring at the wall opposite outside their rooms. They both hesitated briefly before finally making their way over to their doors.

"Where's Loki?" Darcy asked cautiously, suddenly feeling a little bad for not getting up to at least make sure they had room keys when Thor and Loki had been kicked out of the pool.

Standing and still scowling sourly, Thor shrugged. "I'm not his keeper," he said.

Not wanting to push it, Darcy turned away and opened the door to her room. But instead of finding it empty, she was surprised to hear Loki's voice.

"Move the camera down. I want to see," he said quietly.

Afraid of what she was walking into, Darcy paused at the door and cringed. For a brief moment, she thought she might be able to slip away unnoticed, but Loki looked up at her before she could even make up her mind. Worse, he didn't even seem at all embarrassed at being walked in on. Even worse than that, he waved her over eagerly.

Not sure what else to do, Darcy cautiously stepped forward and shut the door. She couldn't hear anything nasty coming from her laptop's speakers, and as she walked closer, she realised Loki had changed into dry clothes, and that those clothes were all the way on. Still, she didn't dare get too close right away, and peered suspiciously over the top of the laptop to see what he was looking at. At first, she couldn't tell what it was. Just a lot of brown and shadow. Then the camera moved, and she could see a cloudy blue eye staring right at her.

"What is that?" she asked.
"Who's that?" someone – presumably, the person holding the camera – asked.

"My pretend girlfriend," Loki answered. "And a python that's chosen an inconvenient time to go into shed."

Darcy slowly moved around to sit down on the sofa next to Loki and watched the snake on her laptop, as it did absolutely nothing.

"Keep an eye on her," Loki said suddenly, staring intently at the snake as well. "She's given me problems the last few times. If you need to give her a soak, be careful. The taps run hot."

"So I noticed," the person on the other end of the line said. The camera didn't seem to be focusing on anything anymore, giving her a fairly wide view of what looked like a basement with at least a dozen tanks along the walls.

"I'll call you back in a day or two to see how she's doing," Loki said. He pulled up the calendar from the task bar and frowned at it. "I can't afford to turn on my phone right now, but I'll check Skype a little more often, when I can."

Darcy tried not to feel bad again about dragging him away from New York. Somehow, it never even occurred to her that being away from home for ten days meant being away from all kinds of animals. He'd said his mom was taking care of the dog, but she hadn't even thought about the snakes, let alone the possibility that something like a snake could get sick. She listened to the man on the other end talk about the snake getting stuck in a shed or something, and decided it was better if she didn't even try to figure it out. Loki ended the call a few moments later anyway and leaned his head against the back of the sofa and looked up almost despairingly at the ceiling.

"What's wrong with your snake?" Darcy asked cautiously, having never expected to ever ask a question like that before.

"She's a pain in the ass and I'm getting rid of her," Loki said, sounding strangely defeated. He raised his hands away from the laptop and stiffly laced his fingers together, holding them straight. "She's shedding her skin, which is a perfectly normal thing for them to do. Except she stops halfway through, and gets stuck inside the old skin. I don't know why, and I'm sick of it." He pulled his fingers apart and covered his face with both hands. "Assuming she survives, I'm posting the ad as soon as I get home."

Darcy felt like there was something else he wasn't saying, but she didn't want to ask. She didn't really understand anything he talked about, and since her entire experience with snakes involved a few stories where dumbass owners got bit by their pet cobras, she didn't feel like she'd be able to ask her questions intelligently anyway.

"How'd you get back in, anyway?" Darcy asked instead. Loki lifted his hand, showing the yellow bracelet from the pool still around his wrist. "They scanned it at the desk and gave me a new key."

"Neat," Darcy said, looking at hers and wondering what other wonders the plasticky bracelet held. "Why didn't Thor do that?"

Loki shrugged. "Don't know. Don't care," he said.

Darcy ignored that one, pretty sure that whatever had happened between them earlier in the day, Loki had been the one to start it.
"Well. If you want, you're invited to Christmas dinner tonight. I don't know where we're going, but I think we're doing it kind of early in the evening. Jane knows," Darcy said.

Loki nodded. "Sounds good," he said.
Darcy was starting to feel a bit waterlogged after getting out of the shower. Her hair felt like straw from the chlorine, and every inch of her skin felt dry and itchy. She let Loki keep doing his thing on her laptop and picked up the small bottle of lotion from beside the sink, taking it to the sofa. Sitting down beside Loki, she watched him as he went through a bunch of forums and websites, opening links in tabs and forgetting about them almost immediately. While Loki looked at countless pictures of snakes in more colours than Darcy ever thought they came in, Darcy tried to slather herself in the vanilla lotion without taking any of her clothes back off to get some of the more indecent areas that felt like they needed it most.

"Don't look," she muttered as she turned her back to Loki. She wasn't sure if he was looking or not, and sort of didn't care as she shoved her hand down the front of her shirt to get her nearly-sunburnt chest.

"Do you need help?" Loki asked facetiously after a few moments.

"Nope," Darcy chirped as she pulled her hand back out and leaned into the sofa. Closing the lotion bottle, she looked back over to see what Loki was doing.

"What kind of snake is that?" she asked.

"Ball python. They all are," Loki answered.

Darcy looked closer at the screen. The snakes were black and white and gold and brown and orange and everything in between, almost. None of them looked like the same kind of snake at all.

"Really? They all look different," she said.

"My dog doesn't look much like a chihuahua, but they're both dogs," Loki pointed out. He clicked on one of the golden yellow snakes and opened it in another background tab. As he scrolled through the page some more, Darcy realised that all of the pictures had weird names and prices next to them. Some of them were more than $1000.

"Are you buying a new snake?" she asked.

"Trying to see how much I can get away with selling Freyja for," Loki said. He opened up one more link, actually looking at this one instead of sending it to the background. After a few moments, he started clicking through the other tabs as well. Now all together, Darcy could see that the ones he was looking for all more or less looked the same.

"If I'm lucky, I may be able to get five or six hundred," he said.

"Six hundred? Why don't you sell them all for that?" Darcy asked.

Loki shook his head. "Freyja's a proven female. And there's no guarantee she'll even sell. Most of my buyers are local pet shops that want the babies to sell as pets to rebellious teenagers."

Darcy nodded. It made sense. "What are you gonna do if you can't sell her?" she asked.
Loki shrugged. "Giver her to the zoo? I don't care. I'm done."

"Will the zoo take her?" Darcy asked.

"Sure, if I toss her over the fence," Loki said. "I suppose then they'd have little choice."

"Unless somebody says, 'hey, I know a guy out in BFE that breeds yellow snakes. He might like this one'," Darcy said, nudging him with her elbow.

Loki growled and leaned his head against the top of the sofa. "Don't even say it," he warned. "Things come true when you say it like that."

From the new angle, Darcy realised Loki was starting to get fairly red and cooked-looking from all the time spent outside as well. Not even thinking about it, she uncapped the lotion again and dabbed a small amount onto her finger, and started rubbing it into the side of Loki's face that she could reach. He gave her a mildly concerned look without moving at all.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"You're getting sunburnt too," Darcy explained. "Here." She dabbed a little more on his nose. After a few moments, Loki reached up and either tried to wipe it off or rub it in. Either way, it just left a streaky smear down his face.

Laughing quietly, Darcy sat up on her knees so she could reach better. "No, jeez. Not like that." She used the tips of her fingers to try to rub it in even more, making sure to get all the spots that looked like they were in danger of getting really dry and painful. Only near the end did Loki start to fight against her, turning his head away. She saw him trying not to smile, so she just kept chasing after him, making sure she got every last smear that she'd left behind.

"There," she announced, balancing precariously over him. "See, that feels better, doesn't it?" she asked.

Loki made the sort of face that suggested he was about to petulantly disagree. Instead, he tilted his head back even further.

"Might as well get the rest," he said.

Darcy could see the sly smirk on his face, but she indulged him anyway. Getting resettled beside him so she wouldn't fall over, Darcy rubbed a small amount of the lotion onto Loki's neck and down just beneath his shirt collar. Once she was done, she sat back down and handed him the bottle.

"The rest is up to you," she said.

Loki gave her a disappointed look. "You're no fun," he complained.

"Nope," Darcy agreed.

He looked down at the tiny bottle in his hand and dabbed a generous amount onto his fingers.

"You missed a spot," he said, leaning over to smear it on Darcy's face.

"Hey!" Darcy called out, leaning away to avoid Loki and failing. Laughing, she turned her head away as Loki smeared the lotion onto the side of her face and smudged up her glasses. "No! Stop!" she said, her own cackling laughter betraying her.

Loki was leaning halfway over her, laughing as well when a loud knock cut through the room. A
second later, the door opened and Jane cautiously peered through. As soon as she saw them, she froze in place as her eyebrows tried to touch the ceiling.

"Uh. Sorry," she said hastily, already retreating.

"No, it's fine," Darcy said, trying to sit up and push Loki away at the same time. "What's up?"

Jane came back as the two of them sat up like proper adults. Darcy took off her glasses and tried to figure out how to clean them off without making a bigger mess, while Loki pretended to be taking care of the sunburn starting on his arms.

"Uh," Jane said again, clearly not buying it. "The reservation's in about an hour. Just wanted to remind you guys before you got... too into something."

Darcy looked down at her glasses and tried not to make a face at them. "No. Yep. We'll be ready.

"Okay," Jane said awkwardly. She took a few more moments before backing out of the room and shutting the door. When she was finally gone, Loki started laughing quietly again, like he was trying not to laugh at all.

"What?" Darcy asked.

"Your face is a mess," he said, shaking his head.

"Oh, fuck!" Darcy hissed. She quickly tried to rub the lotion into her skin to get rid of any smears still there before nudging Loki hard. "You're evil, you know that?"

"I've been told," Loki said.

Shaking her head, Darcy got up to start digging back through her suitcase for something appropriate to wear. She got as far as the zipper before thinking twice and going for her purse instead. "Come on, let's go downstairs real quick," she said.

Loki righted the laptop onto the coffee table and looked up at her. "For what?" he asked.

"A new shirt. Jane will be very sad if you show up to Christmas dinner at whatever fancy restaurant she's booked us into wearing that," Darcy said plainly, pointing at the Jurassic World shirt Loki wore.

He looked down at it and frowned. "If you insist," he said after a moment. He got up and looked around for his shoes, eventually giving up and stepping into the flip flops again.

"You had to borrow his shoes last time too, didn't you?" Darcy asked.

"You're buying me shoes as well?" Loki asked flatly.

"I'm buying you a nice pair of shoes that fit those skis you call feet, yes," Darcy told him, stepping into her own flip flops. She looked down at her glasses once more and gave up, tossing them onto the bed. She made sure she had her room key and made her way toward the door, waiting patiently for Loki to agree to be taken shopping once more.

Darcy should have known better than to expect good things coming from Loki not having to ask to borrow Thor's clothes again. She'd naively expected to avoid the fight by eliminating the whole borrowing aspect, but it seemed that Loki showing up in a new shirt was an even worse crime. Thor glared all the way out of the hotel, but Loki ignored him. With clothes and shoes that actually fit him,
Loki looked like he belonged at the sort of restaurant they were going to, even with his rockstar ponytail and borrowed eyeliner. As they got ready in the room, Darcy was suddenly reminded that he and Thor came from the same privileged background, because for the first time that Darcy had ever seen, Loki actually looked like it.

But Thor clearly saw an imposter, as he glared murder the entire way. At least with their reservations, they got in fairly quickly, and didn't have to risk too much collateral damage by standing around in the line. The waiter took them to their table off next to the windows and left them to get seated while he rushed off to help one of the other tables. Darcy was a bit surprised about the huge crowd, but not terribly surprised, after seeing the huge crowd at the pool. She flashed Jane a toothy cringe as they sat, wondering how long it was going to be before they even got their water. Loki sat down next to her and picked up one of the menus to start looking through it.

"It's not enough that you're taking our mother's money. You're taking all of Darcy's as well?" Thor asked suddenly.

Loki looked up over his menu. "Pardon me?" he asked

Thor huffed and shook his head. "No, of course you don't know. Why should you?"

Darcy and Jane looked across the table at one another nervously, already seeing the inevitable. Taking action into her own hands, Jane reached out and put both her hands on Thor's arm. "Hey. Not here, please? He's behaving. Please do the same."

Thor turned his glare toward her, before looking away entirely.

Darcy knocked her knee against Loki's under the table and looked over at him, trying to seem reassuring. She had no idea what Thor was talking about, but thought Loki might. Still, she kept quiet and picked up one of the menus to look through as well. The four of them sat in awkward silence while everyone tried to decide how best to recover from the fight that was already brewing silently.

"Ooh, they have duck," Darcy said, nudging Loki again. "Isn't that how that Christmas movie ends?"

"You're not ordering an entire duck, are you?" Loki asked.

Darcy shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe I should."

"They're huge. You'd never finish it." Loki looked over his menu thoughtfully. "Actually, the duck does sound good."

"I've never had it," Darcy admitted.

"Get something else," Loki suggested, flipping through the pages. "I'll share mine if you like it."

Darcy nodded, thinking it sounded like a good plan. She'd be too embarrassed to send it back if she didn't like it, and would just wind up getting a second dinner back at the hotel room. "Okay," she agreed, flipping over the next page. "Maybe something entirely un-Christmasy, then. They do fish."

"I don't see how this is your call. She's paying," Thor muttered.

Loki shrugged dramatically. "She's paid for all of our dates. How is this your concern?" he asked.

"Let's please not," Darcy said evenly. She stared at the menu, not even really seeing it anymore.
"You make her pay for all your dates?" Thor said, completely ignoring Darcy. "I suppose she pays your bills as well, then."

"Please stop," Darcy said.

"Does she pay for your habit as well?" Thor asked.

Loki buried his face in his hands. "Jesus Christ, weed is hardly a habit," he muttered.

"So she does pay for it?" Thor demanded.

"Why won't you stop?" Darcy asked, able to feel the other people in the restaurant staring at them.

"Because I don't want him taking advantage of you," Thor said, finally acknowledging her presence.

"Oh my god," Darcy said, throwing her hands into the air. "You do remember Ian, right? The guy I originally wanted to bring, before he took me out on a date just to dump me? I was going to pay for all his stuff too. Were you going to do this to him? Because he didn't put a penny into this trip. For that matter, how much did you put in? How much overtime did you work to pay for your share?"

Thor at least had the sense to look shamed, even if he didn't have any answers. Darcy wasn't sure why, but his lack of answers made her even angrier.

"Seriously!" she tried not to shout. "If I wanted this crap, I could have gone to Long Island for Christmas, instead of spending thousands of dollars to come all the way to a theme park I'm not even really having fun at. It's my money. I'll spend it how I want!"

She was surprised when she felt Loki's hand on her arm, but when she looked over, he wasn't looking at her. He was looking up at the waiter.

"Can we get a separate table?" he asked.

The waiter looked a little lost as he looked around the restaurant. "Just the two of you?" he asked.

"Please," Loki said.

"Uh. Yeah. Let me see what I can do. Can you hold on for a few minutes?" the waiter asked, clearly already overwhelmed by the Christmas crowd.

"Do you have a bar we can wait in?" Loki asked.

The waiter nodded like he'd just dodged a bullet. "Yes. Just through here," he said, gesturing toward the other side of the building.

Loki got up and held out his hand to help Darcy to her feet. They quickly walked through the restaurant toward the bar, ignoring the stares from everyone else. At the bar, Darcy found the first seat available and fell down into it. A few moments later, the bartender walked over.

"What can I get you?"

Darcy shook her head. "I don't know. Don't care. Something with a lot of rum in it," she said.

The bartender nodded. "And you, sir?" he asked.

Loki shook his head. "Just waiting for a table," he said.
The bartender stepped away, leaving the two of them alone. Sighing deeply, Darcy put her head down against the bar and tried to stay calm. "I'm sorry," she said.

"For what?" Loki asked.

Darcy shrugged. "I don't know. I feel like this was all my fault. You can't even afford to call your mom on Christmas, and I brought you way the hell out here just to get shouted at."

"I'm getting shouted at in a foreign country. It's better than being shouted at in my own home," Loki said, entirely too reasonably. Darcy just wanted to cry.

She was momentarily distracted by the soft thunk of a glass being set beside her. She looked up and found a Long Island Ice Tea waiting for her, and an expectant bartender waiting to be paid. Taking a moment to clear her head, Darcy pulled out her room key and handed it over.

"Can you put it on the room?" she asked.

"Yep," the bartender said, taking the card away. He slid it through his register and handed it back a few seconds later before disappearing again to let her wallow in misery.

"I wish I'd stayed home," she said. "Maybe you've got the right idea. Just stay home and watch that Christmas movie all day." Sighing deeply, she took a sip of her drink, kind of enjoying the kicked in the face feel she got from the amount of hard liquor in it.

"I bet we still could," Loki reasoned. "I can't imagine the hotel not having it on the list today."

Darcy nodded and took another drink. "Yeah," she said, liking the sound of it. "Let's go get Chinese food and watch that Christmas movie."

She got up and took her drink with her, assuming the glass would eventually find its way back home. As they walked out of the restaurant, Loki paused to stop their waiter. "Cancel the table," he said.

The waiter nodded. "All right. Merry Christmas," he said, sounding almost apologetic about it.

Darcy looked over to the table they'd left, finding Jane and Thor both looking angry and uncomfortable, but for some reason, not bothering to leave as well. Darcy felt kind of bad for Jane, but she'd learned her lesson thoroughly at this point, and was going to avoid putting Thor and Loki into the same room as much as possible.

They walked slowly up to the hotel, stopping unexpectedly at the front desk once they were inside.

"Do you have that Christmas movie today? The one with the BB gun?" Loki asked.

The clerk smiled and nodded. "Yes, we do. A lot of people have been asking about it today. It's a free rental through tomorrow."

"Sweet," Darcy said into her drink.

They walked up to their room in a comfortable silence, Darcy still sipping on her drink all the way up to the door. As soon as they were in the room, she kicked off her shoes and and fell down onto the sofa, trying not to spill any of her drink. Meanwhile, Loki picked up the room service menu and started flipping through it.

"Chang's?" he asked.

Darcy gave him a thumbs up, thoroughly approving of his choice. A half hour later, they had another
huge room service dinner spread out on the bed. Loki had still ordered duck, which was way too greasy and gamey for Darcy, but Loki seemed to love it. She stuck to what she knew, chowing down on General Tso's and thick, chewy noodles while the precocious child on the television fantasised about shooting a gang of bandits in striped shirts and domino masks. As Darcy stuffed her face, another knock cut through the room, and it took Darcy a moment to realise it was coming from the door leading to Jane and Thor's room. She looked over to Loki, making sure he didn't object before trying to shout to come in. A few moments later, Jane peered through.

"Oh, you did come back," she said. "Mind if I...?"

Darcy nodded. "Yeah, come in," she said, once she was able to speak like a proper adult. "Do you want some chicken? We ordered way too much."

For a second, Jane looked like she wanted to refuse, but something had clearly happened after they left. "God, yes please," she said, making her way over to the bed. "We never even ordered."

Darcy found a fork that had been brought up and handed it over. "Dig in, sister," she said.

Jane took it and sat down on the bed with them, stabbing a piece of chicken with the fork.

"Sorry about what happened back there," Darcy said. "But I guess that's just part of the Christmas tradition, isn't it?"

Jane gave her a worried look. "Remind me never to go to your place for Christmas, if that's normal," she said.

Darcy shrugged. The worst part was that it sort of was normal. "I'm telling you, he's got the right idea. This is what he does, right here, and I'm doing it now too. Every year."

"Jewish deli for lunch," Loki said, pointing his chopsticks at her. "They're open too."

Darcy pointed right back at him. "See?" she said. "This guy's smart. He's got it all figured out."

Jane laughed and shook her head. "Are you guys all right?" she asked after a few moments. "I mean. Really all right?"

Darcy took a deep breath while she thought about the answer. "I think so," she said. "We're probably gonna cancel on the bamboo forest tomorrow, though. I still want to do the river ride, but you probably won't see us before then."

"Can we do it at a different time?" Loki asked.

Darcy shook her head. "No, that one's booked in advance. We have to be there at noon."

"You guys just gonna have your own vacation, then?" Jane asked.

"Yeah," Darcy said. "Maybe go into the mainland or something after tomorrow. Just to really get away, you know?"

Jane nodded. "That's probably best." She gave Loki a pointed look. "And thank you, for mostly behaving. I appreciate it, even if other people don't."

Loki said nothing, and responded only by nodding.

"What'd you do? Walk out on him?" Darcy asked.
"Yeah," Jane said simply. "I don't know where he is right now. And I kind of don't care. I'd never been more embarrassed in my life."

Loki snorted. "Oh, just wait. If he's good at anything, it's outdoing himself."

Darcy expected Jane to argue, but for that moment, they all seemed to be on the same page.

"What are you guys doing for the rest of the night?" Jane asked after a few moments.

Darcy pointed her chopsticks down at the huge spread of food. "You're looking at it. We're gonna eat too much and watch the Christmas movie until we pass out. You can join us if you want."

Stabbing at another piece of chicken, Jane actually looked tempted. "I'll have to think about that," she said. She took a bite of the chicken like she hadn't eaten all day. "It's really tempting though," she said around it.

"We'll build a pillow fort and hang a 'No Thors Allowed' sign up on the door," Loki said.

Jane held her hand up over her mouth and tried not to laugh. She quickly swallowed and nodded. "Now it sounds really tempting," she said. "I'll think about it while I help you eat all your food."

Darcy laughed and snagged a piece of chicken for herself. "Good. We're probably gonna get dessert next," she said.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter notes on Wordpress
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darcy remembered falling asleep some time in the middle of the third repeat of the Christmas movie, but she still woke a bit confused and disorientated. She wasn't sleeping alone, and the realisation of this sent a strange jolt of almost panicked excitement through her. Sitting up, she realised that the person on the other side of the giant bed was actually Jane, and Darcy remembered offering to let her crash in their room after the phenomenal argument with Thor at the restaurant. Further investigation revealed Loki back on the sofa, where he'd been every night that week so far.

Already used to waking up first, and not sure what else to do, Darcy got up and quietly fetched her laptop from the coffee table. She intended to just be a bum on Facebook for a while, but apparently she wasn't as quiet as she thought she was. As she crawled back onto the bed, Jane slowly woke up, looking blearily up at her through tangled hair.

"Sorry," Darcy said, settling back against the headboard.

Jane moved her hair out of her eyes. "What time is it?" she asked.

As the laptop powered back up from hibernation, Darcy looked down at the clock in the system tray. "Almost eight."

Jane hummed and slowly sat up, looking around the room at the messy remains of their dinner.

"Did you pass out before Loki had the chance to kick you out?" Darcy asked her, finding herself strangely worried about what Loki might have said after she fell asleep.

But Jane just shook her head. "No. He was a... perfect gentleman, and told me to take the bed," she said, not quite sounding like she believed it.

Darcy still wasn't sure how she felt about it. She almost felt disappointed, though she wasn't sure why she should. Chalking it up to still being kind of tired after another strange night, she pushed it aside and moved to close out of whatever it was Loki had been doing with her laptop, but thought better of it and opened a new browser window instead.

"Thor know you stayed here last night?" she asked as she signed into Facebook.

Jane sighed and shook her head. "I texted him last night around ten. I have no idea if he looked at it or not."

"Why?" Darcy asked honestly. "He's the one who started it. Make him apologise."

Jane gave her a withering look that Darcy knew not to argue with, even if she didn't understand why she was getting it in the first place.

"Well, good luck," she said, watching Jane make her way toward the door leading to her own room. "We'll meet you at the river ride later." She wondered if she should expect to see both of them down there, but she didn't dare ask. She just watched Jane leave, listening for a few moments for any signs of an argument on the other side of the door. When it didn't seem like anything explosive was going to need to be broken up, Darcy turned her attention back toward Facebook, eager to see everyone
else's bitchy Christmas posts, and make one of her own. As usual, it seemed like Christmas was an even split between a disaster, and people pretending that it wasn't one. As usual, it made Darcy wonder why anyone even bothered. But even as she came to write her own post about how awful Christmas was, she didn't have much to complain about beyond the outburst at the restaurant. When they finally got to it, with just the three of them, Christmas dinner had been fun. And her day at the pool was pretty good as well. It almost made her feel bad to post it after reading all the posts from her family, but not bad enough to keep her from doing so. It only took a few minutes for a couple of likes and one jealous comment to roll in, which made it seem worth it and petty all at once. As she uploaded more pictures from the trip, she could hear Loki waking up as well, taking a few minutes to groan and resist before finally hurling himself to his feet.

"Morning," Darcy said to him.

Loki only grumbled in response as he reached for his cigarettes and made his way out to the balcony.

"What do you want to do today?" she asked, not really expecting any kind of response.

At first, she got little more than a shrug. "What was planned?" Loki asked finally.

"Jane and I talked yesterday about doing the bamboo forest and the gardens, if we had time before noon," Darcy answered.

"Will Thor be going?" Loki asked. Darcy watched him lean over the edge of the balcony to watch whatever was going on below.

"Probably," she said.

Loki shook his head. "No. Something else."

Darcy was hardly surprised. "That's why I asked what you wanted to do," she said.

Again, Loki didn't have much to say on the matter.

"Well, we have until noon to figure it out," Darcy told him. "You can bail on that, by the way. I won't be mad."

Loki glanced at her from over his shoulder. "What's at noon?"

"River ride. It takes a few hours, and you get to look at dinosaurs and fish and things along the way," Darcy said. She didn't mention how it seemed like a low-impact activity compared to the others. This one actually seemed like it would leave the dinosaurs in relative peace, for a start.

"I'll go," Loki said after a moment.

"Okay." Darcy smiled at him, even though he couldn't see it with his back turned again. Darcy watched him for a few long moments as he smoked and frowned down at the people below him.

"What are your tattoos?" she asked finally.

Loki craned his neck to look at one of his shoulders at the twisted designs in black and faded red. "Just... nonsense," he said. "I was young and thought it meant something profound."

"Oh," Darcy said. "Actual nonsense, or like, 'chicken salad sandwich' nonsense that some people wind up getting by accident?"

Loki looked down at himself again. "Both, in a way. Maybe not so much the latter." He looked
away again and watched something off in the distance. Darcy looked at what she could see of the swirling, twisted design on his shoulders, and couldn't quite tell what they were supposed to mean. They still looked like some kind of animal to her, but she couldn't tell what. If it was writing or some kind of symbology, it wasn't any she'd ever seen before. But she didn't ask any more, suspecting it was a touchy subject for him. Letting him finish waking up in his own time, she went back to uploading pictures to Facebook and putting photo albums together.

Walking the boardwalk a second time didn't seem to make it any more interesting than the first time around. Darcy had even wanted to pick up a souvenir from the resort, but so far she hadn't seen anything that didn't look cheap or way below her age group. Finally admitting defeat, and deciding to pick something up from the mainland when they went, she dragged Loki toward the monorail to head out to the river ride. As they made their way up to the monorail stop that would take them to the ride, Darcy debated the early decision to leave her phone at the hotel room, and almost went back for it twice, before she remembered all the times she'd dropped it in the sink or in the toilet. If she dropped it in the river, she'd kick herself forever.

There was, however, a kiosk near the monorail platform that sold little disposable cameras, claiming to be waterproof. Not even sure where she could still get the film developed, Darcy stopped off and picked one up while Loki waited patiently by the escalator up to the monorail platform.

Loki was still being oddly quiet, and almost subdued, even as they jostled for space on the crowded monorail. He was definitely thinking about something else, and Darcy was pretty sure she knew what he was thinking about. She was still trying not to think about some of the things Thor had said the night before, and she could only imagine how much it must have hurt for Loki to have heard it from his own brother. But Darcy didn't say anything about it. Even if Loki did want to talk about it, she was pretty sure he didn't want to talk about it in public, so she just mirrored Loki's silence and looked at the park map as they rode the monorail around to their stop.

The monorail station up at the river ride wasn't as packed as some of the others had been, especially for noon. It seemed almost odd, until the group in front of Darcy and Loki tried to scan their bracelets to get through the turnstile and got denied with a loud buzzer. The peppy girl watching the river ride entrance looked down at the iPad she held and shook her head apologetically.

"Sorry, this ride is reservation only. We still have eight seats open for our four o'clock tour if you'd like to reserve the space," she said.

The group all gawped and stammered at once for a few moments before they all shrugged at one another.

"Sure. Does it cost extra?" one of the guys said.

The girl shook her head. "No. We just have limited space, due to the nature of the ride." She tapped at her iPad a few more times and nodded. "One at a time, scan your bracelets, please."

The group all scanned their bracelets at the turnstile again, this time getting a light bonging sound each time.

"All right. I have you down for six at four o'clock. Try to be here at least fifteen minutes early." She smiled sweetly at them until they all turned around and walked back to the monorail platform, still looking at one another like they didn't quite know what was going on. As they passed by, Darcy looked down at her ride bracelet and wondered what else it could do.

"Hi," she said nervously as her turn came. "Let's see if this works." She scanned her bracelet, and in
return got a cheery ding and a heavy click as the turnstile unlocked. She pushed herself through and
turned to watch Loki do the same, almost surprised that nothing had gone wrong.

"Follow the path to the right," the peppy ticket taker instructed, pointing to the path that curved down
toward the river.

Excited and giddy already, Darcy took Loki's hand and tried not to drag him down the path to the
start of the tour. Their group was already forming, with everyone milling about in a large clearing
next to a wide, shallow part of the river. Looking upstream, Darcy realised there was no upstream
beyond another twenty yards or so, where the river just stopped. Squinting to see through the dust
motes and bright beams of sunlight shining through the canopy above, Darcy watched the surface of
the water where the river started.

"Look," she said, nudging Loki to get his attention. "You can see where they're pumping the water."

Loki looked as well, and frowned the way he did when he was thinking about something. Suddenly,
he turned to one of the tour guides where she was checking the perspex kayaks.

"Excuse me. Is this river saltwater?" he asked.

The guide looked up at him, and then out over the river. "Yes it is," she said, sounding impressed. "It
was one of the first features built on the island when the project was started under John Hammond. The
water's pumped in from the ocean, but it's also mixed with collected rain water and run through
several flash desalinators along the way to make the water safe for the animals to drink."

"Why didn't they finish the original park?" Darcy asked curiously, wondering why if John
Hammond's ideas were so great and wonderful, it took twenty years for the park to finally open.

"Financial concerns, mostly," the tour guide said. "The technology behind the park was still new,
which scared off a lot of the investors."

"Hmm," Darcy said, nodding like she accepted the answer. She started walking away, taking Loki
with her. As soon as they were far enough away, she leaned in close to Loki. "That means too many
people got hurt," she said quietly. "Remember the other day, someone was saying that it was going
to be a safari, but that wound up being too unsafe?"

"Or killed. I find it impossible to believe that nobody's been at least nibbled on," Loki agreed.

"Animals this big, I wonder if there'd even be anything left to bury," Darcy said grimly.

The look on Loki's face suggested he didn't think there would be.

As they wandered around the area a little more, looking at the huge ferns and a tiny green lizard
resting in a sunbeam, Jane and Thor joined the group from the path. Loki pointedly looked away,
turning to put as much distance between them as possible. But suddenly, he turned around and
walked straight to Thor. Before anybody even realised what was going on, Loki hooked his arm
around Thor's and dragged him away from Jane and toward the edge of the clearing. Jane gaped at
the sudden movement, and then at Darcy, but Darcy was just as lost and confused. She shook her
head and shrugged across the clearing, hoping to convey her ignorance over the situation.

From the distance, she couldn't hear anything Thor or Loki said, but she could see that Loki looked
pissed. She'd seen him angry and bitchy before, but this was rage on a whole new level. She
expected Thor to return the anger, but weirdly, he just looked pleased, like he was finally getting
what he wanted. Just as quickly as it had started, the confrontation ended with Thor shoving Loki in
the chest and stalking off again. After a few moments of quiet fuming, Loki stalked back toward
Darcy, obviously trying to keep his cool, and failing. Not sure what else to do, Darcy took his hand again and pulled him as far away from the main group as possible.

"Hey. You okay?" she asked quietly.

Loki looked like he wanted to say something, but he just shook his head instead. If nothing else, Darcy felt like she had to give him points for honesty.

"We can go do something else if you don't want to be here. I can reserve another trip for later," Darcy told him.

Loki breathed deeply and shook his head again. "No," he said finally.

"You sure?" Darcy asked.

"I'm fine," he lied.

"Okay," Darcy said, going along with it. She looked out over the group, wondering if there was any way to save this. "What do you think about going back to the mainland tomorrow?" she asked.

Loki shrugged. "Why?"

"Well. I didn't get to see much of San Jose, and you didn't get to see it at all. Or we can just stay around the coast or something." she said. "I mean. My Spanish is terrible, but we got on fine last time."

Loki shrugged again. "Mine's all right. Probably a bit rusty."

"You speak Spanish?" Darcy asked.

"We lived in Spain for three years. I didn't have much choice in learning it," Loki said.

A dozen more questions popped up, but before Darcy could ask any of them, the tour guides all began calling everyone over to the centre of the clearing. With more than a little apprehension, Darcy began walking over to join the group, taking care to pick a spot away from Jane and Thor, just in case another fight blew up.

"All right, everyone. We're gonna start getting you in the water in about five minutes, but first we need to go through some quick safety instructions," the male tour guide said.

As he went through what to do if the kayak tipped over, and what not to do so the kayak didn't tip over, and how not to use the kayak, the two women walked through the group, passing out bright blue life jackets and made sure everyone put theirs on the right way.

Darcy somewhat expected Loki to balk at having to do something as uncool as wear a bright blue life jacket, but he quietly went along with it and snapped the whole thing up without a word.

"I can swim," Thor said a few moments later, from the other side of the group.

"Thor!" Jane shouted irritably.

Darcy covered her mouth and tried not to laugh or cry, or make any other kind of despairing sound that might draw attention to her.

"Sir, I'm afraid I can't let you in the water if you don't wear it," the tour guide said plainly.

"Put it on," Jane demanded.
Groaning quietly, Darcy covered her face with both hands and tried not to watch the scene unfold.

"Thank you for not being a colossal jackass," she said quietly.

She leaned against Loki and kept her eyes shut until the safety lecture continued and Thor shut up about knowing how to swim. When the guide finished a few moments later, everyone was led to the row of kayaks along the river and instructed on how to get into them. Darcy and Loki picked one at the beginning of the line, following the instructions from the tour guide and walking out into the warm water with the kayaks before getting in. The transparent boat sloshed back and forth precariously as Darcy climbed in, even with Loki trying to steady it. Once she felt like she wasn't going to tumble head-first into the river, she scooted up as far as she could to give Loki room to climb in behind her. There were no seats in the kayak, and as Loki climbed in as well, the whole thing rocked sharply back and forth, threatening to fall over. With both of them in, it sat low in the water, making it seem like any more rocking would fill the entire thing and sink it. Holding onto her paddle with one hand, Darcy reached out for the first thing she could find with her other hand and gripped tightly. She held onto Loki's knee with a death grip until the boat stopped moving around and threatening to drown them, but even then, she wasn't sure she wanted to let go.

"All right?" Loki asked.

"Yeah?" Darcy said, not sure she meant it. "Just please don't tip us over."

"I think it's sturdier than it looks," he said.

They had already begun to drift about in the current, but they weren't the only ones not sure what they were doing yet. Others were having similar issues, struggling to find their balance in the water as their boats rocked back and forth.

"Have you ever done this before?" Darcy asked, finally getting up the nerve to take hold of her paddle with both hands, even if she still didn't want to try to put it in the water.

"Uh," Loki said, pausing for a moment. "Not in the water, no."

"Oh. What?" Darcy asked, taking a moment to register what he'd said.

"We took a canoe down a mountain once," Loki clarified.

"Seriously?" Darcy asked, starting to forget all about the rocking of the small boat. "How are you not dead?"

"We were kids. Kids bounce," Loki reasoned.

"Oh my god, you're crazy."

They drifted around the the lazy current for a short while longer, before one of the tour guides zipped ahead in her own kayak, taking the lead.

"All right, everybody. This is a novice run, but most of the river's smooth and calm. We can expect a few bumps and shakes further down the line, but if you follow our instructions, we'll get everyone to the end of the tour safe and dry," she said, starting to paddle into the main current. "The ride lasts about three hours. We ask that you refrain from any food or drinks while on the ride, and please don't throw or drop anything into the river. We don't want any of the animals to eat anything that might hurt them or make them sick."

Loki glanced over his shoulder at the group behind them and paddled into the current as well,
following the guide. Still holding her own paddle across the top of the kayak, Darcy was perfectly content to watch the jungle quietly crawl by.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Notes on WordPress
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Darcy had to cover her mouth to keep from shrieking when she saw the giant head high above them start to lower toward the river. The dinosaur's long, slender neck bent in a graceful arc as it drank from the river mere feet from the side of their boat. As it drank, it snorted and gurgled, pushing waves against the kayak and making it rock back and forth precariously.

"Oh my god," Darcy said, her voice high pitched and squeaky. She leaned back against Loki's chest, not sure if she was terrified or thrilled to see the giant animal so close.

"Oh, please don't let it eat us," Darcy said. Behind her, Loki laughed. "I'm fairly certain this one eats leaves," he said.

The dinosaur snorted again, blowing bubbles in the water and making Darcy squeak and jump back again.

"So do vegetarians, but that still doesn't stop them from accidentally swallowing a bug," Darcy said. Loki laughed, and Darcy could feel him shaking his head behind her. "Oh, you're bad," he said.

The giant brontosaurus raised its head again, showering water down on them as it dripped from its face.

"Oh my god," Darcy repeated, flinching under the sudden downpour.

"Is this what you were hoping to see here?" Loki asked, shifting slightly so he could hold the paddle in front of Darcy.

"Yes," she said excitedly. "I wanted ten days of this. This is exactly what I wanted." She looked up at the dinosaur, watching as it tried to decide between trying to eat some of the canopy leaves and drinking again. It wasn't being chased or spooked or manipulated into any special behaviour. It was just a giant animal at the local watering hole, completely unbothered by the group of small boats floating past it on the water. Convinced she wasn't about to be eaten, she raised her camera and snapped a few pictures of it, trying to find the best angle without wasting any of the camera's 32 exposures.

"Our apatosauruses may be big, but they're calm, docile creatures," the guide explained, her words being echoed by the other two guides farther down the line. "We have eight of them in this portion of the park, all ranging between six and ten years old."

Darcy looked away from the dinosaur as they passed it completely, and noticed there were even more of them up ahead, all drinking and picking off a few canopy branches as well. Darcy excitedly patted Loki on the leg as another one dipped its head just in front of them, sending a small wave across the water, sending their boat rocking gently back and forth again.

"Look at it. Oh my god!" she said.

They were so close to it Darcy felt like she might be able to reach out and touch it, but she didn't dare. It might only eat leaves, but it could still take her arm right off if it wanted. She just raised her
camera again and took another picture, filling the entire frame with the blue-grey face of an enormous monster.

They slowly passed by the giant, long-necked dinosaurs, moving into an area where the river narrowed slightly, causing the current to pick up. Loki started paddling again, holding it close against Darcy and caging her against him as he moved away from the bank and toward the deeper section of the river in the middle. The tour guide was talking about the giant dinosaurs, and how the animals on this side of the island differed from the ones they kept on the west side, with the rides that let visitors get closer. But Darcy was barely listening. She was too busy watching one of the giant dinosaurs stomp right through the river, splashing everything and everyone near it as it crashed carelessly to the opposite bank. Turning back, Darcy could see one of the boats had capsized, with the riders struggling to get back in. The tour guide in the middle of the group quickly rushed over to fetch their kayak and assist them back to the bank to get them back in. One of the guys who had fallen in was shouting something, but he was talking way too fast, and was too far away for Darcy to properly hear him.

As they flailed about at the bank, Darcy's attention was diverted by a flash of red and yellow on the other side of the river, where the giant dinosaur had gone. She looked over and saw a little two-legged creature with a head like a hornless triceratops hopping and dancing at the water's edge. Gasping, she tapped Loki's leg a few times and pointed.

"Look at that!" she said, holding her camera up, but not quite ready to take a picture just yet. "It's so tiny!"

"So tiny you've missed the other ten," Loki said after a few moments.

Darcy looked around, realising he was right. The tiny dinosaur was just one of many, all scampering quickly in the underbrush by the river. They moved kind of like giant birds, hopping here and there, and then dashing off with incredible speed without warning. As their boat spun lazily in the current, Darcy watched the small herd of dinosaurs play near the water. She quickly raised her camera and snapped a few more shots before checking the counter at the top. With only 19 pictures left, she wished she had bought a few cameras, instead of just one.

"There's a small herd of microceratus to our right," the tour guide announced, noticing them as well. "They're small, but they travel in large packs, sometimes numbering several dozen. Since there are no predators on this part of the river, these little dinosaurs come out a little more often than might be usual for animals their size."

"How does that work?" Darcy asked loudly, hoping the guide would hear her. "Keeping the predators out?"

"We use invisible fences to keep the animals in their areas," the guide answered. "When the animals are born, they're implanted with a subcutaneous chip that lets us track their movements, and keeps them where we want them without using physical structures they could get hurt on."

"What, like a shock collar?" Darcy asked.

"Sort of, yes," the guide asked.

"Mean," Darcy said quietly.

Loki was getting good at manoeuvring the boat, and had turned it sideways against the current so they could watch the tiny little dinosaurs on the bank. When one of the loud tropical birds cried out from the trees, the little dinosaurs all jumped up at least a foot in the air and scattered, all running
"Awh, I wanted them to stick around," Darcy said, laughing despite her disappointment.

"You can't exactly delete sixty five million years of instinct," Loki said. "They don't know that wasn't a pterodactyl."

Darcy shuddered at the thought of the aviary and the dinosaurs in it.

"Yeah, they win. I hated those things," she said.

She leaned back, relaxing against Loki and resting her head on his shoulder while he controlled the boat. Everything about the jungle was perfect. She could see the sun shining through the canopy above, and was content to just watch it for a moment. When she and Jane had decided to take this vacation, this had been what she was expecting for the whole thing. Beautiful environment, gorgeous weather, and the dinosaurs all in their own little places, being allowed to just be dinosaurs. She didn't want any SeaWorld attractions, or glorified lion feedings. The hamster balls and the safari ride had both seemed like they were trying to feel natural, but they weren't. They were entirely artificial, with everything about them manipulating the dinosaurs. This way, floating peacefully down a calm river, they were in the same space as the dinosaurs, but separate from them, moving through their world at the pace of their world – not crashing through it making all sorts of terrifying noises and chasing them away.

Pushing all of that out of her mind, Darcy snapped another picture of just the scenery, taking a small moment to enjoy the view. As they rode the current, Darcy thought she could hear something on the far side of the river, but looking over, she couldn't see anything. She listened, trying to hear the sound again, but it had been lost in the distance and in the wind.

"Was that a car?" she asked, thinking she might be able to hear it again.

Loki looked over as well. "I wouldn't be surprised. There are probably maintenance roads all over the place."

"Oh, yeah, probably," she agreed. "I bet there are tunnels, too. For the water pumps and stuff."

Still, she watched the far side of the river for a moment longer before focusing on what was immediately around her again. She quickly forgot about the sound of the car as a big, black shadow passed by beneath the transparent boat without a sound. Crying out loudly, Darcy jumped in her seat, causing the boat to rock back and forth violently as water sloshed in and pooled in the bottom, distorting the view into the river. She twisted around, shoving herself up against Loki and grabbing onto any part of him she could reach.

"There's something in the water!" she said, watching it swim silently beneath them, and then disappear into the darkness again. She peered through the water inside the boat, trying to see through the rippling light that now reflected off of the intermittent sunshine.

"We have several species of aquatic dinosaurs in the river," the tour guide explained calmly. "They may seem big, but their diet consists of fish and small crustaceans."

"Something that big doesn't eat no crawdad," Darcy argued, looking for it again.

"No, you're right. It eats dozens of them," the tour guide agreed, entirely too cheery.

Cringing, Darcy looked up at Loki for reassurance, but he was too busy looking down into the water to see the animal again. He took his paddle and poked it straight down into the river a few times,
until Darcy pulled the paddle back into the boat again. A few other people behind them were also shouting and laughing as the animal swam around in the deep, calm waters. A few times, Darcy thought she could see the water surface breaking as something peeked out from below, but it happened so quickly that she was never sure if she'd actually seen anything at all. Finally feeling confident that the animals, whatever they were, weren't going to just leap out and devour them all, Darcy remembered the camera in her hands and wound up the next exposure. She waited readily for whatever the animal was to show its face, but it never surfaced beyond the vaguest ripple.

Soon, the current began to pick up as the riverbed rose again. The artificial river had its own artificial landscape, making it seem all that more natural. As the speed increased, Darcy quickly moved forward in her seat to give Loki a little more room to keep them pointing in the right direction, and facing the right way up. It didn't seem that difficult to do, but even with his limited mountain canoeing experience, Darcy was content to give him complete control over the whole steering thing.

"Careful. Don't tip us over," she said, watching a rock about six feet away from them.

"I'm not going to tip us over," Loki said.

"I know. But still," Darcy said nervously. "Don't tip us over."

As she spoke, Darcy could hear some radio chatter coming from the tour guide's boat up ahead, but she couldn't hear what was said over the sound of the water and everyone else having fun in it.

The radio chatter didn't stop, but the tour guide did as soon as the current slowed again. She paddled toward the bank and turned her boat sideways in the current, looking between the radio and the opposite side of the river. She picked up her radio and spoke quietly into it, so nobody else nearby could hear. As she spoke, loud, staccato reports rang through the jungle, cutting over the guide's muffled voice.

"That was gunfire," Darcy said, pressing herself against Loki again. "I've lived in New York long enough to know that sound. That was a gun."

"Yeah," Loki agreed. He sat up and looked over her, trying to find the source of the sound. He turned their boat sideways as well. "A few of them."

"All right, everybody. I'm afraid the tour is going to be cut short," the tour guide in front of them called out, loud enough for the entire group to hear. "We're going to get out of the water at the next shallow area, in about three hundred feet, and go back to the resort. Cars will be arriving soon to take everyone back to the resort together."

Darcy wasn't listening to her, though. She was listening to the sound of the gunfire as it continued to ring out in fits and starts. It was a sound she knew. It wasn't like the gunfire she ever heard, the few times she'd heard it in person. It wasn't the pop! pop! pop! of a handgun. There were solid bursts of gunfire, lasting two or three seconds at a time, running in a terrifying fugue. It was the sound of soldiers and war. Realising she still didn't know where the sound was coming from, or where the guns making the sound were pointing, she tried to lower herself in the boat. The laughter of the tour group had turned to nervous chatter and occasional screams of fright as the gunfire rang out, decreasing in a way that didn't sound like it was winning against whatever it was shooting at. Everybody was starting to panic, putting more effort into trying not to get shot by unseen shooters than in trying to make it to the next shallow area where they could all safely get out and get to land. The tall reeds and low foliage on the west side of the river offered some little cover for those who were able to get to it, but it wasn't enough to stop a bullet.

Then, over the gunfire, Darcy could hear something else. Something big, and distant, but not distant
"Fuck, what got out?" Darcy asked quietly, her mind jumping to a thousand possible scenarios for what might be happening. "The T-rex? Did the T-rex get out?"

"I don't know. We should get to the shallow," Loki said, starting to move the boat into the fastest part of the current. Several other people had the same idea, but most were in full panic mode trying to hide, with the guides struggling to keep everybody together. The three guides shouted over everyone else, trying to instruct the group and herd them all toward the next shallow point, but nobody was listening.

Suddenly, the gunfire stopped completely, and the jungle went unnaturally silent. No birds were crying out, and the animals that had all been on the banks of the river had started to retreat back into the jungle, their crashing footsteps the only sound they could hear. Darcy looked all around them at the jungle, but nothing moved. Even the trees themselves seemed to stand completely still. Then, the air was filled with a deafening, screaming roar, followed immediately by the shrieks and cries of the tour-goers as a giant, white dinosaur even bigger than the T-rex crashed through the jungle and stomped straight toward the river.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter notes on Wordpress
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Darcy watched the giant dinosaur stomping toward the river through the trees, destroying everything in its path as it made tracks straight toward the group. Even though it was huge, it seemed to be moving slowly. Every branch and fern it crushed broke and crumpled in slow motion as the T-rex that wasn't a T-rex strode almost purposely forward. For a moment, there was an eerie, deathly silence as nobody quite understood what they were seeing. Then, the dinosaur roared so loudly, Darcy thought her eardrums were going to burst, and that's when everything started moving quickly again. Screaming and splashing replaced the silence, but Darcy was frozen in place, only able to watch as the thing that was going to kill her stepped into the river and picked up one of the kayaks in its huge, toothy mouth. She couldn't even tear her eyes away, even as she watched one person fall out of the boat and land on his head in the shallow water, while the second person was swallowed alive, still screaming. The dinosaur crushed the boat in its jaws before throwing what remained of it aside, already targeting the next boat. People were diving out of the kayaks into the water, scrambling to get away.

It was only when she was splashed on the face from the paddle in the water that Darcy realised she was there too, and that she wasn't just watching the scene. She was in it, and they desperately needed to get away. Loki was trying to paddle with the current, but it wasn't fast enough, and the dinosaur seemed to realise that the few of them in the front were getting away. It ignored those in the middle of the group and charged forward, chasing them downstream. Darcy forced herself to look away from the monster that was chasing them and looked at where they were, coming up to the shallow area the tour guides had told them to get to. But it still wasn't that shallow, and there was nobody there waiting for them. They were still in about three feet of water as the dinosaur roared again, deep and rumbling, yet screeching all at once.

"Hold on to the boat!" Loki shouted.

"What?" Darcy demanded, looking back at him.

Loki didn't answer her. Instead, he held on to her life jacket and shoved the paddle into the water, forcing the kayak to roll. Sky and jungle turned into water and loose pebbles, and suddenly everything was upside down. Darcy felt a quick jerk, and then her head was above water, in the twelve-inch gap of air inside the boat. But even though they could breathe, they still weren't safe. She could see the giant dinosaur splashing toward them, able to see them just as easily as they could see it. Suddenly, its three-toed foot was on top of the boat, pushing it down into the water as those huge, sharp teeth were clamping against it. Darcy screamed as the boat creaked and cracked under the pressure, while at the same time the weight from the dinosaur's foot pushed them completely underwater. The kayak was pressed into the riverbed, crushing against Darcy's ankles and pinning her in place while the creature kept trying to eat them through the boat. Darcy screamed, reaching for anything she could find, but the boat itself was completely featureless. All her fingers could find where the straps of Loki's life jacket. She held on tight, pulling them closer together while they both struggled to keep their heads above the water that was slowly rising inside the boat.

The dinosaur let go of the kayak with its teeth and lifted its head for just a moment before chomping back down again, shaking the kayak back and forth under the water. The rocks and sand on the riverbed tore and crushed against Darcy's skin, but as she screamed, she wasn't sure if it was from the pain, or from the terror of the view, straight down the animal's throat.
Suddenly, the boat was lifted away as the dinosaur lifted its foot off of it and picked the small craft right out of the water. Even as the life jacket rushed Darcy straight up to the surface again, she knew it was just a matter of seconds before those teeth closed down over her. But as the dinosaur threw the boat like it had before, it set its sights on another pair of boaters nearby.

"Come on. Get up," Loki said, grabbing Darcy by the arms and forcing her to her feet. Even as she moved, she couldn't take her eyes off the animal as it bit down on someone, tearing him in half. Darcy wanted to scream, but Loki's hand pressed hard over her mouth stopped the sound in her throat.

The water was turning red and frothy from all the blood being mixed in it, staining her shirt pink where the hem still dipped below the surface. Darcy watched it in horror, even as Loki tried to drag her out of the water and toward the shore, but suddenly the bottom of the river fell out and they lost their footing completely in a deep pool. Darcy gripped her life jacket with her free hand, trying to keep her head above the water as she watched over her shoulder to make sure the dinosaur wasn't coming back. She saw someone who had fallen out of their boat trying desperately to make it to shore when they disappeared under the surface entirely. He came back to the surface a few seconds later, screaming and thrashing for a few moments before being pulled back under like a swimmer in a Jaws movie. Darcy looked down at the deep, black water she was barely treading, remembering suddenly the giant animals that lived on tiny crawdads. Forgetting all about the mutant T-rex dinosaur, Darcy started thrashing in the water, trying to get out as quickly as possible. Instead of letting herself just be pulled away by Loki, she knew she had to actually start moving if she was going to get out of the river alive.

As she tried to swim in the bulky life jacket, something hit hard against her leg for just a second, before disappearing again.

"Something touched me!" she shouted, trying to jump right out of the water. "It touched me! Oh god, it's gonna bite me!"

"It was me," Loki said quickly, still trying to get both of them to the shore. Darcy didn't believe him, and still tried to kick at anything that might have been down there beneath them. Soon, despite her kicking and complete inability to swim in stiff, styrofoam vest, she could feel the ground beneath her feet again and started rushing toward dry land. She tried not to look down at herself, knowing she'd see blood-stained clothes, and focused just on getting back on her feet and away from the animals. But she stopped on the shore and looked back, watching the giant dinosaur kill everything it could reach. And what it couldn't reach, or what it had already killed, the thing under the water was slowly picking off.

"It's not eating," Loki said, panting heavily. "What?"

Darcy couldn't figure out what he meant by that, since people were clearly dying out there in the water. Their screams filled the jungle and could probably be heard for miles as the dinosaur bit down on people and tore them in half with its teeth.

Before she could watch much longer, Loki grabbed her by the wrist again and pulled hard, dragging her away from the river and into the jungle. It took Darcy a few steps to remember to walk with him, ignoring the throbbing bone pain in both her ankles where the boat had crushed her against the riverbed. They panted and limped quietly away into the jungle, while still trying to follow the course of the river. Darcy didn't know where Loki was taking them, but she didn't care. She just knew that they couldn't stay with the rest of the group.

They stopped walking after about ten minutes, hiding near a huge fallen tree. They both sat down on the ground, silently listening to the sounds of people dying in the distance. The dinosaur roared a few
more times, and soon, everything was quiet again. Darcy knew that they'd hear it roar again, even louder this time as it got closer to them. She could feel the pounding of its giant feet on the ground as it raced toward them, but the dinosaur never came. It was several minutes of heart-pounding suspense before Darcy realised it was her own pounding heart she could hear as adrenaline raced through her system and opened up every one of her veins and arteries so all she could hear was her own pulse.

She looked over at Loki, where he sat wide-eyed and staring up at the canopy, and realised he was probably coming to the same conclusion. She'd seen him angry and spiteful, and even sad, but she had never seen him scared before. He had scared her, when she first met him. He hadn't even done anything. He was just a big, scary guy with a big, scary punk rock attitude, and it had worked on her. But now seeing him scared only made her terrified. If Loki was scared, Darcy didn't think there was going to be any hope for either of them to get out of there alive. Not with murderous dinosaurs everywhere. She felt all that adrenaline that had got her out of the boat and out of the river suddenly drain away, and all that replaced it was a massive, crushing weight on her chest as she realised she was going to die in a Costa Rican jungle. She covered her mouth with both her hands and tried not to wail like a banshee. Despite being wet from the river, she could still feel the hot tears streaming down her face as she cried silently to herself, feeling as hopeless and lost and alone as she had ever felt in her life. Everything hurt, and it was as if her chest were collapsing entirely under the weight of everything she had just seen – everyone she had just seen get killed. Everyone. Jane and Thor had been in the back of the group, and would have been pushed straight at the giant killer dinosaur, if they weren't ripped apart by whatever was in the river. Suddenly, she couldn't hold any of it in anymore and screamed into her hands, muffling the sound into a high-pitched squeaky wine.

Darcy felt herself being pulled to one side, and even as her face crashed into the stiff nylon life jacket Loki still wore, she didn't stop crying. He felt stiff and tense beneath her, even as he wrapped both arms around her.

"We're gonna die out here, aren't we?" she said, trying to ignore the answer she knew was true.

"I don't know," Loki said.

Darcy had expected some sort of falsely reassuring lie from him, but she wasn't sure which answer would have been worse. She tried to tell herself those reassuring lies, that their bracelets would let whoever was rescuing them know where to look, but she didn't think anyone would even be looking after what had just happened. The dinosaur had eaten everybody out there on the river, including the tour guides. Letting the survivors die in the jungle would just be easier than trying to deal with the crushing lawsuits that would follow after any rescue.

She forgot all about personal injury lawsuits when the sound of something stomping through the undergrowth rose over the air. Darcy jolted upright, sitting stiffly against the tree and listening with both her hands clamped tightly over her mouth. At first, she thought the big mutant T-rex was coming for them, but it wasn't big enough, whatever it was. And it was moving unevenly as it crashed along roughly the same path she and Loki had taken.

"Two of them," Loki said quietly. "I think." He sat still beside her, listening carefully to the sounds as they grew closer. Suddenly, a wide, almost unhinged grin spread across his face, and before Darcy could even think to stop him, he stood up and turned to look over the felled tree.

"Are you crazy?" Darcy hissed, trying to pull him down.

"Jesus Christ, buddy. Am I glad to see you!" someone shouted in the distance.

Darcy suddenly couldn't breathe at the sound of the strange man's voice, but she shot up to her feet
anyway. There were two people walking toward them, trying to pick their way through the jungle. One of them had a big cut on his neck, but it didn't seem to have hit anything major, and was already starting to clot. The other was leading the way, making a confident line toward their fallen tree.

"See," he said, looking over his shoulder to his injured friend. "I told you I saw someone else make it out of there."

"We didn't see anybody else," Darcy said weakly.

The first guy shook his head and shrugged almost helplessly, but didn't say anything in response. Loki nodded back and looked out in the direction of the river.

"We need to get out of here," he said, turning back to face them again with a renewed intensity. "These animals are fiercely territorial."

"So I noticed," said the man with the cut on his neck. His fingers moved up to touch the edge of the wound, only to flinch back as soon as he made contact.

"Was it the...?" Darcy said, looking away.

"No. The thing in the river," he said.

Loki climbed up out of the tree's branches and took Darcy's hands to help her back out as well. She barely even registered what they were doing, trusting Loki to know what was right.

"If we stick together, we'll have better luck getting back to the hotel," Loki said, looking around the jungle around them.

"Great," said the first guy, nodding deeper into the jungle. "Let's go."

They all started to follow him, but Darcy stopped after a few moments. "No, wait." She looked over her shoulder, back toward the river, and held her hand up in front of her face. As they had crawled out of the water and onto the banks with their backs to the river, downstream was to the right.

"Come on, princess. Let's go," the first guy said impatiently.

"No, that's the wrong way," Darcy said, certain she was right.

Loki looked at her intently, the same way he had stared at the dinosaurs and the handlers every time they were at one of the attractions – like he was trying to see right through her.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Darcy nodded. "Yeah, we're on the wrong side of the river. We have to cross it again to get back to the hotel."

"No," said the first guy, but his friend didn't seem too sure. "Look, sweetheart. You're just confused without—"

"No. I'm not," Darcy said forcefully. "We're on the wrong side of the river. Downstream is that way." She pointed off to her left, toward the south. "The hotel is on the west side of the river. That way." She jabbed one angry finger in the direction of the river.

"No it isn't," the other guy still argued.

"I'm pretty sure it is," Loki said. "She's had her nose in the park map since the minute we stepped
foot on this island. If she says we're on the wrong side, we're on the wrong side."

"You're both idiots," the guy said, taking another step deeper into the jungle. But his friend was even less convinced and stayed, looking confused between the rest of them.

"Listen," Darcy said, giving up on the first guy since there wasn't going to be any convincing him either way. "If we follow the river downstream, we'll eventually come to a place that's shallow and easy to cross. We cross there, then we follow the monorail line back to the hotel. It crosses over the river just before the ocean."

The first guy laughed ruefully and tromped off into the jungle alone, leaving the other three. Darcy watched him go, not sure what she could even say to him.

"What's your name?" Loki asked the one who remained.

"James," he said confidently.

"James, if you want to keep breathing, I would listen to her on this," Loki said, already turning to get back toward the river. "If your friend has any sense, he'll catch up with us soon enough."

Darcy followed after Loki, unsurprised when James started following them a few seconds later. As they walked through the jungle back toward the river, Darcy was acutely aware of every sound she heard and thought she heard. That dinosaur was still out there, wherever it had gone. She already knew there would be no hope in outrunning something that big. She didn't even know if she could outrun something smaller, especially with the tangled undergrowth already tripping her up every few steps.

"It wasn't eating," Loki said again as the river came back into view, flowing to their left just as Darcy had insisted.

"Tell that to all those people who are dead," James said ruefully.

Loki stopped, looking down into the water. Broken kayak parts and paddles floated lazily downstream, the only evidence of the carnage that had happened only minutes earlier.

"It was killing, but it wasn't eating," Loki said stiffly.

Darcy realised what he meant suddenly. He'd said something similar when they were in the aviary. "Like the birds wanted to do," she said quietly.

"But this wasn't territorial," Loki said.

James huffed. "How do you know? Are you some kind of expert?"

Loki looked around the serene jungle, up into the trees at the light filtering through the canopy. "Because they wouldn't have put that in here with the tourists," he said, pointing his finger across the river. "Whatever that was."

Darcy felt the rush of fear spike deep in her belly, almost making her sick. "It got out? From where?"

Loki shrugged and started walking along the riverbank, following it downstream. "How many times was that little one beneath our balcony this week? They couldn't keep it in its cage. It was inevitable that something bigger would eventually get out. Who knows what they're keeping on this island."

He walked surprisingly quickly along the bank, making it a struggle to keep up with him. But it gave
Darcy something to focus on instead of actually having to think about what he was saying.

"We have to get back before nightfall," Loki said grimly.

"Why?" James asked from behind them.

Loki took a deep breath. "Because I am an expert, and these animals aren't cold blooded. They'll stay active while we're lost and blind. And we have no idea what else is out here."

Keeping up with Loki wasn't enough to let Darcy ignore what he was saying. Worse, she knew he was right. She covered her mouth with one hand, desperate not to let either of the men hear her trying not to cry.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Notes on WordPress
Every sound Darcy heard – every bird screeching, every twig snapping – made her heart stop for a few brief seconds. Every time, she knew that giant dinosaur had come back and found them, ready to finish them off. She kept thinking about what Loki had said, about how its attack was neither out of survival nor territory. She wondered what other reasons an animal ever had to attack and kill, and as her mind raced in circles the only thing left was a psychotic rage to kill for fun. It didn't make sense though. Animals didn't kill for fun. They killed to eat, or because something wanted to eat them. That was how animals worked. Except for house cats, which apparently killed because house cats are evil. But if a house cat could be evil, why not a dinosaur? But that was stupid too. Animals weren't evil. Animals didn't follow that dichotomy, or anything even similar to it. Animals worked on instinct, and killed things for instinctual reasons.

Except that dinosaur hadn't done that. It wasn't eating, and this wasn't its territory.

The more Darcy tried to ignore it and push it from her head, the harder it was to ignore it. She had seen everything. She was right there when it came out of the jungle and bit someone in half. There was more blood than Darcy had ever seen, and that had only been the beginning. Anyone within reach of that monster had been killed. It had almost killed her and Loki. If anything, it seemed to give up out of frustration and went for the next person, like someone batting at flies in their kitchen.

Darcy's clothes were starting to dry, and the pink was turning to rust as the blood from more than two dozen other people dried in the humid air.

More than two dozen people were on that trip. And as far as Darcy knew, James and his self-important friend were the only others to get away. The only others to survive, because they were also at the front of the group. Those at the back couldn't get away as quickly. They had to paddle upstream if they wanted to escape, or else get swept right into the jaws of the monster.

Darcy tripped over a fallen branch, barely having time to catch herself with her hands before falling face first into the rocks and mud. It hardly even hurt, but she stayed there anyway, barely able to move. She just looked at the rocks as they drifted further out of focus, keeping herself stiff and quiet when all she wanted to do was crumple up into a ball and wail like a banshee. She didn't even realise she was already crying until she felt someone's hands on hers. She looked up, having to pull one of her hands free to dry her eyes, and felt sick at the hard look Loki was giving her.

"Come on," he said.

Darcy shook her head, sobbing suddenly. It felt like a knife had been driven into her chest, and that the only thing that would make it better would be to just cry uncontrollably.

"I can't," she said. She wiped her eyes again, realising only then that she had lost her glasses. She hadn't been paying attention to anything much farther away than two or three feet, that she hadn't even noticed they were missing.

Loki tugged, trying to get her to her feet. "We can't stay here. Come on." His voice was infuriatingly calm, as if he hadn't just seen everything she had.

"They were at the back," Darcy protested, doing nothing to help or hinder Loki pulling her onto her
feet. "Jane and Thor..." She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head again. "They were at the back. They couldn't..."

She didn't want to finish that thought. She couldn't. Saying those words would make it too real, even though she had seen with her own eyes just how real it had been. There was no getting away from it.

"We can't do this," Loki said, pulling even harder, managing to get her to her feet again. "Grieving is a luxury, and one we don't have right now. Right now, we have to move."

Darcy shook her head and turned to look back upstream. There was no sign that anything had happened. The water was clear, and any debris had long since been washed away in the current. But she still felt like she should be able to see something.

"We should..." she started, not even sure what she thought they should do.

"We should keep going," Loki told her snappishly. He tugged hard on her wrist, forcing her to take that first step.

Somehow, the second step came easier. And the third came even easier after that. Finally nodding, Darcy started following Loki again, not turning back around to face James as he trailed behind the both of them. He hadn't said anything since they started moving together, but none of them had really had much to say until Darcy couldn't keep it in any longer.

"We should start looking for a decent place to cross," Loki announced suddenly. Darcy noticed the stiffness in his voice, the exact same that she had heard after every fight he had with Thor. She felt so stupid about not being able to keep calm when the other two had managed it so far, that she didn't even really hear what he had said.

"I'm not going back in that water," James protested.

Darcy's mind reeled backwards until she finally processed what Loki had said. "What? Cross? Why?" she asked, knowing what was waiting in the water for them.

"They were sending cars back to pick us up," Loki said, peering across the river. "I assume that means there's a road that follows the river somewhere on the other side."

Darcy looked out over the river, calm and dark in the afternoon sun. And deep. The river started out narrow, but it was getting wider and wider as it worked its way toward the sea. Already, it seemed too wide to cross safely, unless they wanted to be fish food.

"I don't want to swim," Darcy said, grabbing the top of her life jacket before she even realised she was still wearing it.

"I ain't going in that," James said more forcefully.

"We will have to eventually," Loki pointed out.

The river began to meander to the right, taking a sharp turn for no apparent reason other than the will of the landscapers. Loki stopped and looked up at the sky, prompting Darcy and James to stop and look up as well.

"What is it?" Darcy asked.

Loki looked straight up, and then in the direction of the sun. He checked his watch, frowned, and looked at the sun again with the same discontented look on his face.
"Great," he said quietly.

Darcy looked up as well, not able to see whatever he was seeing. All she could focus on was what she kept expecting to see in the water every time she looked at it. But there was nothing there – just a calm river with unspeakable horrors hidden beneath its glassy surface.

Loki looked up at the sun once more before shaking his head and continuing to follow the river. Not sure what was going on, Darcy looked back at James. But he seemed just as lost as she was.

"What time is it?" Darcy asked cautiously as she followed after Loki.

"Nearly two," he said. He was walking faster, giving more of a clue to what he had seen than anything he'd said. Sunset was a little later in the day than it was in New York, but not that much later. They were still rapidly running out of daylight, and had no idea where they were yet. They couldn't even get to the right side of the river without risking getting attacked by whatever was in it, but if they put it off much longer, they'd never be able to cross at all.

As they walked along the river, Darcy kept her attention focused on the water. Several times, she thought she saw something break the surface for a split second, before disappearing again. Every time, it happened so quickly she couldn't tell what sort of creature had popped up, or if anything even had surfaced at all. The more she watched the water, the more she started seeing things that probably weren't even there. Taking a deep breath and trying to force everything out of her mind, she focused on the monotony of one foot in front of the other. She had to keep walking, because there was no other choice. And somehow knowing that she couldn't just stop made it a little easier to keep going.

Soon, the terrain on their side of the river became a little less man-made and more forged-by-nature, forcing them away from the bank and further into the jungle onto higher ground. The trail they blazed climbed higher and higher into dense undergrowth, slowing them down even more. At times, the river was almost a straight vertical drop beneath them, at the end of at least a twenty foot ledge. Darcy had to keep her eyes averted entirely, trying to find a balance between looking up at the canopy, away from the deadly drop, and watching where her feet were going so she didn't fall.

She almost laughed when she realised she was just a single misstep away from being dragged onto the worst water slide ever.

"Loki, I got bad news," she said as she carefully stepped over a large, jagged rock jutting out through the mud.

He looked over his shoulder, looking vaguely alarmed. "What is it?" he asked.

"I am really, really not having any fun right now," Darcy said, trying to sound like she was being playful. "You're falling down on the job."

Loki actually looked relieved as he turned back around to continue along their dangerous path. "I think our contract is officially void," he said.

"What contract? What's going on?" James asked.

"Oh. Dumb joke. On our way out of New York, I told him it was his job to make sure I had fun on this trip," Darcy explained. "But someone insisted the dinosaurs would do that job for him."

"How was I supposed to know the dinosaurs would be crap?" Loki grumbled.

Darcy wanted to laugh. She should have laughed, but she could barely managed an amused huff. An hour ago, his remark would have been funny, but now it was entirely too real. The dinosaurs were
crap, along with the entire park. And now they were lost and stranded because the same idiots who put the pool a half mile away from the hotel had designed a river boating trip with no contingencies in place for people who got lost and stranded. Nothing on the entire island seemed to have had any thought put into it, outside of the typical corporate bullshit of trying to get as much money from as many people as possible.

She let herself stew on her anger, because anger made it easier to keep going. Anger at the negligence that led up to what had happened made it a little easier to momentarily forget why she was angry. Having someone to blame gave her a reason to get back, so she could find a phone and call her boss so everyone in the world would know what had happened.

The terrain began to get difficult again, forcing them away from the river and into the jungle once more, hoping to find a safer route back down. The air was getting sticky under the thick canopy, and the smell of decaying plant matter filled the air as it baked inside the natural, humid oven. It would have almost been nice, if she had wanted to be there in the first place. But nobody had asked her. She'd simply been thrown into this situation with no way out but to walk however many miles it was back to the hotel. As they walked, her quiet anger began to fade as something else started vying for her attention. Something familiar, but she couldn't place it, or work out why it was familiar – just that she knew it was something she should have recognised.

"Wait," Loki said, stopping suddenly on a steep slope. Darcy quickly stopped, grabbing onto a nearby tree to keep from falling forward under her own momentum. James wasn't as quick to stop, and if not for the tree, they both would have crashed into Loki and fallen down the hill in an angry tangle.

"What?" Darcy asked before she even managed to regain her balance.

"I think we've crossed one of their invisible fences," Loki said, looking intently into the jungle to their left.

"What? Did you get shocked?" James asked facetiously. "How could you possibly know that?"

Loki ignored him, still focused intently on something in the distance. The longer they stood there, the more Darcy felt like they should be running. Like something didn't want them there, and was screaming for them to leave.

Then she noticed it; the thing she thought she should recognise, overpowered by everything else. The thing she did recognise, and understood completely. Beneath the smell of natural decay, there was something else, acrid and powerful. It smelled almost exactly like Loki's disgusting leather jacket. At first, she thought she was just imagining it; that her mind was building new horrors to keep her moving away from the first horror. But suddenly, Loki sprang into action, all but running down the steep slope.

"Move. Now!" he called out.

Darcy tugged on James' wrist before quickly following Loki down the slope, moving much more slowly as she tried to find a solid footing before making each step.

"What the hell is going on?" James asked, following closely behind her. "Who the hell is this guy?"

"He's an expert," Darcy said sharply.

No sooner had she spoken, a strange, alien sound rose up through the trees. It wasn't quite a bark, nor a growl, nor a hiss, but all three at once. Something out there had noticed them, and a few
seconds later, another animal made the same noise, even farther off. Darcy forgot all about watching where her feet were going and started lunging down the steep slope, arms splayed out to keep her balance as she made a barely controlled descent back down toward the river. Soon, she could hear the rushing water off to their right again, somewhere through the thick trees and tall ferns. She caught up with Loki as he all but fell into a large, spindly fern at the bottom of the slope, stopping just enough to catch his footing and look back to see that Darcy and James were still with him. But when the animal called out again, this time closer, the three of them hesitated no further before making a dash toward the river, jumping over fallen branches and tearing through the low vegetation. Darcy vaguely thought, as she barely managed to get over a fallen log without falling on her face, that she would break an ankle if she wasn't careful. But there was no time for careful. There was just enough time to run.

The finally broke through the undergrowth and stumbled out to the bank of the river, finding the section completely impassable. The water was quick, rolling over exposed rocks and through the tangled branches of a tree that had fallen a few yards away. It lay only a few feet into the water, not nearly enough to cross to the other side, but enough that it had managed to catch hold of some debris that had floated downstream. Darcy wanted to look away, afraid that amongst the pieces of wrecked kayak and blue nylon, she'd see what remained of a person. But something else caught her eye instead. Something translucent and glinting as the sun caught it. Without thinking, Darcy rushed into the knee-deep water, barely conscious of her feet slipping on the mossy rocks covering the riverbed.

"We can't cross here!" James shouted awkwardly from the riverbank.

Darcy ignored him and got to the tree, bending to hold onto it as she walked further into the current toward the tangle of branches. This close, she could see that she was right, and snatched her hand out before the current could sweep the item away.

"Not crossing," she said, looking at the camera and finding it in one piece. "Gathering evidence."

She tied the camera's wrist strap to one of the straps on her life jacket and quickly made her way back to the bank as both of the animals in the jungle called out to one another, getting closer and closer. The bank on their side of the river was mostly clear, and without taking a moment to confer with one another, the three of them all began to run along the water's edge. The swift current continued in what was probably supposed to be the "white water" part of the ride, making crossing all but impossible. As the dinosaurs got even closer, calling out to one another, the three of them were rapidly running out of escape routes. Even as they ran, Darcy grabbed onto the camera dangling at her hip and clumsily wound up the next exposure. She wasn't even sure why she though she should be taking pictures while they fled for their lives. But she knew that if they managed to make it back alive, she'd have something valuable to sell.

In the distance, a new sound began to rise up through the air. At first, it sounded like a new animal stalking them, but as the sound became clearer and the sound of helicopter rotors pounded over the jungle, Darcy dared to think someone was looking for them. But the helicopter was on the wrong side of the river, heading north, and soon faded away again. Darcy wanted to stop and take just a few moments to despair, but the dinosaurs calling out to one another kept her going.

The terrain again took a sharp drop, about five or six feet straight down alongside a waterfall that fed into a large, open area of river. Without pausing, Loki dropped down first onto the rocky ledge below. When Darcy came to the drop, she found Loki waiting for her below, and eagerly took his help getting down. James jumped down on his own, rushing ahead of Darcy and Loki as he followed the river further downstream. The thought that they were going to have to cross, regardless of the safety of the river was on Darcy's mind as she followed after James, running almost blindly away from whatever was chasing after them. The animals cried out again and again, getting closer by
the second, and suddenly, James darted back toward the jungle. Darcy jumped, not sure what she was expecting, and yet somehow surprised when nothing leapt out of the water at them.

"Up here!" James shouted as he climbed a tree, scaling its huge, tower-like roots to get to the branches.

The lowest branches were more than ten feet off the ground, stopping Darcy in her tracks.

"I can't!" she called up.

Without warning, she was grabbed tightly around the waist, drawing a terrified scream from her before she realised Loki was lifting her to be able to climb up onto the roots and reach the branch. She grabbed onto it, wrapping both arms around it and pulled herself up. Listening to what sounded now like three dinosaurs coming after them, Darcy quickly scrambled as high as she could into the branches, making way for Loki to get up.

"This is stupid!" she shouted. "How do we know we're not just putting ourselves right at mouth-level?"

"We don't," Loki said below her. "Do you have a better idea?"

Not having a better idea, she kept climbing as high as she dared until she started to feel dizzy. Grabbing onto the nearest branch, she held on with both arms, torn between keeping her eyes closed so she didn't have to look down, and keeping them open so she could see what was about to eat them. Down below, she could see the undergrowth begin to move as three striped dinosaurs, a fraction the size of whatever it was that had come at them in the river, began circling around beneath the tree. They were smaller, but not exactly small, and shaped kind of like a T-rex. They called out to one another, looking up into the tree and snapping their jaws angrily.

Darcy felt Loki's hand on her again, and she looked down to see him untying her camera from her side. Before she could ask what he was doing, he snapped a picture of the dinosaurs that were trying to eat them.

"Whatever you're planning, I want in," he said.

Darcy nodded weakly. "Okay," she said, watching the dinosaurs beneath them and trying not to think about falling straight into their jaws. "Get me out alive, and you can have half."

"Deal," Loki said. He wound up the camera and took another shot, as the dinosaurs below them tried to leap up and snatch them right out of the air.

Chapter End Notes
Darcy could see the river from high in her perch. If she jumped right, she could probably even land in it. It wouldn't be a soft landing, but she'd at least hit water before she hit rock. She watched the water, and the swarm of gnats dancing on its surface while she tried to ignore the hissing, shrieking dinosaurs below them. They'd started charging at the tree, trying to jump up it, but their stubby little arms and stiff backs made it impossible for them to climb. So it was a waiting game, to see who gave up first. Either the dinosaurs would eventually get bored and wander away, or Darcy's arms would get tired from holding onto the branch and she'd fall straight down to become mini T-rex food. Darcy leaned against the tree's trunk, trying not to feel so hopeless. She could hear the click of the camera's shutter again, and when she looked down, she saw Loki had pointed it up at her and James.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Loki shrugged. "There's not much else to do," he said.

He managed to tie the camera to one of his belt loops before climbing up higher to be a little closer to Darcy. Sighing, Darcy leaned against the tree again, trying to prepare for the inevitable. The dinosaurs weren't going to go away. They were going to camp out below until they got what they wanted. Darcy could hear James moving uncomfortably above her, followed by the snap of a branch. She looked up, expecting to see him falling to the ground, but he was fine. He'd broken a smaller branch off, and held it up in one hand. After a few moments of waiting, he threw it down at one of the dinosaurs, hitting it square in the face and pissing it off even more. It hissed and shrieked as it jumped straight up at him, snapping its jaws angrily. While it tried to attack something it couldn't reach, the other two dinosaurs stood up as tall as they could and looked out over the river. Darcy realised they could hear something, but when she looked out at the water, she couldn't see anything. The water was still smooth and calm, with no sign of anything that might have put the dinosaurs on edge.

Suddenly, the third one stopped griping at James and went silent as well, and that's when Darcy could hear it too. To the north, where the helicopter had gone, Darcy could hear a familiar shrieking. Every muscle in her body froze as the sound of angry, prehistoric birds rose over the jungle, heading straight toward them. She couldn't tell how many there were, but one would have been enough. Either way, it was clear they had somehow managed to escape as well.

The dinosaurs on the ground quickly forgot all about their dangling prey and started shrieking toward the river. Through the thin gap in the trees, Darcy could see the small flock of evil dinosaur birds heading their way, shrieking and squawking as well. Above her, James started to move again, and looking up at him, Darcy realised he was trying to climb down.

"No, are you crazy?" Darcy asked, refusing to get out of his way.

One of the dinosaurs on the ground looked up at them and made its barking sound a few more times before turning its attention back to the flock of pterodactyls quickly heading their way. After a few moments, Darcy realised the birds were headed directly their way, making a line straight toward the tree they were all in. Before she could rethink her plan to stay put, Loki climbed up to her level, putting himself between her and the giant birds as they started to swoop into the jungle. Darcy could hear them screaming all around her, and feel the wind from their giant wings as they sped past. Then, she could hear them crashing and tumbling, and looking up, she saw that the jungle was too dense.
for them to fly properly. They couldn’t manoeuvre through the trees and fell out of the air as they tried to dodge around them, exciting the dinosaurs on the ground. Those that managed to get out came back around again for a second pass, coming dangerously close to colliding with the tree. James started to push past Darcy and Loki, making his way quickly down to the ground, but was knocked off by one of the birds and fell screaming to the ground. Darcy turned away, burying her face in Loki's chest as his screams turned to tearing flesh and throaty gurgles as he was eaten alive below them. And still, underneath it all, she heard a single, mechanical click, followed by a short ratchet. Part of Darcy wanted to scream about it, but the rest of her just wanted to ignore everything.

The dinosaurs that weren’t tearing James to pieces were fighting amongst one another. The small T-rex dinosaurs were quick and light on the ground, taking cheap shots at the pterodactyls as they stumbled about on their wings, trying to get out of the dense undergrowth. The combined shrieking of the animals was deafening, and Darcy was powerless to do anything as she sat frozen in the tree above.

"Come on," Loki said quickly, moving down the tree.

Darcy shook her head and held on even tighter. She wasn’t going to go anywhere while those animals were nearby. They'd eaten now, which meant they'd go away. They wouldn't care about her and Loki any more. They just had to wait a little bit longer.

"We have to go. Now," Loki insisted.

Rather than waiting for her, he started making his way back down to the ground. Darcy watched him pause at the lowest branch, where he watched the melee happening all around them. When none of the dinosaurs on the ground seemed to notice him at all, Loki dropped down and crouched down at the base of the tree, hidden behind the spire-like roots that climbed high up its sides. Instead of going after him, the dinosaurs still kept fighting amongst one another, tearing and slashing at one another with beaks and teeth.

"Hurry," Loki insisted, looking up at Darcy.

Taking a deep, steeling breath, Darcy nodded and started to make her way back down. Climbing up had been easy. Climb down, when she new how high they had gone, and when she could see what was happening beneath her made each motion feel almost painful. She felt like she was going to be sick, and kept her focus on Loki, so she didn't have to see anything else that was happening.

As she neared the lowest branches, she felt her foot slip out from under her. She could feel herself falling, and screamed even as she wrapped her arms around the branch she was holding onto. The shock on her shoulders was enough to make her scream again, and when she dared to look down, she thought some of the dinosaurs might have turned their eyes back toward her. She looked down at Loki, crouched beneath the tree again, and knew they didn't have much time if they wanted to get out of there in one piece. Taking a deep breath, Darcy let go, allowing herself to fall straight to the ground. She crumpled as soon as her feet touched dirt, but she didn’t stay down for long. Loki grabbed her by the arm and started running before she was even up again, the force pulling her to her feet. It took a few strides before she was able to move under her own power and match his speed, but that was all she needed to get running again. She could hear the screeching and snarling behind them, and when she looked back, one of the pterodactyls had broken away from the melee and began lumbering after them, bouncing on its wings as it awkwardly gave chase. It snapped its huge beak each time it lunged, shrieking and snarling angrily. Turning away from it, Darcy ran back toward the river with Loki. They kept to the undergrowth, able to move around the tight spaces more easily than the awkward bird that chased them, allowing them to put some distance between them and it. The further away from it they got, the more angry and desperate its cries became, until it
finally gave up and lumbered toward the river instead.

Even without it following them, they didn't slow down. Darcy and Loki continued to make a mad break through the jungle, putting as much distance between them and the warring packs of dinosaurs behind them. As the noise faded behind them, they began to make their way out of the underbrush and back toward the river again, once more hoping to find a safe place to cross. But the further south they followed the river, the wider and deeper it got. The water looked almost black as it swirled around, the swift current giving itself away where the surface texture suddenly changed toward the middle. On the edges of the river, the water was smooth and glassy, but it didn't stay that way. Darcy stopped as she watched the river, wanting to cry at the thought of being stuck on the wrong side forever.

"I can't," she said, shaking her head. "I can't do this."

Loki took her by the hand and gently pulled, trying to get her moving again. "We can't stay here," he said.

Darcy shook her head again. "I can't," she repeated.

Sighing, Loki pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her shoulders.

"It's going to start getting dark soon," he said. Rather than being comforting, he'd opted for being practical. It wasn't what Darcy wanted to hear, but she still knew he was right. "If we stop, those things will come back."

"Okay," Darcy said, nodding weakly. "That thing is in the water though. And if we go in..."

"I know," Loki told her.

He let go of her and started walking along the riverbank again, as if nothing had happened. Taking a deep breath to try to pull herself together, Darcy followed after him. She moved slowly, barely able to put one foot in front of the other, even as her heart pounded in her chest like it wanted to escape. But she couldn't keep running. Everything hurt and she was tired, and she felt like if she kept going, she'd die from exhaustion before the dinosaurs even had a chance to eat her.

"I don't even know what I'd tell Jane's mom," she realised suddenly.

"It's not up to you to tell her anything," Loki said, almost flippantly.

"I don't care! I can't just let some random cop tell her what happened!" Darcy argued, struggling to hold back the wall of raw emotion that kept threatening to crush her.

Loki shook his head and glanced back at her. "You can't think about this. Not now," he said.

"Seriously?" Darcy demanded. She could feel the hot tears streaming down her face. "You can't tell me that you don't care at all about what happened back there!" She swung her arm back, jabbing a finger angrily back toward where they had come.

Loki stopped and turned around sharply. "Yes! I hated Thor. But when I told him I never wanted to see him again, I didn't exactly mean that I wanted any of this to happen!" He snapped. "But we can't do this right now. Grieve later. Right now, we have to survive." He swatted angrily at the air between them and turned to face the water.

Darcy nodded, feeling strangely better for seeing Loki lose his calm. It meant he wasn't the emotionless robot he'd been acting like, but suddenly she realised he probably just didn't know how
else to behave right now. Somehow, she had forgotten that for all their antagonism and vitriol, Thor was Loki's brother. And he had seen exactly the same thing she had out on the water.

"Okay," she said quietly.

She started walking again, taking Loki's hand as she passed him so she didn't feel like she was actually leading the way.

"Sorry," she said. "I just..."

She didn't know how to finish that thought, and was glad when Loki didn't respond to it. They walked silently together, moving a bit more slowly than they should have done. But they were both clearly out of energy, moving only because they had to. Darcy wanted to try to find a safe place to rest, if only for a few minutes, but she knew a few minutes would become a half hour, which would become several hours, and then they'd be stranded in the dark. And if that happened, they wouldn't be getting out of the jungle alive.

"You know the worst part?" Darcy said, not sure why the thought had popped into her head. "We were originally thinking of maybe going to California. Seaworld and the San Diego Zoo, and all that. But I didn't want to go to Seaworld because of what they do to their whales. And I was afraid I might see something to wrong."

Loki snorted. "Just wait until the Blackfish documentary for this place comes out," he said.

As the ground grew softer, Darcy let go of Loki's hand so she could keep her balance better. The river looked like it might be getting safer to cross, but even with her life jacket still on, she didn't trust herself not to get swept away by some unseen current, and tossed out to sea. But as the river grew ever wider and deeper, she knew they'd need to cross sooner rather than later, if they wanted to ever cross at all. She looked up at the sky, trying to find the sun through the dense trees, but she couldn't see any sign of it. A sign which she took to mean that at it was starting to get low on the horizon.

"We need to think about crossing soon," Loki said distantly.

"I know." Darcy looked out at the water once more, feeling her every muscle tense at the thought of what waited for them in the dark. "I keep hoping we'll find the end of the ride, so we can cross there."

"I'll make you a deal," Loki said in a tone that made Darcy think she wasn't going to like it. "We either cross at the next shallow place we find, or as soon as we see a car on the other side we can steal."

Darcy wanted to object to the thought of stealing a car, but given the situation, she knew it would be their best chance.

"Otherwise, we cross at dusk, regardless of the river conditions."

"How long do you think that is?" Darcy asked.

Loki glanced down at his watch. "About two hours," he said. "Maybe less."

Darcy nodded. "Okay," she agreed. Two hours was a long time. They could probably go another two or three miles by then, by which time they should have found what they needed.

A bird screeched suddenly overhead, making Darcy duck instinctually before she realised it was just a regular old jungle bird – the sort that had been screeching all week. Before she could even stand up
again, Loki was right there with his hands on her shoulders, trying to urge her forward once more. Taking a deep, uneasy breath, Darcy let him nudge her along the edge of the river. Having him so close made her feel just a little bit safer, even knowing they could be moments away from danger. She didn't even want to think about what might have happened to her if she were alone out there, trying to get back completely on her own. She didn't know anything about the jungle. She could at least pretend that Loki did, even if he was making it all up as he went along. Which he probably was, since he was just as much of a city kid as she was. The only advantage he had was a singular weird hobby with very limited applications. Everything he said was just guesses, but his guesses were better than Darcy's. On that alone, she felt like she wanted him in charge.

Eventually, he let go of her, but he stayed close as they walked along the water's edge. The jungle had begun to come alive again with the sounds of birds, painting a deceptive picture of serenity. But every time something moved in the jungle, or splashed in the water, Darcy leapt up and squeezed Loki's hand, refusing to let go. The whole island had lost its sparkle, and Darcy didn't want to see a single wild animal again, until she was far, far away from the park.

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There were no more bright patches; no sunlight pouring through the gaps in the trees. Though the sky above, in the thin canopy opening directly above the river was still a darkening shade of blue, within the jungle it was growing difficult to make anything out through the shadows. Despite this, at times, Darcy wasn't even completely sure that it was the sunlight making it difficult to keep moving. Every part of her hurt, and she was starving and exhausted from moving constantly all day. The headache right between her eyes was slowly turning into a migraine from the strain of trying to find her way without her glasses, and all she wanted to do was bend down to the river and just take one drink.

But she didn't dare. Not when she knew what was upstream. Not when she knew what was in the water. She wished she had thought to bring a snack for the tour, or at least an over-priced bottle of water. But it was only supposed to last three hours.

A three-hour tour that ended in catastrophic disaster. Only this wasn't a sitcom. There were no convenient coconuts, or picturesque lagoons for fishing. No brilliant scientist able to build a radio out of whatever junk he found lying around near the water. The only thing that would save them from their shipwreck was their own dogged determination to get out of the jungle.

Darcy had stopped looking out for animals, and started looking up into the trees, hoping to find a banana or something. She didn't even expect anything she did find to be safe to eat, but she was so hungry, she was starting to feel willing to take that risk. It was stupid and dangerous, and she knew she wasn't thinking straight. But she felt like if she didn't eat something soon, she'd start having a hard time continuing.

"I have to pee," she announced suddenly.

Loki stopped and nodded. "Don't wander far."

"God, no."

Darcy hesitantly walked a few paces into the jungle, finding a large tree to hide behind. She did have to pee, but it wasn't the real reason she wanted to get away. Even as she started unbuttoning her pants, she could feel herself start to tremble from her fingertips to her toes. Before she even managed to get her butt near the ground, the tears started falling. She buried her face in her hands and tried not to make any sound that Loki might hear, but having to pop a squat in the middle of what was supposed to be her luxury vacation was only highlighting how catastrophically badly her trip had gone. She was going to die in this damn jungle. Hope of ever getting out alive was fading by the minute, leaving just an empty, yet impossibly heavy void in her chest.

She stayed where she was far longer than she needed to, trying to calm down even as her legs burned angrily from squatting down at the ground. Already feeling about as gross as it was possible to get, with her clothes stained with other people's blood, Darcy lifted her pants and quietly buttoned up again while trying to purge the very last of her emotions. She rubbed her face with the backs of her hands, trying to dry her eyes and wipe away any sign of what had just happened. When she came back out of the vegetation, she spotted Loki standing ankle-deep in the river, looking straight down into the water. Darcy didn't want to know what he saw in there, and was almost afraid to even approach him. She knew he was going to try to make her cross the river, which at this point was
more than 50 feet across and full of rocks.

But when he turned to her, he didn't say anything about the river or the other side. He just looked at her almost questioningly. Nodding weakly, Darcy hunched into her life jacket and started walking along the river again, going slowly as she stepped over the rocks hidden deceptively in the shadows. A few moments later, Loki started following after her, keeping pace with her a little easier than she'd been able to keep pace with him when he was leading.

As Darcy stepped down on what looked like a shadow, her foot slipped violently out from under her and in between two of the basketball-sized rocks that made up the shore. She threw her hands out to catch herself, but stopped before she even started to fall. It took her a moment before she realised that Loki had grabbed onto the top of her life jacket and was holding her up so she could regain her footing.

"I'd suggest crossing now, but it doesn't look much better on the other side," Loki said.

Darcy looked out to the opposite bank, able to see the same mess of rocks and small boulders. While their landscaper had done a phenomenal job at creating a river that would have made a beautiful sight-seeing trip, he obviously hadn't accounted for anyone trying to get from one end to the other by foot. It made Darcy wonder if they even had a contingency plan for someone sneaking off from the group to go take an unsanctioned wander in the jungle. Considering how difficult it was to just walk along the water's edge, Darcy couldn't imagine trying to get anywhere through the jungle itself. She especially couldn't imagine trying to chase down someone who had gone off wandering where they weren't supposed to.

Each step was slowly turning into a controlled stumble as the bank rose higher and higher above the river, basketball-sized rocks turning into piles of sharp stones. As Darcy slipped on another one, something new called out from the jungle. It wasn't the deafening roar of the thing that had attacked them on the river, or the kind of barking growls of the smaller ones. This thing hissed and gurgled, almost like a set of loud pipes on a motorcycle. The sound carried through the trees, echoing off of everything as if it came from all around them. It was a sound Darcy thought she'd heard before. She looked back at Loki, hoping he had some kind of magic solution to the problem, but he wasn't looking at her. He was looking down at the water, frantically searching for something that wasn't there. Thinking something was going to come out and eat them, Darcy started climbing up the slope faster, dropping down to her hands so she didn't have to keep her balance.

"What was it?" Darcy asked.

Whatever it was was hissed again – a low, throaty sound that definitely was not coming from anything friendly.

"Crocodile," Loki said breathlessly.

He climbed quickly, threatening to overtake Darcy. But instead, he hooked one hand under the bottom of her life jacket and started pushing her up the slope faster, his weight behind her giving her a little more confidence to move faster.

The growling turned into a terrifying roar as something crashed through the trees at them. A giant, two-footed crocodile as long as a school bus, and with a bright blue face leapt out at them with all its teeth bared. Loki threw himself down on top of Darcy, slamming her into the rocks before she could brace herself. The dinosaur was on top of them in an instant, its giant four-toed foot inches from Darcy's face as it's long, toothy snout bit down around them. Darcy screamed, trying to squirm away out from the weight Loki and the dinosaur. Suddenly, she felt something give way, and Loki was pushing her away, further up the slope. She started to run, glancing back even though she knew
better not to, but was surprised when Loki was following behind her. His life jacket was in the
dinosaur's mouth as it reared up again and shook its head violently back and forth. It soon realised
that what it had in its mouth was not food, and threw the blue vinyl vest away before giving chase
again.

Without warning, Loki grabbed onto Darcy and pulled her hard toward the high, rocky ledge over
the river.

"Jump. Now!" he shouted, giving the example and leaping off into the water.

Darcy hesitated, afraid of what would be waiting for them below. She looked back at the giant
monster chasing her, and suddenly forgot all about whatever was in the water. She stumbled
backwards toward the ledge, turning too late before jumping off. As she fell, something felt like it
caught hard on the ledge, and she could feel her entire body jerking and twisting her so she fell face-
first into the water. The sudden force of the impact filled her sinuses and throat with water. She
fought the instinct to inhale for more air as she struggled to get her head above water, with her life
jacket trying to hold her face down. Every time she tried to kick her legs to right herself, she could
feel a lightning hot pain run straight from her toes to her spine.

Something else splashed down beside her, throwing up a wave that pushed her out of the water for
just a moment, before sucking her back under again. She flailed and thrashed frantically, still trying
to find the surface even as the water rushed around her from all directions. Suddenly, Darcy felt
something pull on her hard. She screamed under the water, letting out what precious air she had as
she flung her arms around as hard as she could. But her head was suddenly above the water, facing
the darkening sky. She coughed and sputtered, her lungs and face burning from the water she
practically vomited out. Still kicking even as the pain from it made her vision grey at the edges,
Darcy tried to get away from the thing that had her in its grip.

"Stop it!" Loki shouted.

Darcy turned sharply, surprised to see him holding onto her life jacket again as he tried to swim on
his back toward the shore. Trying to help, instead of hinder, Darcy tried to put her effort into
swimming toward the shore as well. She looked back toward the east bank, finding a renewed
energy at seeing the blue-faced crocodile dinosaur heading straight toward them, much faster in the
water than she and Loki could have ever hoped to be.

Suddenly, it was pulled aside and under the water. As it thrashed, an even bigger crocodile monster
reared its head out of the water and bit down hard on the smaller one's neck. Darcy recognised its
black and yellow pattern from earlier in the day, and screamed at the sight of it mere feet away from
her. She kicked her left foot and splashed backwards frantically, not sure if she was trying to get
away or frighten it away.

"Come on," Loki said.

Darcy could feel his weight changing behind her, and realised they had come close enough to the
west bank to start to make a run for it. She turned around to face the shore, but as soon as she put her
right foot down to step forward, she screamed in unbridled agony as every nerve on her right side felt
as if it had been lit on fire. Loki turned sharply and grabbed her to help her to her feet, but even with
help she couldn't stand. Instead of trying to figure it out, Loki picked her up from the water and half-
dragged her to dry land as the two dinosaurs behind them thrashed and screamed as they fought to
the death. Every step Loki took sent shocks of pain through Darcy, blocking everything else out
from her attention. Once they were far enough away from the river, Loki put Darcy down on the
ground and moved to her side while he tried to move both her legs out in front of her. Even as he
touched her, all Darcy could feel was pain.
"Oh, fuck," Loki breathed quietly.

"What?" Darcy asked.

She kept her eyes clenched shut and tried to breathe through her nose, hoping it would make the pain ease up a bit. And then she could feel Loki touch her leg and everything came rushing back again. Darcy looked down, ready to accuse Loki of doing something horrific, but the words died on her tongue. She buried her mouth and nose in the crook of her arm and leaned her head as far back as she could as her stomach roiled at the sight of jagged, broken bone piercing through her flesh.

"I don't know what to do," Loki said hopelessly. "Do I put it back? What do I do?"

Darcy shook her head violently, trying to find her voice again. "No, don't," she said, thinking she might actually die if he tried.

Loki glanced back toward the river and nodded. "I– I need to tie it off."

It sounded like a better option, so Darcy nodded. She watched as Loki searched himself frantically for something that might work as a tourniquet, only to come up empty. After a few moments, he turned his attention back to her and quickly unbuckled her life jacket. He pulled one of the straps free from its loops and tied it tightly just below her knee. When he was done, he unbuckled the other two straps and helped Darcy out of the life jacket. Since they were finally where they needed to be, she didn't object, even if she didn't do anything to actively help him. Loki flung the life jacket into the water and got up, moving stiffly. He watched the battle in the water as it wound down for a few more moments before bending again to pick Darcy up, growling quietly to himself as he moved. She managed to help him as much as she could, keeping her weight on her left side as Loki turned around. He picked her up to carry her on his back, hoisting her up sharply and jostling her painfully as he hooked his arms under her legs. Darcy held on tightly around his neck, trying not to choke him, even though she felt like she had to hold onto him as tightly as she could to stay alive. Every step Loki took over the rocks was agony, shaking and jarring the broken bones until Darcy was sobbing into the back of Loki's shoulders. Even as the terrain mellowed out again, turning once more to sticky, soft mud, Darcy could barely stand the movement of being carried. The smallest motion set bone grinding against bone and tearing already abused flesh. Darcy could feel her foot going numb, but even through the numbness she could feel the constant burning pain coming from her ankle and radiating outward in all directions.

"We're going to keep going," Loki said, panting heavily. He was sagging beneath Darcy's weight, and his voice sounded rough and forced. Darcy couldn't help but feel bad, knowing he'd already been exhausted even before he had to start carrying her. "We'll find something soon."

He didn't sound entirely convinced, but Darcy didn't want to think about that. She just thought about getting back to the hotel and away from Jurassic World, and Costa Rica, and everything else south of Brooklyn. She wasn't going to think about the what ifs. She just grit her teeth and tried to keep everything clamped down so Loki didn't have to listen to her pathetic whimpers and crying anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Notes on Wordpress. Overall notes:

This is going to be the last fic I serialise to AO3. I'll still be posting here, and won't be taking anything down. But I'll no longer be posting WIPs here. WIPs will go on my
WordPress blog, and won't be posted to AO3 until they've been finished, and will be uploaded all at once. This is a decision I made alongside the decision to delete my Tumblr account. I'm pretty much entirely on WP now, with crossposts to DW and LJ.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

I put up a straw poll, and the results were overwhelming in favour of just uploading the rest of the fic, so that's what I'll be doing today. There are only five chapters left, and tbh, this will give me a little bit more time to focus on finish my next fic.

As night fell, the jungle grew calm and quiet. The birds all stopped squawking as shadows faded to darkness. The sound of the wind in the leaves grew more pronounced, rustling everything as if the entire jungle were moving. Darcy listened for the sound of anything following them as Loki carried her, moving more and more slowly as they continued along their path to nowhere. Darcy didn't even have the energy to feel the pain in her leg, and felt only the numb exhaustion that threatened to consume her. With the side of her face resting against the back of Loki's shoulder, she held onto him loosely, trusting him not to drop her, and trying to do anything other than fall asleep.

He paused every few yards to catch his breath, taking five or six steps and then stopping for a few seconds to breathe again. It was as if they weren't in a jungle at sea level, but on top of Everest, struggling to reach the top with no air in the atmosphere to breathe.

"We need a new plan," Darcy said blandly, knowing that any plan they came up with would just end the same.

"It can't be that much farther," Loki argued breathlessly.

"Are you sure? Maybe you'd be faster if you just left me here." Darcy didn't exactly expect to get out alive either way, but at least Loki might be able to if he didn't have to keep carrying her through the mud.

"The island's not that big," Loki said, ignoring her implications entirely.

Darcy lifted her head to look out in front of them, but all she could see was shadow of the trees against the starry night's sky. Everything else was black. But at least the terrain had levelled out again, making the going somewhat easier. There were no more rocks to climb over or trip on. Maybe Loki was right. Maybe they were getting there.

Something splashed in the water to their left, prompting Loki to freeze in his tracks. Darcy tensed up, suddenly feeling wide awake as she looked over to try to see anything in the darkness. But the water was still and calm again, and after a few moments of letting her pounding heart calm back down, Darcy realised the splash sounded more like a fish than anything else. Fish had to eat too, after all.

Darcy tightened her grip around Loki and leaned against him once more, wishing she could do more than just be a lump he had to carry around. She wanted to apologise, but didn't know how to do it without sounding even more pathetic than she already was, so she kept her mouth shut and let Loki focus on trying not to fall on his face and break her other leg.

"The ground is definitely getting harder," he announced, already moving more quickly across it.

Darcy looked up again and realised that the trees around them were thinning out as well. The
darkness nearby seemed a little less dark, as more light from the sky was able to trickle down toward
them. Darcy still couldn't make out any individual details, but she felt her mood already rising at the
very thought that they'd finally made it to the pickup point.

But then her heart sank all over again. Would anybody even still be there to pick them up? She
realised that even if they were where they were supposed to be at the end of the ride, the best they
could hope for was to find the road back toward the hotel. Which meant walking through the jungle
in the dark, with nothing to protect themselves. They'd have to spend the night next to the river,
hoping nothing found them out in the open while they waited for the sun to come up. For the first
time, it occurred to her that they should have stayed where the dinosaur had first tried to eat
everybody. Anybody searching for them would have looked up there first. Nobody would be
expecting them to have walked all the way down the river to the pick-up spot, six hours later.

Suddenly, Loki stumbled and forced Darcy to start paying attention again. She gripped onto him as
tightly as she could, waiting for the impact when they both fell. But he managed to right himself
without dropping her, if only barely. Once he had his balance back, he turned around and looked
down at whatever he had tripped over.

"I think we're close," he said stiffly.

Darcy tried to look down as well, but her angle made it difficult to see anything in the dark, and Loki
started moving away too quickly.

"What was it?" Darcy asked.

"Nothing," Loki said.

She tried to turn around to look, but she couldn't without feeling like she was going to tip them both
over. Forgetting about it, Darcy looked ahead again, watching over Loki's shoulder as they slowly
moved forward. Suddenly, somewhere in the near distance, something flashed red – quick and dim,
but definitely there.

"Did you see that?" Darcy asked.

Loki stopped and looked off to their right. "See what?" he asked.

Darcy pointed toward where she had seen the light, trying to keep her hand close enough to Loki's
face so he could see where she was pointing. "There. Something flashed," she said.

They both stood still and silent as they watched the darkness in front of them. Seconds dragged on
with nothing happening, making Darcy wonder if she had just imagined seeing anything. Between
stress and hunger and blood loss, her mind was surely playing tricks on her.

Then, it flashed again. Just a single red light, blipping into existence just long enough to be seen.
Loki quickly made his way toward it, looking around in all directions as they got closer. Soon, Darcy
could see the outline of a giant SUV ahead of them, sitting entirely out of place in the dark jungle.
Loki ran the last few steps toward the car, stopping only to shift Darcy's weight before reaching
for the handle.

"Let's see if it's armed," he said off-handedly as he pulled the door open.

There was a brief pause while they both seemed to wait for the inevitable alarm to start wailing, but
there was nothing. Just the yellow glow from the interior light flooding out over the clearing,
illuminating everything nearby. Suddenly, their luck didn't seem to random. There were five other
SUVs in the clearing, one of them upside down and torn into. Sprawled out near the cars were more
than half a dozen motionless bodies, all dressed in khakis and dark polo shirts. Darcy covered her mouth with her hand as Loki lowered her down to the ground just long enough to pick her back up again in both arms. He helped her into the back of the car, moving her quickly so she didn't have to look at the carnage all around them.

"Oh my god," she said distantly, barely even aware of the help being offered to her as she tried to get settled so her weight was completely off her right foot. She had just enough time to glance down at the mangled mess, just inches above her ankle, before Loki disappeared and slammed the door shut, sinking the car into darkness. Darcy looked up suddenly, acutely aware of how alone she was. As she looked frantically around the car, the light popped on again as Loki flung himself into the driver's seat.

"Oh, come on!" he shouted, punching the steering wheel.

Darcy tried to lean forward to see between the seats as Loki flipped sun visors down and checked the glove compartment for the keys. It didn't take long before he exhausted all avenues and threw his hands into the air.

"What's behind you?" Loki asked.

Darcy froze, not wanting to look. "Uh. What?" she said.

Shaking his head, Loki got out of the car again and shut the door, once more casting everything into darkness. This time, Darcy was able to watch him as he rushed around to the back. The rear hatch opened just as easily as the doors had, letting Loki dig around in the back. After a moment, he crowed triumphantly as he flicked on a bright, white-light flashlight, shining it straight at the ceiling.

"Stay here," he told her, as if she'd be able to go anywhere.

Before Darcy could object to being left alone, Loki shut the rear hatch. Darcy watched the light from the flashlight bouncing around outside as Loki tried to search the area. She suddenly felt very cold, sitting alone in the back seat of a car. Loki had left her to find the keys, putting him alone out there in the dark, with god knew what kind of dangerous monsters. As he searched, he wandered farther and farther away, behind the other cars and into the trees, making it harder for her to track his motions. Soon, she lost sight of him altogether, occasionally thinking she caught a flash of light here or there before it vanished again.

"Loki!" she shouted, hoping he'd hear her and come rushing back.

But he didn't. Wherever he was, he stayed there. Darcy tried to listen for any sounds at all, but all she could hear was her own pounding heartbeat in her ears. No sound of Loki outside, or jingling keys. No hissing or roaring of any animals. Just a deathly, foreboding silence.

As the minutes dragged on, Darcy knew her own danger increased as she sat alone in the car. One of the big SUVs had been knocked over, and if something was big enough to do that, it was probably big enough to find a way to tear her out. Sooner or later, she was going to have to make a move on her own. Loki had left her, and she knew he wasn't coming back. She didn't know how she knew, but she did. He'd gone out there into the jungle alone, with nothing but a flashlight. Soon, Darcy would have to do the same if she wanted any chance at survival. That big dinosaur was going to come back, or the big one from the river was going to jump out at any moment. If she stayed where she was, she was as good as dinosaur bait.

But she was stuck where she was. Even trying to sit up enough to look behind the seats for another flashlight pulled on the broken bones in her leg and forced her back down again. The smallest
amount of weight was too much to handle, and if she didn't find a way to fix that first, she wouldn't be going anywhere, unless she left inside a dinosaur's mouth.

Forgetting about whatever was behind the seat, Darcy reached up to the ceiling and blindly fumbled around until she found the dome light. She managed to switch it on with her fingertips, and with her eyes closed, she took a deep, steeling breath to prepare herself for what she knew she was going to see. In the harsh yellow light, she could see the jagged white bone piercing straight through her flesh, and the unnatural way her leg bent where it shouldn't have. The blood around her ankle was thick and almost black where it had dried, stuck to her skin and staining her shoes. There was also blood smeared along her inner thighs, giving Darcy an unexpected pause. She wasn't cut anywhere, and her shorts were clean, so she knew she wasn't bleeding unexpectedly. But it was definitely blood, smeared thin and drying a dirty rust colour.

Ignoring it, not caring how it got there, Darcy sat up as slowly as she could and reached out to try to figure out what to do about the bone poking up from her ankle. She touched it gingerly, pulling her hand away quickly before she even knew whether it had hurt, or if she was just too grossed out at the thought of touching her own bone. She groaned, almost wanting to cry as she tried again, thinking she might be able to at least push the protruding bone back into place, but every time she chickened out before she could even try.

She forgot all about trying to fix her leg when she heard Loki scream bloody murder out in the jungle somewhere. Darcy sat up and looked out the window, unable to see anything but her own gawping reflection in the glass. Frantically, she reached up to turn out the light again, but even with it off, she couldn't see anything. Her eyes had already adjusted to the light, and now that she was plunged into darkness again, darkness was all she could see. She looked around in all directions, hoping to catch a glimpse of Loki's flashlight, but it was still gone. She couldn't hear him, or anything else out there, no matter how hard she strained herself to listen.

Suddenly, the light turned back on as the back door at Darcy's feet flung open. Darcy screamed and kicked out instinctively, immediately wishing she hadn't as her scream of terror turned into an anguished wail.

"Darcy! Oh my god!"

Darcy looked up, and through vision blurred with tears, she saw Jane trying to get into the back of the car with her, without upsetting the already delicate situation.

"Jane?" she asked, certain she must have been hallucinating. "How?"

Jane managed to find a spot to sit without having to move Darcy, and even managed to get the door closed. A few seconds later, she flipped on the dome light and looked down at Darcy's injury.

"It hurts," Darcy complained.

"I bet," Jane said, still just looking.

"Your bedside manner sucks," Darcy said.

"I work in ER. It's allowed," Jane told her. "But we're gonna get you out of here. Your stupid, ridiculous boyfriend is out there looking for the keys right now." She messed with the tourniquet, sending another flare of pain through Darcy's entire right side as the blood was able to rush back into her leg. Everything was fire, and Darcy had to bite down on her hand to keep from screaming.

"Don't call him stupid," she said through her teeth, trying to just breathe. "Wait, where's Thor?
How'd you even get here?"

Everything Jane did just made the pain worse. Darcy wished she'd just go away and turn off the light, so she could see what was going on outside. Every now and then, whatever she was doing, she'd stop just long enough to rattle something behind the seat.

"Loki kind of hit him in the face with his flashlight," Jane said awkwardly. "We tried to wait, thinking someone would come find us. But they didn't. And it started getting dark. We were lucky we found the road."

Darcy wanted to cry. "You guys had a road? Lucky."

If she and Loki had been able to walk up a road, she wouldn't be slowly losing her foot in the back of some soon-to-be stolen SUV. She closed her eyes and tried to ignore whatever it was Jane was doing to her, but it wasn't easy. Somewhere in the distance, she could hear arguing, telling her that both Thor and Loki were still alive. But somehow, knowing that didn't really make her feel any better. None of them would stay alive if nobody found the keys.

"What's going on up here? Are you bleeding anywhere else?" Jane asked.

Darcy slowly looked down to where Jane was pointing, and shook her head. On the edge of her vision, she could see a huge, puffy bandage, with entire rolls of gauze just stuck up against her broken bone, with more gauze wrapped around to hold it in place. Somehow, it wasn't any easier to look at.

"No. I don't know," she said.

"You sure?" Jane asked.

Darcy nodded, closing her eyes again. "Yeah, my foot's falling off. The rest of me's fine."

Suddenly, the arguing outside turned into screaming and shouting, making both of them forget what was going on in the car. Darcy tried to turn to look out the window, but she still couldn't see anything besides her own reflection. She jumped when the driver's door opened, and as Loki got into the car, Darcy could hear what they were running from. She couldn't see it, but she knew the sound – hissing and growling all at once – and knew that the things that were chasing after them wouldn't be far behind. Loki slammed his door shut, just as Thor opened the door on the other side and got in, slamming the seat back and knocking into Jane and throwing her against Darcy. Darcy cried out uncontrollably, even as Jane scrambled to get up and find somewhere else to be. Slamming his own door shut, Thor turned around to look at them.

"What is it?" he asked.

Jane shoved her hand into the back of the seat. "We need room!" Jane shouted at him.

Thor scooted his seat as far forward as he could without eating his knees, while in the driver's seat, Loki tried to force a key into the ignition. Suddenly, the entire car lurched as something hit the side, screeching furiously. Darcy screamed and looked out the window behind her, seeing the outline of something as tall as a person, and twice as long trying to scratch its way in with its tiny arms. Loki threw the keys to the ground, momentarily making Darcy think he'd dropped them until he picked up another set from his lap and tried that. This time, the engine turned over, and Loki turned on the lights and dropped the car into gear. The sound of dirt being thrown up from under the tyres was deafening but welcome. It meant they were actually going to get somewhere. Loki slapped his hand against the roof, turning off the dome light as something jumped out in front of them. It screeched at
them as Loki gunned the engine, running straight into the animal and busting out one of the headlamps in the process. For a second, it felt as if the entire car had stopped moving as the dinosaur was smashed by the weight of the SUV ploughing into it, and then running it over with enough speed to make the entire vehicle jump.

Behind them, Darcy could hear several other dinosaurs screeching at them, their noises fading as Loki found the road that would hopefully take them back to the hotel.
Every little bump in the road was like a sharp blade slicing its way up Darcy's leg. Every big bump made her nearly pass out. Darcy grit her teeth and tried not to just scream as they hurled through the jungle under the power of a single headlamp.

"Loki, slow down!" Thor demanded.

"Uh. No!" Loki snapped back.

Darcy wanted to agree with Thor, but she could barely find her voice to do so.

"You're going to get us all killed," Thor said "Or was that your great plan all along?"

The car hit a huge bump, sending it bouncing almost out of control. This time, Darcy did scream. She sat up, gripping onto her leg just below her knee to try to keep herself from bouncing around too much.

"What?" Loki asked.

"None of this would have happened if you hadn't come here," Thor said. "This was all your fault. I don't know how, but you did this."

"What?" Loki repeated, gunning the engine even harder. Surprisingly, he slowed down again when Darcy smacked the back of his seat a few times, but only just.

"How the hell is this my fault?" Loki demanded, screaming over everything else.

"You tried to kill our father! How do I know this wasn't your fault?" Thor shouted back. "You couldn't even take care of your girlfriend. Or what? Were you just trying to kill the witnesses?"

Loki swung his fist out at Thor. "I liked you better when you were dead. Get out!" he shouted.

He hit Thor a few more times, even as Jane shouted at them to stop. Eventually, Loki did stop, only to lean over Thor and try to open his door while they were still racing down the dirt road.

"What the hell! Stop it!" Jane shouted. "There's a time and a place, and it is not here!"

Loki still continued to hit Thor with his right hand, even while Thor closed his door so he didn't fly out into the jungle. As soon as Thor was safe in his seat once more, he turned to face Loki and threw his fist straight into the side of Loki's face. The car skidded to a halt on the loose dirt as Loki held his face with both his hands. There was a long, tense silence after that, while Thor panted angrily and Darcy whined quietly to herself.

"You broke something, you asshole," Loki said finally, his voice muffled behind his hands.

"Are we done now?" Jane demanded angrily.

"I couldn't have possibly had anything to do with what happened today," Loki said slowly.

"Loki. Shut up and drive," Jane ordered stiffly.

Loki groaned quietly to himself for a few moments. Without warning, he lashed out and punched Thor in the arm as he started to drive again.
"Thor. Ignore it," Jane said.

They were all silent as Loki worked the car back up to a frantic pace once more, bouncing over the bumps in the road and crashing down hard. It seemed like they weren't getting anywhere, no matter how fast they went. Darcy wondered if they were even going in the right direction, but she didn't dare voice that opinion. And even if she wanted to, she wasn't sure she'd be able to. All of her dwindling energy was spent just trying not to cry and scream every time the slightest jolt tore through her like lightning. Jane was still sitting precariously at the edge of the seat, one hand on the back of Thor's seat, and the other bracing herself against the backseat headrest. Even in the darkness, Darcy could see Jane watching her nervously, but not daring to release her hold for an instant, lest Loki fling her into the back of Thor's seat again.

"Loki, stop," Thor said finally.

"Uh. No," Loki repeated forcefully.

"Yes, Loki!" Thor shouted. "You're taking us the wrong way."

"I'm following the road. Would you have me drive us off a mountain instead?" Loki demanded, gunning the engine out of spite again.

"Or into the river!" Thor said. "Look, it's right there. We're going the wrong way!"

"We're going south," Loki insisted.

Darcy tried to sit up a little better. She couldn't see anything but blackness out of the passenger side window, so she carefully twisted around to see out of her own window. Thor was right. She could see the shimmer of faint starlight reflecting off the surface of the water not too far away. Maybe twenty feet away, with nothing between them and the water but open ground.

But Loki was right as well. If the river was on their left, then they were still heading south. The road would turn east eventually. Sooner, rather than later, Darcy hoped.

Without warning, something bright flashed to the right, momentarily lighting up a grass plain as the sounds of an explosion rang out with a deafening roar. A roar that continued for longer and louder than it should, slowly transforming into an animalistic sound – huge and unreal, and very close. Darcy leaned into the back of her seat, looking around wide-eyed for the source of the roar. Gunshots rang out again from nearby, their short bursts ringing out menacingly. There were no places to hide within the SUV, which almost certainly wasn't bulletproof. Covering her head with her hands, Darcy ducked down as low as she could. Every now and then, through the sounds of war that continued to rise, she could hear something else. Something high pitched, like a screeching his. The big dinosaur roared again, this time close. Darcy thought she could hear it coming after them, its feet pounding on the ground in a steady rhythm. When it roared again, right behind them, Darcy knew it had been following them, and had just enough time to brace before the back end of the SUV was lifted up. The car filled with screams as Loki gunned the engine and veered left off the road. There wasn't much difference between the surface of the hard dirt road, and the open grass next to the river, giving the dinosaur every opportunity to catch up again and try to tilt the car once more.

"Loki!" Thor demanded.

"Shut up!" Loki demanded.

The car tilted even further to the left, slamming Darcy against the door, and then back down onto the seat a few seconds later. She screamed in terror and in pain all at once, able to see the giant, round
snout outside the window just inches away.

The dinosaur slammed into the car one last time, tilting it so far to the left that the whole thing rolled onto its top. Everything burned as Darcy found herself on the ceiling, looking out a window that didn't look right. When she realised water was pooling around her, she understood why. The dinosaur had thrown them into the river. But it wasn't trying to get into the car to eat them, or try to tear open the car as if it were food. Nothing was moving, and Darcy could no longer hear the dinosaur outside. It was as if it had done what it set out to do, and had simply left.

Darcy looked down at the water as it slowly rose around her, sharply cold against her skin. She wished it was warmer. She didn't know why it had to be so cold.

"Darcy!" Jane shouted.

Darcy looked up, trying to figure out why Jane was so upset. It was just water. But Jane was throwing herself against the door, slamming her shoulder into it again and again. In the front seat, Thor was doing the same.

"Thor, stop it," Loki demanded.

He climbed into the back with Darcy and Jane, crouched down low with the flashlight in his hand. Thor was still throwing himself against the door, but Jane had stopped, watching Loki fearfully.

"Get read to move," Loki said, looking over his shoulder to Jane.

Jane nodded nervously.

Loki reached over Darcy, pushing everything from the back off to the side before climbing under the seat.

"I'll need your help," Loki said loudly, crouching down in front of the rear hatch window.

Jane nodded again. "Okay. On three?" she asked.

"Three!" Loki shouted. He hit the flashlight against the rear window, cracking the glass. The second time he slammed the flashlight into the window, everything shattered, and the water that had been a slow trickle now flooded in, filling the car. Darcy could feel herself being pulled and pushed from every direction, but she couldn't scream past all the water in her mouth and throat. She could feel something digging hard into her arms, and her leg feeling like it was being torn apart, while her lungs screamed for air that wasn't there. Finally she could feel cool air on her face as she was lifted out of the water and carried quickly. The landing on the ground was hard and painful, but she was too busy puking up more water and crying to care. She could feel Loki next to her, one hand on her back, and the other on the side of her neck, holding onto her while her entire body was wracked by the violent choking.

"Breathe," she heard Loki say. All she could do was nod as she continued to choke. She was starting to get sick of water. She never wanted to see another river ever again.

Before she was even ready, Loki took her by the wrists and pulled her up. She tried to put her weight on both feet before she remembered not to, and nearly fell down in a heap. Loki held onto her, holding her up as he turned and tried to pull her onto his back again. As she finally managed to get up off the the ground, Darcy looked back at the water, surprised to see Thor standing waist-deep in the river and shouting something she couldn't understand. Loki shouted something back that sounded like it could have been swearing and started walking back along the grass toward the road.
"Loki, wait," Jane said.

Loki stopped and turned to face her as she trotted to catch up with them. Jane stopped at Darcy's side, taking a moment to check the bandage around her ankle. She didn't do much, but it still hurt enough to make Darcy hiss sharply.

"We have to get back," she said.

"And what do you suggest?" Loki asked. "The car's upside down in four feet of water."

He clicked the button on the flashlight a few times, shaking it angrily until it sputtered and flashed back to life. Darcy watched the bright white beam as it washed over the road and the grass beyond, and fell on the distant trees. In the distance behind them, they could still hear the faint remnants of whatever had flared up so suddenly, spurts of gunfire and the lone explosion still ringing out.

"Don't they know we're out here?" Jane asked, looking back toward the noise.

"Oh, I'm sure they do," Loki said coolly, already walking in the opposite direction down the road. "But I'd just as soon put something between me and their stray bullets."

Jane was quick to join him after that, walking close beside him, while Thor trudged on behind them.

"We should be going the other way. Loki!" he shouted.

"Then go," Loki told him. "We never saw the other person who said the same thing. I'm sure he's doing just fine."

Darcy wrapped her arms around Loki's neck, holding on tight as she leaned her weight into him. She didn't want to think about anything that had already happened, and she didn't want to think that Thor would walk off into the jungle as well. She was surprised when she heard him huff angrily behind them, heavy footsteps following evenly.

Suddenly, over the noises of everything else behind them, something else rose up – a familiar screeching, throaty hiss, much closer than any of the gunfire or explosions. Darcy looked back over her shoulder, tapping on Loki's arm wildly until he turned around, swinging the flashlight back. There was nothing on the road behind them, but Loki turned and starting running awkwardly anyway, holding onto Darcy while trying to keep the flashlight pointing forward. The sound came again, high pitched and almost barking this time, in three short bursts. Darcy could hear it in the grass now, and when she looked over, she could see it moving as something ran through it, just low enough to be completely hidden beneath the tall stalks. Suddenly, it burst out, clawed arms outstretched, and its long, toothy mouth wide open as it screeched at them. Jane fell away, covering her head with her arms as Loki swung out with the flashlight, losing his grip on Darcy as he smashed the dinosaur in the side of the face. Darcy tried to hold on, knowing that if she fell, she wouldn't be able to get back up in time to get away. Loki clouted the animal on the head again, distracting it long enough for Loki to find his grip on her again and start running. But the animal was fast, taller than Loki was and far more agile. It snapped at them, lunging forward before turning back. Darcy looked over her shoulder at it and screamed when she saw Jane struggling to get away. Thor was right by her side, with a giant, twisted branch in his hand. He swung at the dinosaur and jabbed the jagged, broken end of it right at the animal's face, but it had little impact. The dinosaur forgot about Jane and focused on Thor, snapping and swiping at him as Thor continued to swing his branch. But the branch was big and unwieldy, and in the dim light, Darcy could see the moment Thor lost control. The dinosaur took advantage of the stick dropping too low and lunged at him, arms spread out wide as it leapt on top of Thor. Thor and the dinosaur were both screaming, their sounds mixing together to form something unholy.
Suddenly, Loki released his grip on Darcy again, trying to ease her back down to the ground. She didn't want to stay there, but he left her little choice, running back as soon as she had her left foot on the ground. Darcy tried to balance awkwardly as she watched Loki run forward, not for Thor, but for Jane. He dragged her up to her feet, pulling her back along the road.

"No, wait!" Jane shouted, pulling back after the first few steps. She broke free from Loki and turned back, rushing toward Thor.

"Jane, stop!" Darcy shouted.

Jane did stop, a few feet away from Thor. She bent to the ground, picking up his stick and lunging forward with it. She struck the dinosaur in the side of the neck with the sharp, broken end of it, sending it sprawling off sideways and kicking angrily with giant, clawed feet.

Suddenly, Loki was running back to Darcy, not even bothering to get her onto his back again. He simply picked her up in both arms and ran. Darcy managed to look past him, able to see Thor staggering to his feet as Jane implored him to move forward; to run and get away. Thor was slow to start moving, but once he started, he quickly gained momentum. Soon, they caught up with Loki's hampered pace, running along with him as they followed the road into the darkness. By then, everything had quieted again, but the jungle seemed as loud and terrifying as ever.
Chapter 22

As the shock and the horror began to wear off, Darcy began to grow more and more aware of all her sharp pains and throbbing aches. Even as Loki slowed down and stopped jostling her about as much, all she could concentrate on was how every time he moved, she felt it set her leg on fire. Even after he stopped long enough to carry her on his back again, the ride was no better.

Jane walked just behind Loki, holding the flashlight and shining it everywhere. Darcy was afraid it was going to attract more animals, but she couldn't find the words to say it. She just put her head down against Loki's shoulder and tried to think nice thoughts, even though none came.

"Wait, stop," Loki said suddenly.

Jane froze in her tracks, holding the flashlight straight out in front of her. With an exasperated sigh, Loki reached out and tilted the flashlight off to the right of the road, at something in the trees that didn't look like a tree. Darcy squinted through the darkness, trying to see what it was Loki had found. It wasn't moving, and didn't even look like anything alive. It was small and squat and grey, and suddenly, Loki was running toward it. Darcy held on tight, clenching her teeth tightly until he finally stopped at the edge of the trees. When Jane caught up, Loki directed the flash light toward what was now clearly a small, cement shed hidden in the trees, with a sign reading "PUMP HOUSE 3" on the door.

"Here," Loki said, already lowering Darcy back down to the ground. Jane helped her find her footing as Loki took the flashlight and held out one arm, keeping everyone away. He shined it up and down the door, finding the heavy padlock just beneath the handle. Flipping the heavy flashlight around, he swung at the lock again and again until something finally sheared off with a metallic twang. Loki quickly pulled the lock away and tried the door, seeming almost surprised when it opened. He spent barely a moment checking the inside of the shed with a light before holding the door open and waving the rest of them inside.

The shed was small, making a tight, if manageable fit for the four of them. Jane helped Darcy to the ground in an empty corner before turning around and snatching the flashlight from Loki's hands. As the light flashed and dance across the walls, Darcy could see all sorts of pipes and dials along one side, but they weren't what Jane was looking at. She was digging through the shelves on the opposite wall, tearing through boxes of supplies until she came up a large white case.

Shoving the flashlight back into Loki's hands, she knelt down beside Darcy and flung open the case, quickly tearing through it as well. Looking at it under the steady beam of the flashlight, Darcy realised it was a first aid kit. Jane found a small pair of scissors and cut the soaked gauze off of Darcy's leg, casting it aside. Darcy had to look away quickly, not wanting to see what was being uncovered.

"How's Thor?" Jane asked as she tore open a sachet and poured a thick, oozing gel out onto the gash on Darcy's leg.

"Surviving," Loki said, keeping the light on Darcy even as he looked over to Thor, sitting in the opposite corner and cradling his arm against his chest.

"How's he look?" Jane asked.

"I'll have to take the light away," Loki said.
"Okay."

Loki hesitated a moment before swinging the light around to shine on Thor. Darcy gasped when she saw him. His arm was torn to shreds, and he was covered in blood, but he still managed to scowl angrily up at Loki.

"He looks like hell," Loki announced as he returned the light to Darcy.

"Okay," Jane repeated.

She was finished dabbing the salve onto the area and began digging through the kit for bandages to re-wrap the wound and re-secure the splint. She carefully placed two large gauze pads on either side of the break, wrapping it loosely in gauze tape exactly as she'd done before. As soon as it was tied off, Jane got up and moved to Thor, taking the first aid kit and Loki with her. Darcy watched distantly as Jane provided the same treatment to Thor, trying to dress as much of his mangled arm as she could, with what little supplies she had. When she was done, she started digging through the box again, and came up with a few more sachets. She handed one to Thor, and brought the other to Darcy.

"Try not to puke these up, okay?" she said, handing the individually-wrapped Tylenol to her. "Take them both. I'll help a little."

Darcy nodded and numbly tore open the packet, finding two of the biggest Tylenol pills she'd ever seen.

"Is there any water?" she asked.

Jane looked around and shrugged. "No. Sorry," she said. "It won't taste good, but chew them if you have to."

Darcy had tried chewing Tylenol before, and knew what that would be like. She put the first pill in her mouth, holding it between her teeth while she got up the nerve to try to swallow it dry. But she was so dehydrated and exhausted, she couldn't even coax herself to work up enough spit to help the pill down. Sighing and giving up, she put the other in her mouth as well and bit down, trying to keep from spitting the harsh, dangerous chemical taste out of her mouth. She got as much of it down as she could, but the taste lingered, making her want to scrape off her tongue.

As Jane settled down onto the floor, Loki put the flashlight up on one of the higher shelves and sat down as well, slowly lowering himself to the floor next to Darcy. It felt good to just sit and be quiet, Darcy realised. They weren't even safe yet, but they were at least behind walls and a heavy door, with no windows to let the light through and give away their location to any prowling animals. Or to anybody who might be running a search party.

"I was thinking about Canada," Loki said suddenly, speaking as if nothing was wrong at all.

"What about Canada?" Darcy asked.

"I don't think I want to go," Loki told her.

Darcy frowned, trying to figure out what he was talking about. And then she'd remembered how he jokingly proposed the idea of spending next Christmas up there with her.

"Why?" she asked, not sure if she was even asking why he didn't want to go, or why he thought the conversation had been serious.
"Moose," Loki answered simply. He picked up one of Darcy's hands, playing with her fingers as he spoke. "Huge, hulking beasts with giant horns. They kill people all the time. I don't want to go to Canada."

"No moose," Darcy groaned.

"No," he agreed. "You've broken a nail."

Darcy looked down at her hand, noticing a huge split down the middle of the nail on her index finger. She didn't even remember doing it, and hadn't even noticed it until Loki had said something, but suddenly the stinging pain was all she could think about.

"Ow, fuck," she said, surprised.

She pulled her hand away to look more closely at it. In the light, she couldn't tell if she was bleeding, or just really badly bruised. Suddenly, she felt something land in her lap, and when she looked down, it was another little sachet, this time with an alcohol pad inside.

"Thanks," she said, tearing it open awkwardly, now that she realised her injury. When she pressed the pad against her finger, the sharp sting of alcohol burn told her she was definitely bleeding.

"What about you?" Jane asked, looking pointedly at Loki.

"I'll survive," he said without hesitation.

Jane didn't look convinced, but there wasn't much she could do. She stayed by Thor's side, hugging her knees against her chest.

"What about you?" Loki asked her.

"I'm fine," Jane echoed back.

Loki made a pointed display of scratching at his hairline, prompting Jane to do the same, only to quickly pull her hand away, looking affronted. After a few moments of looking incredulously at her hand, she dug through the first aid kit again for another alcohol pad, and used it to dab at the cut she couldn't see in her hair. When she was done, she tossed it down with the rest of her trash.

"Well. Now what?" she asked with a sigh.

"Wait until morning," Loki said. "We'd at least have the advantage of being able to see where we're going."

Jane looked nervously to Thor, who still glared in silence as he held his arm close to himself. Then she looked to Darcy and sighed.

"I don't think we can--" she started.

"We don't have a choice," Loki cut in.

Darcy knew what they weren't saying, and hugged her arms around her chest tightly. She could feel something digging into her skin as she became slightly more aware of sensations other than blinding pain.

"If nothing else, I need a break," Loki continued to argue. "Unless you want to carry her."

"No," Jane said, falling into belligerence for the sake of it. "But we can't stay here, either."
"Just the two of us? Splendid idea," Loki said sharply.

"No," Jane repeated. "I mean."

Darcy pulled her arm away, wondering what was digging into her skin. She looked down at the blue band on her arm, wondering for a moment what it was, and where she had seen it before.

"They know we're here," she said suddenly, touching the band with her fingertips.

"What?" Jane asked. She sat up straight and looked toward the door, but it remained closed and latched.

"They can see us. They know we're here," Darcy insisted, trying to break through the fog that was slowly falling over her again.

"Darcy, nobody can see us," Loki told her.

"Yes, they can," Jane said suddenly.

Loki looked up at her. "Who?" he asked.

Jane held up her hand, showing Loki the bracelet on her wrist. "These things. We were joking about it yesterday," Jane said "About how it felt like we were being tracked with everything they keep giving us to wear. You can't even buy a Pepsi if you're not wearing this, though."

Loki looked down at his own and scowled, deeply offended. "I hate this place," he said.

"But no. I think she's right," Jane said.

"And if she's not?" Loki asked.

Jane inhaled hesitantly. "If she's not? We leave in the morning," she said slowly.

Loki nodded and looked down at his watch. "Deal," he said.

Thor muttered something distantly as he stared at the floor. Darcy couldn't understand what he was saying, but he kept on saying it again and again, until Loki said something back. Darcy realised only then that she couldn't understand him because he wasn't speaking English.

"What's he saying?" Jane asked.

"His arm itches," Loki said. "I'm surprised there's anything left of it to itch."

Jane glowered at him. "It's probably infected. And there's not much I can do about that out here," she said sharply.

Loki shifted besides Darcy. "No, I wouldn't imagine you could," he said.

Jane glared at him and shook her head, but Darcy was too tired to get involved. She let herself lean against Loki, even as he shifted again to put her weight against his chest. He held one arm over her shoulders, letting his hand lay limp over her arm. It was comfortable and safe, and Darcy didn't want to leave. Every time she tried to get a little more comfortable though, Loki shifted away from her again, leaving a small but noticeable distance between them. Eventually, Darcy gave up and tried to get comfortable as she was. She felt strangely cold, sitting there on the cement floor, and didn't know why. Even as she felt herself drifting off to sleep, she tried to find as much warmth as possible by curling into herself.
She was in that foggy place between asleep and awake when something started to pull her back. She wasn't sitting right, she realised. When she looked up at Loki, he was sitting straight up and staring at the door, one hand frozen as he reached up toward the flashlight on the shelf. It seemed like a weird way to be sitting, until she heard the low, rumbling growl outside. It was the crocodile growl, like loud motorcycle pipes, and it seemed to be coming from everywhere.

"What--"

"No," Loki cut her off quickly.

Darcy finally felt that final snap back to consciousness as she realised what was going on. She looked at the door, expecting it to crash open. Beside her, Loki slowly rose to his feet and reached for the flashlight. Holding it like a club, he slowly stepped toward the door, holding his free hand out toward it as if to hold it shut. With his torn shirt and blue jeans covered in blood, he looked like he was prepared to take anything on with the expectation of winning.

The dinosaur outside growled again, scraping up against the door. It was latched, but it still clanked and rattled as the latch held it shut. The growls turned to grunts and snorts, and what sounded like digging outside the door. Darcy thought of the massive clawed hands on the crocodile dinosaur that had chased them along the river. If this was the one in the river, it was almost twice as big. A tiny steel latch wouldn't do much to keep something that big out, if it really wanted in. Holding her breath and biting her lip, Darcy slowly tried to move along the wall to get out of the direct line from the door. If it was the big one, it probably wouldn't be able to fit much more than it's long, toothy snout in. If she could get out of the way, she might actually be able to stay where she was without getting torn to pieces. But each inch she moved was agony, pulling on tissue that was already so badly abused. She gave up after barely moving two feet to the left, knowing that if she kept going any more, she'd just wind up screaming and drawing even more of the animal's attention. She buried her mouth in the crook of her arm to keep quiet and listened as the growling and grunting finally began to subside. But even as it quieted down completely, she didn't relax until Loki finally stepped away from the door. He put the flashlight back on the shelf and sat down beside Darcy on the floor again, lowering himself just as gingerly as he'd risen.

"Is it gone?" Jane asked quietly.

Loki shrugged. "Would you like to look outside and check?" he asked.

"No," Jane said simply.

She sighed and leaned against Thor, looking up at him with plain worry on her face. Even in the low light, Darcy could tell what she wasn't saying. She didn't want to think about what was going to happen once they all accepted that she and Thor were never going to walk out of the jungle. She leaned against Loki again, ignoring the way he tried to move away, and held on tightly to his shirt to keep him close. None of them said anything as they sat in the low light from the flashlight, just listening for the next sounds to rise up from the trees outside.
Darcy was just aware enough to recognise that she was drifting in and out of consciousness. She could hear Loki and Jane talking quietly, but their words all blended together into meaningless sounds more often than not. She didn't even want to listen to them, but she couldn't seem to stay asleep any more than she could stay awake. It was as if something was constantly pulling her so she stayed at the middle point between the two.

"I know you don't want to hear this, but we may have to," Loki said.

His voice was weird, like he was trying to shout and whisper at the same time. Jane said something in response, but Darcy couldn't hear what she said. She wondered what they were going to have to do. It didn't seem like Jane wanted to do it, though.

"... other options!" Jane hissed back. She kept talking, but she lowered her voice again, and all Darcy could hear were the indistinct hisses of syllables.

Darcy breathed in deeply and turned to look up at Loki. He was glaring at Jane, until he noticed Darcy looking at him. Both he and Jane went quiet then, making Darcy wonder if they had even been speaking at all.

"Go back to sleep," Loki told her gently.

"Mmm," Darcy said, nodding tiredly. Sleep did sound like a good idea.

Distantly, she thought she heard Jane say, "You're disgusting." But Jane wouldn't say anything like that, so Darcy ignored it. She leaned against Loki, wishing she could get warm, but even out in the jungle the nights were surprisingly cold. As she drifted off again, she could hear the noises that sounded like whispering again, and tried not to listen to it as she felt her entire body grow heavy.

"Carry him?" The words seemed to hang in the air, and Darcy vaguely wondered what they meant. "Carry her," floated by as well, confusing Darcy. She thought it was a him. Who was 'her'?

She was jostled back awake when Loki sat up straight, away from the wall. When Darcy looked up, Jane was next to him, crouched down beside him and looking strangely furious. Something rattled heavily over Jane's hissed words. Darcy was vaguely aware of being moved aside as Jane forced her way between her and Loki. She tried to protest, but it only came out as a vague mumble. But the next thing she knew, she was right back next to him, looking up at his face as he chewed on the side of his thumb and glared at the far wall. Assuming she had been dreaming, Darcy leaned into him and closed her eyes again. She could feel his arm loosely over her shoulders, his thumb absently tracing loose circles on her bare arm.

"We'll wait until morning," Jane said quietly.

"What?" Darcy asked quietly, fairly certain she heard what she thought she'd heard.

Loki shook his head. "We're staying here for the night. That's all," he said.

"Okay," Darcy said. She nodded slowly and shrunk further against Loki while she tried to go back to sleep.

They all went quiet again after that, the only sounds filling the little shed being someone's laboured breathing. After a while, Darcy could hear the drifting sounds of quiet conversation start up again, all
quiet voices and hissing whispers. They came and went in gentle waves, drifting in and out of
Darcy's perception almost effortlessly.

She was jarred awake again as Loki quickly jumped to his feet. He left Darcy there alone on the
floor as he reached out for the dying flashlight on the shelf and made slow steps toward the door,
holding his free hand out toward it. Darcy watched him, trying to work out what he was doing, and
why he wasn't down there with her.

"What is it?" Jane said quickly, watching the door with wide eyes.

Loki shook his head and leaned his body against the door. Darcy thought she could hear something
outside again; a low growl just on the other side of the door. She watched with foggy confusion as
Loki turned off the flashlight and reached for the door handle.

"No, they can see us," Darcy told him. She didn't want him to go. But he opened the door anyway,
pulling it open just the smallest crack to peer outside. Suddenly, he threw the door open and ran,
leaving everyone else behind.

"Hey!" Jane shouted. "Wait!"

She started to get up, looking frantically between the door and Darcy. All Darcy could see was
Jane's silhouette against the pale blue light from outside as she struggled to figure out what to do,
eventually going to the door and looking outside.

"Oh my god," she said breathlessly, before running out after Loki.

Realising she had been left behind, Darcy tried to get up. She tried to pull herself to her feet, but her
arms were too tired and heavy to support her weight, and as soon as she tried to kick her legs beneath
her to leverage herself up, a searing bolt of pain shot all up her right side again, reminding her of her
injury. She looked over to Thor, hoping he might help her to his feet, but he was muttering
something to himself in an almost continuous stream, apparently unaware of anything around him.

Suddenly, the door flew open again, slamming hard against the shelves along the far wall. The shed
was flooded with noise as tall, dark shadows rushed in. Darcy tried to scream and fight against them,
but she was quickly overpowered. She could feel herself being picked up by something, and tried to
cry and scream and fight, though she hadn't the energy to do any of it. Then, the darkness of the shed
faded away, and above her she could see the sky, tinged pale blue with only a vague hint of starlight
throughout. Then it was gone again, replaced by grey and white, and a pale yellow light. She could
hear frantic voices again, and was suddenly aware of Loki by her side once more as the entire world
seemed to rock back and forth for a few seconds. She reached out to Loki, grabbing his torn and
stained shirt so he wouldn't leave her again.

"Skip the triage," someone said, while another voice mentioned the hotel.

Darcy tried to sit up, not liking being down on the floor away from everyone else. With Loki's help,
she managed to slide back so she could lean against one of the low walls. Sitting back up, it was a
little easier to keep her eyes open, and she slowly became aware of the fact that they were moving.

"She's my girlfriend. I'm going with."

Darcy looked around, trying to figure out who else was with them. There were a few strange men
she didn't recognise, along with Thor and Jane. One of the men was crouched down beside Thor,
fussing with a plastic cord. Darcy watched him move quickly, attaching something to the wall behind
Thor. Then he was by Darcy's side, with another long, plastic cord and a giant needle. She realised
that he had intended to stick her with the needle, and she wanted to pull away, but he was quick. It was in her arm before she was even able to react to it. After a few seconds, he pulled the needle back out again, leaving the cord attached to her arm. She watched him tape it to her skin, and then fiddle with a bag full of watery liquid on the other end. He stuck it on a hook above her and turned to do something else. Suddenly, Darcy felt very warm, and very comfortable, and couldn't keep her eyes open any longer no matter how hard she tried.

It was warm. That was the first sensation Darcy registered. Actual warmth. The second sensation was an uncomfortable, pulling itch in her left arm. Rolling her head over to the side, she could see the IV line stuck in the crook of her arm, with a hint of purple bruising blossoming out around the edges of the white tape that held it in place. She wanted to scratch it; to pull off the tape and get rid of the painful itch. But when she tried to lift her right arm to take off the tape, she couldn't. Slowly looking over, she saw why. Her hand was stuck beneath Loki's arm, where he slept awkwardly at the side of Darcy's bed. That was all right, she figured. Though she didn't know why. Taking a deep breath, she went back to sleep.

The next time she woke, she didn't feel quite so much like her insides had all been stuffed with cotton. It was dark outside the window, but that didn't tell Darcy much. Her arm still itched, but her right hand was free to scratch it this time, though she resisted pulling the tape off.

"Stop it," someone said.

Darcy looked up, still a bit sleepy, and was surprised to see Loki sitting in the chair next to her, messing with her laptop again. That part wasn't so surprising. He was wearing a grey sweatshirt with some sort of embroidered design on the front, and under the fluorescent lights, every one of the cuts and scrapes and bruises on his face stood out like neon.

"You look like hell," Darcy said before she could stop herself.

Loki snorted. "You should see your hair."

Darcy reached up to brush her hair back with her hand, finding it a wild, tangled mess.

"You must be on the really good stuff," Loki declared, not looking up from the laptop as he tapped away at something. "You've been out for two days."

"Fuck," was all Darcy could think to say.

She tried to sit up, struggling against the pillows and the inclined bed. As she started to slide backwards, she could feel something pulling uncomfortably and stopped. Suddenly, she remembered what had happened. She remembered looking down and seeing her bones sticking out of her skin. And she remembered everybody else's panic when they'd seen it too. She looked away, not daring to look down, already fearing the worst.

"What's wrong?" Loki asked.

Darcy stole a quick glance in his direction, surprised to see him actually looking at her.

"I..." was all she could manage before she shook her head. Taking a steeling breath, she turned her gaze toward the end of the bed, and felt a flood of relief at the sight of both her feet tenting up under the thin blanket.

"Oh, thank fuck," she said breathlessly.
She pulled herself to sit up and carefully pulled the blanket back. She had expected to see her ankle all neatly wrapped in perfectly white gauze, and was shocked to find it not the case. Her ankle was huge and swollen, marbled with purple and yellow bruises, and adored with a long stapled incision up the outside of her leg, with a shorter one on the inside. She hissed sharply and flapped her hand in front of her face, wishing she hadn't been stupid enough to look. Loki was quickly by her side, fixing the blanket again and hiding everything away before she passed out from looking at it.

"Took them six hours to do that," he said.

Darcy leaned back into her pillows and covered her eyes. "Oh, fuck. I didn't want to see that."

"You're lucky," Loki told her.

"I know. Still didn't want to see it," Darcy said.

"Do you want to hear the rest from me, or the doctor?" Loki asked.

Darcy opened her eyes again and took a deep, considering breath. "I don't know. How bad is it?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Is having to give up jogging a bad thing?" he asked.

"What about running for the bus?" Darcy asked. Loki shook his head strangely.

Darcy curiously tried to wiggle her toes, and found it almost painful even though the drugs, but still possible. But when she tried to wiggle her entire foot, all she got was dull pain. Panicking, she tried again. She could feel her foot wanting to move, but it wouldn't do anything but sit there and hurt.

"Okay," she said breathlessly, thinking about all the pins and plates and everything else they probably stuck inside her to fix her. "Great."

Loki sat down again, and passed the laptop over to her. Looking up in surprise, Darcy took it, expecting him to be showing her something relevant. Instead, it was just opened to a photo folder.

"What's this?" she asked.

"While you've been on Pluto, I've been busy," Loki explained. He pointed to the laptop. "I found a pharmacy and got your camera developed. Digital copies, so you can send them to your people. Then I found your address book, and called your mother. And your boss wants you to call him."

Darcy gaped down at the laptop, realising which photos he was showing her. She wasn't sure where to start.

"You called my mom?" Darcy asked. She had expected Jane to do that for her, but suddenly felt very confused. She thought she remembered seeing Jane after she fell, but now she wasn't sure. She had been in a bad state, and started to wonder if she had just imagined it.

"What about Jane?" she asked cautiously.

Loki shrugged. "She's somewhere. I haven't seen much of her since we got here."

Darcy nodded, covering her mouth with her hands so she didn't make some sort of embarrassing noise. Jane was all right. And nearby, if not busy with her own problems and her own family. Darcy could have cried, and it took a long moment for her to convince herself not to.

"What'd my mom say?" she asked.
"She's going to try to get a passport to get down here, but those people don't like to be hurried," Loki said.

Nodding again, Darcy looked back down at the laptop. She clicked on the first picture in the folder, surprised to see just the calm jungle. The first half of the roll had been basic tourist shots, actually. Then without anything in between, it changed. The next shot was from high in the tree, with the chomping, snapping dinosaurs beneath them. Then the next one made Darcy recoil as she realised Loki had taken a picture of James being eaten alive by the snappy dinosaurs. Trying not to wretch, Darcy looked away and clicked off of it.

"Why did you take a picture of that?" she asked.

"I have no idea," Loki admitted.

He'd taken other pictures she hadn't realised he'd taken, too. There was a shot in the dark of two dinosaurs fighting in the water. Another one of Thor in the darkness, covered in blood and a thick, white foam dripping from his arm. A Costa Rican paramedic doing something to Darcy in what looked like a helicopter. Jane sleeping in a plastic chair somewhere. Then a picture that had been taken in a mirror, showing just the person's bare chest and stomach. At first, Darcy couldn't tell who it was, until she caught a glimpse of black and red tattoos near the top of the frame. But it wasn't just some vanity Facebook shot. There was a crescent-shaped tear along his side, bruised and swollen, and stitched shut. The next shot showed the same thing, but on his other side. Darcy looked over at Loki, straining to remember when that would have happened.

"What's this?" she asked, pointing to the screen.

Loki shook his head. "It's not as bad as it looks. Life jacket took most of it," he said.

She remembered, suddenly. The crocodile monster that had made her break her leg had also tried to eat Loki whole, but he somehow managed to get away. She hadn't even been thinking about it at the time, because there had been so much else going on. It had never even occurred to her to stop and ask if he was okay. And now she felt stupid and ashamed for it.

"You sure? Because it looks really bad," Darcy said, looking back down at the picture.

Loki shrugged. "I've got Codeine and antibiotics. I'm great," he said.

"Okay," Darcy said, not entirely believing him as she went back to look at the remaining pictures in the folder.

"Call your boss," Loki said suddenly, getting up.

Darcy watched him as he walked out of the room, feeling like there was something they weren't talking about. But then he was gone, and she still couldn't remember, so she pulled up Skype and signed in to her work account.

The call lasted nearly two hours, and by the time it was over, Darcy just wanted to go back to sleep. They had put her on the air, insisting she go on the webcam, and at first she was angry that they had wanted her to do that without any notice. But her anger soon faded when she realised that her messy hair and bruised face didn't matter when they were putting her through not just to the local affiliate, but to the national network, along with all the photos Loki had taken. And then, suddenly, she remembered what they weren't talking about when Jason had asked her about the photos. Her memories after she fell into the river were patchy and hazy at best, but one had filtered through, and she had no idea what to do with it in the middle of the most important video call of her life.
As soon as the call was over, and she had negotiated her return to work off the air, she slammed her laptop shut and leaned back in bed, exhausted and aching all over, but unable to to relax at all. The nervous energy from being on the air for the first time, being treated not like some scared witness, but an actual ground reporter had her pulse racing. But it was the memory of what Loki had said back on the island that had her thoughts buzzing just as quickly. Their stupid little charade had been for Thor and Jane, and Darcy would have thought for sure that all bets had been off by that point. But she was certain she heard him maintaining the story. And he was still hanging around her room. Likely because he had nowhere else to go, she reasoned. But surely the park would be racing for damage control, and lodging people elsewhere on their own dime. It would have been the smart move, even for a company as clearly inept as InGen was.

Darcy expected Loki to come back when she was done with her Skype call, but he kept his distance, further confusing her. Eventually, she did doze, waking up again as a nurse stood over her while making notes on a clipboard. Darcy looked over, hoping to see Loki back in his chair, but it was still empty.

"Where'd he go?" Darcy asked tiredly.

The nurse looked down at her, confused for a moment. At first, Darcy thought maybe the nurse didn't speak English, making her feel stupid for even asking.

"Oh. Your boyfriend?" the nurse asked, her English heavily accented. She looked at the empty room, and then out toward the hall. "I'll have someone find him."

She finished taking down her notes, and then fiddled with the IV line and some of the beeping equipment before walking out of the room again, leaving Darcy alone in a quiet, vaguely uncomfortable room with nothing but her thoughts. Her mind went back to the call to New York, and what she had learned while giving her own piece. People had died – a lot of people had died, and not just those who were stuck out on rides that had failed to return when called back. Park staff had suffered significant loss of life just trying to contain their genetically engineered monsters, but that paled in comparison to the amount of people who were killed just by the pterodactyls that had swarmed over the boardwalk. Even the Mosasaurus in the tank in the middle of the boardwalk had managed to claim a few lives. It was clear, even just several days after the fact, that InGen was not going to survive the fiscal quarter. They were already facing a building class-action suit, as well as massive fines from both the US and Costa Rica. From what Jason was saying, it even sounded like InGen were already selling off assets in a pre-emptive brace for the worst.

Darcy vaguely wondered what would happen to the animals – if the smaller ones might wind up in zoos, or if they'd all be destroyed.

She was distracted from her thoughts by voices out in the hall. It took her a moment to recognise one of them as Loki, though something about the way he sounded seemed to change when he wasn't speaking English. Like he was speaking lower and faster, but it might have just been because she didn't understand what he was saying. Then she heard the other person he was talking to. At first, she thought he was talking to one of the nurses, but then she realised that whatever they were saying, it didn't sound like Spanish. Then she heard Thor's angry voice, and realised quickly that it must be their mother with them out in the hall.

"Oh, fuck you," Loki spat in English.

"Hey," their mother said tiredly, but Thor was already shouting over her.

"You have no right to be here!" Thor shouted.
"At least I was invited. Were you?" Loki asked.

"That doesn't matter!"

Their mother shouted something something Darcy couldn't understand, and then all three of them started shouting over one another in a tangled mess of languages, sometimes switching halfway through sentences.

"Stop it!" Darcy shouted as loudly as she could, surprised when they all actually stopped.

"Now look. You've pissed her off," Loki said calmly. A few moments later, the door opened and Loki slipped through, shutting it again before anyone could follow him. He had a bottle of some bright orange soda in his hand, but it hadn't been opened, and he seemed to have forgotten he was holding onto it.

"Does this door lock?" he asked.

"Don't," Darcy warned. She was tired, and it felt like whatever good stuff they were giving her was turning her insides into goo, and she didn't have the patience for any of their crap.

Loki sat down gingerly and took the laptop from Darcy, setting it aside on the table between them. He checked his watch and opened his soda before pulling a few small bottles from his pocket. Twisting in his seat, he lifted up his sweatshirt and frowned down at his side, giving it a gentle prod with his fingers.

"Bastard hit me," he said, surprised.

Darcy sat up to try to see. "Did you bust any stitches?" she asked.

"No. I should have busted his, though." He opened both of his pill bottles and fished out one of each, popping them both into his mouth and washing them down with his ridiculously orange soda. For a long moment after, he sat in a still silence, just looking up at the ceiling.

"So. I have a question," Darcy said slowly, her nerves tying themselves in knots as she broke the silence. "I was pretty out of it. Back there. Before."

"I don't think you were on this planet," Loki confirmed.

"No. I don't think I was either," Darcy said, still not entirely sure what were actual memories, and what she had imagined. "Which is why I need to ask." She paused, trying gather the courage to actually ask, and risk looking like a moron if she got this all wrong. "Are we... still pretending?" she asked finally.

Loki looked at her evenly, not saying anything for what felt like a year. "I suppose that's up to you," he said finally.

Darcy felt a little too fuzzy to be having this conversation, and regretted starting it. But she knew that if she left it where it was, it might just make everything even more awkward and uncomfortable down the line.

"I don't think I want to anymore," she said carefully, trying to pick her words one at a time. Watching Loki, she felt like she still wasn't getting it right. "Pretend, I mean. I–I want you to stay. I just don't want to pretend."

Loki was still quiet for a few more seconds, before he nodded almost casually. "All right," he said,
and then took another drink of his soda.

Darcy started to nod, but realised she still didn't know where either of them stood. "Wait. What?" she asked, trying to work it out, and not quite finding the ability to.

Loki's attention flicked over her shoulder briefly. "I'm not having this conversation right now. You're stoned, and I'm not yet," he said.

"No I'm not," Darcy protested.

"They've upped your morphine," Loki said, pointing. "You're stoned."

Darcy slowly turned to see what he was pointing at, but all she saw were machines quietly beeping every now and then, and displaying all sorts of numbers Darcy didn't understand. "Oh," she said anyway.

"I'm going back to bed," she decided suddenly.

Loki laughed, and reached for the laptop again. "You do that," he said.
Darcy clung on tight as Loki took the stairs two at a time, like a maniac. She'd barely been back in New York for a half hour, and already she knew that staying at home during her massive recovery was going to be a massive pain in the ass. Loki carried her piggyback up to her apartment, but he wasn't going to want to do it every time she had to leave the house, going to or from work, and in to doctor's visits, and everything else. And she wasn't going to want to keep doing it, because it was already freaking her out just going up. She wasn't looking forward to going back down.

She felt like she could breathe again when they finally reached her floor. Loki dashed up to the door, stopping just long enough for Darcy to reach over his shoulder and dangle the keys for him to snatch up. Once inside, Loki leaned Darcy's crutches against the back of the sofa and stopped in the middle of the room.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

Darcy thought about it for a moment, trying to quickly weigh the pros and cons of going back to her bedroom. "Uh. Here," she decided quickly.

Loki helped her down onto the sofa, making sure she was settled comfortably with the remote before dashing back out of the apartment again. He'd left the door wide open behind him, making Darcy growl in frustration as she swatted her hand completely ineffectually at it. Not able to do much else, she turned around and turned on the television, trying to find something to watch on a Tuesday afternoon. Shortly after she started flipping through channels, she could hear Loki stomping back up the stairs, dragging Darcy's suitcase and bags with him. He dumped them all off near the door, this time actually shutting it on his way in. He sat down on the floor in front of the sofa, shoving the coffee table out of his way.

"What's on?" he asked.

"Nothing," Darcy said, dropping her free hand down over his shoulder to rest on his chest. They sat together in silence as Darcy flipped through the channel list a few times, failing to ever find anything worth stopping at for more than a few seconds, until they were eventually interrupted by the door opening. Darcy looked up, expecting to see Jane, and being surprised and wary at seeing Thor instead.

"What are you doing here?" Thor asked, managing to look threatening even with his arm still in a sling.

"I was invited," Loki said, not looking at him.

"Get out," Thor demanded.

"No," Darcy cut in, having about as much of this constant argument as she could handle. "I live here. You don't. Stop it."

She could feel Loki tense up beside her, and tried to calm him down while still trying to out-macho Thor. Eventually, Thor backed down and turned to walk into the kitchen, but Loki suddenly got up all the same. "I can't," he declared, making a line straight for the door.
"No, wait," Darcy protested, pissed off that she was stuck on the sofa and unable to get up to follow him.

"I can't ignore him. I'm sorry," Loki said, shrugging and shaking his head. With one final glance to Thor, he walked out of the apartment.

Darcy glared at the door as it closed, and then turned her glare to Thor. "You're unbelievable," she said, finally turning her back to him to face the television.

She expected Thor counter with something annoying, which she'd already heard a hundred times before, but he stayed surprisingly silent. Darcy tried to ignore him as he dug through the fridge, and then took whatever he'd found into Jane's bedroom. Not having too much of a choice, Darcy stayed where she was, angrily flipping through the channels. She expected Loki to come back, after having blown off some steam somewhere, but the longer he was gone, the more clear it was that he wasn't coming back any time soon.

When she heard keys in the door again, Darcy sat up and turned around in her seat, hoping Loki had come back. There was a brief moment of conflicted disappointment when Jane walked in, but it quickly passed at the excited realisation that seeing Jane meant Darcy was finally, finally home.

"Oh, Jeez. I tried to get here before you," Jane said as she tossed her things down onto the kitchen counter on her way to Darcy.

She leaned down over the side of the sofa and hugged Darcy awkwardly, before moving to the other end and sitting down carefully.

"We got in early. We made it here about a half hour ago," Darcy said, handing the remote over, hoping Jane would be able to find something worth watching.

As Jane took the remote, she looked around the apartment. "Is he here with you?" she asked.

Darcy sighed and shook her head. "No, Thor chased him off again. He's in your bedroom, by the way."

Jane looked toward her closed bedroom door and rolled her eyes. "So, uh." Darcy started. "I don't know if he's gonna come back, or if he's been chased off for good. But I kind of have an appointment at ten o'clock tomorrow?" She cringed, not really wanting to ask Jane to take the time off to drive her out to Mount Sinai.

Jane sighed. "Would it be okay if I made Thor take you?" she asked.

"I guess," Darcy agreed. She didn't really want to ride with Thor, but she had to check in with the doctors now that she was back home.

"How's it feeling?" Jane asked.

Darcy shrugged. "All right, as long as I don't do anything. I'm not even supposed to be using my crutches unless I have to,"

"Yeah, well. That's part of healing," Jane said.

Darcy threw her hands into the air, letting her darker, more angry emotions surface. "I'm fucked!" she said. "I start work again in a week, and I'm not supposed to be moving around, much less trying to get to the bus stop from here. At least my job is one I already sit on my ass to do, so that won't be
Darcy, Jane cut her off, taking her hands. "It's all right. Someone will get you to and from work. And I'm sure your boss knows that you're not going to be at the top of your game right now."

"I'm never gonna pay for all of this. I'll be working overtime for the rest of my life," Darcy said. She let herself sink against the arm of the sofa, wishing she could just disappear from all of it.

"The lawyers are handling all of that," Jane said. "I promise, everything will be fine."

"I guess," Darcy said, not believing a word of it.

Inhaling, Jane stood and handed the remote back to Darcy. "You just need to rest. You'll feel better after your appointment tomorrow. I promise."

"Okay," Darcy said, still not believing it.

Jane smiled weakly at her as she turned to her bedroom. Darcy watched her disappear inside and sighed. She turned off the TV and twisted around to grab her crutches from behind the couch, deciding that maybe Jane was right about one thing. She was exhausted. The plane ride up had been uncomfortable and felt cramped, even in first class. What she really needed was to be able to just stretch out and sleep. For a moment, she considered trying to drag her luggage into her room, but quickly gave up on that idea after struggling to just pull herself up from the sofa. She didn't like the crutches, and didn't feel very steady on them, so she tried to move as quickly as possible so she wouldn't have to be using them for very long. Once in her room, she kicked off her shoe and leaned the crutches against her night stand, and fell into bed. She immediately wished he hadn't, but didn't quite care enough to do anything about the awkward position she'd fallen into. She waited until it felt like her back was going to permanently twist before shuffling about and trying to move onto her back, but it was surprisingly difficult to roll over without being able to really do anything with one of her feet. Once she was finally comfortable, she tossed her glasses down onto the night stand and let herself drift off.

Darcy woke suddenly, feeling groggy and confused. Looking at the clock, it was just past midnight, and she could see through her cracked bedroom door that the lights were all off in the apartment. Then, she heard it – the thing that had woken her up. The metallic scratching at the front door. She heard it open, only to clunk heavily when the chain caught it.

"Damn," she heard someone hiss. After a moment of tired fear, she realised she was being stupid, and reached for her crutches. But before she managed to even get out of bed, she heard a loud scraping and clunking, followed by the door opening all the way. A few seconds later, her bedroom door opened, and Loki quietly slipped through.

"What the hell?" Darcy asked.

He tossed her keys down onto her dresser. She'd forgot he still had them. "Your chain's about five links too long," he explained

"Oh," Darcy said, watching him in the dark as he took off his jacket and tossed it aside. "That's terrifying. And worrying that you knew that. I didn't think you'd be back."

Loki shrugged and lay down on the bed beside her. "I said I'd take you tomorrow," he told her.

"Oh," Darcy repeated, suddenly realising that she had somehow expected him to just completely blow her off. She started to get comfortable again, stopping when she felt her toes brush up against
Loki's sneakers.

"Get your shoes off my bed, please," she asked.

Loki quickly sat up again and started pulling his shoes off, tossing them one at a time into the darkness. "I was thinking, while I was picking up my dog. We're both going to get very annoyed with this arrangement very quickly."

So he was blowing her off already. Darcy was glad he couldn't see her roll her eyes at him in the dark. "Okay?" she said.

"It might be easier if you just came out to stay with me for a while," Loki said, lying back down.

It wasn't what Darcy had expected. "What?" she asked. "You live out in Yonkers." She wasn't even sure how to mention the fact that moving in with him was moving their relationship along awfully quick.

"So does Thor, but for some reason, he's always over here," Loki pointed out.

"It just... I don't know," Darcy said. She felt Loki take one of her hands in his, running his thumb over her knuckles.

"Think about it," he said.

She heard what he was saying, but she wasn't actually thinking about what he had to say. Instead, she was thinking about how close he was to her. They hadn't been able to share any space like this in Costa Rica, since she'd spent most of the time down there stuck in a tiny hospital bed. She could feel him trying to test bounds, seeing how far she'd let him go, and trying to get close and be careful at the same time. Darcy tilted her head back and exposed her neck, inviting him to get even closer. He hadn't shaved in a few days, and the prickly little hairs on his chin tickled her skin and itched all at once, making her laugh and squirm. His hand began making its way under her shirt as he shifted, trying to find a way to get closer without upsetting her injuries.

"Darcy?" Jane asked suddenly.

Darcy sat up, startled at the intrusion, as Loki slammed his head against the headboard.

"Hi. What?" Darcy asked, trying not to sound super bitchy about being interrupted.

"I–uh–never mind," Jane said. She started to back out of the room again, but stopped and came back in. "How did he–never mind." She left in a hurry, shutting the door behind her.

"Okay, I think I see your point," Darcy said.

Sighing deeply, Loki started to get up. "I should go. I'll be back in the morning," he said.

Darcy quickly reached out for him, grabbing his hand and stopping him. "No, don't. Stay. I want you to."

Loki sighed and settled back down. "Now, I just expect him to bust down the door and break my neck," he said.

She tried to get his attention again by sneaking her hand under his shirt and onto his belly, but he was completely disinterested. He felt tense and stiff, like he was ready to spring up and jump out the window at a moment's notice. And then she realised he probably was.
She knew why, too. And she also knew he was probably right.

"I'll tell you what," she said with a sigh. "I was gonna try to do my laundry tomorrow, but all my stuff is still by the front door. It might actually be easier at your place, if you've got a washing machine."

Loki stayed still for a few seconds before getting up to hunt down his shoes. "Get anything else you need," he said, waving vaguely around the bedroom as he walked out, picking up his jacket on the way.

Darcy listened quietly as he picked up her suitcase and left the apartment. She didn't know why she was doing this, and didn't even really want to, but she knew it would be easier in the long run. Loki didn't have a job that made him barter for time off, and she wouldn't have to keep worrying that another brawl would break out at any moment whenever he came over. Trying to ignore how unbelievably stupid it felt, she managed to pull herself up from the bed and started looking for anything she might need in the long term that she hadn't taken with her to Costa Rica.

It was after one in the morning by the time Darcy was negotiating the three steps up to Loki's front door. She was a little surprised to find that he lived in a house, rather than an apartment, and even more surprised to find out he lived alone. Once Darcy was steadily on the landing, Loki rushed ahead of her to open the door, and quickly stepped inside before her.

"No! Get in your chair!" he said loudly.

Darcy peered cautiously around the front door, watching Loki's giant dog jump up into a torn up old recliner, wiggling impatiently. Once she was sure she was safe, she carefully made her way inside. Loki’s house was clean, in the sort of way that suggested it would have been a lot more messy if he had enough stuff to make a mess with. None of the furniture matched, and the carpet was old and torn up in places, probably from the giant dog.

A little nervous around the dog, Darcy quickly sat down on the sofa and watched Loki as he walked around to the other side of the room.

"All right," he said.

The dog leapt up from the chair, and barely even touched the floor before it jumped up at Loki, smashing at his face and chest with its paws. Loki shoved it back down to the floor and swatted at its nose, but it didn't seem to even notice. Instead, it just ran quick circles around him, whining for attention.


"No," Darcy said quickly. Part of her couldn't believe he could even still look at them after what they'd been through.

Loki stood in the middle of the room, looking exhausted as his dog kept jumping around with seemingly endless energy.

"Fenrir usually shares the bed with me, but I'll put him outside tonight," he said, looking down at the massive dog. "Come on, stupid," he grumbled, starting to walk through the kitchen to the door leading to the back.

"You don't have to put him outside," Darcy said.
"The bedroom door doesn't latch," Loki told her.

"Oh," Darcy said, looking at it. The thought of having a monster dog jumping on her in the night wasn't a pleasant one. "Uh. In that case, thanks."

Loki had to shove the dog outside and shut the door quickly, barely able to step away before the scratching began.

"He'll calm down in a few minutes," Loki said as he joined Darcy on the sofa. He yawned loudly and rubbed his eyes, making Darcy do the same. She'd sort of thought they might pick up where they left off at her place, but by then, they were both too tired for anything.

"Where am I sleeping tonight?" Loki asked.

"You—seriously?" Darcy asked, not even sure that she heard him correctly. "With me, I hope."

Loki nodded and leaned his head back against the sofa. "Okay. Give me about five minutes."

Dacy nodded back, looked at her crutches, and felt all of her remaining energy drain away. "Okay," she said.

Loki hadn't come into the exam with her. The doctor wanted to make sure everything that had been done in Costa Rica had been done right, and then wanted to make sure that nothing had been upset on the flight over, and then wanted to do a bunch of lab work for infections just in case. It had taken a lot longer than Darcy had expected, before they even got to the point where the topic of recovery and rehab even came up. It was going to hurt. It was going to take forever and suck. Darcy wasn't looking forward to it. But he did give her an all-clear to go back to work, with a special note telling her boss all the things she could and couldn't do. Things she had already told everyone personally, but now it was official.

Loki was out in the waiting room when she finally got out, making worried faces at one of the magazines he'd picked up. He threw it down as soon as he spotted her hobbling through the door, and got up to help her through the next set of doors out to the hall. She needed help to get up into his van, which he offered graciously, and was surprised to see a stack of envelopes on the dash.

"What's this?" she asked as Loki got into his seat.

"Mail," he said.

Darcy grabbed it and started looking through the stack. "From my place?" she asked.

"Yeah."

As Loki pulled out onto the street, Darcy began opening the envelopes. There were a few Christmas cards from family, some of them stuffed with cash, which Darcy pocketed immediately. Her cell phone bill, which had been paid in advance before the trip, and still showed a $15 credit to the account. And at the bottom of the stack, a thick manila envelope with just a PO box as the return address. Confused, Darcy carefully tore into it, not sure what to expect. But all she found was a folder inside, stuffed with all sorts of papers and print outs and photocopied news clippings.

"What the hell is this?" she asked quietly, flipping through the first few sheets.

There were news clippings from as far back as the 1980s, talking about John Hammond's tiny elephant, with someone exposing the fact that it was in actuality many tiny elephants that kept dying
from the complications of genetic engineering. Then there were the pharmaceutical articles that just made her eyes glaze over.

Then there was a stack of articles and clippings from 1993. Articles about the T-rex at Jurassic World, and how it had escaped its pen at the original safari park and killed people. There were other dinosaurs that had got out at the same time, resulting in the deaths and maimings of park staff and guests. Then, information about another island nearby, and some secret breeding program. Kids that had managed to get lost out there; more people dead. A plan to bring dinosaurs to the San Diego zoo resulting in even more deaths. All covered up and buried under mountains of money.

"What is it?" Loki asked, glancing over at her quickly.

"I have no idea," Darcy said. She would have thought it was a hoax, if she hadn't seen what she had at the park. She knew this was all real. She started searching the stack of papers for any clue as to who had sent it, but there was nothing. Just information at the back on how to get involved with the lawsuit against InGen.

"I need to call my boss," she said, flipping through all of the papers again. She hadn't heard anything about any of this yet, and wondered if anyone else had sent this information into the media yet. Putting it all aside, she grabbed her phone and dialled her boss' number, eager to find out anything more.

By the time they got back to Loki's place, every news station on television was talking about the packages people were getting in the mail. Some unknown person had managed to find the addresses of everybody registered at the park the day after Christmas, and had sent these packages all over the world. Darcy couldn't believe what she was seeing. It seemed like every ten minutes, something new was being dug up, and with each new piece of evidence, InGen's defence was being torn to shreds.

Finally, Loki picked up the remote and turned off the TV. Darcy looked up at him, startled and annoyed.

"We don't need to be watching this," he said.

Darcy started to argue, but stopped herself when she realised what he wasn't saying. "Okay," she said. She looked around the sparse living room, finding absolutely nothing else to do. "You want to go get something to eat?"

Loki made a sour face. "I can't afford it," he said.

"So? I can," Darcy reminded him. "And you've got like, a pack of hot dogs and some ramen. So you might as well let me take you shopping too."

Loki continued to make a sour face, and finally got up. "Fine," he said with a sigh. "But you're taking me shopping. Not doing it for me."

"Okay," Darcy said, slowly getting up. She was getting better at it, at least.

"Fine," Loki repeated, making his way toward the door. Following after him, Darcy wondered how long it would take for that to start getting old.

Chapter End Notes
Final Notes on Wordpress

If you want to keep getting other WIPs in a weekly format, make sure you follow me on WP. I'm not going to be posting any more WIPs to AO3 until they're complete.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!