### Theory of Entanglement

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>No Archive Warnings Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Thor (Movies), The Avengers (Marvel Movies), Marvel Cinematic Universe, Tasertricks - Fandom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Darcy Lewis/Loki, Jane Foster/Thor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Loki (Marvel), Darcy Lewis, Thor (Marvel), Jane Foster (Marvel), Erik Selvig, Odin (Marvel), Frigga (Marvel), Some Sif and The Warriors Three, The Avengers - Character, Ian Boothby, The Other (Marvel Cinematic Universe), Thanos (Marvel), Original Characters, Original Non-Human Character(s), Background &amp; Cameo Characters, The Norns, Dwarf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Friendship/Love, Minor Violence, Fluff, Angst and Feels, Hurt/Comfort, Humor, Magic, Spells &amp; Enchantments, Torture, Implied/Referenced Character Death, Attempted Seduction, Slow Build, Slow Burn, Attempted Rape/Non-Con, Threats, Original Character(s), Self-Hatred, Soul-Searching, tasertricks - Freeform, Self-Discovery, Suicidal Thoughts, The Nine Realms, References to Norse Religion &amp; Lore, Premovie(s), Post-Movie(s), Diverges after Thor 2, Blending of Norse mythology and Marvel Cinematic universe, Rating May Change, Astral Projection, Other Worlds, Action/Adventure, loki is a little shit, Vanahaimr</td>
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</tbody>
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**Theory of Entanglement**

by stubzs87

**Summary**

ON HIATUS.

Darcy thought he was just her childhood imaginary friend until he sent a fire-breathing robot to take down his brother, now she's not sure of anything. Loki is a drift and unsure of his place in life, but after a visit to The Norns gives new purpose, he decides to bring along the human that has managed to weasel her way into his life. What will they figure out about themselves and between each other along the way?
So yeah...this is a first from this fandom from me and my first post to this community (hope it doesn't completely suck). I just recently re-watched all the current movies (excluding Age of Ultron, Loki's not even in that one anyway) and I remembered that I really wished that Marvel Studios had done something with Loki and Darcy. This was supposed to be just a one-shot sort of thing, but then my muse decided to sprout wings and take off, so depending on how well this is received I'll be posting more chapters (I'll be writing it either way though). I'm happy to get constructive criticisms to help my writing improve, but please no nonsensical flames! I don't own Loki or Darcy (awesome as they are) or any other characters from any Marvel movie/comic universe.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Loki retired early from yet another dinner banquet held in the grand hall of Asgard's royal palace. Not because he was physically tired, but because his mind grew weary of his oaf of a brother's antics and how everyone seemed to find the stupidity endearing. Sure he loved Thor, just as much as—if not more than—anyone else in attendance, but there was only so much idiocy he could handle in one day. Then there was the added feeling of being so indescribably out of place. A feeling that lingered with him since he was a boy and began learning magic.

Only their mother seemed to understand Loki's departure for as he made his way to pass her to leave the hall, she reached out to take his hand, silently asking if he was okay. Loki grasped her hand fondly and gave her the slightest inclination of his head to let her know not to fret before smoothly slipping his hand from hers, his departing gait never slowing.

True he wasn't tired, but he still found himself in his private chamber perusing his large bookcase for something to get his mind off of the unknown feelings that continued to rise more and more every time he noticed the growing distance between himself and his brother. He'd already read through his impressive library several times, he knew everything by heart by now. His hand immediately landed on one of his favorites, the book detailing Yggdrasil and all of the nine realms.

While Thor loved to boast loudly about victories in battle and rely on his strength and the power of his hammer, Mjolnir, Loki liked to observe and form strategies, using his cunning and magic to trick his enemies into submission. Thor's approach was often fool-hearty, but still everyone on Asgard loved the oaf and fell at his feet. Those same people scoffed and looked disdainfully at Loki for using magic, finding brute strength more honorable than intelligence. Even Lady Sif and the Warriors Three that were often in his presence only seemed to put up with him for Thor—though Fandral seemed to put up with him better than most. The only ones that seemed to accept him wholly, though they were as different as night and day, were his brother and their parents. It was especially his mother, Frigga that made him feel most at home.

So why was it that home didn't feel so natural to him and the Asgardians that he might one day rule, should be worthy of being Odin's successor to the throne, seem so suspicious of him?

Loki could practically feel his magic tingling at his fingertips as he tried to focus on the pages describing the secret passage of Niflheim into Helheim, but his thoughts from dinner were bleeding through, allowing his magic to feed from his restlessness and charge dangerously.

It had been centuries ago the last time Loki felt his magic fight build up to such unstable levels inside of him. When he was still learning all the ins and outs of his magic, his mother said that he might need to expel excess magic from time to time and then all would be fine. So he spent that excess magic on tricking as many people on Asgard as possible. When it was discovered that it was Loki who was the cause of all the chaos, the All-Father forbade him from using his magic for a week. The magic built up in him again in that week, so Loki had to find another outlet to unleash his magical pranks upon. He read about astral projection and learned how to project his spirit to whole other realms without anyone on Asgard suspecting he was making trouble at all—of course he could only do tricks capable of the realm he visited. Should he do something otherworldly on another realm he’d surely raise some suspicion with the ever-vigilant Heimdall. He got to release pent up magic and get his kicks at the expense of whomever he was pulling the wool over on. Two birds with one stone was his way of thinking of it.

Loki put the ancient book on his bed next to him and relaxed onto his back. He took a soothing deep
breath before calmly closing his eyes, emptying his mind of all distracting thoughts until there was nothing in his mind's eye but the vast branches of Yggdrasil.

Slowly he felt himself starting to float and stars and nebulas dotted the darkness behind his eyes.

Astral projection came naturally to him, but it was more difficult than a simple projection. Firstly it wasn't just a copy of him that would dematerialize the moment it made contact with something. It was his spirit that was being projected. He could remain invisible to anyone around him and perform magic. But he could also make his spirit as corporeal as his actual body. There were drawbacks to that. The more tangible he made his spirit or more elaborate his magic in another realm the more it drained his body of magic and energy. Secondly it took a lot of concentration for him to maintain his spiritual presence on another realm, much less just mere feet from his motionless body.

The process would drain him of a lot of magic, but he had plenty in his reserves, sparking and crackling at his fingertips to be released.

Loki looked about the nine realms, considering each one as they balanced on the branches of the mighty world tree. Which realm would be the lucky—or unlucky—one that he would visit tonight?

He remembered the fun he had on Vanaheim teasing Hogun's people into becoming untrusting of each other, but that incident had also resulted in Odin having to visit the very same realm to calm the sudden calamity among the normally peaceful nomadic people. Loki didn't want to raise more suspicion there.

Then there was Nidavellir, home of dwarves. They were a short, stout, busybody race that crafted many of the weapons for the warriors of Asgard, including Mjölnir and Odin's spear, Gungir. The last time he visited that realm for the sport of mischief he caused one dwarf to trip, which turned into one catastrophe after another inside the workshop until nearly everything was left in shambles. That one left him laughing heartily to himself for a long time as he watched invisible from perch in the rafters. Once again however, news traveled back to Asgard about the unfortunate accident and how the latest shipment of weapons from Nidavellir had to be delayed due to the destruction of many of the weapons.

Loki decided soon after that to stay away from realms that were closely tied with Asgard, lest he be found out that it was he that was causing all the trouble.

That left out Alfheim, because it was home to the Light Elves and they were also well connected with Asgard as well as were they highly skill sorcerers in their own right and might "sniff" him out. Niflheim was no fun because its only inhabitant was the dragon Nidhug. Lastly there were Jotunheim, Svartalfheim, and Muspellheim, and they were off his radar as well because he the Jotuns made him feel uneasy, the Dark Elves were almost as proficient in magic as their counterparts on Alfheim, and he simply just did not like being on the heated world that was Muspellheim.

Ah Midgard.

The newborn realm amongst the nine, but it was very low on Asgard's radar as Midgardians were frail, short-lived creatures that barely had any understanding of the other realms outside their own. The few times in the past when Aesir did visit Midgard, especially when the Jotun threatened it with another ice age, the foolish mortals thought them gods. They might as well have considered them gods given the strength and the longevity the weakest Aesir had over the strongest human.

When Loki made his first voyage to Midgard he looked on at the mortals with fascination. They were normally smaller than any being from any other realm and even the bearer of the fairest of their skin held imperfections. These creatures had yet to attain the time required to become anything close
to a being of higher power, if they were ever meant to.

So it was quite easy for the Aesir to make grand impressions on the mortals, the infantile life forms they had spared from the Frost Giants. More than any other of the Asgardians, the humans gravitated their praise towards Odin and Thor, lavishing them with celebrations, temples, and even their finest maidens.

At first Loki merely observed the interactions of the mortals and Aesir from the shadows, gauging their reactions. Wondering if they would accept his presence as much as the other "Gods." Finally, long after all the other Asgardians made their way back to their home realm, he slinked out from his solitude and into the fray of the Midgardian celebration called Jul, allowing all to see him in his full Asgardian armor. The humans, having noticed him melt away from the shadows ceased their doings and stopped, eyes wide. Loki felt a surge of hope and let a pleased smile cross his face as this was the same reaction the people gave his father and brother.

"Who are you?" a man asked, seemingly the chieftain of this particular clan.

Walking forward, ignoring the tribe's staring gaze, Loki walked to the large table where a sacrificial boar had been placed upon it for the night's feast, inspecting it. The people continued to stare before backing away from him.

"Sons and daughters of Midgard, I mean no ill intent on this eve," he spoke gently, splaying a hand over his breastplate in a disarming gesture, "I am Loki, son of Odin and Frigga, and brother of Thor."

"Where is Freyr?" the Chieftain asked warily.

Loki felt his teeth grind together in mild annoyance at not being met with rejoicing as his kin had, but he kept his frustrations in check, letting his lips slip back into a charming smile.

"Freyr and the others have returned back to Asgard, celebrating with you Midgardians having thoroughly tired them out. But I still remain, vitally eager to join the festivities."

He sat at the long wooden table amongst the still silent mortals and plucked a piece of boar and popped the morsel into his mouth, chewing with consideration. Of course it was nothing like the succulent boar prepared on Asgard, but it still brought forth a pleased sound from his throat.

"A truly worthy boar of sacrifice," he said thoughtfully, then asked, "Did you spare the blood when it was slaughtered?"

When he received a nod, he beckoned the blood be brought to him. A maiden came to him, carrying a bowl containing the blood. It sloshed a little in her hands as she trembled before him. Loki rose from his seat and she seemed to shrink back from his towering height and she eyed his horns with trepidation. His arm moved slowly so as not to startle her further as it passed over the blood, it glowed in his signature color for a moment before returning to a deep maroon.

"Let this blood seep into the earth of your fields and there will be a bountiful harvest come spring," he instructed to the chieftain. His green eyes then flickered back to the maiden and he dipped his long fingers into the blood. She gasped audibly when he let his digits slowly run down her face from forehead to her collarbone, leaving crimson trails in their wake. "You too shall be blessed with bounty," he said to her and her alone.

After the celebration, Loki retreated back to the shadows to watch how his blessings played out, sure that once the mortals received their rewards that they would flock around him and worship him the
next time he appeared. Maybe he could be an equal to Thor in this realm.

He should have known better.

The next morning that same maiden exited her dwelling, carrying the very bowl of blood he had blessed the night before. He watched from his perch with pride on his face, but it soon melted away as he saw her taking her travels outside the village and not to the farming fields. Confusion and anger stabbed at him at the mortals' blatant disregard of his instructions, but he stamped it down and followed the maiden, keeping his presence cloaked from her.

She didn't stop even as she shivered in the cold in her white slip of a gown, her face and clothes still stained with blood from his hand, her bare feet crunching in the snow. Despite her shivering, she kept on until she reached the precipice of a cliff overlooking a frozen fjord. With only a moment's hesitation, the maiden continued on her way as if the drop off were bridged. Loki was too shocked to react in any way that would save her from herself and he watched with rare expression of horror as the maiden's body fell in a flutter of white fabric, his blessed boar's blood spilling out behind her like the tail of a comet.

He didn't know how long he stood there overlooking her body, but it was certainly long enough for the horror and brief grief to turn to bitterness.

When he returned to Midgard, he no longer came with goodwill and blessings, but instead darkness and curses. Being that Midgard was no longer under threat of the enemies of Asgard, Loki made many fond memories of doing whatever he pleased, of course within range of what was natural, lest his magic be found to be the culprit. He caused crops to wither and fail, cows to dry up, bewitched women out of the arms of their husbands, and whispered words of encouragement to men who had the seeds of evil already growing within them, starting wars. The Midgardians learned to fear him like never before and they prayed and made sacrifices to keep him away. Loki found their efforts strange, but amusing nonetheless. Such witless, pitiful creatures they were.

*I wonder what Midgard is like now?*

He focused on the lowly realm and his spirit projection drifted closer until he past through the threshold of the portal. The sight that met him was vastly different from his last visit. The twinkling lights of massive cities replaced the tiny villages of centuries ago.

*Well at least there is some improvement,* he mused as he hovered invisible in the sky. *Time to have a bit of fun.*

Loki vanished from the sky, reappearing moments later on the ground among the bustle of humans walking the busy city of Tokyo. He found himself looking up and around him for although it was daylight there, the towering buildings all around were lit up and flashing with visions and lights. Loki found the display to be an eyesore.

*So they like flashy things?*

Smirking, Loki twisted his wrist bending the lights to his will. They continued blinking in their regular patterns, but much faster than the human eye and brain could keep up with. Almost immediately several of the civilians began to stagger in their steps, throw up, or simply fall into convulsions.

He puffed out a silent snicker as he watched his handiwork before transporting himself to his next destination.
The next place he found himself was a desolate, frozen wasteland, reminding him of what he heard of Jotunheim. A frozen lake and a tiny dot sitting in the middle of it caught his sharp green eyes and he transported himself closer to get a better look. There sat a lone man in thick clothes, weathering the cold, a simple rod and line dipped in a hole in the ice.

Loki walked a circle around the man, studying his primitive way of procuring food. The line jerked in the water and the man grinned, "Finally a big one!"

Oh it will be a big one indeed.

As the man fought his catch up to the mouth of the hole in the ice, his excitement turned to comical horror as a giant serpent broke through the surface, a mouthful of sharp teeth ready to take a bite out of its would-be hunter.

The man screamed high and shrill as he backpedaled away from the creature Loki conjured, slipping and sliding on the ice as he went. The sorry fellow looked to be on the verge of cardiac arrest, but the scene brought much needed amusement to the sorcerer. He watched the man eventually disappear in his haste to escape, and finally let the visage of a serpent melt away into the harmless fish it had been all along.

Loki dashed from country to country; pulling mostly harmless yet humiliating pranks on the Midgardians that had the misfortune of being in his vicinity. He caused a strange beverage maker to malfunction and spray the operator with the bubbly liquid that humans apparently liked to drink. He ruined romantic moments between young lovers by momentarily influencing one of the pair to say something completely uncouth to their partner.

Upon seeing some scandalously dressed Midgard women walking down the sidewalk he wondered if they had no sense of modesty. He decided to test it and with just a small shift of his fingers, their already short skirts flew up as if by a gust of wind. The women shrieked and frantically pushed at their clothes to keep their under garments from prying eyes. Loki snorted to himself at the idea of the stupid humans dressing like harlots, yet acting suddenly too modest should they show just what they were blatantly trying to advertise.

It wasn't even beneath Loki to pick on children (though he never caused them any real harm), especially the annoying bratty ones—they reminded him of Thor. He'd cause a newly bought toy to drop "accidentally" and break or ice cream to fall from its cone to the ground. Their wailing cries were music to his ears.

The God of Mischief took a break from his troublemaking to sit on a lonely bench in the middle of a park. He leaned back in his seat, dipping his head back to look up at the night sky. He noticed that despite the darkness, the artificial lighting of Midgard muted most of the stars. Only a fraction of the stars he could view from Asgard were visible here. Although he lacked Heimdall's eagle sharp sight, from the Bifrost's observatory Loki could easily make out countless galaxies, nebulas, black holes, and super novas. Midgard's skies were hardly even worth calling a cheap imitation.

Being that he was alone, he allowed himself to mutter the feelings he got from the realm. "Pathetic."

Unlike the wailing tantrums of spoiled children he heard earlier, he sensed a deep wounded sorrow
from this cry. It made him feel suddenly uneasy and he made to get up and leave Midgard altogether.

The crying sputtered to a sniffling before a tiny voice called out, "M-Mommy, w-where are you?"

Loki felt every fiber of his being freeze, those words tugging painfully at something inside of him. What that something was, it was familiar, but he could not place it.

Again he shrewdly contemplated what it was. When the lifespan of an Asgardian could last up to 5,000 years, one could forget the names of emotions that are not used frequently enough. He thought back through his own millennium of life, searching for a time he felt such a strong emotion.

There was the time when Thor had hurt himself during warrior training as a child. He was there to see his older brother break a bone for the first time, no small feat, even for an Asgardian child. Their father assured Thor that his arm would be healed by the end of the day, but offered no further comfort—a tactic to toughen young boys to become warriors. Loki found himself feeling something for his wounded brother, a feeling like he could imagine Thor's pain in his own arm and it brought tears to his own eyes. It took the combined effort of Loki and their mother to ease Thor enough to dry his tears.

What was this emotion? Compassion? Empathy?

The sobbing started again in earnest breaking Loki from his memories. Did he feel those things for a lost little mortal? Against better his judgments, curiosity won out—something else Loki had a penchant for other than mischief—and he stood to follow the simpering sniffing cries.

The walk took him deeper into the heart of the park, where the trees and shrubs grew thicker and more plentiful. The sidewalk lamps became less and less frequent allowing darkness to reign without much hindrance. Animals of the night fluttered about the trees and scuttled through the brush with near noiselessness, picking at the litter humans had left behind during the day. They didn't warrant much of his attention and he only paused to listen again when he heard the sobbing getting louder as it was also accompanied by much less careful footsteps. Definitely human.

Loki swiftly rounded a tree, eyes meeting the back of a little Midgard girl. She stopped walking to turn her head to and fro, frantically searching.

"Mommy!" she called louder, her voice reaching a desperate pitch.

Loki gripped the bark of the tree as that feeling from before clenched at his insides, tight enough to force out a shaky breath. The scene tossed him back into reverie of his past, when he was the size of the girl before him, calling for his own mother after having a horrible nightmare.

He at least felt just a smidge of empathy for the girl, begrudgingly, but he wasn't about to call it compassion.

The girl whipped around suddenly facing him now, fear obvious in the depths of her wide blue eyes. She looked right at him causing his muscles to pause rigidly under his skin.

"H-Hello," she called in apprehension.

*She sees me? Impossible.*

He was still by all means invisible.

Her breathing increased with her panic, clutching her hands at her chest in a feeble attempt to put something between her and the dangers of the night. "W-Who's t-there?" More tears gathered in her
eyes and spilled down her heart shaped face as she shook in fear, yet her feet kept her rooted to the spot she currently occupied.

Loki's chest constricted painfully at the look she gave him. The will to trick and tease left his being replaced with the need to put the mortal at ease. There was something else he wanted, but he wasn't sure what. He slowly materialized before her with little thought behind it.

This isn't like you.

The girl blinked at him, startled at the revelation, then as if she'd forgotten her prior fear, her face changed to an expression of awe. "Whoa, coooool."

Though he remained outwardly neutral, a strange sense of pride filled him from impressing her and causing her tears to dry. But then confusion took over, making him wonder why his presence bothered his own people and the mere whisper of his name caused Midgardians of the past to quiver. Why was this girl so different from any of them?

He studied her as if looking at an insect under magnification trying to figure out just what made her unique from the other insects. She was fairly ordinary by Midgardian standards with long umber hair that fell in waves from underneath a knit hat. He thought she was too young to need glasses, but deduced she may have been born with eyes that needed correcting. The rest of her was dressed in a knit scarf, pants, and a peacoat. The whole ensemble made her seem even tinier.

Loki decided he wanted to find just what made her so different.

"Does my appearance cheer you up child?" he hedged in a gentle but imploring tone.

"Oh yes!" she said with a smile—showing off a recently lost baby tooth while bouncing on the balls of her feet as if that were the only thing that could keep her excitement from exploding forth. "How did you do that!?"

Loki allowed a smile of his own, again feeling pleased with the mortal's interest in him. "Magic of course."

"Wow," she breathed, her eyes widening in admiration, "are you like a fairy—wait," he quirked a brow as she paused in her thinking, "...you're too big to be a fairy. Are you an elf?"

He chuckled at her attempts to figure him out. "I'm not a fairy nor an elf," he answered, gracing her with a bow, "I am prince Loki of Asgard."

It was taking a chance revealing himself, even to a mortal so small, but he could not bring himself to care at the moment, the desire for her to acknowledge him for who he really was far too strong.

The girl seemed none the wiser to his former Midgardian title of Loki, God of lies and mischief. She returned his bow with a curtsey despite wearing pants and not a skirt. "I'm Darcy of Santa Rosa."

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Lady Darcy," he inclined his head once more before stepping closer, "Now if I may ask...what seems to have troubled you little one?"

Darcy's face faltered and she looked down from him with a quivering lip. "I-I was walking through the park with my mom when I saw the fire flies lighting up and I chased after them. Mom called after me, but I just wanted to catch one...a-and then I did and I wanted to show her, but then I looked around and she w-was gone and I-I didn't know where I w-was..." she finished her story with a sniff, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears meeting his again, "W-What if I never see my m-mom again?"
The clenching of his chest started again. This girl was definitely pulling at all the right strings of his usually indifferent heart, bending him into feeling things he never cared to feel for a mortal before.

Loki knelt before her bringing her as close to eye level with his tall frame as he could, his hands reaching out to grasp both of her tiny shoulders in an act of reassurance. "You will see your mother again, she will find you."

"H-How d-do you know?" she whimpered.

"I just know," he smiled, "A good mother would never abandon her child. Do you have a good mother, Darcy?"

Her wave of locks bounced as she nodded vigorously.

"Then you have nothing to fear. If you wait right here for her, she will surely find you, and I will remain in your company while you wait." Loki released her, shifting smoothly so he sat cross-legged on the sweet smelling grass. He beckoned her to join him and she plopped down next to him without hesitation. "So you like my magic? Would you like to see more?"

"YES!" Darcy nodded again, bouncing up and down even though she was sitting.

Another mirthful chuckle escaped the prince and he obliged her by conjuring glowing apparitions of the beautiful native birds of Asgard. Darcy gazed up in wonder at their colorful and intricate plumage as they flitted and soared gracefully around her and Loki, leaving trails of light in their wake.

Loki flicked his wrist and the birds slowly morphed into equally stunning fish, elegantly long fins trailing them like veils. Another flick and the fish bloomed into flowers, one more flick and the flowers collapsed into spheres emitting a soft green glow. His hands silently called the orbs to him and he effortlessly juggled all ten of them as Darcy giggled and clapped her hands. It wasn't very often that he was this showy with his magic; he namely used it practically or for setting up the perfect prank. But yet here he was, Loki, prince of Asgard, God of Mischief, using his magic like parlor tricks for a mortal child's amusement.

At least this particular use of his magic dried the tears and silenced the sobs plaguing the girl, which in turn plagued him.

Deciding the scene around them was too drab the prince bumped one orb off his elbow and sent it flying into a tree. It exploded in a dusting of brilliant green sparks, enhancing the colors of the tree and illuminating it with shimmering lights. The mortal let out a shameless squeal of delight at his handiwork, bringing a prideful smirk to his face.

With simple yet swift gestures of his hand, the remaining orbs shot out around them, blasting everything in their surroundings with tiny, brilliant explosions of light. It wasn't until he had finished that Loki realized he'd transformed their little spot of the park into a vision of a lush Asgardian forest.

"This is awesome!" Darcy shouted with glee and jumped to her feet to investigate every inch of the new world unfurled before her.

Loki was simply content to watch her while his mind contemplated his feelings since meeting the girl. He decided that it was her personality—her inquisitiveness, enthusiasm, and her lack of filter that made her unique and interesting to him. Never had he met a being like her, someone who didn't view him with disdain or fear. In fact she embraced his magic. He admitted to himself, and only to himself, that he felt a sort of fondness growing in his heart for her. He thought her as kindred to him, sharing his free spirit.
Look at how far you've fallen Loki Odinson, he heard a voice say with contempt, the once feared God of lies and chaos…look at you now, pandering your magic to soothe a mere mortal child. Her acceptance of you matters not. The voice was his own conscience echoing within his head.

A second voice chimed in sounding more encouraging of his behavior compared to the seething of first voice. Just because she is mortal does not mean her company should be ignored. You do seek acceptance don't you? It does not matter if that acceptance comes from a being as great as you or from one as insignificant as a Midgardian. Friendship and acceptance is all that matters.

The girl is beneath you; this entire realm is beneath you! All it is good for is reminding you that you are vastly above them. A prince, a future king of Asgard!

A king who should be mindful of all under his rule, a worthy king respects all, from the highest race to the lowest of creatures. All branches are integral to the great Yggdrasil; don't forget that.

The warring voices overtook Loki's mind and he winced as their words ran together and became so indiscernible that he couldn't make sense of it anymore.

A scream finally hushed his thoughts and he shot up to his feet. When realized he was suddenly alone he cursed to himself for not keeping an eye on the mortal who's curiosity seemed to rival his own.

No wonder the girl got lost in the first place, he thought, letting frustration take over as he trudged through the forest in search of his young charge.

"Loki! Help!" she cried out seemingly just ahead of him.

The prince's chagrin melted away to be instantly replaced with gut-wrenching worry over the girl's safety. He called out her name in response, letting her know he was coming for her. After brushing some foliage out of his way he located her, his worry multiplying upon seeing what new trouble she got herself into.

A tree that he had enchanted with magic had grown limb-like branches and held her pinned against its trunk, but that was the least of the danger. His turning the area into a little piece of Asgard had gone a little out of his control and conjured another beast of his realm, the feared Bilgesnipe. The beast inched towards the screaming girl, snarling as it prepared to pounce.

Loki wasted not a moment in flicking a magically charged dagger at the creature and it fell dead instantly. With the Bilgesnipe no longer a threat, Loki turned his attention back to Darcy who still struggled against the tree holding her hostage. He waved one hand dismissively through the air and all his enchantment seeped away, returning the scene to that of the Midgardian park.

Loki had not felt such worry in a long, long time and it unsettled him, and when he felt unsettled, he usually let his anger override the situation.

"You shouldn't have run off," he growled, "do you not understand that you could have been hurt or killed? You silly Midgar—"

His rant was cut short when the object of his ire latched herself to his leg, leaving his silver tongue without anything more to say.

"I-I'm sorry…please don't be mad," Darcy whispered, clinging to his leg as if her very life depended on it—which it probably did.

All the anger seemed to leak from his very pores and his tense shoulders sagged in defeat. He
gingerly pried her from his leg so he could kneel down, arms wrapping her up in his arms.

"I'm not mad, little one," the words just tumbled out as he stroked her head tenderly, "my magic just got out of hand and I was worried for your safety."

There it was, out in the open. The fact that even a mere thought of this little mortal in any kind of danger made him feel physically ill should be disconcerting to him, but he felt like he couldn't deny it to himself anymore. Darcy had him wrapped securely around her tiny little finger.

Oh yes…look at how far I have fallen, lowering myself for one so small.

"I'm okay, Loki, don't worry," she whispered, momentarily pulling away from his chest to give him an endearing smile. She then stood on the tips of her toes so her little arms could make a circle around his neck and fully return his embrace.

Loki knew at that moment that he would have fallen again and again just for another hug from her. Perhaps this was how Frigga felt when she gave into his and Thor's demands behind Odin's back when they were children. Maybe she still felt that way about them no matter how big the two of them have grown.

Being in Darcy's company eased his mind and made him stop questioning himself and just focus on the here and now. He felt like he could shed the mask he forced himself to wear around Thor and his friends and embrace his magic without fear. He honestly didn't know if he could let her go now and he silently debated with himself on whether or not to spirit her back with him to Asgard.

"Darcy!" came a distant feminine call.

The decision was taken out of his hands literally as the girl wiggled out of his arms, as if forgetting all him, and ran to the direction of the voice.

"Mommy!"

Loki watched Darcy's brunette hair bounce behind her as she ran, feeling the contentment and warmth get sucked right out of him. A woman appeared over the hill and happily scooped up the little girl, all the while letting out incoherent cries of relief upon finding her daughter.

The prince felt cold and alone from his spot in the shadows, but he couldn't bring himself to feel too bitter.

It wouldn't do for me to get too attached, her lifespan will be over in the blink of an eye. She belongs with her mother yet.

"Don't ever run off like that again," the woman scolded in a frantic voice, still too shaken up for it to sound truly threatening.

"I'll try not to," Darcy said mischievously—which caused Loki to chuckle to himself. Before her mother could protest to that, Darcy wiggled out of her grasp as well. "Mommy, come meet my new friend!" she exclaimed, taking her mother's hand and pulling her along.

"Friend? What friend, dear?" her mother asked pensively.

Friend?

Loki barely broke out of his thoughts in time to make sure he was invisible again.
"Loki!" Darcy called, looking for him in the spot he previously occupied, "Loki, where'd you go?"

"Who is Loki?" her mother asked again, blue eyes searching as well, but exercising more caution.

"My friend! He's a prince! A-And he can use magic! Oh and he stayed and protected me until you found me!"

"A prince AND magic?" her mother dropped her defenses slightly before muttering mostly to herself, "I wish I had an imaginary friend like that when I was your age."

"But he's not imaginary!" the child insisted.

Loki remained hidden, but his heart swelled with happiness as he eavesdropped on Darcy's praises of him.

"Okay, okay," said the mother, still clearly not believing her "but it's late so you'll have to wait until after school tomorrow to play with your friend again. It's way past your bed time." She gathered up her daughter again, holding her against her hip as they walked out of the park.

Meanwhile Loki could feel his spiritual connection to Midgard slipping, his magic was nearly drained and he'd have to return to Asgard soon. But he had one last thing he knew he must do before his departure.

"But mommy, I'm not tired yet. I can't sleep noow," Darcy pouted from her spot under the covers of her bed.

"You better or I'll give you chores tomorrow," her mother left no room for argument and kissed her daughter goodnight.

The bedroom light was switched off and the door shut, but Darcy resisted sleep.

"You should sleep, little one."

Darcy bolted up in bed upon hearing his voice and seeing his form illuminated by a lone green orb. "Loki!"

Loki shushed the girl with a slender finger to his lips.

"Show me more magic," she whispered.

He shook his head solemnly. "My magic is wearing thin, Darcy. I merely came to bid you goodnight." And goodbye.

Darcy looked disappointed—and it pulled at his heart a little, but she nodded concededly. "Then will you tell me story…please?"

Loki couldn't bring himself to say no, so he told Darcy of the story of when he cut off all of Lady Sif's once golden hair in retaliation for calling him a coward for using tricks during battle training. His punishment had been to find a way to replenish Sif's hair. He tricked the dwarves of Nidavellir to not only construct Sif's new hair—though to have a laugh he had them make her black hair instead of gold—but to also give him the spear Gungir which he presented to his father as a gift.

Darcy listened intently at first, asking questions here and there, but by the time he was halfway
through the story the little Midgardian and reluctantly fallen fast asleep. Loki carefully tucked her further under her covers and brushed some wayward strands of hair from her face, a sad smile gracing his angular features.

"As much as I have grown fond for you, little one, I must take my leave back to Asgard," he whispered, "We probably won't cross paths again, but I hope you will understand that it is for the best, for the both of us."

Only a few threads of magic kept his astral projection tethered to Midgard now, so he said the last of his parting words hastily.

"Be good for your mother and don't run off so much. Try not to get into so much trouble, but live your life to the fullest." He leaned over and pressed his lips to lightly to her forehead, "Sweet dreams and farewell my dear Darcy."

With the very last ounce of his magic, he quickly whispered a charm upon her so that when she woke, she would remember her time with him more as a dream than reality.

Loki returned to his body on Asgard feeling absolutely drained, but light-hearted all the same. He too fell quickly into an easy slumber after throwing on his sleeping tunic and trousers and tumbling back onto his bed.

Despite not being able to use his magic again for a good two weeks, his uplifted mood continued. Not the idiocy of his brother, the taunting of Lady Sif and the Warriors Three, nor the disdainful looks of the people of Asgard could wrench the contented smile from his lips as he went about his days. He walked confidently with his head defiantly held high.

And for a short time, much to the relief of Odin, Asgard was free of any maliciously humiliating pranks from its trickster prince.
Thank you to everyone for all the wonderful feedback, it all really means a lot to me! I originally was going to post this and the next chapter as one long chapter, but it didn't jive well with my next chapter being considerably shorter, so I broke it into two chapters. I hope you enjoy!

Over the next few years Loki's thoughts would occasionally drift back to the happenstance meeting he had with the little Midgardian, Darcy. Sometimes, at random intervals, he even thought he heard her little voice calling out to him, making him wonder if what he was hearing was real or if he had gone mad after so badly wishing for her companionship. He often entertained the thought of visiting her again, especially when his father's favoritism for Thor became ever glaringly evident and it darkened the his mood, but he also wanted to find out if Darcy was in need of his aid or something.

But he stamped down those foolish notions, passing them off as wistful thinking, and for the next fourteen years drowned himself in his practices, honing his magic, wit, and fighting skills more than ever, hoping for the day Odin would show as much pride in his lone eye for him as he held for his brother.

Loki should have known better than to hold out a hope for that.

After years of trying to prove himself worthy to his father, in the end his efforts were for naught. Odin announced that the heir to the throne would be his firstborn son and that Thor's coronation would be held on the full moon of the month of January. Loki kept his resentment under his skin, but only just barely.

Why their father chose his bumbling oaf of a brother—firstborn or not, to be king was beyond Loki. Thor was strong and he alone could wield Mjolnir, Asgard's most powerful weapon, but that was all he had going for him. Odin's golden boy was brash, vain, and lacked the much needed intelligence that would allow him to run Asgard smoothly for one day, much less the next five millennia. Loki could see it now; Thor holding the crown along with the very moment something didn't go his brother's way. The first realms would be under utter chaos within five minutes for his older brother lacked the patience of a king.

What was Odin thinking? Or was he even thinking in his old age?

By now sixteen years had passed since the encounter on Midgard and Loki had all forgotten about the girl. The time of the God of Mischief was almost entirely spent trying to please his father, and then it turned to time spent hating the shadow Thor had cast upon him. Was that his fate, always to be overlooked in the presence of his brother?

He had to make Odin see the grievous mistake he made in his choosing, or at least delay Thor's crowning for as long as possible. He shared his concerns with his mother, but even though she agreed that Thor was far from ready for the crown, there was nothing she could do to change Odin's mind.
Loki momentarily considered coming to his father directly, but quickly redirected his thoughts. His father could be just as stubborn as Thor in his decision-making.

So instead he swallowed his emotions and did what he did best: lie. Outwardly he put on a mask of smiles and happiness for his brother, while behind the closed doors of his room he silently plotted and waited.

Soon everything fell into place just how Loki had planned, like playing a game of chess and predicting every enemy countermeasure.

Thor had taken the small, failed attack of the Jotuns and blew it completely out of proportion, demanding for war like a petulant child. The All-Father called his son's words foolish, but only intended to delay Thor's ascent to the thrown.

That was not enough for Loki, but it was something he already had planned for. So he went to Thor and sewed more seeds of manipulation, telling his brother that he agreed with him on his stance on the Jotuns. That was all it took for an impatient Thor to gather him and their friends and march onto Jotunheim looking for answers. And when Thor said answers, he knew his brother was truly lusting for war.

So Loki told one of the guards of Thor's intentions knowing that the fool could get them all slain, and in the end Fandral and Volstagg were injured and they were surrounded by legions of vengeful Frost Giants. Odin appeared with only seconds to spare, whisking them all away back to the safety of Asgard and thus finally came to the conclusion that Thor was not worthy of being king. Loki had not seen their father this angry in a long time, nor Thor this foolish, talking back when he was clearly in the wrong.

There were a few outcomes that Loki had not been able to predict in this little web of games he was spinning.

He did not expect that when a Frost Giant grabbed him, that his arm would turn blue with raised sigils scoring his skin, before returning to his usual pale Aesir pallor. He expected frostbite, but not this. Had the Frost Giant been a sorcerer and cast some sort of curse on him?

He did not expect for his father to banish Thor to Midgard.

Loki felt lost after having his older brother banished from Asgard—even being the immense idiot that he was. Odin cast out Thor, his favored son, what might he do to his youngest should Loki also step out of line? Then Sif and the Warriors three had the audacity to be cross with him for alerting Odin to their whereabouts, he saved all of them! And then there was the secret that Loki had hanging over his head, making him feel incredibly uneasy.

What happened to me on Jotunheim?

Looking for answers, he went from the healing rooms to the vault. He stared warily over the Casket of Ancient Winters, his hands hovering over the weapon as though it would burn him; and it very well could. But his curiosity and desire for answers won out over self-preservation, and he picked up the Casket of Ancient Winters finding out that it wasn't just his arm that could turn Jotun blue.

What am I?

Odin came to him as if sensing his youngest son's troubled feelings, seeking to placate, but in the end they only seemed to make things worse.

The full revelation brought Loki’s world crashing down around him, piece by piece, threatening to
bury him in the rubble. At first he felt hollow, void of identity. He did not belong among the Aesir he was raised with, but was in fact sired by very the bogeyman Asgard learned to fear; and his own kind cast him out for reasons he could not control.

At least now he knew why he never could measure up to Thor, but he could not figure out why Odin spoon-fed him notions that he was meant for the same greatness as his adoptive brother when all along his purpose was nothing more than a political pawn.

*A pawn to be used and then tossed away…and even that purpose no longer matters, so what use do I have now?*

Loki, the God of Lies, had been told the greatest lie of all and he ate it up, believing every word.

The shock and displacement soon turned into a fury that ground against his bones like a friction fire, and Loki was just itching to let it out, to let his wrath burn and consume everything along with him.

"No it all makes sense now why you favored Thor all these years," Loki began, his tone growing louder and bitterer with each word, "because no matter how much you claim to love me, you couldn't have a Frost Giant sitting on the throne of Asgard!"

And despite learning of his true origins and his newfound rage for always being in Thor's shadow reawakening, when the All-father, overwhelmed with the latest events, collapsed into Odin-sleep, Loki felt the helplessness of a son over take him. He still loved Odin, and Frigga, and desperately wanted to prove himself to the both of them, to all of Asgard.

Even though Odin always favored Thor, Loki knew Frigga always favored him, for she shared her magic with him and gave him praise when he completed a lesson, and kind words and a soothing hand when he injured himself in warrior training. Still when his mother named Loki king in Odin's absence and Thor's banishment, shock momentarily overtook him.

He had not calculated that into his plans either.

When she woke up the next morning, Darcy was left with the impression that she had an incredible dream, a dream that started out as a nightmare and ended with magic, mystical creatures, and a man with dark hair and mesmerizing green eyes rescuing her; a very princely man.

The only thing that seemed to elude her was his name.

She didn't have long to lie in bed and try to piece that last bit of information back together because her mom got her up and dressed and off to kindergarten. Despite running the dream through her head all day at school to the point that when it was lunch time and Darcy was the only one still at her seat. Her teacher politely came to her and asked if her mind was still on Earth or in outer space.

A week went by and the dream wouldn't let her attention go. Yet she could not place the young man's name, or the feeling that this dream was something more.

It wasn't until she asked her mom to take her to the park that the answer came to her.

"I don't know if I should take you to the park after last time…"

"What do you mean 'last time', mom?"

"The last time we went to the park you wandered off. I lost you for a good hour and when I finally found you, you were going on about some friend…" her mom paused, "What did you call him?
Oki?

Like a flickering of a match lighting a candle his name returned to Darcy. "Loki! His name is Loki!" she cried.

It wasn't a dream at all. The prince was real and his name was Loki.

After five minutes straight of begging, her mom finally agreed to take her to the park as long as she promised not to run off again. The moment they reached the park Darcy took hold of her mother's hand and pulled her along deep into the park.

Darcy reached the spot she met him and called out to him. She called and called but he didn't appear. She thought maybe he was shy of her mother so she made her mom close her eyes before telling Loki it was safe to come out. He didn't. No amount of calling, pleading, or even demanding could make the prince show himself. Her mother patted her on the head, saying that perhaps he was sick or something, that maybe he'd be back another time.

That put enough hope into Darcy and whenever she got the time she had her mom take her to the park and she'd play in the shaded forest and call for Loki to come out while her mother read and kept an eye on her. When he didn't come to her calls, she would sit in front of the tree she first saw him materialize next to and talk to it as if it was some conduit to him. It started to become a weekly tradition for her, so her mom started packing them picnics.

Years passed and while the picnics didn't cease, Darcy stopped talking to the tree in hopes Loki appearing or responding to her chatter. Instead she would sit under the tree and read books about adventures and magic or play hide and seek with other park going kids—her insisting that that particular tree would be the safe base.

Ten years came and went and when she was able to come to the park alone, Darcy continued to visit and hang around the tree, but the reason she came in the first place became a distant memory. The only reason left for her to come to the tree was that she'd been doing it for so long that it became her special spot of solitude.

Darcy came to the tree even up until the very day she was to leave from her little hometown of Santa Rosa to Puente Antiguo for a college internship she had signed up for to quickly earn some easy college credits.

The internship was concerned with astrophysics, which was as far from political science as she could get, but at least it was still in New Mexico and she wouldn't have to travel out of state or out of the country (she had to conserve every penny she had).

"I'm going out of town for a little while," she said after sitting down at the base of the tree and leaning her head back against the trunk, speaking to no one or anything in the area in particular. "I'm going to miss my little ritual of sitting here while listening to my iPod or reading the next book in the Fever series."

It was here that she graduated from reading the child-friendly magic of Harry Potter series to the darker, sexier magic of the Fever books—and for some reason she loved to read about magic. Darcy pushed those memories aside and closed her eyes, letting herself just feel one with her little spot in the world for a few minutes longer. She opened her eyes and looked up at the sky peeking through the branches of the tree. "Don't miss me too much," she said and got up to leave.

Darcy had not thought of Loki since she was a kid. She didn't think of him when their vehicle collided with Thor as he popped up seemingly out of nowhere after the colorful funnel cloud she had
been tracking with Jane and Erik folded back up into the sky. Sure Thor talked weird, was super strong, and ate like he had a hollow leg, but nothing in his behavior tipped her mind towards recalling long forgotten childish notions. He was felled by her taser like any normal human being after all.

It was Erik that had caused her to begin to remember and it was by pure accident.

After S.H.I.E.L.D. confiscated all their scientific equipment and Jane was at her wits end, considering taking Thor up on his offer to go to the site where he could reclaim "Myeuh-muh." In his effort to show her how crazy Thor was and to keep her safe, Erik had showed the astrophysicist and her intern a book on Norse mythology.

At first Darcy paid the pages he pointed out to them with little interest, but after Jane had left the bookworm in her took over and she looked through the book on her own, immersing herself in the rich myths of the Vikings. One section smack dab in the middle of the book gave her definite pause.

**Loki: God of Mischief and Lies.**

*That name.*

*Loki.*

Flashes of images lit up her mind, flashes of being lost in the park as a child, of being scared and feeling like someone was there with her, a man appearing near her tree out of thin air. A man dressed in black, gold, and especially green, looking incredibly handsome and royal. The smell of leather and the cleaniness of winter's first frost clung to him like a cloak. His short black hair, smoothly slicked back, was a stark contrast to his beautifully pale skin. And then there were his eyes, brilliantly green pools that sparkled playfully when he showed her his magic.

*Now don't you start going crazy Darcy, people already think you're a little out there already. He isn't real...just an imaginary friend that your head cooked up when you were a kid.*

*You were six years old and you called your imaginary friend Loki...when you didn't know a damn thing about Norse gods.*

*I probably heard about him on some sort of TV program, ya know, some sort of subliminal thing that got stuck in your head subconsciously only to resurface later.*

Darcy shook herself of her mental debate and pushed her glasses back up her nose and started reading the section on Loki. Much of it seemed completely far-fetched, like him giving birth to an eight-legged horse, and having a serpent, a wolf, and a corpse for children. She was about to give up searching for any answers among the old tales of Loki and chalk everything up to her wild imagination when she came upon the story called **How Sif Lost Her Golden Hair to Loki's Mischief.**

*Sif...that sounds familiar too...*

She read the story, but as she did she found herself almost knowing the ending before she got to it, as though she had known the story all along.

She remembered a charmingly deep voice, soft as velvet, and the memories from the park changed to that of her childhood bedroom, of Loki kneeling at her bedside with a glowing green orb of light. And in that silken voice he said, "Alright...then I'll tell you the story of when I cut off all of Lady Sif's golden hair..."
Some things were different in the book compared to the tale Loki had told her, but she recognized it all the same. Darcy skipped back to the general description of Loki and what caught her eye most was that he was a user of magic and often accompanied Thor on adventures.

Darcy closed the book with a resounding clap and vowed to herself that should she and the man calling himself Thor crossed paths again, that she would ask him about Loki.

The moment came early in the morning after Erik came back with Thor (or Thor came back with a drunken Erik draped over his shoulders).

She hoped to catch him alone for her questioning and thankfully for her Jane was a late riser and Erik was still very hung over. Thor on the other hand was an early bird. He was in living area of the place Jane had rented to do her research, watching the sunrise from the window with an uncharacteristically morose expression on his usually cheerful face.

Darcy cleared her throat to announce her presence and his face changed instantly to a friendly smile. "Good morning Lady Darcy."

"G'morning," she returned, but found at first that she couldn't go on with what she intended to talk with him about. She moved her weight from one foot to the other, while unconsciously biting her lip and looking everywhere but at Thor's deep blue eyes.

*Am I really going to ask this guy...who could just be a crazy, albeit incredibly hot, homeless guy...about Loki? This just could be enabling his condition...but still...I need to know...and Jane seems to trust him.*

"Something troubling you?" Thor asked as he came to stand before her.

"Can you tell me about Loki?" she hedged, "I mean...you know him, right?"

"Ah yes!" he boomed, "My brother! What would you like to know?"

"Did he ever visit Earth?"

Thor nodded. "As have I and many other Asgardians in the past."

"Did he ever mention m—?" the word 'me' was out of her mouth before she could stop it, but she was just able to backpedal.

You almost sounded like some sort of creeper ex-girlfriend. You really need to work on your mind-to-mouth filter.

But I wanna know if he ever talked about me.

That still sounds creepy...

Oh you know what I mean!

"Did Loki ever mention... a lost little girl looking for her mother...or something like that?" she rephrased her question after her earlier embarrassing near slip up; she then added to make sure he did not ask weird questions, "I mean...a childhood friend of mine claimed a Prince Loki once helped her out when she was lost, so I was just trying to figure out if she made all that up or something."

His forehead pinched together a little as though he were thinking quite hard. "Can't say that I have. The last time I remember an Aesir, Loki included, visiting Midgard, it was centuries upon centuries
ago. But Loki could have visited Midgard again at a later date, but he didn't tell me. He can be quite secretive. However he would have had to have used the Bifrost and Heimdall would have known about it."

"I see,"

Darcy felt like she was at another dead end. *Bummer.*

"I already miss my brother…and his tricks. I used to make jest at his silly love of books and magic…but now I find myself missing him and his mischief."

She patted the big guy on his arm with a comforting smile. "Care to tell me about this magic and mischief of his?"

"Sure," he nodded, face turning thoughtful as he appeared to consider how to best describe the trickster God, "Loki is very much my opposite in appearance and tactics," he smiled broadly while in remembrance, "he complained that I ran into battle and hit things first, and I always looked down at my brother's baiting for attacks while scheming to get the upper hand. He was never the strongest warrior, relying instead on throwing daggers and illusions…but it was him and his tricks that got me out of many a trouble," he then paused, his face sobering some, "And it's taken this long for me to truly understand and appreciate the value of his skill set…the value of him as my brother. And now I fear all my understandings have come gravely too late…"

"Nothing is ever too late, you know?" Darcy interjected, her voice remaining light even amidst the gloominess of Thor's mood, "I mean even when things seem so hopeless, there's still always a sliver's chance of things turning out right."

She looked down in thought then gave him a sheepish up curl of her mouth when she gazed up at him again, "Like…I know this is nothing like your situation…but at the county fair back home years ago, there was this contest to win this really snazzy Huffy bicycle, but to win you had to guess how many jelly beans were inside this really massive jar."

Thor appeared to be confused when she used the words bicycle and jellybeans, but did not make her pause in her story to explain them to her.

"Tons of people were stopping by the stand," she went on without losing a beat, "betting a dollar on their guess and getting it wrong, and getting frustrated. I was probably eight and I was begging my mom for us to give it a try. She kept saying we would only have a snowball's chance at winning and we'd just be wasting perfectly good money on a rip off when it could be used on rides or food. But I really wanted a bike, because all my friends had one, but most bikes are horribly expensive, so I insisted. Mom gave up a dollar and we also lost, and I went home and went to sleep disappointed."

"I don't understand," Thor shook his head in puzzlement.

"Because that is not the end, it's called a cliffhanger," she said with a smirk, "The next day I came home to find a bicycle in the living room. Sure it wasn't shiny and new like the Huffy, but I loved it anyway. At the end of the day I failed, but I still ended up with a bike, even if it was not the most perfect of bikes. What I'm trying to say is things still have a chance to turn out alright, even if they don't exactly go as planned."

"Interesting analogy Darcy."

"I guess so, I was just grasping at straws because you looked like someone had kicked you while you were already down."
Thor gave a little chuckle, but she could still tell he was hurting over something. "I must thank you for your compassion, no matter how frivolous it might seem."

"No problemo, big guy."

He looked to be recalling something again and smiled. "Funny how I am again reminded of my brother, of when he was younger, doing simple little trivial things with his magic for the benefit of others."

"Do tell," Darcy encouraged.

The God of Thunder looked to be sifting through his stories to bring about one that seemed most favorable. "Once he cheered up a little boy that had fallen and skinned his knee while playing with his comrades. I told the boy to stop his fussing and be a man, but Loki bent down and told the boy he was going to show him a trick. He placed his hand on the wound and when he lifted it away, the wound was gone. Mind you, my brother is no healer, but I'm sure you remember that I told you he is very adept at illusions. The boy was so shocked with the thought that he was healed that he forgot his own pain and misery and happily jumped to his feet to resume his fun."

Upon hearing this Darcy was once again bombarded with memories of Loki conjuring strange creatures with his magic, of turning the landscape into one she'd never saw before or had seen since. She had been hopelessly lost and scared, but his illusions took her mind completely off of the fear she had been feeling before.

"Doesn't sound like much of a mischief maker," she mused.

"Oh he's full of it, believe me" Thor boasted, "Often times bratty children were told to behave in Loki’s presence, lest he turn them into toads and snakes should they raise his ire. In fact he pulled tricks on anyone that prodded his temper the wrong way."

Darcy tried to tactfully press Thor for more stories and information, but Jane and Erik decided to enter the room and Thor turned to help Jane prepare breakfast, leaving the intern with her own thoughts for a short time.

_Okay then if I didn’t just pull Loki out of my wildly creative imagination, why did he never come back? He only pops up one night then poof, he's gone…guess I just wasn't that important. Gah, no I totally do NOT have abandonment issues._

The fact that her dad left her and her mother to fend for themselves practically from the moment she was born also did not mean she had abandonment issues. She and her mom got along just fine without him. She had also done quite well without Loki, thank you very much, but that still did not stop her curiosity about him.

_Would he look like now?_

Loki had looked about Thor's age now when she first met him, and according to the supposed God of Thunder, Asgardians lived to be 5,000 years old; if Thor's looks were any indication, his brother would not look much different from when she was a kid.

_But would he recognize an all grown up me? Would he even care to?_

_You still don't know if Thor is just telling you crazy psychobabble…_

It wasn't until Thor's buddies showed up at the lab, dressed in their regal armor and banging happily on the glass doors, that Darcy decided she was 95.9% sure that she didn't just imagine or dream Loki
My imaginary friend was a Norse god…can I get a minute to process all of this awesomeness?

She dropped her mug of coffee in unison with Erik and Jane from sheer shock.

Chapter End Notes

I hope my recounting of the movie isn't boring or too filler-ish, but I felt like it was integral to this fic to go through scenes from Loki and Darcy's point of views with my own take on them, and add some "deleted scenes." Things will be diverging away from the Marvel movies eventually, don't worry. I already have this fic written up to chapter 5, but I will only be posting a chapter about once a month for now because my best friend is visiting me from Sweden soon. Once she is gone I'll post more frequently depending on feedback.
Chapter Notes

Been listening to a lot of Imagine Dragon's songs. I feel they really help me get into the mindset to write Loki (especially many of the songs from their Smoke + Mirrors album). Also drew some art to accompany this fic here. Thanks for all the comments, kudos, and bookmarks; I eat them up like cookies and they help fuel my writing~ Hope you all enjoy the chapter!

Frigga could have enacted herself as regent until Odin awakened, but she trusted him to act as king instead. Loki felt his body swell with hope that even though he shared no blood with the Aesir royalty that raised him that they could still be the family they had been before his true heritage had been discovered.

Odin had lied and kept a very important secret from him and he still felt slighted by that, but adopted or not, Frost Giant or not, he was still a son of the All-Father. Odin surely wouldn't sleep forever, so Loki wanted to use all of his time as acting king to make his father proud and see that he too could one day be a worthy ruler.

Loki knew that Laufey, though he obeyed the treaty with Asgard, wanted war with Aesir as much as Thor had wanted it with the Frost Giants. If Laufey knew the sort of state Odin was in, he would bring more than just a handful of Jotuns to spring an attack on a vulnerable All-Father and Asgard, using the secret pathway from which Loki had shown him. He had to find a way to keep everyone safe.

He also wanted the one who sired him to rue the day he decided to leave him to die.

Before he could deal with Laufey, Thor's friends, the ones that called themselves his allies when all along they were only loyal to his brother, came to him, looking utterly surprised and full of disdain that it was he who sat upon the throne and not Odin. Loki had a hard time keeping the sneer from his face as Sif begrudgingly beseeched him to end Thor's banishment and bring him home.

Well unfortunately for her and her friends, Loki plans called for Thor to stay on Midgard. He didn't need his older brother's help in ruling Asgard; in fact things were going far more swimmingly for him since Thor's banishment than he first thought they would. Thor could just stay the hell away for all he cared. Besides, Thor hardly had learned a lesson at all from his banishment. Loki had already visited his brother and in telling him that their father was dead and his banishment permanent, he ensured that Thor would no longer have the will to seek a way back to Asgard.

If Sif and the Warriors Three thought he would bend to their groveling, would let them bully him into getting what they wanted like they had for years, then they were as foolish as Thor.

Finally Loki was able to meet with Laufey, but he purposefully left out the bit that he was the Jotun king's long-thought-dead son. Instead he allowed his silver tongue to speak for him, spinning lies and manipulations as easily as breathing, promising to grant Laufey the Casket of Ancient Winters that he so longed to regain, in return for slaying Odin for him. Laufey eagerly accepted, chomping at the bit for power and prestige.
It was safer to dispatch the Frost Giant king this way, allowing Laufey to think he had the upper hand over Asgard when in fact he was just a pawn in Loki's game now. And once the Laufey's intentions were discovered by all, then Asgard would be calling for the destruction of the Jotuns once and for all, and Loki would gladly grant them that wish.

Two birds, one stone.

While that plan worked flawlessly, when Loki returned to Asgard, Heimdall voiced aloud that he was unable to keep watch on new king while in Jotunheim, suspicion just barely lacing his deep words. Heimdall could be a problem, so Loki used his superior rank to put the gatekeeper in his place, ordering him to keep the Bifrost closed, and thus keeping Sif and the Warriors Three from trying to go after Thor (Sif after all did give him quite a defiant stare-down before she left, which told him she alone at least might go against his commands).

Loki thought the warriors AND the gatekeeper would not be daft enough to disobey his direct orders, but even as their king, they didn't pledge their loyalty to him. First Lady Sif, Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg defied him by requesting passage to Midgard from Heimdall, and then the gatekeeper granted them that permission and allowed let them leave.

First he punished Heimdall's treason, relying on his Jotun abilities to wield the Casket of Ancient Winters and freeze the gatekeeper solid. He would not allow Heimdall the chance to open the Bifrost should Sif and the Warriors somehow succeed in finding Thor. Then to do away with his adoptive brother and to punish the warriors, he sent the vault guardian, the Destroyer, to Midgard.

It was not yet time to bring Laufey to Asgard, so Loki took the opportunity to be the eyes and ears of the Destroyer, controlling its every movement and attack. He could sense through the Destroyer where Thor was and steadily lead it that way, incinerating anything standing in its way.

When the Destroyer finally came into the town and Loki had Thor and his allies in his sights, he noticed that there were three mortals nearby as well, two women and a man. Unlike the other Midgardians of this village who were running for their lives as the Destroyer laid waste to it, these three seemed determined to stand by Thor and the Asgardians.

So my brother has made little friends on his stay on this pathetic realm? Midgard hasn't changed a bit…

Sif and the Warriors Three did their best against the Destroyer, but their best could best be described as insects picking a fight with lion, only mere annoyances. They could do nothing to stop his advance.

As the warriors busied themselves with regrouping, Loki let his gaze drift back to the mortals, wondering what could possibly be so special about them. The woman seemingly most concerned with Thor held an elegant attractiveness that might even rival Aesir women. He could tell why she captured his brother's attentions. The older man next to Thor's woman held a shrewd intelligence in his eye, but other wise looked unremarkable.

Loki flicked his eyes to the third mortal and he felt a surge of recognition run through him.

She was curvier than Thor's woman, her pink lips fuller and stood out against her pale skin; but that's not what held his attention. He focused in on other, more familiar details. She wore glasses over blue eyes, a peacoat over her shirt, and her umber hair spilled in waves from under a knit hat, framing her heart-shaped face.

Where have I seen her before?
Though she stood close to the battlefield he could tell she was scared for she clutched a hand close to her chest. The posture and look of fear in her blue eyes revealed a long forgotten memory of a little Midgardian girl, dressed in many layers and lost in the dark, searching for her mother; a memory of a little girl who adored his magic.

Loki's body tensed, one hand gripping the arm of the throne while the other tightened around Gungir, as he leaned forward in his seat—as though it would give him a better look.

"Darcy?" he whispered so quietly it could have been mistaken for the wind.

So far in all his planning, this was the least expected result.

He never thought he would see her again and he certainly never planned on it. But there she was, and though she still preferred layers of clothes, he could tell that she had certainly grown wonderfully since he last laid eyes on her.

Loki idly wondered what she would think of him after all these years, if she even remembered him at all. Would she be as enthralled by him and his magic as she had before? He thought of his newly found Jotun heritage and couldn't help but think that had her child self met him in his true form she would not have be so keen on calling him her friend.

*Stop thinking those weak thoughts. Keep your focus on the plan.*

In the time he took in observing the humans, Thor had coerced the warriors to fall back while he approached the Destroyer alone, unarmed and utterly defenseless.

*What did he hope to achieve in this puny form of his?*

Thor offering himself as the sacrificial lamb to appease his caught Loki off guard, and even more shocking was that Thor had somewhere gained the humility to apologize to him, though the oaf was quite unsure of what he did to wrong his little brother.

*You could stop this now, before things go to far. Things could still go your favor if Thor lives, even if he found a way back to Asgard. And think of the girl. Can you live with yourself if you end her as well?*

The thought of Darcy burned and lifeless on the ground flickered through Loki's mind and it made something in his gut twist painfully. He did not wish her dead, but he couldn't any longer hold the same sentiment for Thor.

No I can't stop now…*I can't live normally anymore, not now, and I won't live in Thor's shadow again. As for Darcy…I can end this without extended bloodshed.*

A few times Darcy thought the big fire-breathing robot of doom was turning its steely gaze towards her.

At first it freaked her out and she thought that at any moment it would open up and blast her to ashes. Instead the only sensation she felt was a tingling going up and down her spine and she sensed something, or someone else peering at her and through her as if her soul was being dissected from her body and put on display for this person's eyes to examine.

The feeling would have creeped her out had she not sensed any malice behind the almost omniscient gaze. Then there was the fact that being stared at by something she couldn't see seemed to be too familiar to her, even if it had only happened once before.
She remembered feeling the same sensation just before Loki had appeared beside the tree in the park all those years ago.

Thor then approached the robot of doom, breaking her from her thoughts as he called it "brother."

Loki was inside that thing? Was he controlling it like Iron Man or something? That would explain the weird staring she sensed. Darcy was curious, but she wasn't about to waltz up to the walking tin can and knock on it to find out. She very much wanted to live, and seeing as this internship had put her life on the line, she should totally get some sort of award of valor at her graduation. Not to mention scoring some extra credits towards her bachelor's degree!

Darcy let out a sigh of relief that echoed everyone else when the robot of doom seemed to surrender to Thor's words and turned to leave.

The battle was over.

Or so she thought.

The robot—or Loki—had a change of heart and swatted Thor away like he was but a child. Thor landed hard on the dusty ground with a groan that told her he wasn't going to be getting back up.

Darcy felt her heart clench for her newfound friend and for Jane, who was starting to develop feelings for her "scientific evidence." Thor had only been with them for a few days, but the big guy had managed to worm his way into their hearts and flip their normal lives upside down.

The robot gave Darcy one last glance before turning away, content with the damage done.

An image of Loki's face flashed in her mind, his expression gentle and happy as he entertained her with his sorcery. She remembered the fierce protectiveness when he saw she had become trapped. And when he told her he was coming to tell her goodnight, his face held pleasant smile, but the expression didn't quite reach his eyes. She saw sadness in his green pools.

Darcy shook her head from her reverie and trained her eyes on the robots retreating frame.

She clenched her fist.

This isn't Loki.

Her fingernails bit into the skin of her palms.

This isn't the Loki of my childhood. They aren't the same. Can't be. This is some fucking imposter!

Darcy released her hand from a fist with a gasp when she felt her palm burning. She briefly looked at her hand, but barely registered the small droplets of blood oozing out from under the broken skin.

Numbness was spreading throughout her body leaving her feeling as though she was watching everything, including herself, from the outside in. She could no longer feel her own emotions because they flashed through her so fast that she couldn't discern one from the other.

This is too much. I didn't sign up for this shit!

Her ears vaguely picked up a sonic boom and her eyes sluggishly looked up in time to see something in the distance shooting through the air, heading straight for Puente Antiguo at supersonic speeds.

Erik seemed to be the only one mindful enough to pull a distraught Jane from Thor's lifeless side as his large hammer rocketed towards him. Thor's hand came alive, catching the hammer with ease and
a bright light enveloped his body.

The next series of events happened so fast that her overwhelmed brain could hardly keep up. Thor was now alive again and sporting very godly threads. Then he was swinging his hammer around like it was nothing, knocking the robot of doom loopy. It tried to fight back with blasts of fire, but Thor was able to neutralize it with Myeuh-muh. He then flew into the air and whipped his hammer about his head, creating a tornado. The whirlwind slowly sucked the robot into the air. It tried another series of blasts, but Thor deflected them all, before knocking his enemy back to the ground with a mighty crash.

The whirlwind faded and Thor casually strode back to Jane (like beating up laser-shooting robots was a common occurrence), who looked like she was torn between relief and awe.

Darcy felt like she could finally rein in at least part of her emotions enough to feel the sickening twist at Thor's death leave her to be replaced with happiness that the big guy was back. She idly wondered what had happened to Loki, but she forced all thoughts of him away.

Open Pandora's box later, Darcy. Focus on the present.

Thor decided it was time to fulfill Jane's wish to show her the great rainbow bridge he had spoken of. Jane held no complaints has he hauled her against his muscly side before he flew them both through the air towards the site of his appearance.

Looked like the rest of them had to drive, but then again Darcy was not too keen on flying when there were no seatbelts involved.

Driving suited her just fine.

Despite some minor performance issues, the Bifrost finally started to open up and Thor's warrior buddies all stepped inside the circle of swirly patterns. The god of Thunder momentarily hung back, promising to come back for Jane.

He kissed her hand, but Jane jumped him, kissing him as if she had much repressed sexual tension pent up inside of her and her lips remaining on Thor's meant her life. Darcy didn't have many doubts because her boss was often more focused on her research than much of anything else, including food and rest.

Whoa boss lady definitely needs the big guy in her little routine, Darcy thought with a grin.

After their little make out session, Thor pulled back and joined his friends, and a great beam of shining kaleidoscope colors enveloped them, sucking them up into the sky at breakneck speeds. It looked like it might kind of be fun except Darcy was sure her stomach would literally end up in her throat if she ever attempted it.

So she remained on the ground, looking on with Jane and Erik as they all waited for Thor to return.

Loki had failed in killing his insufferable brother, but he still had a chance in redeeming himself by saving his father and Asgard from the threat of the Jotuns.

He returned to the Bifrost, pleased to see that Heimdall was still a frozen statue. Using Gungir, the God of Mischief opened up the Bifrost for the awaiting Laufey and his small troupe of Frost Giants. Upon welcoming his true kin to Asgard, Loki told them where they could find Odin's chambers.

Laufey attacked his mother as she tried to protect her slumbering husband, and as much as Loki
wanted to strike the monster down immediately, he waited in the patiently in the wings for the perfect moment to strike. He waited until Laufey stood over a prone All-Father, the Frost King's pride and arrogance at its height before he blasted him into oblivion with the power of Gungir.

It felt good to be the one who ended such a wretched creature—any being that abandoned their own offspring were nothing more than animals.

Frigga had her arms thrown around him as he promised her that Jotunheim would pay for their actions, her love and relief washing over him in gentle waves, her embrace telling him that he had done well in protecting Asgard more than words ever could.

And then Thor just had to once again steal the little bit of light he had been granted in his steadily darkening life. Loki was done being outshined by his older brother, and so despite their mother baring witness, he did not refute Thor's claims, instead blasting him straight through the palace's exterior wall.

For now he ignored Frigga's hurt expression—as painfully difficult as that was, and left to make his way across the bridge to the observatory. The golden room was thankfully completely clear of anyone that might stand in his way.

Asgard, and all the realms, would no longer have to fear an attack Jotunheim again.

Using the bit of information Heimdall had once let slip about the Bifrost's destructive power, Loki did just what the gatekeeper had warned against and left the bridge to Jotunheim open. He felt Thor's presence nearing so he prepared himself to meet his brother directly this time.

For the first time in his life Thor seemed unwilling to come to blows with Loki, and for the first time in Loki's life he was the one courting battle, practically begging for it like a frothing beast. When striking his brother down failed to elicit a combative response from Thor, Loki again turned to his wit and manipulative tongue, threatening to pay Thor's woman a visit.

That did the trick for Thor launched himself at him with a roar.

The two fought earnestly inside the observatory, taking turns being on the offensive, Gungir proving to be a worthy weapon against Mjolnir's power.

However, the scales were tipped in Thor's favor when he dodged Gungir's blast and tackled Loki through the wall of the observatory. Loki still had his tricks and while appearing to be helplessly clinging to the edge of the bridge, he pleaded to the part of Thor that still thought of them as brothers. The oaf fell for it and Loki struck him down again. Relying purely on wit and illusion, he cast his projections around Thor to distract him from his true self as he waited for his moment to finally end his brother.

Loki didn't count on his brother gaining an ounce of intelligence from his stay on Midgard, so when Thor's lighting crashed, dispelling his copies and knocking him to the ground it caught him by surprise. Thor shocked him further by using the weight of Mjolnir to keep him grounded, but it still would not stop the inevitable destruction.

The Bifrost's power could not be stopped and Jotunheim would fall.

Thor considered this for a moment before calling Mjolnir back to him and doing the unthinkable, using Mjolnir to hammer the bridge apart. If the energy flowing through the bridge was interrupted the Bifrost would be ruined indefinitely and Jotunheim's destruction would be incomplete.

*When did Thor start using his brain?!*
"If you destroy the bridge you'll never see her again!"

Thor chose not to heed his words and in a last ditch effort to keep his brother from thwarting his plan Loki flung himself forward with Gungir in hand. It was too late, Thor blasted what was left of the path to the observatory and both brothers were sent flying from the shock wave.

The both of them surely would have followed the destroyed observatory over the great waterfall and into the oblivion of space had Odin not awakened from his sleep and spirited himself to their exact location, grabbing Thor's leg. The only thing keeping Loki from falling was his grip on the very end of Gungir, gripped in Thor's hands above him.

Thor, who had not one ounce of true relation to him by blood, had deemed it necessary to save him. Why? Were Thor's brotherly sentiments still so strong even after all he had done to him?

The God of Mischief flicked his gaze up higher to Odin, searching his eye for any hint of what the All-Father thought of these recent events. Desperate emotion filled Loki's voice as he implored his father to see the meaning behind all his actions. He had done all of this for him, for his mother, for the future of their realm. By the Nine, he was doing this for all of Yggdrasil!

Odin had to understand that.

"No Loki."

Upon hearing his father's rejection, Loki felt suddenly drained of all life, all purpose. He felt numb with loss, yet heavy with the burdening sense of betrayal. Loki had one choice left to make in his life and he would be damned if he was not in full control of his own fate.

Nothing felt more freeing than the moment he chose to let go.

Judging by the amount of time that passed the rainbow clouds completely closing up, Thor wasn't coming back, at least not anytime soon.

On the drive back to Puente Antiguo Jane looked like someone had kicked her puppy and was murmuring something about binge eating ice cream while watching the Princess Bride, and Erik was lost in thought (most likely still coming to terms that the myths he were told as a child were in some form a reality).

"Hey guys, cheer up..." Darcy said as she drove, "Thor's alive and back to all his godly glory." She pulled up to the lab and smiling brightly when she pointed at the boxes of equipment sitting just outside the doors, "And look! S.H.I.E.L.D. gave us our equipment back. Now most importantly, my iPod better be in there too."

"Darcy, you're a genius!" Jane exclaimed and hugged her tightly before jumping out of the vehicle to gather her equipment.

"What? What do you mean?" Darcy asked dumbly.

Jane turned and looked at her from over the box she was precariously holding in her thin arms. "Now that we know for a FACT that the Einstein-Rosen Bridge exists, I'm going to find a way to open it from our side. If something is preventing Thor from returning to us from his side, I will find a way to him from our side. Are you with me, Erik? Darcy?"

"You know I will always be with you in all that you do," Erik vowed to the young scientist he considered as a daughter.
Darcy shook her head, but smiled. Looks like this internship thing was going to be more long-term than she thought.

"Guess I'm in on this crazy train too."

That evening, after eating some take out from one of the only eating establishments left standing in Puente Antiguo, Darcy mind fell back into replaying every occurrence from the last three days.

She thought that her crazy imaginative mind could handle anything. Boy was she wrong.

Reading about myths and fantastical worlds in fiction books were one thing, but once myths started literally colliding with real life then all bets on keeping the mind from being blown were off.

There was only one remedy Darcy could think of.

"Hello, there honey," her mom greeted from the other end of Darcy's cell phone.

"Hey, mom," Darcy tried to start their conversation without trepidation leaking into her tone, but it was a miserable attempt against her mother's intuition.

"Darcy, are you okay? How are things in Puente Antiguo?"

"Things are good, I'm earning my credits and I'll be graduating soon, but I've decided to stay on with Jane for a bit longer," she then let out a sigh she'd been trying to suppress, "okay, maybe not everything is totally normal. Don't freak out though, mom, just let me explain."

There was a brief silence on the other line, and she could picture her mom absorbing the information, deciding whether or not to worry.

"Alright I'll let you explain, I've got plenty time."

Thoughts about Thor, the attack on the town, Loki, all flooded unbidden into Darcy's mind and she fought internally with herself.

How to I talk about this without letting classified bits slip?

She would have to be as vague as possible.

Darcy licked her lips then began, "What would you do if you found out that something you thought wasn't real for your entire life was actually real all along?"

"That's a hard one, kiddo. I guess I would just have to learn to live with this new reality, try to understand it. It's not unlike life really. We are born knowing so little, and growing up forces us to come to terms with so much. We either accept life' and move on, or we let life's little curve balls suffocate us. Does that help at all with your question?"

Yes it does actually!

"You're a sage mom, a Jedi freakin' master!"

"Yeah well, I had to be to keep up with you," her mom teased good-naturedly, then went serious, "you sure you won't tell me what's troubling you for advice from me?"

"It's nothing really troubling really, mom…it's just more mind blowing…uh…Jane made a neat discovery in the lab is all…really flipped my world upside down," she felt bad for telling a white lie, but S.H.I.E.L.D. had sworn her to secrecy, "I wish I could give you more details, but I don't think I
could really put it in words… plus Jane doesn't want to jump the gun before she is more certain."

"Well as long as it's nothing harmful. I'm very glad you're having fun with this internship, considering your outlook on it before you left. I miss you though, kiddo."

"I miss you too mom," she returned the sentiment whole-heartedly.

She stayed on the phone and indulged in pleasant, less complicated talk before she reluctantly told her mom go for the night as it was growing late.

Darcy partly wishing she could say she had simply come across Loki's myth as a child, thought he was cool, and named her incredibly vivid imaginary friend after him. Believing that Norse gods were merely by-products of Viking minds trying to understand the world around them had always kept her life nice and safe and simple before.

But another part of her could not help feeding off the thrill that came with knowing that it was real, and that she was acquainted with two of those Norse gods.

Life was much more complex now, but it also was certainly packed with new, more exciting elements.

In her next conscious moment she found herself surrounded by the far-reaching expanse of space. Her first impulse was to claw at her throat because she knew no oxygen occupied the unforgiving, all encompassing environment, but to her surprise she discovered that she could breath.

That's funny.

She was also falling front forward through the cosmos.

And isn't there supposed to be no gravity in space?

Still the sight of all the of cosmic phenomena that she knew not the name of as she fell told her that she could be in no other place. She passed burning stars of differing sizes on her steady descent. She saw planets whose beauty put Jupiter and Saturn to shame and she fell directly through what she could only describe as colorful space dust.

Darcy tried to flip herself so that she was looking upward while falling (she would rather not see herself impacting into something, she preferred to die blissfully unaware of the moment she was going to go splat), but the intense pull of gravity would not allow it.

Her eyes squinted as she caught sight of something below her, or rather someone.

Who is that?

The momentum of her free fall brought her within proper viewing distance of the person below her. As she grew closer she realized the other person was falling as well, but at a slightly slower rate. The overwhelming sensation that she was going to collide with them overtook Darcy and she closed her eyes, but she felt nothing.

She cracked her eyes open and the person she saw before her caused a loud gasp to escape her mouth.

Unmistakable was this combination of colors of this royal attire, the gold of the armor, the black of the under coat and trousers, and the deep green of the cape. Unforgettable was the unblemished
alabaster skin and high cheekbones. His black hair was still slicked back as she remembered it but it had grown since she had last seen it, just reaching his chin now. His eyes were closed, as he appeared to be peacefully sleeping, but she didn't need to see his eyes to know their color.

Darcy knew him.

"Loki," she whispered.

Loki remained oblivious to her presence. He was either keen on ignoring her or he truly was asleep.

She reached out to him with one hand, but once she nearly had her fingertips on him, gravity seemed to jerk him just out of her reach. Her second attempt ended with the same result.

"Rise and shine Sleeping Beauty," she urged with her voice, wishing she could shake him, "Or should I say Snow White?"

His face continued on wearing that peaceful look on his face that was so painfully lovely to look at; one that made him look more youthful and pure. But Darcy wanted more, she wanted to see his eyes, and wanted him to see her.

"Loki, it's me," when she saw one of his dark eyebrows twitch, it spurred her on, "It's Darcy."

"Little one?" he murmured, though his eyes were being too stubborn to open.

Darcy's throat constricted with an emotion so strong that she felt like she had to swallow a rock in order to properly respond. She felt like she was six years all over again and it nearly brought her to tears.

"Y-Yeah."

Loki's eyes fluttered about under his eyelids before dark eyelashes parted to reveal the feature she would forever remember about him above all else. No one else owned a pair of eyes of so luminously green and swirling with enchanting mystery.

She smiled in relief and managed to croak a "Hey, you," passed the lump that had resurfaced in her throat.

At first he simply blinked slowly at her as if he were regaining the focus of his eyes, then his eyes widened and his pale lips parted in a sharp intake of breath. He seemed deathly afraid.

"Darcy," he choked out, lower jaw trembling as he stared up at her, "Y-You…should not be here."

She cocked her head to the side. "What do you mean?"

He opened his mouth to answer her, but a guttural growl echoed around them. Loki seemed to sense the source of the sound and craned his head to look over his shoulder. When his eyes met hers again they were wild and frantic.

"Get out of here!" he shouted, thrusting his arm at her in a dismissive fashion.

The gesture did more than let her know that he wanted her to leave, his hand momentarily glowed green and she suddenly felt an invisible force shove her backwards, sending her end over end in the opposite direction.

"Loki!"
After several long moments, Darcy's body finally stopped somersaulting and when she looked back down at the prince he appeared miles away. The stars and planets that were once at Loki's back sunk away into an inky, pitch darkness and the same growl from before rumbled through space.

As the blackness closed in, Loki twisted and writhed his body in his struggle to pull away from the malignant miasma. Shadowy tendrils elongated from the inkiness, forming into the shape of clawed hands. They grabbed at Loki's arms and legs, the mere touch of them ripped screams of anguish from Loki's throat as if the contact scalded him.

"Loki, hang on!" Darcy cried.

She made swimming motions with her arms and legs, but no amount of flailing propelled her even an inch closer. Tears streamed from her eyes unrestrained as she realized she was powerless to do anything but watch.

The sentient darkness seemed to grow tired of hearing the God of Mischief howl in pain and one more hand shot forth and latched itself tightly around his pale neck, cutting his scream off into a muffled gurgle. Now that Loki was silent and pliant the darkness grew pleased and this time it let out a dark chuckle that roiled like thunder.

Loki was as equally powerless as she was now, though he bravely stared up at her weeping face with a sharp glint of resolution in his eyes, accepting of his fate.

The darkness took this as a sign of his surrender and it opened up like the gaping maw of a black hole and swallowed him whole.

Darcy awakened to the sound of her own voice hoarsely screaming into the night, her bedspread and sheets tangled around her sweaty, trembling body like a constrictor. And for a moment as she fought off the offending sheets, she too thought she was destined for the depths of that inky black hell as well.

Jane came running to her side, but no amount of consoling could stop the racking sobs. A horrible sense of loss that she couldn't explain overwhelmed her and she cried until her voice was thoroughly spent. Further sleep eluded her and she laid the rest of the night in bed letting out silent tears.

Darcy never knew one human being could cry nonstop for twelve hours.

When she was able to speak again Jane and Erik questioned her about that night, she considered telling them everything, but in the end she borrowed a tactic from the God of Mischief himself.

She lied.
The morning after the terrifying quasi-dream (she still was unsure of calling it a dream), Darcy took full advantage of late rising pattern of Jane and Eric to remain in bed. She was immensely tired, more tired than any late night studying or partying. Though her body was screaming for sleep her brain was acutely awake.

*Why did I lie to Jane and Eric?*

Well...for starters, there's the fact that your once imaginary friend is the God of Mischief, the very same God that leveled much of Puente Antiguo and tried to kill Thor and many innocent people. You could be shipped off to S.H.I.E.L.D. and interrogated for simply associating with said God.

*Good point.*

Then there was a sense of loss that seemed to settle deep in the very marrow of her bones. The feeling was enigmatic to her and she couldn't explain it. The closest emotion she could use to describe it was mourning. She had lost family members to death in the past, and she felt the loss of them, but those paled in comparison this. It was like she had lost her mother or her best friend.

Loki was a pretty important part of her childhood, even though she only met him once (it was because of him that she had her spot in the park), but he was hardly more than an acquaintance. All she knew of him was what she saw of him all those years ago and from what little Thor has shared of him.

It did little to explain why she felt like she was split in half, the life slowly bleeding out of her.

*Enough of this emotional crap Darcy, time to lose yourself in a new day.*

She lifted her torso to rise, but fell boneless back against the bed with a groan that ended in a tiny sniffle.

*Just give me another five minutes, okay?*

In the days following she thankfully had little time to herself to properly think about all of her confusing. Jane was working on her recovered equipment and notes like a madwoman and at first she was just barely keeping up with her job of entering the data entries into the computer, while keeping coffee and snacks on hand for the two scientists who were overworking themselves, but the intern soon found herself settling into the routine.
Sometimes the three of them worked late into the night inside the more spacious lab S.H.I.E.L.D. had furnished them with. The lab also came with a special high-tech cell phone that could directly contact the secret branch of intelligence and defense should Jane need any parts or equipment that she couldn't easily get otherwise. The astrophysicist was skeptical about agent Coulson's offerings, still quite sore about them taking away her precious equipment, but since working in the new lab with shiny new toys, Darcy and Eric had to practically drag her away from the lab for sleep.

After a month of this breakneck pace and several times of falling asleep at the computer, Darcy decided to put her foot down. Literally.

She felt her eyes beginning to droop for the 100th time that evening and jumped out of her seat and stamped her foot loudly. Jane and Eric both looked at her in mild surprise at her outburst.

"Jane..." she announced, "I know you want to get the Einstein-Rosey Bridge up and working as soon as possible so you can get your sexy beefcake back, but this is getting ridiculous. I need sleep, Eric needs sleep, and even you, energizer bunny boss lady, need sleep too...and breakthroughs in science are no excuse for a lax in personal hygiene!"

Putting down her meter, Jane had the humility to look incredibly sheepish. "I'm so sorry Darcy...I've been so swept up in my work that failed to noticed that I've been taking advantage of your role as intern."

The intern clapped her hands once in her flurry of excitement about the prospect of getting a well-deserved break. "Thank you! All this science has been hurting my brain."

"Go ahead and head back to the apartment, be back in the morning at 7 and you can leave at 3," Jane said, returning her attention back to tweaking her meter, clearly intending on not leaving the lab that night.

"Ugh, you're seriously..." Darcy stamped her foot again, but sighed in defeat and grabbed her messenger bag, "Fine, see you too crazies in the morning."

As she walked the short distance from the lab to their shared apartment, she thought back to Jane's efforts. Her boss clearly had it bad for the Thunder God, and who wouldn't? But she was going to end up running herself into the ground if she kept this up. To Darcy no guy or god known to her for a mere three days was worth all that.

Upon arriving at the small apartment Darcy held a mental debate with herself and her stomach. She was so tired she could fall asleep standing up, but her stomach was rumbling angrily at her for food, and it was too late to order out.

"Grr damn you stomach, can't you wait for breakfast?" she asked looking down at the offending organ in her stomach.

It rumbled loudly in protest.

"Fine," she sighed as if giving in to a petulant child and set to work in the kitchen preparing a BLT.

Darcy only got three bites in before she ended up dozing off to sleep at the dining table, half uneaten sandwich still in her hand.

It was barely light out when Darcy startled from her sleep with a yelp, both hands jerking back, and the forgotten sandwich went sailing through the air behind her. Her mind didn't register the mess she made; instead it was focused on calming her rapidly beating heart and panting lungs.
Remnants from her sleep came back to her, showing her a desolate, rocky world, completely dark save for sparse illumination of an eerie blue glow. Shadowy figures as jagged as the landscape moved among the rocks, hissing and screeching. She then got the distinct feeling of being restrained and tortured. Her captor was intending to break her spirit and get her to submit.

Strangely even though her bones were shattered one by one and her ligaments were twisted and stretched beyond normal limits, Darcy snarled in a voice not her own.

"I'll never submit!"

There was something about that voice. It sounded far away and hard to place, nondescript, yet she still felt some connection to it.

Darcy shook the voice from her head and absentmindedly slid off of the stool she had slept sitting on and onto her feet. Her legs broke out into a tremble and she immediately fell into a heap on the floor.

"Aghh…shit!" she cried, echoing the cry of her body as it ached painfully in places she didn't realize had pain receptors. Honestly she was one big pile of hurt.

A door opened from the small hallway, "Darcy?" said a voice that she slowly discerned as Eric's.

"In the kitchen," she called from her place on the linoleum floor, waving her hand so he could see her.

Eric looked like he was caught between worried and amused at her situation. "What are you doing on the floor?"

"I would say that I have a hangover from hell, but I didn't have a drop to drink last night…" she said with a grimacing smile and decided to add, "sadly."

He helped her to her back to her feet and settled her back onto her stool. His eyes then noticed something behind her. "And is that you as well?"

Darcy winced as she twisted in her seat to see what he was pointing at. The remnants of her BLT were strewn all about the sink and counter top. She winced again as she faced him and it had less to do with the mysterious pain her body was feeling. "I had another bad dream?" she offered, not quite knowing herself.

"The same nightmare about the Destroyer?" Eric hedged as he started picking up after her.

"Ye-Yeah that one, that's the very one," she said, playing with the hem of her shirt, "the robot of doom incident must have majorly traumatized me."

"Indeed," he grunted. He wasn't buying the lie so easily this time.

"And like…I probably need to stop skipping sleep and sleeping at the kitchen table, it's killer on the back and all. We should probably warn Jane about those sort of things."

Eric seemed more at ease with her added explanation and attention seemed to turn elsewhere.

"Perhaps we should…I think Jane spent the night in the lab."

Happy that suspicion was off of her, she nodded enthusiastically. "We should visit Dr. Foster. Just let me pop some aspirin."

The longer she was awake and on her feet the more the pain seemed to ebb and fade from her body
and she was soon mostly back to her usual self. Jane was discovered to be sitting at her desk, leaning over her notebooks; pen perched precariously in her hand as she slept.

Eric shook his head at the sight while Darcy giggled evilly to herself as she put her iPod in its speaker dock, placed it on the desk next to Jane, and turning the volume all the way up.

"She's going to kill you, you know?" Eric quipped as he watched her disapprovingly but made no move to stop her.

"Totally worth it, though," She whispered in excitement.

Darcy turned on her iPod and "U.R.A. Fever" blared over the speakers. Jane's head shot up and the wheels on her office chair squealed over the hard floor as she quickly scooted away from the offending sound.

"Oh my god!"

Both Eric and Darcy were laughing at the look on the young astrophysicist's face, as well as at the ink staining her cheek in the distinct chicken scratch that was her own handwriting.

Darcy turned the volume town so she could tease her boss some more. "Having a lusty dream about Thor, are we?"

Jane blanched and said nothing, suddenly looking everywhere but her and Eric.

"You were!" the younger girl's face lit up at the prospect of catching her straight-laced boss having a naughty dream.

"Get me some coffee, Darcy, you're on the clock," Jane finally said, putting her authoritative boss voice on thick.

"Yes, boss lady."

The next few months blew by fast. Jane and Eric came upon a few breakthroughs and did some elaborate trial experiments, but always the outcome fizzled and left them disappointed. The two scientists would argue over notes, equations, theories while Darcy served them coffee and donuts.

Finally graduation day came and Jane and Eric were seated alongside her mother for the exciting event. Darcy had a feeling they felt more excited than her, though. She kept up a smile for their sake, but it took all of her will power to try and put some pep in her step as she accepted her certificate.

From the inside the world looked washed out, everything was tasteless, her smell and hearing dulled. Truly she was a wreck, but she was not about to let everyone know.

And every night when Darcy went to sleep, she was transported back to that place of craggy rocks, darkness, and suffering. Each time the captor asked for submission that same unyielding voice would bite out "Never." And every night before bed she would silently beg for this tortured soul to yield for the sake of her sanity if not for the prisoner's own sake.

She did not know how much longer she could take waking up and feeling bruised and battered with no evidence of the injuries upon her body.

Though Darcy slept well enough, she felt like a hundred years worth of tiredness was weighing upon her. She even checked her complexion in the mirror, expecting to see dark bags under her eyes, but...
they looked ridiculously normal. Her eyes themselves were a different story. Every day they seemed to be turning a duller shade of blue, as if all the fun and cheerfulness of life were getting sucked out of them.

A hunger like no other also began to grip her. Eating as she had before didn't cut it anymore and she was finding herself sneaking bites of food whenever she could. Paranoia slowly set in and she started checking her weight frequently, but it neither went up or down. Then there was the fact that though she was eating quite ravenously, nothing she normally craved had much of a taste anymore. Nothing had much of a taste at all.

In secret Darcy set up an appointment to see a doctor concerning her condition, and played hooky so she could attend it. She best described her symptoms without going into details about her dreams or the feeling of being beaten, because that could open up a whole other can of worms. The doctor looked her over thoroughly and drew blood, but in the end found nothing of consequence. He did suggest that she start taking vitamins as he found her diet to be lacking in some key nutrients and with that, sent her on her way.

If Jane and Eric knew anything of the things plaguing her, they did not let her on to it, and in turn Darcy went on bustling about them, listening to her iPod, cracking jokes, and pretending that she was not suffering the someone else's torture every night.

*Can a dream really kill me?* Darcy wondered with trepidation while she lay in bed already feeling the harsh wave of sleep crashing upon her. It hit her like this every time without preamble.

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Hours, days, weeks, and months all blurred together. Time only seemed to creep along when it was night and she pulled back into the world of anguish that awaited her. During the day she was possessed by a weird sense of autopilot. She was saying and doing things how she always did, but there was little feeling behind her actions.

Darcy only truly felt anything when she was living vicariously through the experiences of the man held prisoner on the godforsaken land his captors' called home. The realization that his spirit was barely holding together against the onslaught of his captors' chipping at it struck her only very recently.

Before she had begged for him to just give in and end his suffering, but this new brokenness had her begging for him to hold on, to keep fighting.

"He knows you yearn for something," she heard the captor say one night.

Instead of commanding for submission or laying out a beating, his voice slithered out from the darkness as his hooded figure stepped into the glowing blue.

The prisoner gave a small indication that was listening, a slight upward tilt of his head from its previously lowered position.

Even though Darcy could make out their forms against the faint glow, they still remained little more than silhouettes to her eyes.

"Stop fighting and let Him in," the sinister voice urged in mock gentleness, "Allow Him to expand upon your mind and there will be nothing you cannot achieve. All He asks for is your loyalty and word that you will retrieve what He desires."

"The last time I swore loyalty to someone," the prisoner rasped as if severely parched, "I was betrayed and I ended up on this sad rock of a realm. Tell me creature, what makes Him so different?"
"Watch that loose tongue of yours or I'll have it cut from your head, boy," hissed the captor.

"I am quite attached to my tongue…" the prisoner lamented, "do go on."

The captor went on, pacing in front of his captive, "If you think Odin had immense power, then Thanos is power personified. He can destroy whole worlds and races with ease, but He can also bestow great rewards and He always rewards those that follow through for Him."

The prisoner made a small hum of understanding. "And what does Thanos want me to retrieve?"

"The Tessaract, an object of unimaginable power unto itself. I'm sure you've heard of it."

The prisoner nodded in affirmation. "But what exactly will I receive in compensation?"

"Anything your little heart desires, simply name it," cooed the captor.

The prisoner remained in a long contemplative silence, then said, "Do allow me some time to narrow down my desires."

Darcy could hear the sickening smirk crossing the face of the captor, knowing he was hitting a breakthrough after long efforts of wearing down his captive's stubborn spirit.

"Of course…"

Darcy woke up murmuring "Idiot," over and over again, referring to the prisoner. She then thought she heard the television from the living room filtering in through the walls.

"You mock my pain."

"Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something."

*The Princess Bride? Jane is…home…AND awake at this hour?*

Forcing herself out of bed Darcy peeked out of her room to discover her boss on the sofa, indeed watching The Princess Bride, as well as eating straight from the tub of cookies and cream ice cream. The longer she watched the scene in the living room, the easier it became to make out the minute shaking of Jane's thin shoulders and the barely contained sniffles.

For the first time in a long, long time Darcy felt emotion grip her while in the waking world, and she scurried over to the sofa, placing her arm around Jane's shoulders in a comforting embrace.

"What's wrong?" she found her own voice sounded wounded and small.

Jane swallowed thickly, eyes trained to the screen as Princess Buttercup realized she had sent her Westley tumbling down the hill and threw herself after him without hesitation. After much rolling and "Oofing" the pair finally reached the bottom where they reunited.

"Can you move?"

"Move? You're alive, if you want I could fly."

The lovers held each other longingly and then Westley said, "I told you I would always come for you. Why didn't you wait for me?"

"Well, you were dead."
Westley shook his head, but smiled. "Death cannot stop true love. All it can do is delay it for awhile."

"I will never doubt again."

"There will never be a need."

And then their lips met.

As the grandson began to complain about the kissing to his grandfather, Jane finally turned to Darcy with tired, bleary eyes. She had been up all night.

"T-Thor isn't coming back," Jane swallowed down a sob, "my research…is at a dead end…a-and Eric's gone."

"Whoa…Eric's gone?" disbelief flooding the younger woman.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. abruptly swooped in last night and took E-Eric off on some top secret…t-thing," she ended that with an angry gesture of her hand then brought it up to wipe away the fresh tears that managed to spill down her cheeks.

"So they wouldn't tell you anything?"

Jane shook her head mournfully. "I'll never get close to opening the Einstein-Rosen Bridge without Eric. And Thor…I don't even know…but he's just not coming back."

Darcy grabbed the ice cream out of Jane's hand and sat it out of her reach. "We can do this together. I'll work longer hours, anything you need. And don't count yourself out boss lady, it was your crazy hunches that brought you to Thor in the first place."

"That's flattering, Darcy," she gave a dry laugh, "But no offense, but you barely know the first thing about science and I've been working on this for nearly a year since…” she paused to choke back a sob, "and it's been without any promising results…and that was with Eric's help…”

"Wait…it's been a year?" Darcy asked distractedly.

Jane sniffed and nodded. "Ten months."

Holy shit.

The intern quickly shook her head of the realization that it had been ten months since the last sign of Loki. Ten months since she had become a prisoner to those bizarrely real dreams on a nightly basis.

"Yeah well…Buttercup had to wait five years for Westley. What's one year?" Darcy quipped and carefully wiped more tears away from Jane's face. The older woman had quickly became more than her boss, Darcy saw her as a best friend and a sister over the time they had spent together.

Jane smiled solemnly at her attempt to humor her and cheer her up. "Yeah…but…Westley was just across the world, not across the galaxy."

"Look at me Jane," when she did, Darcy did her best dreamy-eyed impression of Westly, "Nothing can stop true love."

That got a laugh out of the astrophysicist and the intern couldn't help the giggle that started bubbling up in her own chest. After they shared a healthy laugh, bordering on nothing short of hysterics, Darcy stood and offered her hand.
"How about we blow this popsicle stand and get to work on some science?"

"What else do I have to do?" Jane relented and took her hand.

Darcy pulled her friend to her feet, amusement lilting her voice, "You need to still come join the bar scene, Dr. Foster."

For the next couple of weeks Jane and Darcy worked diligently in the lab during the weekdays, and on the weekends they sampled the night life.

Jane was a real lightweight when it came to drinking, but more than made up for it in the ensuing hilarity that was her boss tipsy. She was much more coercible when inebriated. Darcy could easily talked her into a round of karaoke and they both talked a couple of guys into buying them a few extra shots.

Darcy was also unburdened of her nightly dreams.

Or so she thought.

"I've decided what I want," the prisoner spoke first this time, "but first I need to know that I will be given access to an army, one to help me conquer the realm of my choosing."

"We will equip you with anything you need," the captor reassured, "So you will submit your loyalty, yourself to Thanos' power?"

The prisoner nodded. "I am at your service."

"Good," a new voice rumbled and a third figure melted out from the darkness.

The prisoner inhaled sharply, body tensing and becoming alert as the massive shape appeared, foreboding just starting to tingle at his nerves.

This could only be Thanos.

The giant silhouette reached out with a large hand towards the restrained prisoner, engulfing the man's head with his palm while the other hand held a glowing yellow gemstone. "Brace yourself child, expanding your mind may nearly end you."

No, this doesn't smell right. Don't let—

Darcy's pleading was cut off by the sudden overwhelming sensation that her mind was being vacuumed out of her skull, detached from her body.

The prisoner in turn went completely limp against his restraints as Thanos pulled something from the prisoner's head with the help of the gemstone. He cradled a misty essence in the palms of his massive hands; the prisoner's mind she realized without any clear way of knowing.

She just knew.

Thanos picked apart and twisted around the consciousness in his possession like he was playing with a puzzle. Only when the essence turned blue did he seem satisfied with his work, and he shoved it back into it back the prisoner's head.

The prisoner arched up as his consciousness reconnected with his body and she then caught a glint of reflection his eyes in the low light of the darkness. A glowing film of blue slid over his eyes,
overtaking him like a virus invading a healthy cell.

Emotions that weren't her own rolled through her, reaching a crescendo so harshly that they branded themselves into the core of her being.

Heightened forms of anger, jealousy, betrayal, vengeance, and a lust for power surged through her rapidly and she was sure the sheer volume of this man's swirling emotions were going to smother her.

The next thing she knew she was back in the lab, but the lingering affects of murderous intentions clung to her like a second skin. Darcy had to rub the heels of her hands roughly against her eyelids to get a semblance of her own thoughts back, and she let out a loud shuddering sigh.

"You okay?" she heard Jane ask from behind her.

Darcy bit her lip hard in an effort to bring herself completely out of the intense dreamscape she thought she had escaped, then turned to face her boss with a hastily thrown together smile.

"Yeah, guess I just needed that power nap."

"Mmm," Jane nodded in agreement, "good thing I let you rest then. I couldn't bring myself to wake you once you dozed off, even when you started snoring."

The younger woman blinked a couple of times, still getting her bearings, then she retorted haughtily, "I do not snore!"

As suddenly as they had started, the hold tethering Darcy to the strange world and the pain and feelings of the prisoner were finally severed after that last subconscious encounter.

As the days went by without any further dreaming, Darcy tried to return to her normal every day routine of browsing Tumblr, inputting Jane's data from written notes onto a computer spreadsheet, making sure the astrophysicist had enough coffee and food and sleep, but in the back of her mind Darcy could not dismiss the dreams.

The need to talk about the dreams to somebody was overwhelming for Darcy, but once again she found herself mute when seriously entertaining the notion. Jane was her closest contact, but she was sure her friend was more affluent in science than dream interpretation.

She even went so far as to Google the topic, but most of the details in her dreams were interpreted into nothing but weird new age mumbo-jumbo, like she was about to experience financial gain.

Financial gain my ass!

On the fourth day and for the first time in months, Darcy had an in depth conversation with her mother over the phone. She did not talk about her dreams because she knew they would make little sense and would most likely make her mom worry. Instead they talked about Jane's progress, which steadily morphed into her mom's current crochet project.

"So enough about everyone else, how are you, kiddo?"

The question threw Darcy for a loop and it took her a few seconds to refocus. "Oh I'm good, just the usual."

"That's it? Heavens there was a time when you could scarcely stop talking about your day, what's happened to my Darcy?" her mom gave off a teasing air, but underneath alarm tinged the humorous
"I…well…I don't really do much but assist Jane with her equipment, help her take readings, data entries, make sure she doesn't kill herself with work," she tried to sound unaffected, but she stammered anyway.

"And does that still bring you happiness? Are you getting enough time to yourself to enjoy life?"

"Yes," Darcy answered with a defensiveness she could not explain, "I mean Jane is a workaholic, but she gives me plenty of breaks. And I'm happy helping her out. Jane's got a passion for her research and I want to be there to help her reach her goals."

"What about your goals, kiddo?"

"Huh?" once again she was caught off guard.

"You've graduated months ago, what now? Are you going to look for work or further your education? What are your goals?"

There was a time when Darcy had an idea of what she wanted to do. She was going to finish her bachelor's in political science and then become a policy analyst. That was before gods started falling out of skies and intergalactic robots started destroying little towns. That was before she really got swept up with Jane's research.

"I…really don't know anymore," Darcy confessed, "I promised to stay on as Jane's assistant months ago, but I sort of don't want to leave my post here."

"Being a permanent intern doesn't exactly pay the bills though."

"I know…I just…need some time to get my head on straight again."

"Y'know," her mom was back to advice mode, "You could take a little vacation and come home. That could help clear your mind."

Darcy perked up at the idea. "That does sound great right about now."

But would Jane be okay without her?

It turned out that the idea of allowing her vacation time did not bother Jane Foster one bit.

"You've been working so hard, Darcy," said the astrophysicist when Darcy broached the subject to her, "I'll be fine. Go take as long as you need, and tell your mother I say hi."

Darcy bear-hugged the woman she considered her friend and sister before rushing off to pack.

A new sense of eagerness that she had not experienced in nearly a year filled Darcy as she sung along with the tunes on her iPod while driving home. Although it was not until her three-hour drive from Puente Antiguo to Santa Rosa ended and she was on in her mother's embrace that the full weight of her returning emotions hit her like Mac truck.

_God I missed this town._

The next few weeks were spent soul-searching. She picked back up a knitting project that she had left unfinished, watched movies with her mother, and reacquainted herself with old friends on nights out on the town.
One night while out with her girlfriends, she caught sight of one of her old high school crushes, Stewart. He still appeared to be good-looking as he nursed a beer and played pool with his buds, though Darcy found herself feeling more unimpressed by him than she was years before. She chalked it up to being exposed to the sight of two alien princes whose looks really were worthy of myth.

Her friend Lisa nudged Darcy, daring her to go up to him. Darcy was momentarily hesitant, but felt she could not turn the opportunity down. She was trying to rediscover what she wanted from life after all.

Darcy downed the rest of her Seven And Seven for a much needed boost of liquid courage before sauntering towards Stewart, or the best saunter she could do while already a bit inebriated. After introducing herself to him, he quickly recognized her and flashed her an inviting smile.

Stewart abandoned his game to give her his full attention and they immediately dove into comfortable conversation. Before long talking turned to flirting, which lead to dancing, and then lead to standing outside next to Stewart's car as he proceeded to put his mouth all over hers.

That's when she was smacked sober by a particularly determined thought.

_You're needed elsewhere._

The mantra would not stop niggling around in her brain.

Those words, coupled with Stewart's lousy, beer-laced kissing, was distracting enough for her libido to thoroughly cool off. Darcy untangled herself from Stewart, muttering a quick apology before wandering off into the night against his protests of him driving her home.

_Yeah, not happening buddy._

She had rode over to the bar in one of her friend's cars, but this part of Santa Rosa was localized enough that walking did not bother her.

She discovered her seemingly aimless feet had a destination after all once she looked up to see she was in the park, standing under her old tree. It did not take much time gazing up at the branches reaching towards the sky for her to realize what she really wanted.

The very next day, after heart-felt goodbyes, Darcy Lewis was well on her way back to Puente Antiquo.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, to clarify, Darcy doesn't know the dude in her dream being tortured is Loki. The dream depicted him as a completely ambiguous silhouette, and his voice indistinguishable. She simply knows that she feels sympathy for the prisoner. Knowing that it was Loki won't be revealed to Darcy for a little longer. This is probably considered a filler chapter, but I wanted to do something in between movies to show what's going on there, as well as depict the connection between Darcy and Loki. The song that Darcy blares on her iPod is _"U R A Fever"_ by The Kills, pretty neat song. Please keep the feedback coming!
How long he spent on that barren dark rocky realm, Loki did not know. Time meant nothing when there was no nearby star to gauge the days with. Days, months, years, millennia, he did not know. Until a very short time ago, all he knew was the most excruciating pain he ever had the displeasure of experiencing.

These people, the Chitauri, were quite inventive in their torture, and the worse of them all was a being known simply as The Other.

He nearly bent to their will the first time the "In-jiceerah" was used on him. The Injector was a piece of Chitauri technology that was connected into the nervous system, in Loki's case, into his spine. The result was an intense firing of neurons that sent his body into a fit of contortions. His body felt like it was set on fire and that some invisibly force was tearing him limb from limb, ripping his ribcage open rib by rib, and cracking his skull like an eggshell.

The pain went on for an eternity the first time, making Loki wonder how he was not dead yet. He blacked out into a dreamless sleep for so long that he thought he had died until he woke up, finding himself once again on his knees, arms chained to the ground.

"Most impressive," The Other's voice met him when he lifted his head, "I don't believe anyone has lasted that long without screaming for mercy in over 7,000 years."

"W-What do you want with me?" Loki said, each word punctuated with a deep gasp for air.

His lungs felt ragged where his broken ribs would have punctured them, but as he gave his body a quick once over, he found himself to be intact; the pain had been real, but completely non-physical.

"I want to determine if you will have use to me," a second, deeper voice cut in.

Loki looked up further to see a titan of a being float forth from the shadows upon a giant rocky throne.

Loki felt a tremor go up his nerve endings. "Who are you?"

"Silence!" The Other hissed at Loki, "You will introduce yourself first as a sign of respect!"

The titan raised a massive purple hand in the direction of The Other, causing the hideous creature to silence himself and step back from Loki.

"I am Thanos."

Loki could tell that Thanos expected him to acquaint himself to him and The Other, but he remained silent, sizing up the situation. This caused The Other to snarl at his insolence, but Thanos seemed hardly perturbed.

Thanos appeared as large as Laufey from this distance, if not larger, but he was certainly built thicker. His rippled purple hide covered almost completely in gold and black armor and two luminous blue eyes peered out from under his helmet.
"You are a crafty one, prisoner," Thanos said with an appreciative grin, clearly seeing what Loki was doing, "the last Asgardian I crossed paths with did not hold such cunning in his gaze."

Balking for the first time since the conversation started, Loki sputtered, "How did you-"

"It's been many millennia, but I know Asgardian armor when I see it. But you hardly compare to the typical Aesir. Your frame is slighter, and I can smell the magic on you," Thanos leaned forward in his throne, "Just who are you?"

Loki closed his gaping jaw, returning to his voluntary silence. The little Thanos knew about him and the more he knew about Thanos, the better.

"Answer Him!" The Other growled, lashing out at with a blow to the face. Loki's face whipped painfully to the side, but he defiantly turned his gaze back on Thanos, lips still firmly sealed.

Thanos let out a snort that ended in a chuckle. "You certainly have the spirit of an Asgardian, but it will break. They all break in the end. Or I could offer you a reprieve from the torture you were given when you arrived. I can tell you crave knowledge and…" Thanos squinted; smile widening, "is that vengeance? It matters not to me who you are, simply pledge your loyalty to me and I will expand your questing mind. I will give you what you desire."

Letting Thanos' words sink in, Loki found that he was quite curious about the titan's deal, so much so that he nearly caved and pledged loyalty, if not for the sake of knowledge, but for self-preservation. He was not too keen on going through another round with the In-jiceerah.

But every deal had a catch. What was Thanos' catch? If he opened his mind to the titan, what would happen?

Loki remained silent once again as he stared shrewdly at Thanos.

"Very well…then you shall be broken," said Thanos as he turned away in his floating thrown.

Upon hearing Thanos' words, The Other's lip curled in a gleeful sneer at the prospect of continuing the torture. The creature was already striding eagerly towards him when Thanos turned his throne back, a thoughtful look on his face.

"If you will not tell me who you are, then will you at least indulge me on who's presence I felt with you the day you fell here?"

Loki stiffened as a sudden shiver of apprehension and anxiety fluttered up and down his spine.

*Darcy. But I sent her back, there's no way her spirit could have landed here with me.*

He remembered falling from the Bifrost, and then falling for eons through Yggdrasil. The fall was so long that he drifted to sleep, dreaming of the final embrace of death.

The Midgardian's voice had roused him from his slumber. When he first opened his eyes he saw her as a vision of the child she had been, but there was someone beyond that vision. Blinking his eyes of their sleep revealed Darcy's true form to him. Her trademark glasses were missing and she was dressed in thin sleeping attire, attire that showed off the creamy expanses of her arms and legs, as well as her beautifully sculpted collarbone.

At first surprise overcame him at how she had gotten herself where he was. When he realized she was performing an astral projection of herself, a thrill of excitement shot through him momentarily, but it quickly turned to puzzlement on how she was able to accomplish such a feat, much less been
able to locate him.

It was not uncommon for Midgardian children to be more open to what mortals called the "supernatural," for they often called beings that adults could not see "imaginary friends"—Loki being no exception. But it was quite uncommon for a Midgardian of Darcy's age to still be so open, open to the point that she could cast forth her spirit from her body. Humans could in fact perform astral projection—anything with a soul could do it, but it was such a highly difficult art for them to master, whereas it was fairly easy for him. No mortal her age could hope to perform astral projection correctly for it called for nearly half a half a mortal lifetime to perfect the technique.

When he had left Darcy as a child, he had made sure to keep the memories of his presence obscure that way she did not go out of her way trying to find him. He wanted her to live a normal life Midgardian life, and even now she did not strike him as cultivating such ability, or even knowing about it.

*How is she doing this?*

His wonder then turned to fear for her well-being. This was no place for a Midgardian's spirit to be lurking, especially one just stumbling into the art of astral travel. If she could not find her way back to her body, her spirit could be trapped here never to awaken and her unconscious body would merely lie dormant until it died, effectively trapping her spirit in a limbo like state.

Then he felt a dark, suffocating presence behind him, a magnetized pull tugging him closer and closer towards it. If he did not act now, she would be sucked in with him and he knew not what was on the other side.

He threw a shockwave of magic at her spirit, repelling her from him just as strange tendrils grabbed at his body, pulling him further towards the abyss at his back. The grip on him was boiling hot, and he found that his Frost Giant form was particularly susceptible to this sort of pain.

Upon hearing his cries, Darcy became desperate to aid him, her brilliant blue eyes dripping with tears. The sight added to his pain and all he wanted to do was gather her up into his arms as he did when she was small, until her tears ceased. Instead he did the opposite, using his magic to keep her at bay even as the burning felt like it was consuming him.

Finally the last tendril wrapped around his neck, silencing his screams. He forced his eyes open to get one last look at the Midgardian, even if his last view of her face was her devastated expression. He could not hold her, but with his own expression he hoped to convey to a silent message to her, that all that mattered to him now was that she was safe.

*Is she still safe?* Loki wondered frantically, searching Thanos' eyes for any sort of hint.

"Hm, I shall find out about this person when you surrender your mind to me," Thanos said, voice laced with poison and promise.

Loki lunged towards Thanos as far as his chains would let him. "I will never surrender my loyalty or my mind to the likes of you!" came his answering growl.

Thanos merely shrugged his boulder-like shoulders before leaving completely.

The Other stepped in front of him again, his nasty grin in place. "Please do make this fun for me," he said, then called for Chitauri to bring the Injector over along with a few other unpleasant-looking utensils, "I will find out what makes you tick, Asgardian."
The only time Loki got any semblance of sleep was when he passed out from his sessions of torture, and when he was not "sleeping" he was being tortured. It was a maddening, cyclical routine.

The Other asked him if he would submit to Thanos.

Loki would say no through gritted teeth.

The Other, or sometimes his Chitauri henchmen, would then beat him into the ground with all manner of weapons, be them simple or complex; sometimes they even resorted to using their fists when he was particularly stubborn and frustrating to them.

He was asked again for submission.

He refused.

The In-jiceerah was then connected into his spine where his body was tricked into feeling pain so great it was perhaps impossible to recreate with physical blows. It was like the technology knitted itself into his brain each time it was connected, searching for the things that would cause him the most agony. Then it would inject those sensations straight into his raw nerve endings, leading him to writhe for hours until passing out.

How long The Other let him rest off his torture was unknown to Loki. He only knew that when he was awakened his body felt like one big bruise and the punishment would begin again.

Using his magic in any way was also denied to him. He rattled his chains and ran his fingers over them, checking them out, figuring if they could hold back his Asgardian-like strength they could possibly be restraining his magic as well. His shoulders sagged at that.

Magic to Loki was as much the same as his dominant arm, if he could not use it, he felt very handicapped.

Time meant nothing and Loki was left with nothing but pain and his own thoughts, which lead to him cursing himself for not falling to a swift death or at least landing on a different realm, any other realm than this. He cursed his true parentage and kind. The Chitauri, The Other, and Thanos were also on his list, but most of all he cursed Thor and Odin.

It was their stupidity, lies, and betrayal that landed him in this mess in the first place, and now he had plenty of time to nurse his hatred for them.

The Chitauri also abstained him from any food or water, the only nourishment he got came in a strange device with a thistle-like appendage. The thorn was stabbed into his arm without care and his veins burned where the serum was injected. The procedure left annoyingly itchy bruises up and down his arms.

Sometimes during his torture sessions Loki thought he felt another presence nearby. First he thought it was Thanos watching from the shadows, but the gaze held none of the ill intent that the titan's had. This presence was fluttery and anxious like a humming bird.

The presence often only observed, but occasionally he would get snippets of impressions from it. It was telling him to give up, that his pain was too much to bear. Loki wanted to tell it to leave, that if his pain was bothering it so much to go elsewhere, but he did not want to out the being to The Other and Thanos. So he simply hoped it could read his thoughts and actions.

I'm not going to give in. If I am not allowed to die then I shall at least keep my pride while I continue to live on being punished. And can't you see I'm doing this to protect someone? Leave me to my fate,
you frail thing.

The presence always faded out as suddenly as it came, and they were always at random intervals as if the owner had no control of when they visited him.

This too had become a routine for Loki and he came to welcome it. Anything to keep his mind from the horrible things he was going through.

A long time must have lapsed since his arrival on this strange realm for Loki felt his hair tickling further down his neck to touch his shoulders. He felt more tired and sickly than ever before, but he continued to cling to his determination. He kept his voice clipped and stubborn anytime he answered to The Other, but deep inside he knew his cling to defiance was a desperate one.

Each moment that passed while on this rock chipped stoically away at his will, at his sanity.

Loki often wondered what would be left of him if he kept this up. Even more often he wondered what reprieve he would get if he gave in.

He rolled his heavy eyes to the area occupied by the presence; it was still fluttering and begging him to end his torture.

Soon…Not just yet…I will not give in without a plan.

Since Loki's last chat with The Other where he told the minion that he would think over exactly what he wanted in return for his submission, things surrounding the mysterious presence changed.

No longer did it want him to give in, it was now begging him to not submit.

The presence also had not visited him at all since then.

But it was there now as he sat, chained and kneeling, before Thanos and The Other as they awaited his decision. It fluttered like a heartbeat beside him, again urging him to not give in.

He ignored it. Now that he knew of Thanos' plans with the Tessaract, the other infinity stones, he could not continue to obstinately refuse Thanos' deal. He could not fight back against the titan even with the restraints holding his magic at bay removed. If he did not swallow a bit of his pride, not only would he die at the hands of Thanos, but also so would entire realms.

Unlike Loki, Thanos' idea of conquering had little to do with ruling and a lot more to do with utter annihilation. He was obsessed with death, as Loki had unwittingly discovered after asking just why they wanted the Tessaract so bad. Apparently genocide was what pleased the maiden that enamored Thanos' heart, and he was aiming to accomplish that on a scale that made even Loki's gut twist with disgust.

Loki hoped that his agreeing to Thanos' service indeed came with the perks that The Other was touting so much about. His life was not the only one on the line now, and he needed this plan to work.

"I've decided what I want but first I need to know that I will be given access to an army, one to help me conquer the realm of my choosing."

The presence fluttered frantically now seemingly distraught at his words.
"We will equip you with anything you need. So you will submit your loyalty, yourself to Thanos’ power?"

"I am at your service."

Thanos’ throne slowly swooped towards him, producing a yellow gem in one hand. "Good," the titan said.

The God of Mischief tensed. Is that…the Mind Gem?

A shadow loomed heavily over Loki as Thanos’ giant purple hand rested over his forehead. "Brace yourself child," the titan cautioned, "expanding your mind may nearly end you."

One moment his thoughts were swirling over his decision with misgiving, then he felt his consciousness suck out of him through the point where Thanos was touching him, and then there was nothing, neither thought nor feeling, just emptiness.

A death-like state.

Then his mind suddenly sucked back into his skull and a whoosh of air swelled his lungs as he remembered to breath. Following his normal functions returning to him he felt his familiar emotions, but amplified and focused.

Power surged back into him with a feverish pitch, causing him to seethe breaths in and out through his teeth. The energy was raw and invigorating, but it seemed to give him an unquenchable hunger for more. This was just but a taste, a mere scratch of the surface.

Loki saw himself retrieving everything he was denied before he fell from the Bifrost, a throne and crown, and complete control over a realm and all who dwelled within it. If Thor was entitled to be king, than so was he, he was the son of a king too after all.

He would secure himself more power.

His thoughts then turned more towards his foster brother. If he thought he hated Thor before, he utterly abhorred him now. The thought of obliterating all that was loved by Thor left him trembling with glee. He would see the God of Thunder suffer as he had suffered, and then suffer even more before he would finally extinguish the fool’s life.

Complete retribution would be his.

He barely registered the mystery presence fizzling out of its existence. Once his emotions calmed enough for him to form a coherent sentence, Loki turned his wide-eyed gaze back to Thanos.

"Midgard…I want it to tremble and kneel at my feet," he said, voice coming out as an enthralled, albeit raspy hiss.

"It will be done," Thanos promised, "Once we locate the Tessaract, you will be furnished with a weapon and the army of the Chitauri to retrieve it. After it is in my hands, Earth will be yours."

Loki was eager to begin his retrieval mission, but he tamped it down and nodded his head in compliance to the titan. He was patient by nature and he had all the time in the world.

"You are very fortuitous, Asgardian," The Other came to Loki after a time, "that for which you seek is on the very planet you wish to dominate."
Loki stood atop a precipice looking out at the view of stars visible from the tiny realm he still loathed. At least he was released from restraints and allowed to roam mostly free and unhindered.

"The Tessaract is on Midgard?" he asked without a backward glance.

"Indeed. The humans appear to be attempting to harness its power," he could hear the sneer in the creature's voice, "as if they could hope to understand how to wield it."

"When do I begin?"

"Immediately," The Other barked, "the Chitauri are growing restless with the promise of battle, but they must wait until you secure the Tessaract. Without the Tessaract in our hands we can only open its doorway remotely from this side of the cosmos and send you through. Once you have the gem in your grasp, you are to open the portal from it directly, allowing the Chitauri through. They will help you fight your war, and once Earth is under your control, you will relinquish the Tessaract."

The minion then shifted behind him, causing Loki to spin around and face him. In his seven-fingered hands The Other held out a scepter for the God of Mischief to take. The scepter's handle was long, made of some golden metal or alloy, and tipped with several glistening blades; a brightly glowing blue gem cradled among their sharp edges.

"Your weapon, Asgardian, courtesy of Thanos himself."

All it took for Loki to know the abilities of the scepter was for him to take it into his hands; it was a useful side effect to Thanos' "expansion" of his mind. The coolness of the handle hummed to life in his fingers in response to his touch, quickly acquainting itself with its wielder. It felt truly at home in his hands, more so than Gungnir ever did. The scepter was truly grand, and it was all his.

Loki straightened and held his weapon in one hand, letting the butt of the scepter sit firmly on the ground. The scepter made impacted the ground below with a solid, resounding thump that pleased the fallen prince. Surely that sound alone would claim the attention of all that occupied his court once was king, and he could not wait to test that theory.

"I am ready."

Traveling through the portal opened by the Tessaract to Midgard left Loki more feverish than ever. The residual heat and power of the infinity gem roiled off of his body, meeting the cool air around him and turning to into a thick steam. The capacity of energy he could feel from the Tessaract gave him a rush of adrenaline.

It was quite exhilarating.

His attention switched to his surroundings, his ears pricking at the sound of footsteps easing towards him. The Midgardians were trying to get the drop on him, but their steps were like the sound of trampling bilgesnipe. The very idea of their wasted efforts amused him to no end.

After slowly regarding the mortals before him, like a cat choosing which mouse to snatch first, his interest piqued when his eyes fell on a familiar face. It was the man that was in the company of Darcy and Thor's woman the day he attacked Midgard with the Destroyer.

Loki's thoughts swiftly turned to Darcy and it took all he had to repress a pleasant shiver at his last memory of her, shed of all her usual layers of clothes, her curves barely left to his imagination, her eyes so bright and trusting.
His grip on his scepter tightened minutely, keeping him grounded from the rising emotions welling in his chest.

*How fortuitous indeed.*

Surely this man, this scientist, knew where to locate her, and she had better be safe, or Midgard might not survive his reign.

"Sir."

Loki's attention on Darcy's friend was broken as a commanding voice addressed him, his eyes snapping to an authoritative figure dressed in all black. The eye patch the lead Midgardian wore irked him, causing him to immediately compare the man to Odin.

"Please put down the spear," the man continued.

Surely these mortals were mad, thinking they could order a God to do their bidding. Loki humored the man by glancing innocently down at the scepter in his hand, then flickered a glance back up at the leader, as if asking, "Who? Me?"

Watching the Midgardians scatter like panicked vermin to avoid the blast from his scepter filled him with relishing pride. Now they knew quite well what they were dealing with, or at least they should have.

One of them opened fire upon him, but the projectiles merely ricocheted off his armor and Jotun skin. Loki leapt at the man, dealing out swift death at the end of his scepter. Two more fired at him like annoying insects, but were soon joined their comrade upon receiving his throwing daggers to their necks. Out of the corner of this eye he spotted a woman working frantically at some Midgardian technology hooked up to the Tessaract. Loki did not hesitate in felling her in a blast of blue energy, then without wasted motion, sliced down another of the general's henchmen.

All that could not fight back ducked for cover and those who could engage him unleashed their weapons on him or foolishly in attempted hand-to-hand combat. With ease Loki flung the rodents from him or vaporized them where they stood.

Eventually all that opposed him were either dead or grounded for the moment, allowing the fallen prince to fully assess his situation.

Until he was able to summon the Chitauri, he would have to make due with having his own Midgardian henchmen. Loki spied one of the men that possessed the lightning quick reflexes to not only avoid his blasts, but also to fire back on him. For a mortal, the hawk-eyed man was atypical. As he approached him, Loki had already made up his mind, and stopped the hawk from raising his weapon with one firm hand. He could feel the determined will just from one touch.

"You have heart," Loki praised, charging his scepter with his own will before pressing it firmly to the hawk's chest.

The hawk-eyed man stiffened, fighting against the power of the scepter momentarily, but then acquiesced to the scepter and Loki's will, the control turning his Midgardian eyes an otherworldly blue. The feeling of complete control over another being brought joy to Loki. He was truly looking forward to all of Midgard kneeling to him, awaiting his first command as king.

As for now, a handful of loyal subjects would do.

The general was sneakily trying to make his getaway with the Tessaract in his clutches, but Loki was
the master of sneaky behavior, no other could get out from under his radar. He told the leader to stop where he was, using the word "Please" just to mock him.

The man in the eye patch tried to bargain with him, but the God of Mischief was having none of it. He spent too much time on that filthy realm and traveled much too far to stop now.

"I am Loki of Asgard…"

If the remaining Midgardians had any doubt about who or what he was, they could no longer hold onto it now that he let himself be known. Still when the scientist who knew Darcy accosted him, speaking of his brother, he had to restrain himself from further murder (a thousand years had gone by and the fools were still going on about Thor). He needed the man to work out the Tessaract as well as accessing Darcy.

The general, knowing full well who he was now, attempted to placate him again, but he shot down the man's offer of peace with a reference to Midgardians being little else but insects to him.

That seemed to get the general's attention, so Loki continued, explaining that he was here to release all mortals from their sad clawing for the one thing they would never meant to achieve: freedom.

No matter how independent humans thought they were, they would always worship something, pray to whatever deity they chose to bring them what they needed, and they would always fall in line under the command of a leader. It was an inescapable nature and Loki was going to give them what they needed. To emphasize his speech, he pressed his scepter to the doctor's chest, forcing his will upon him without a fight.

Still the general continued his argument, until the hawk ousted the general's (or as the hawk called him, director) attempt to stall them, revealing his plan to allow the residual energy of the Tessaract that had been caught up in the ceiling of the room to break loose and bury them all.

"Well then," Loki said turning to the hawk, silently giving him permission to end things.

He was very pleased at he ease at which he could control his new subjects. All that required was a mere thought and the hawk shot down the director, leaving the case with the Tessaract unguarded for his subjects to snatch it up as he lead the way out of the building. They met with some resistance from the remaining Midgardian agents milling about the edifice, but they were no match for his scepter.

Soon his subjects had procured a vehicle, a sort of land rover, with which to escape the collapsing of the Tessaract's portal. The mortals were quite keen on keeping the cube for themselves, however, giving chase in their own land rovers. The hawk was truly an excellent choice, as he proved not only adept with weapons, but also with piloting their land rover in both defensive and offensive maneuvers. They lost the female agent back in the tunnel, but once they exited it, an air ship met them overhead.

Loki looked up to see that the director had survived his wounds, but he fully intended on changing that, with a blast from his scepter. The attack hit the rotating blades of the general's air ship and it immediately plummeted to the ground as they made their final break for escape. Shots sounded from the wreckage, telling him that the tenacious director had yet again survived, but the man's last-ditch efforts at stopping them were for naught.

While he finally let himself relax in the back of the land rover as the hawk drove on, looking for a suitable hideout. Loki's thoughts drifted back to Darcy. Badly he wanted to order the scientist to have the hawk take them straight to her, but he knew that the director would not give up his search
so easily. First, he relented in allowing the hawk to find a safe haven for himself, his subjects, and the Tessaract. Once all was secure he would question the scientist about Darcy.

*I'm coming for you little one…very soon.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who commented, bookmarked, and left kudos~ Thought I'd give you all an early post :)  
Superposition is a quantum theory principle, you can learn more about it [here.](#)
Love is a Polaroid, Better in Picture

Chapter Notes

Thought I’d go ahead and post a chapter for Halloween, even though it's not really that scary...I don't think ^^'
Saw Avengers: Age of Ultron and I saw a few instances there that could fit into this story, but I'm not going to do that, and I most likely won't include Ragnorok into this when it is released as well, because again I want to start veering away from the movies. Also saw Crimson Peak on premier night and it was pretty damn good! I won't give away anything though except that if you're expecting it to be one of those bone chilling horror movies, it isn't (least it isn't by my standards). Just thought I'd say so in case anyone is disappointed it didn't scare the pants off of them. And as always, thanks so much for all the reviews, faves, and follows~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I'm a reckless mistake
I'm a cold night's intake
I'm a one night too long
I'm a come on too strong

All my life I've been living in the fast lane
Can't slow down
I'm a rolling freight train
One more time
Gotta start all over
Can't slow down
I'm a lone red rover

Dr. Selvig and Agent Barton bickered shortly about where they should take their new King and his stolen relic for safekeeping. In the end the hawk won out, whether because his choice was a lead-lined tomb that could resist S.H.I.E.L.D.’s detection or because the agent intimidated the scientist into agreement, Loki did not know nor care.

Once settled, his two subjects set to work gathering all manner of scientists and soldiers from organizations who were in opposition to S.H.I.E.L.D., most hailing from another shadow group known as HYDRA. HYDRA did not even need the persuasion of Loki’s scepter to agree to help and their scientists proved themselves invaluable in knowing how to unlock hidden potentials of the Tessaract that not even Dr. Selvig and S.H.I.E.L.D. were privy to.

Within the span of mere hours Loki's team had found a suitable lair, built a cache of weapons, located equipment for opening the Tessaract's portal, and secured the perimeter of the lair. All his scientists were now bustling about the Tessaract with manic glee. Loki considered himself well on schedule if not vastly ahead of it.

It's time.
Before he could commence his more personal plan, Loki felt the gem in his scepter calling to him. He looked down to see the gem pulsing a blue so bright that it burned hotly with white light. The Other was harkening to him.

_Damn hideous creature..._

Loki let his energy meet that of the scepter's, answering the beckon, and his mind unwillingly transported itself back to the desolate rock the Chitauri called home. It took all he had not to look on at the landscape and The Other with disgust and contempt.

"The Chitauri grow restless," the creature informed him.

_Is that all you've come to waste my time about?_

"Let them goad themselves," Loki responded, keeping his voice neutral, "I will lead them into glorious battle."

The Other sounded unconvinced that Loki's battle against the puny Midgardians would be contain so much glory. Loki knew full well that Midgard was undoubtedly unequipped to defy him of becoming king, but he also knew that mortals had some defiance in them that made up for their short, insignificant lives. But their meager collective spirit would fall short. There would be plenty of glory for the Chitauri to gloat about for centuries to come.

That was if the Chitauri truly had the abundant fighting capabilities that The Other was singing his praises about. Loki was growing tired of The Other's idle chat so he purposefully prodded the creature by questioning the Chitauris' potential aloud.

The Other's mostly obscured countenance heated into anger, offended that Loki doubted their power, the power of Thanos, just the outcome the prince was looking for. The Other then turned the tables on the trickster, mentioned Loki's fall from Asgard, and causing his own agitation to burn to life and for him to lash back in his defense.

_How dare this lowly minion speak to me as if I'm a child who not yet knows his purpose! I am an exiled prince, but I'm more than he could ever hope to be! I will have a throne once again._

"Your ambition is little, born of childish need," The Other cooed, adding salt to Loki's already tarnished pride, before droning on about how he and Thanos looked to greater conquests that their precious Tessaract would reveal to them.

Loki took another jab at The Other, "You don't have the Tessaract yet." In his rekindled rage the creature lunged at Loki, hand outstretched to strike down the would-be king, but his attack ceased at the last second, leaving the creature frozen in that position with an unpleasant snarl etched on his lips. Emboldened by the minion's powerlessness, Loki continued to court The Other's wrath, "I don't threaten…but until I open the doors, until your force his mine to command…you are but words."

The Other relented in very mild agreement as he pulled back just slightly, but then proceeded to make his master's threat clear: should Loki fail or keep them from the Tessaract, Thanos would find him no matter the distance Loki put between himself and the titan.

"You think you know pain?" came the cold warning and suddenly Loki felt a lick of fear for the first time since their war of words had begun, "He will make you long for something as sweet as pain!"

A great blast of agony sliced through Loki's head, much like the pain the In-jiceerah was capable of inflicting, and then the connection was severed. The Other's warning left a deep chill in Loki's bones as he briefly pondered them, pondered how Thanos could hurt him worse than that infernal piece of...
Chitauri technology. Loki was keen on not finding out.

*It's definitely time...*

"Dr. Selvig, I need your council for a few moments."

Selvig seemed reluctant to peel his attention away from the Tessaract, but obeyed his king nonetheless.

*The cube's pull on this one is quite intense.*

"What can I do for you, sir?" Selvig said once he approached, wringing his hands the entire time as if being away from his work made him physically ill.

"I presume you know a girl by the name of Darcy?"

"Ah Darcy," Selvig's glazed eyes softened with fondness for a split second, "sweet girl, diligent, though a bit flaky. What would you like to know?"

Loki stood from his seat to tower over his mortal subject. He did not want to share his reasoning for seeking out the girl, he also did not have the time, and so he commanded curtly, "I wish to speak with her. Where is she?"

Selvig went back to wringing his hands. "Last I knew, back in Puente Antiguo, New Mexico with Jane."

Loki figured his subject meant the little town that he had leveled with the Destroyer a year ago, but that gave him little idea of how to get there. Growing impatient, the God of Mischief gripped the man by his head and extracted the needed information. The scepter granted him such powers over all his subjects and he likened the sensation to pulling a struggling worm from its home in the soil. When he released Selvig he noticed the scientist looked a bit winded and paler than usual.

"I appreciate your council, Dr. Selvig," Loki said with a slow grin as he teleported away from the compound, hoping Darcy was still taking up residence in the location provided.

Darcy's body was screaming at her to sleep tonight, but her mind was practically bouncing off the walls and she was not sure why.

*Did I enter that last row of numbers right?*

*Are there enough pop tarts stashed for Jane to eat?*

*Does she have enough coffee to last the night?*

*Should I go tell Jane to pack it in and sleep too?*

*Did I charge my taser?*

Darcy flipped angrily onto her back. "Shut up head and let me sleep!" she grumbled aloud.

Her stomach rumbled in reply.

*Mmm a hot pocket sounds good right about now.*

Darcy sighed and flipped off the covers, getting up from her small cabin bed within Jane's cramped camper to enter the kitchen. It only took her a few steps from her bed to reach the dining quarters.
Darcy's first action was to grab a frozen ham and cheese hot pocket from the tiny freezer and put it in the microwave.

Next she glanced at her taser to see that it was indeed fully charged. She unplugged the charger from the wall and placed it in her purse, setting her taser down on the counter where it would be within her reach at all times.

As the hot pocket nooked, Darcy decided that while it was still fresh in her mind she should probably check on Jane, so she grabbed her cell and speed dialed her boss.

Jane answered on the seventh ring, inquiring in surprise, "Hey, you're awake?"

"Yeah, just needed a midnight snack," Darcy explained, "and thought I'd check up on you, because if I didn't then you'd never sleep and you'd starve to death. So how are you boss lady? Enough fuel for your science?"

There was some beeping on the other end of the line, surely one of Jane's do-dad meters.

"That's very nice of you Darce, and everything's fine, you provided plenty of coffee and snacks."

The intern hummed thoughtfully, "Sure you shouldn't try to get some shut eye though?"

"I can't," said Jane, her voice getting an octave higher, "I'm on a roll with these readings tonight and there's no rest for the wicked, you know?"

"Sure, because you're all sorts of wicked, Jane. Wake me up when you've taken over the world, because I get to be your second in command."

Jane just laughed at that. "Yeah, alright. See you in the morning, Darcy."

"Mmhmm, bye."

Darcy ended the call, pleased to find her food finished cooking and waiting for her in the microwave. She had been prepared to annihilate her hot pocket the moment it was out of its wrapper and on her plate, but the distinct feeling that she was being watched gave her pause.

"Will you be my second in command?" asked a smooth accented male voice.

Before she could get her wits about her, Darcy's released her plastic plate and it clattered loudly to the ground as she made a mad dash for her taser. Once the weapon was solidly gripped in her hands she quickly whipped around, aiming its laser pointer squarely on the intruder's chest, her finger poised to pull the trigger.

The thud of her rapid heartbeat bounced against her in her ribcage and rushed in her ears, sounding loud in the near deafening the silence of the confined space. A panic filled her that was so strong that it caused her eyesight to blur around the edges; her only focus was taser's light reflecting off a strangely familiar black chest plate adorned with a golden half circle.

Darcy took a steadying breath and blinked hard a few times to shake the blurriness of her vision. The edges began to clear and her vision gradually expanded to take in elaborate leather and armor, accents of green standing out most in her mind. Her gaze trailed up a pale throat to take in a face she had not seen in a twelve months, a face that held an air of charming mischievousness that was matched by no other.

"I'm so sorry…I didn't mean to startle you," he said in that unmistakable, pleasantly silken voice.
Both of his large hands were raised and placidly open where she easily could see them.

His name tried to tumble from her lips, but it was stuck somewhere on her tongue as her eyes continued to sweep over him. It was a little funny considering how people complained that she never shut up, and here she was speechless.

Loki stood there just inside the doorway of the camper (just a few feet in front of her) seemingly looking her over in much the same manner she was, committing her features to memory.

The God of Mischief looked just as he did when they first met all those years ago as well as when he was falling through space. This time though his royal features seemed to be subtly sharper. And his raven hair had grown even longer, reaching his shoulders and ending in an upward sweep; suggesting that his hair was curlier than she previously thought. He never failed to make her feel a sense of awe just by being in his presence.

His masculine beauty was enough to make her cry.

There was also something different about Loki besides the minute changes in his appearance, but Darcy could not to be able to put her finger on it.

Was he really there, within her reach, or was this another quasi-dream? Why did he seem so different, even though his appearance had barely changed?

I have to find out.

All other thought flew out the window of Darcy's mind and she dropped her taser back onto the countertop behind her before flinging her arms around his torso, pressing her face tightly to his armored chest.

Loki's body immediately tensed in her arms, but slowly relaxed as one arm practically crushed her to him. The nimble fingers of his free hand stroked gently through her hair. She felt him shift as he leaned down to first nuzzle his cheek against her temple before his forehead came to a rest on her shoulder. Being this close to him, she was completely enveloped by that minty and crisp winter breeze that was his scent.

There were so many things she wanted to say running around in her head, but she still found herself silenced by the gravity of him. It breathlessly pulled her right to him and she was happy just to be wrapped up in his secure embrace.

Loki let out a breathy chuckled that vibrated from his body into hers and then he put words to just exactly how she was feeling, "I missed you too, little one."

"Little one?" she shifted so her chin was resting on his chest, "How can you keep calling me that when I'm a grown woman?"

Lifting his head from her shoulder, Loki looked down at her pointedly with an affectionate yet teasing glint in his eyes. "You will always be 'little one' to me, Darcy."

Looking up at him was like looking at a tree, not to mention he was nearly 1,000 years older than her, but it did not stop the pout from tugging at her lower lip.

"Touché…" she reluctantly conceded with a crooked smile, but it slowly faded as her mood sobered.

Her eyes burned with the familiar sting of saline wetness pricking at her tear ducts. Having such strong emotions pop up in front of the God of Mischief bothered her, so she did what she could to
switch his attention elsewhere.

She angrily slapped his chest as hard as she could, but it only ended up hurting her palm.

"Y-You come into my life when I'm just a kid," **Slap** "then you leave and I think I'm crazy and you don't really exist," **Slap** "and years later when I do see you again, you to slip right through my fingers," **Slap** "I thought you were dead, Loki!"

With his eyes soulfully trained on hers, he skillfully snatched her wrist before she could inflict more damage on her already reddened hand, engulfing it protectively between his hands; and damn if she could not remain pissed at him with the look he was giving her.

"You were young," he began softly, "and while I wanted deeply to keep you with me, I also wanted you to grow up without me complicating things. And as a prince and then king of Asgard, I had many important duties weighing upon me. I…I'm so sorry, I had forgotten about you up until the very moment I saw you again," he paused to wipe the tears from her eyes with the pads of his thumbs before cradling her face in his hands, "And about me…falling into that void…" his tone turned somber, "you would not have wanted have ended up with me there. I wasn't about to let that happen."

With a snuffle that she tried to keep from sounding as unattractive as possible, Darcy banished her tears away, focusing instead on the gold half circle on his chest plate. "Still you could have sent a post card saying, 'Hey Darcy, might not see you for few years, but I'm alive.'"

She heard Loki give another chuckle, and shifted her eyes back to his face.

"Still as witty and amusing as ever," he remarked, his eyes crinkling mirthfully when he smiled, "I'm here…right now, aren't I? And I don't plan on ever going away from you again."

"Promise?" her voice sounded pathetically small to her own ears.

"You have my word," he breathed against the angry, smarting flesh of her palm, and then pressed a searing kiss there that swiftly had her face burning up with heat.

How he managed to kiss such an innocent part of her anatomy, but make it look and feel more erotic than making out with any of the boys in her past, Darcy had no idea. All she knew was that the atmosphere of the confined space they occupied had shifted.

The cool desert night air instantly grew hot and making her feel light headed and wobbly.

Loki kissed her palm again, only more longingly and his eyes flickered back up to meet hers, revealing pupils dilated with hungry desire. The devouring look he was sending her hit her full force and her toes curled in response.

The room was suddenly too small, too hot, and he too close. He was suffocating her in the best possible way.

Darcy swallowed thickly, wetting her lips and parting them so she could breath again.

Sharp eyes darted instantly to her mouth, the heat of their gaze increasing tenfold.

"Darcy," Loki murmured lowly, slowly leaning in while his hand released hers to snake itself around to the small of her back.

She was feeling herself being drawn in as well, "Yes?"
The cycling of his cool inhale and then hot exhale was puffing out against her lips, adding to her Loki-induced daze.

His mouth was so close that she almost felt it brush hers when he spoke again, his voice deepening, "Come with me and be my second in command? Be my queen?"

"Q-Queen?" she panted the question, hardly understanding what he was saying.

_Why are you talking so much? Just kiss me before this tension melts me into a Darcy-puddle and I die on the floor!_

Loki appeared to be having the same sort of focus problems she had because he merely nodded at first, torn between continuing the conversation and putting them both out of their misery by sealing her lips with his. He seemed to realize that he could not finish speaking like this, so he pulled himself back a bit, but his eyes remained heatedly on hers.

"I aim to rule Midgard and I wish for you to be at my side."

Darcy blinked at him, still feeling too hot and bothered to comprehend anything besides wanting to feel his body against hers again, to taste that mouth.

Loki seemed adorably unsure about her lack of a response so he continued, "Your mortality is an issue, but worry not," he waved one hand perpendicularly above the other and a luminous golden apple appeared in his palm.

"Whoa!" Darcy shook out of her lusty daze to stare in amazement at the shiny fruit he had conjured out of thin air, "Is that real? How did you do that?"

The apple was so wonderfully gold that she would have wore that thing on a necklace, not caring how ridiculous she looked.

_Now that's serious bling!_

A cocky smirk pulled at Loki's mouth, erasing the shy uncertainty she saw moments ago, "No illusions this time, little one," he tossed the apple into the air with a bit of a spin and caught it in the other hand, "When I was a child I stole one of Idunn's apples from her orchard, wanting to know what magic lay within it that granted immortality. I've yet to figured it out, but I kept it stored away for the moment I might need it. That moment is now."

He placed the apple in her hand, curled her fingers around it, "If you eat this apple, you'll become Aesir, prolonging your life, and then we can rule Midgard together."

While examined the apple in her hands, Loki's words were starting to hit home for the first time.

"Midgard?" she asked, "You mean Earth?"

"Yes."

Her words came out more deliberate this time, "You want to rule as a monarch…over the _entire_ Earth?"

The God before he nodded.

"You want to be king of the world?" she asked again incredulously, hoping he was just pulling her leg—he was the god of lies and mischief after all, but she noticed that he was being completely
Loki narrowed his eyes calculatingly before answering, "My birthright is to rule, I was king of Asgard before I was betrayed and left to fall into that abyss—which you apparently remember quite well. If I cannot lead Asgard then I will provide Midgard my guidance as king."

"Yeah, I did see you fall...and it still bothers me," Darcy agreed, but then crossed her arms in an effort to put a bit more of a barrier between them, "But I also recall you trying to destroy Puente Antiguo last year with a fire-breathing robot, almost killing me and my friends in the process, and that bothers me much more. What kind of king does that?"

Loki's heated stare suddenly dimmed to embers and he let out a regretful sigh. He briefly looked away when he spoke, "I had no idea you had befriended Thor during his banishment to Midgard. If I had known, I would have dealt with him differently. As it was, when I did see you there, I minimized and focused the Destroyer's attack solely on Thor so that you would remain safe," he stepped back into her personal space and cupped her cheek, the calloused pad of his thumb stroking her lower lip, "I'm so sorry I put you through that."

Darcy leaned into his touch, feeling herself being dragged in by that same magnetized pull he seemed to have over her now, but she did not allow herself to be so fully consumed by it as before.

"What about Thor? He's your brother and you tried to kill him...hell for a few seconds he was dead!"

His eyes became heated again, but this time they were lit with anger and not desire. "Thor is not my brother," he hissed, clearly attempting to reign in his temper, "And he is far from innocent himself!"

"No one is innocent, Loki," she said, a bit of sympathy for the god seeping into her, "I don't know what happened between you two, but when I last talked to Thor, he said nothing but kind words about you, and he hoped to reconcile things with you. He loved you and I'm sure he still does."

Covering his hand with hers, Darcy looked up at Loki with a plea in her eyes, hoping beyond hope that he could read it.

"Please, see that Thor cares about you. I know the prince I first met is still inside you somewhere, please find that Loki again."

Loki shook his head slowly, clearly understanding her silent plea.

"Too much has happened between Thor and me, little one...too much has changed...we've changed...and we'll never be who we were to each other again. It would take too long for me to explain it all to you, and time is very precious right now. But know this..." his hand firmed against her cheek, using it to gently pull her closer as his head simultaneously dipped, "You are dear to me...that has not changed, so please," his lips were hovering insistently over hers again, his voice growing desperate while voicing his own plea, "please be with me."

Darcy wanted badly to tell him yes, wanted so badly to feel his mouth on hers, to see just how much it would more it would affect her to have him kiss her there instead of her hand. She wanted to run her hands through his lengthened hair and in turn feel his large hands on her body, those exquisitely long fingers dancing over her skin.

But as much as she found herself wanting the delicious god that had sought her out, she knew that if she let him have her now, in his current state of mind, she would have regretted it in the long run.

What was done to you...to make you this way?

Loki seemed be take the desire still clouding her expression for a form of acceptance, because he
made and sound low in his throat and moved to finally press his lips to hers. Darcy's eyes widened, knowing that if he did get that mouth of his on her, she would be pleasantly screwed.

At the last second she shifted her head to the side, just in time for his kiss to land on the corner of her lips instead. And then she had to ignore the enjoyable tingle their almost-kiss managed to wring out of her.

The next moment she felt Loki's body tense against hers and he pulled his head back from her slowly; a neutral, completely unreadable look on his face as he studied her. Darcy swallowed thickly for a totally different reason, she was starting to feel afraid of his reaction to what she had to say next, but she steeled herself.

"I'm sorry Loki," she whispered, removing his hand from her cheek, turning it palm up and placing the golden apple upon it, "but I can't do this," her hand rubbed over the back of his sympathetically before she pulled away from him.

The skin around Loki's eyes hardened slightly, his gaze flicking from her to the apple, and back to her like he was trying to figure out what piece of the picture he was missing. Then he briefly, but violently winced as though physically struck, one hand grabbing at his temple.

Baffled, Darcy moved to place a comforting hand on his shoulder, but as suddenly the expression of pain scrawled itself on his face, it vanished, allowing him to regard her again.

Loki's lips tightened into a frown, his jaw ticking with hints of animosity lying just under the surface. Darcy immediately felt a crackling of energy in the air, matching the raging intensity of his eyes.

All it took was a simple raise of his hand for an ominous, deadly looking staff to appear. Loki gripped it tightly in his waiting hand and swiftly pointed the sharp, glowing end of it towards her chest, causing Darcy to screw her eyes shut in anticipation of the painful thrust that was sure to end her life.

When she felt nothing, she slowly opened her eyes to find the longest of the blades hovering just over chest as it heaved up and down with panicked breaths.

"All I have to do," Loki began in a frigid tone that sounded foreign to her ears, "Is enchant you with this scepter and you will agree to my proposal. Is that what you want?!"

Darcy's raised her surely saucer-shaped eyes to his face and for the first time since he appeared she realized what it was about him that bugged her. The skin of his face was sheet white and feverish and the skin around his eyes was tinged in the soot-colored rings of sleeplessness. But most startling of all were the color of his eyes, they were glowing an eerie blue now that she really focused on them.

Loki's green eyes held flecks of blue, but they were never such a sinister, all consuming blue.

*Why didn't I notice that before?*

*Well you were very distracted by his godly charm...*

*Right...that...*

The thought that this Loki was not the real one crossed her mind, but would a fake know so much about the way the real Loki would interact with her? Would an imposter know all the little nuances of their previous meetings so flawlessly?
It hit her like a ton of bricks, making her stomach churn.

_No this is Loki…a severely fucked up Loki. But that doesn't explain why his eyes are that different or why he's so manic all of a sudden. Whatever's happened to him…it's put him through a blender and totally scrambled up his brain before spitting him back out._

Her mind went flying in a million different directions, torn between freaking out and wanting to break down and cry—out of both fear for her life and fearing for him, she still had a lot of fucks to be given about his well-being too. But she knew neither freaking out or balling would get her out of this situation.

"Is this what you want?" she croaked, trying to sound calm, but failing to keep emotion out of her voice.

_That's it keep him talking. If he's talking he's not acting._

Loki's eyes softened minutely. "No, my dear, but this is for your own good," his tone then became clipped, "lately I've seldom gotten what I've wanted, so it seems I must instead take."

_For my own good? Really? When was slavery ever good?_

Keeping her eyes wide and trained on Loki's, Darcy timidly reached for his face, gently stroking his cheek. "But I don't want this, Loki, and I don't want you like this. If you control me, my body and mouth may say and do the things you want, but I won't want them. And I really don't think that deep down," She moved her hand down from his face to the chest plate covering his heart, "that you will ever come to enjoy that either."

His eyes lowered to her simple, yet intimate touch, his throat tightening visibly as his adam's apple bobbed under his skin. Darcy could not decide if his expression was subtly regretful or lustful, maybe both. It was to her advantage either way.

While his attention was focused on her words and his own thoughts, she inched her other hand onto the counter top just behind her, hoping that the movement looked natural.

"Please…tell me isn't what you truly want, to rule the Earth, to enslave people," the hope that she could talk some sense into him still strongly flowed through her, fueling her words.

"Please?" Loki abruptly growled, teeth gleaming dangerously within the newly set snarl of his lips, "You want to know what I really want, Darcy? I want every single Midgardian at my feet, praying to me, worshipping me, ready to attend me at my every beck and call! I want to be the god-king that I was born and deserve to be, and I will have my queen beside me at the throne and writhing beneath me in my bed!"

_Oh hell no!_ her inner feminist cried.

Something flipped inside of Darcy's head like a switch and she used the hand resting on Loki's chest to shove him back from her body with all her might. A look of astonishment crossed the trickster's face at her boldness, but quickly replaced itself with barely restrained malice.

Everything felt like it went in slow motion as Darcy grabbed up her taser and leapt sideways towards her bed, ignoring the pain of her back crashing to the floor; gaining more distance between them her current priority. Loki had recovered from her shove and was closing distance with a purpose.

His Asgardian clothes covered nearly from head to toe, so she made a split-second decision and aimed the laser at his hand—the one wielding the scepter—then pulled the trigger, praying that the
prongs hit home.

Loki's scepter went flying haphazardly behind him as the initial jolt of electricity flowed through his exposed hand, up his arm and into the rest of his body, tearing an ungodly yelp from his throat.

*Two Norse gods felled at the hands of one mortal, Darcy Lewis. They'll write myths about me in the next 1,000 years.*

Unlike Thor though, Loki did not collapse in an unconscious heap.

Instead, to Darcy's horror, he gradually fought against the debilitating volts running through his body and ripped the prongs from his flesh with a violent yank.

Magic phased over Loki's form and more armor adorned his head and body. His eyes met hers, his demeanor positively glowing with murderous intent. When he obliterated the golden apple in his clenched fist, she had no doubt that that hand could do the same to her.

Squeaks of "Oh shit! Oh shit!" escaped her lips as he started prowling towards her again; the metal of his horned helmet screeched loudly and rained down sparks as they scraped against the ceiling of the camper with every step he took. The sight would have been exhilarating and a turn on had the true implications not been so absolutely terrifying.

Darcy pulled herself out of her paralyzing fear enough to scramble up from the floor. The backs of her knees hit her bedframe; she reeled backwards then toppled onto the mattress.

That moment of weakness set Loki off like a cat tracking the movement of a mouse, his pupils widening just before he pounced on her in a flurry of gold and black, his green cape flowing behind him as he went.

She did not know where the knife had come from (probably from the same inter-dimensional pocket thing he produced everything else from) but she could distinctly feel the cold steel of it pressing flush against her throat as he straddled her body. Loki was much leaner than his burly older brother, but that did not mean he lacked lethal muscle. No, the lengthy body above hers was like coiled steel, humming with power and magic.

It surprised her that she was not already dead, which meant that he was only using a fraction of his strength.

"So that's what your little Midgardian toy does," his face loomed over hers as much as curve of his horns would allow, which was close enough, "I didn't expect that...how very naughty of you."

"I'm sure that's how Thor felt when I tasered him."

If she was going to die, she was going to do it with sass.

Loki's gaze darkened at hearing his brother's name, "I should kill you for your impertinent tongue."

"I don't think you will." *Please don't!*

"No?" he raised a brow, a flicker of dark amusement crossing his face, "And why not?"

Darcy licked her dry lips, she was going out on a limb here, and she hoped it paid off. "Because you find me exciting, fascinating...and I know...as much as you want to control me, you secretly *like* me being defiant and talking back to you. And if you become the divine dictator of the world, you will be hearing plenty of talking back from me," she finished her little speech by giving him some stiff
upper lip.

Loki's face turned contemplative before being erased by a slow smirk. He made a sound of approval that morphed into a full rumbling chuckle, flashing his perfect teeth—teeth that also looked perfectly suited as weapons. He pulled away slightly, smoothly removing the knife from her neck without incident and stashing it underneath one of the gold bracers from where it had likely been hidden.

"You little tart…but I must admit you have unbridled fire, untapped potential..."he placed his hand on the side of her waist, then softly caressed its way up to her cheek, causing her to shiver under his weight.

That same hand then grew taut as it coldly shoved her face to the side.

"…And yet you squander your potential and the gift…the blessing…that I offered you. True you are quite intriguing, my dear, but as different as you are, in the end you're just as foolish as the rest of the insects dwelling this pathetic realm," just like his gesture, his voice turned arctic cold.

Then the God of Mischief crawled off of her (his movement a strange combination of feline and serpentine) sensually brushing as much of his body as he could against hers, making sure she got a taste of what he felt like underneath all that leather. What she was missing out on.

The action wrought a needy whimper from her throat and she nearly went back on the refusal of his offer.

Towering over her prone form, Loki eyed her down his nose so harshly that she flinched, feeling suddenly small and very insignificant in contrast to his power and prestige. She may as well have been an insect in comparison as he so eloquently, yet bluntly put it.

"But tell me this…how long will that fire last, hm?" he asked, even more venom dripping from his voice, "I will spare your trivial little life and spare you from the scepter's enchantment, for when I become king I will bend this realm and all that you hold dear so utterly to my will that you will drown in your hopelessness. And I will be there to witness that fiery spirit of yours be snuffed out like a candle."

Loki retrieved his scepter and presented her with his regal back, "All I want from you now is your anguish, Darcy, so do make it a point to survive the Chitauri…"

He faded out in a flash of green, the mess on the floor the only indication that he had visited.

Not knowing how long she lay in the same position he left her, Darcy only moved when the sun was peeking up from the horizon, numbly picking up her taser and forgotten midnight snack.

She had only just tidied the scene when Jane arrived at the camper; animatedly talking about "I'm needed for consultation in Tromso, Norway. We're traveling first class," as several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents flanked her.

It was probably in everyone's best interests that Darcy spill the beans about her meeting with Loki, considering his plans for Earth. Instead she found herself incomprehensibly secretive about him once again.

As she helped Jane pack for their unexpected fieldtrip, she tried to consider her torn loyalties between the god she knew since a child and her friends—fuck the entire human race. However the only real thought bouncing around her mind like a song on repeat was: How did it come to this?
*Dodges knives and cleavers* Hope I didn't tease too many people with that almost kiss there ^^' But hope you all enjoyed the chapter and happy Halloween! (The song lyrics and the title of this chapter come from the song "Polaroid" by Imagine Dragons). Here's also a little tidbit of Norse mythology: Thursday is dedicated to Thor, but Saturday is Loki's day. Funny how Halloween fell on a Saturday this year :')
I Am the Color of Boom

Chapter Notes

Thanks yet again for all the wonderful feedback to that last chapter, they really made me feel happy and special ^///^ My birthday is coming up on the 24th of this month so it would really make my day to receive more good feedback, but it's never mandatory. Ohh and I would like to wish you all a happy Thanksgiving if you celebrate it. Now on to the chapter (and once again it is entitled after lyrics to Imagine Dragons' "Polaroid"), enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The meeting with Darcy left Loki with an irksome taste in his mouth. He knew that taste all too well by now. Rejection.

He was not ready to admit it – not even to himself, that her refusal affected him. It rekindled memories of more than a millennia's worth of spurning, loneliness, and self-doubt, but most of all her refusal burned him.

How dare she – a Midgardian no more special than the next – refuse Loki, soon-to-be king and a god?!

Loki reappeared within the bowls of his lair seething with bared teeth, frightening a few of his grunts. They looked to have been slacking off in his absence so he snarled a warning to them, and with the fear of the God of Mischief swimming deep in their hearts, they fled back to work. As Loki strolled the compound, he found the good doctor Selvig still slaving away at the Tesseract, just as he had left him. He also found Agent Barton assisting the scientist in locating one of the last remaining components needed to allow the Tesseract to open its indefinite portal; iridium.

Seeing his most loyal subjects working so diligently helped wipe some of the bitter taste off Loki's tongue. It truly mattered not that Darcy would not be a part of his grand scheme, for he would still hold Midgard and turn it into his own little podium with which to safely watch as the rest of Yggdrasil burned under Thanos' might. Honestly she should be thanking him for choosing Midgard to rule over lest the genocidal titan would also target her precious realm. But he was done looking for anyone to favor him.

Upon reaching the Tesseract unit, Selvig turned to him with a gleeful twinkle in his eyes. "Hey! The Tesseract has shown so much. It's more than knowledge. It's truth."

Loki had to agree with his underling.

The god had glimpsed so much through the Tesseract himself. The cosmic cube showed him worlds he never knew existed, pathways to those worlds that he had only just scratched the surface to. If he had the Tesseract all to himself there could be no limit to his power. Still Thanos seemed to be a being of terrifying abilities, and Loki knew very little about the full extent of the former's power. The mere thought of enduring another session with the In-jiceerah was reason enough to give Thanos what he wanted and remain unscathed on Midgard.

He turned to the Hawk. "What did it show you, Agent Barton?"
Barton's answer was curt and down to business, "My next target."

Loki then watched in mild boredom as his second in command and the scientist exchanged jabs at each other, first about being too serious and then the choice of hideout once again.

The hideout was gloomy and miles underground, but Loki conceded that Barton did make quite a valid point in choosing it. "I see why Fury chose you to guard it."

The god and the assassin turned away from the Tesseract unit and walked side by side to talk stratagems. "You're gonna have to contend with him, sir," Barton said about S.H.I.E.L.D.'s director, "As long as he's in the air, I can't pin him down. And he'll be putting together a team."

That little tid-bit of information piqued Loki's curiosity. "Are they a threat?"

"To each other, more than likely. But if Fury can get them on track, and he might, they could throw some noise our way."

It took only a beat for Loki to perceive Barton's feelings about his former leader. The younger man held a strong respect for Fury's battle prowess, even under the thrall of the scepter. Loki could feel his ire rising again.

"Is that why you failed to kill him?"

Barton did not deny the possibility, but then added the fact that guns not being his preferred weapon may have played a part in it.

Loki knew better. The assassin could kill with his bare hands if he had no other option.

It was becoming clear that allowing some free thought to prevail among his subjects was no longer wise. Strengthening the control the mind gem held over his subjects would be a must very soon.

Dismissing Barton's excuse, Loki turned back to the subject of Fury's team. He kept his growing anger to a minimum and said in a calm, but authoritative tone, "I want to know everything you can tell me about this team of his."

The fallen prince paused, thinking about how he wanted Darcy to suffer. Normally he fought from the sidelines, but not now. He wanted her to be audience to his war of conquest, baring witness to the taking of her planet by first watching him defeat this specialized team of Midgard. "I would test their mettle. I am weary of scuttling in shadow. I mean to rule this world. Not burrow in it."

Barton, also a great tactician in his own right, acknowledged that taking the Earth in such a showy fashion was risky business. But there was a silver lining in this dangerous move. Choosing not to remain hidden meant that Loki could openly aid in Barton's missions.

Loki's smile returned. "Tell me what you need."

His second in command moved to a nondescript case and retrieved his beloved bow, readying it for combat. "I need a distraction. And an eyeball."

How could the God of Mischief turn down such an interesting request?

It had been a thousand years ago since Loki had last walked among the mortals, unshielded by shadows and the glamor of magic.

Of course this mission still called for him to blend with modern and fashionable Midgardian attire.
For his distraction he had to attend a gathering of socialites in Stuttgart, Germany. The man with the eyeball Barton required was none other than the host of the party, Dr. Heinrich Shafer, head of Shafer Industries, where the much-needed iridium was located.

Loki could have simply transported himself to the venue by merely thinking about the location, but he also wanted to draw out Fury's team. He arrived in a green 1937 Jaguar SS1 fixed head coupé and exited it with a flourish. The car was eye catching, as was Loki's three-piece suit and long jacket. The clothes were more subdued compared to his Asgardian casual, but still made him impossibly important in appearance.

Men and women alike stopped and stared in wonder at the sharply dressed stranger with elegant in hand as he quietly stepped among them. The mortals parted like the red sea to make way for him and Loki outwardly grinned as he strolled inside the grand edifice, quite content with the mortals' subconscious compliance.

Upon giving his surroundings a quick once over, Loki found his target to be subtly surrounded by guards on lowest level of the building. Shafer was in the perfect position for an easy sneak-attack. Loki descended the curving staircase efficiently with his long stride and surprised one guard with a swift bash to the face with his "cane."

The rest of the Midgardian nobility were too caught off guard to do anything more than watch as Loki grabbed their host by the scruff of the neck and hauled him to a grandiosely carved bull table, throwing Shafer onto it like the sacrificial lamb that he was. Their collective gasp rose in volume once the wolf among them brandished a device from his coat and proceeded to stab it into the eye of the doctor. Their next course of action was to run blindly into the streets, a herd of sheep they were.

Mortals were once again learning that they should fear the God of Mischief and it satisfied Loki to no end.

Through his mind-link with Barton he was able to make certain that his agent had indeed been in position to let the retina scanner read the image of Shafer's eye and therefore unlock the door between him and the iridium. The mission was over, but Loki was just getting started.

The nobles continued to flee from him, especially as he let his true form be revealed to them. He chose to appear in his updated full Asgardian regalia, to ensure that he gained their fear and respect immediately.

Loki's attention was momentarily grabbed by the annoyingly loud blaring of a Midgardian car. To end the retched sound, he carelessly blasted the vehicle with enough force to send it careening down the street and onto its roof.

With the racket silenced, he refocused and created a projection to stand ahead of the herd of people, stopping them in the tracks. He formed two more on all sides of the crowd, effectively using their own fear of him to corral them in.

"Kneel before me," he commanded calmly, and when they did not heed him he punctuated his repeated command with the deafening echo of his scepter upon the ground.

That got their attention and quickly the once proud and rich were falling to their knees before him.

Loki smiled down at the throng as he made his way among them. "Is this not simpler?" he openly chastised them for behaving like the infantile animals they were, "Is this not your natural state?"

Once again the trickster found himself reciting one of the all too obvious lessons of humanity, but
like children they refused to listen to their own nature to follow the lead of one more powerful than them. So it was up to him, their king to remind them. The sooner the fools realized their own fate the sooner they could simply accept it and give in.

"You were made to be ruled. In the end, you will always kneel."

Then a gnarled old man took it upon himself to stand and be the voice of those too cowardly to speak up. "Not to men like you."

The old man's misguided defiance wrought a snicker of amusement from the god's lips and he countered, "There are no men like me."

"There are always men like you."

The wicked side of Loki's temperament surfaced once again and he decided to show everyone that the old man was nothing more than a fool to stand up against him. His attack was cut off by a blur of red, white, and blue jumping in between and he was knocked down by the blast of his own scepter.

The energy that could disintegrate a human was merely a discomfort to Loki, and he quickly recovered while listening to the self-righteous droning of the peoples' would-be savior.

Ah, so Fury chose to send in the soldier first. It would soon prove to be unfortunate for him that the director was stupid enough to send a mere enhanced mortal in alone.

However Loki's initial assessment stood corrected as a jet flew into view and Barton's assassin partner ordered him to drop the scepter.

Honestly they needed to be more creative in separating him from his beloved weapon. He answered that request just as the first time and fired it upon the jet.

The jet swerved just in time and the mild distraction afforded the captain enough time to land a blow with his ridiculous shield. Loki took another hit, testing the strength of the enhanced soldier.

Frigga could out strike this poor excuse of a specimen.

The Captain parried just two strikes before the scepter staggered the colorfully dressed man back several feet. He tried to hit him again with another throw of his Shield, but it was an old trick by now for Loki, who swatted it aside.

What he lacked in strength the Captain made up for in agility and tenacity, but he quickly found it pointless to try and engage the God of Mischief in combat without a weapon. Loki used his scepter to halt his opponent's recovery.

"Kneel," he seethed, growing impatient with the skirmish.

His scepter was shoved away and the agile soldier managed a surprise drop kick, "Not today!"

And yet Loki easily kept the pressure up on his foe, not allowing any breathing time, and thus not giving the assassin a chance to strike at him from her perch in the sky.

In the distance came a cacophony of whooshing, instruments playing, and awful singing. It could mildly equate to the sound of a comet breaking the atmosphere, strangely accompanied by some sort of music, but only because the god could not find any other term to describe it. He had just enough time to pinpoint a red streak of light in the sky before sparks littered his vision and he was thrown quite forcibly onto his back.
It was the man suited in iron who interfered this time.

"Make a move, Reindeer Games," the man of iron goaded, the weapons in his suit poised in challenge.

This whole repeating of actions that these Midgardians seemed to like to do was getting really dull all too quickly for Loki. They were such predictable creatures of habit, never deviating from what they knew.

They would have their work cut out for them trying to keep up with Loki's unpredictable schemes.

_I can't wait to meet the entirety of this team that Barton's been telling me so much about._

He phased out his armor to his casual Asgardian wear and raised both hands in surrender.

_Let the game begin._

Loki felt the familiar presence long before any of the idiotic heroes holding him "captive." The air around them was completely saturated with Asgardian magic and a particular power signature that he would recognize even if he were stripped of all his senses.

Loki cast out his magic like the feelers of a cat, but did not sense the Bifrost opening upon Midgard. Yet it was unmistakably the presence of Thor who was quickly closing in on the jet. That only left one other option, dangerous dark energy, and Loki would bet his right arm that conjuring Thor to Midgard left the All-Father drained and weary.

His discomfort at knowing that Thor was once again attempting to ruin his plans must have been palpable for the Captain made note about it.

They would not know what was coming even if it plowed into them head on – which was certainly what the God of Thunder might do.

Thor gracelessly let his presence be known to the rest of the jet's occupants then with the finesse equal of a bilgesnipe, tore open the hatch, knocked down the man of iron, and hauled Loki by the throat and flew away with him into the night.

The two gods landed on a rocky outcropping in the midst of a forest and his once-brother began his plight to talk some sense into him. The Tesseract was demanded, but Loki playfully dodged the subject, awakening Thor's ire. Then the conversation changed to a more difficult topic.

"I thought you dead," Thor voice was minutely tinged with sorrow, but Loki easily latched onto it.

He vaguely wanted to know how much sentiment his adoptive brother still held for him. "Did you mourn?"

Thor admitted his true feelings, telling him that everyone did, even Odin, Loki quickly corrected the oaf with a scathing, "Your father." He would never again let himself be associated as being the All-Father's son. Odin gave up that right when he willfully lied to him, when he refused to acknowledge his worthiness to favor his reckless son, when he tore Loki's heart out with the toss of one word.

The only person he owed his life and possibly his allegiance to was Frigga.

Was Thor really so blind to his reasoning? How would the golden child have liked it to be thrown into the shoes of the boy resigned to the shadows? The fact that they were raised so closely, yet so
differently only made the betrayal even more the bitter pill for Loki to swallow.

The sooner he was able to get his former relation to realize that, the easier it would be to get down to the bare bones of his vengeance, to vanquish Thor once and for all.

"So you take the world I love as recompense for your imagined slights?" So Thor still did not get it, "No, the Earth is under my protection, Loki."

Protection? Ha!

The thought brought a mocking chuckle from the God of Mischief. "And you are doing a marvelous job with that."

Thor should also be thanking him for securing his precious Earth from Thanos. Not only was the titan was salivating at the chance to destroy any world in his path while Asgard continued on without knowledge, but the humans were savaging each other every day. Really what was there to complain about?

Midgard would be safe and Loki would finally ascend to what was rightfully his. Sure he intended to rule the hapless mortals without remorse, but that was infinitesimally better than their little world being reduced to dust. Ultimately humans desperately wanted, needed, practically prayed for guidance and intervention, and he intended to give them what they needed.

In the end they would all see it was just for their own good as well as his.

Still Thor went on fretting about how he should humble himself to the Midgardians instead of place himself above them. They were mere witless children compared to his cunning and power. Of course they were beneath him.

If he wanted to expand upon the topic, Thor, even Odin was now beneath his scope of abilities. Asgard only cared about itself and its power over the other known realms, while worlds never before dreamed of by any other being residing in the nine realms were revealed to him. Loki had evolved while Thor remained static.

"Who showed you this power?" the Thunderer asked, suddenly suspicious and hopeful at the same time, "Who controls the would-be king?"

Loki felt himself start to seethe again, "I am a king!"

"Not here!" the other god pushed back, "You give up the Tesseract. You give up this poisonous dream!" his voice then softened and his face contorted in agony, "You come home."

The idea of Asgard being home was nothing more than a pipe dream to Loki now, and he subtly let the other know just that.

Thor held steadfastly to his belief that he could convince him otherwise, but he was unable to say more for the man of iron zipped into view and tackled the God of Thunder, and the quickly commenced into a flashy battle of who had the most fire power and machismo.

The armored man, for all this strength and precision attacks, was a prideful dolt for attacking Thor, who was in fact an ally in their endeavors. Not to mention he was still only just barely a match for a god.

Loki merely watched them gleefully from the rocks above. Perhaps Thor being thrown into the mix was not a hindrance, but would in fact accelerate his plans to tear this so-called team apart.
It did not take long for Loki to meet and assess the rest of Fury's team once imprisoned on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s great flying fortress.

The first was the beast hiding in the guise of a plainly ordinary Midgardian. Dr. Banner was an unremarkable looking man, feeble, and seemingly unsure of himself. But Loki knew there was a rage greater than his own hidden just under the surface.

Oh yes, he had a special role for Banner.

He had another brief encounter with Director Fury once he was shut behind the doors of his glass and metal cage, demonstrating just what would happen should he try to escape. If the Director thought that this cell could hold him forever, he had another thing coming – in fact Barton was already on his way to provide aid – but Loki played along, pretending that the threat of falling thousands of feet to the ground inside of a steel trap intimidated him.

Fury was desperate not only to stave off Loki from his goal of world domination, but also to have the Tesseract back in his grasps. It was written all over his face, though carefully neutral as it was. Loki knew S.H.I.E.L.D. and its team of misfits was monitoring him, so he decided to throw more doubt amongst them, to reveal how Fury had no intention of using the intergalactic power source as free energy, but something more sinister.

Then there was the scepter.

He had allowed S.H.I.E.L.D. to take possession of it. They thought they were safe now that it was separated from its wielder, but on the contrary, Loki could influence them with it remotely and without enchanting them under its full control. The powers of the mind gem were truly wondrous.

Lastly he could sense that Selvig was already on his way to Stark's tower of self-sustained energy, the source of power that he intended to use to activate the cube. The building was in the middle of one of the largest cities in the world, where every resident of the planet, Darcy especially, could see his war without problem.

Loki had all his pieces in place and now simply had to wait for his opponents to blunder into his checkmate.

The next person to accost him was Barton's partner, the infamous Black Widow.

This one was more enigmatic than the others, and he could not help but feel a little of himself in her. She was the only one capable of getting so close to him before he sensed her presence.

Unlike the others, she did not question him about the Tesseract. Instead she asked about Barton's current status and what he intended to do with him once his plans were at last realized.

"Is this love, Agent Romanoff?" he answered with a question of his own.

The redhead femme fatale predictably denied this, but Loki was the master weaver of lies. He could see through the most carefully crafted falsifications. The Black Widow may have been a highly trained spy and assassin, but it was plain as day to him that she cared for the archer in one way or another.

If bargaining for one man's life while the entirety of the world was in the balance was not out of sentiment, then Loki had spent a 1,000 years with the wrong idea of that particular emotion.

The subject of wanting to wipe clean the slate of her past was then brought up. A slate drenched in
the blood of the innocent, and he knew all about it. Her dear Barton was full of tasty tidbits of information.

Agent Romanoff said that love was for children, but hoping that one could erase the atrocities of their life was an even more childish notion that Loki was all too familiar with. No matter how much good Romanoff tried to do with the meager remainder of her life, it would never turn back time. The blood of the lives she took was already on her hands and she would endure it for the rest of her life.

Loki thought back to the sentiment he once held for his family, for Darcy, how it had gotten him nothing but pain in return. The rage he now carried because of it reemerged and he threatened the female assassin with little censorship.

"I won't touch Barton, not until I make him kill you. Slowly, intimately, in every way he knows you fear. And then he'll wake just long enough to see his good work and when he screams, I'll split his skull!"

Romanoff turned away with a sniffle, calling him a monster. Perhaps she was not as unflinching as he had previously thought. He found her fear invigorating.

"Oh no. You brought the monster."

When she faced him again, not one tear glittering in her eyes, he realized he'd been the one to be tricked. It was shocking and infuriating that a Midgardian woman had outwitted him into a disguised interrogation.

This one was truly different.

Now they knew his plans with the beast, but it would not stop the avalanche of tensions from descending upon the heroes. He could sense through his scepter the clash simmering into an uncontrollable boil, could hear Stark and Rogers bickering amongst each other. The rest of the team converged on the lab and even Romanoff's best efforts to stem the emotions flying about the room could not stop the volcano from blowing.

Loki could also sense Barton was very close now and in position to cripple the fortress and free him.

All Dr. Banner needed was just the slightest push.

No sooner did Barton destroy one of the helicarrier's engines and infiltrated with a small team of subjects that all hell broke loose and Banner's beast was unleashed.

While the Hulk raged, Loki's men finally battled their way to the location of his prison and freed him. He sensed Thor barreling down the hallway after the Hulk, so he cast a projection just in front of the open cell. The oaf never learned from his younger brother's childhood trick and instead found himself trapped inside the cell.

Thor recovered and attempted to bust his way out with Mjolnir, but the mighty hammer only managed to crack the glass. But Loki could not allow him to stay aboard the helicarrier, for given enough time Mjolnir would penetrate the barrier.

Fury showed him the means to eject the cell from the helicarrier, and though the agent that had been present at the attack of the Destroyer briefly interrupted Loki, the mortal fell for his trickery as well.

Thor howled in anguish at the man's quickening demise. Clearly the two were acquainted. Seeing the conflicted emotions playing across his "brother's" face as he was sent plummeting downward pleased Loki immensely.
He prepared to leave the helicarrier when the dying agent's voice spoke up, "You're going to lose."

"Am I?" Loki asked.

What had he to fear now that all the saviors of humanity were scattered and barely on the same page? "You lack conviction."

This was the second time in the course of less than one day that Loki had been reminded of Darcy, most distinctly some of her last words to him.

"Please…tell me isn't what you truly want, to rule the Earth, to enslave people."

She was really starting to rattle his nerves, but he had little time to fret about her or give the agent his rebuttal. The Destroyer-based weapon in the man's lap fired and Loki crashed through a wall from the impact.

Wasting time arguing with stubborn Midgardian insects was quickly getting him nowhere – and he wanted to avoid another blast from that weapon, so Loki quickly slinked off to his rescue jet and escaped the falling fortress.

War was coming to the New City of York

Selvig had the Tesseract and all its equipment set up on top of Stark tower when Loki arrived. Unfortunately his connection with Barton had somehow been severed. It was of little consequence though.

The heroes were nowhere to be seen, so he casually strolled about Stark's outdoor balcony.

The humans below him milled about their daily routines, ants completely unaware of the coming storm that would be flooding out their little nest.

It took a surprisingly lot less time than Loki expected for the man of iron to come swooping in to try and shut down the cube. Stark soon found out that his suit's repulsor rays could not breech the energy barrier.

He wisely gave up on the Tesseract and turned his attention to Loki, removing his damaged armor as the two of them stepped inside the tower. Small talk was beneath him, but Loki still needed to keep the Midgardian hero occupied until Selvid initiated the Tesseract to open its portal. He initiated the conversation with a mocking jab, assuming the unarmored man would also try to talk him out of his war.

Now this one claimed he was threatening, but it seemed so silly for one to make such a bold move while completely vulnerable. Then he offered Loki a drink. How very quaint.

"Stalling me won't change anything."

"No, no. Threatening," the quirky man insisted and Loki considered making him a minion. He was certainly interesting.

Whether or not Stark was truly threatening him or not made no difference. Loki would have his war and his throne. There was nothing for him to fear, definitely not from some lone wolf hero.

Stark continued his insistent "threatening," going on about how The Avengers – the name Fury's little rag-tag team was now calling itself – were all so very vexed with him. But that was all a part of
Loki’s game, and where were these self-proclaimed Avengers now?

All that were left were a bunch of bickering mortals with special abilities and suits. The true threats, Thor and Banner were lost, thrown from the helicarrier, and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s air fortress had been left in chaos. The Avengers were a joke.

Steadily Loki found himself growing tired of the man of iron's idle threats and moved to enchant him with the scepter. Something metallic clinked and the energy flow from the mind gem was severed. His eyes squinted in mild confusion at the scepter and Stark's chest before trying again. The scepter's power fizzled out on the second try as well.

*Why isn't it working?*

Then Stark had the gall to insult his potency, so Loki had no other alternative but toss the arrogant dolt through the window. He had hoped that there was nothing left of the infuriating man but a stain on the streets, but Stark's new suit had unfortunately saved him.

Fortunately, the energy of the Tesseract had finally reached its peak. The portal opened and the Chitauri rained down upon Midgard, blasting everything in their wake and sending the mortal insects into a panic.

The exhilaration of war licked through Loki's veins. His battle armor shimmered into place almost involuntarily as he looked on at the chaotic grandeur he had created. Something rippled in his mind, the telltale sign that the Other was patching himself in. It was enough to make even the legendary Silvertongue wobbly on his feet.

"Resistance?" the creature inquired in his slimy voice.

"From a few, we'll pick them apart."

He could envision the Other's lips curling up with anticipation, "And the rest, come in throng?"

The answer was simple, "Mow them down."

Loki could definitely feel the grotesque slug smirking before the connection was abruptly severed upon Thor's arrival. The sight of his would-be brother imploring him to deactivate the Tesseract made him sick. He had so greatly hoped that crashing in the cell had killed the fool.

The Tesseract would not be deactivated even if he wanted it to be, and he most definitely didn't want it to be. He was having too much fun.

*Now, it's time to kill dear brother for good.*

Loki leapt at Thor with a snarl and blocked Mjolnir with his scepter before swinging for his brother's head. The attack was avoided so Loki used the momentum of the scepter's arc to brace it over his shoulders and take aim. Thor raised his hammer just in time, the uru Mjolnir was forged from deflecting the blast.

Both weapons met in a mighty collision, resulting in another missed blast.

The assassins and the Captain arrived in their jet just as Loki was forced to lean backward to evade Thor's hammer. He pushed his brother down against the railing surrounding Stark's balcony, turning his attention to his new foes above him. Loki knew they would not watch idly for long, so he tossed Thor aside and fired on them with his scepter.
This time the Widow could not out maneuver him and the jet sputtered about before going down.

Thor quickly renewed his attack vehemently upon seeing the attack upon his comrades, resorting to punching him with his bare hands in his foolish anger.

A roaring sound resonated through the air and deep into Loki's bones, telling him that the first of the Chitauri's war-mongering leviathans had arrived. It weaved its way throughout the city, crashing its fins into buildings and releasing more Chitauri onto the helpless Midgardians.

"Look at this!" Thor shouted at him, "Look around you! You think this madness will end with your rule?"

Loki didn't very well care if it did or didn't; such was the nature of chaos, the very nature of him.

The God of Chaos feigned concern as he looked at the scene of destruction painted around them, telling his brother that everything was too late. His eyes even glistened on command as if about to pour forth emotions of guilt and remorse.

Thor bought it, still ever faithful as a mindless retriever. The oaf still thought they could mend fences, fight together to vanquish their foes, and return to Asgard with new tales of valor.

It was just the distraction Loki needed to sink a dagger deep into his brother's side. The other god stumbled momentarily, but fought back with a vengeance, his blows threatening to fracture the Trickster's face.

Remembering his previous loss to Thor in one-on-one combat the year before, Loki chose to retreat onto a Chitauri air chariot and focus his attacks on the weaker members of The Avengers.

The battle turned into a blur for him then.

First he fired upon the civilians, knowing that the chivalrous heroes would be forced to stop fighting to protect the masses. The Chitauri followed suit but unlike him, they fought with a mindless aggression that more often than not ended with them lifeless on the ground or falling from their air chariots.

Though they were grounded, the Captain and the assassins took charge of the situation. Authorities were directed to aid the civilians and start up a perimeter, allowing the three Avengers to fight the Chitauri freely. They took care of things on the ground while the Man of Iron covered the skies.

Banner appeared and converted into the beast, changing the tide of battle back into Earth's favor.

Once again Loki felt the Other delving into his mind for a peek of the situation, giving him a migraine. "This is a little resistance?" hissed the creature.

Loki growled in return, "Your force lacks…finesse…"

"Our warriors are fearless, they welcome a glorious death."

With a sigh he shook his head, "That may actually be the problem."

Now he knew what his army was made up of, all-brawn-and-no-brain bruisers just like Thor. He could have a never-ending supply of Chitauri, but it could mean nothing if they kept running into their doom; and his army was unfortunately limited though numerous.

Loki tightened his grip on his chariot, anger filling him at having to resort to more force to defeat a
miniscule group of opposition. "Send in the rest."

A few of the last things he could recall before he was knocked for a loop were his high speed pursuit of Romanoff, who had also commandeered one of the Chitauri flying chariots, then Barton loosing an arrow aimed for his eye socket. Loki had caught the arrow just inches from his face, but it was carrying an explosive device. The detonation sent him flying back down to Stark Tower where the Hulk seemed to be waiting for him.

The Trickster hoped to distract the beast with boasts of his greatness, but the creature was not as mindless as he first perceived. Before he could form a projection, the god was swung several times against the hard ground like a rag doll. The blows were excruciating, knocking the air from his lungs and leaving him motionless. It was a beating he wouldn't soon forget.

Loki passed out from the pain only to awaken with a new perspective on things.

By the look of all The Avengers training their weapons on him at point blank range, his is army was beaten, he was beaten. His conquest for Midgard and for vengeance was lost. And while all of those things bothered him, one thing ate away at him most of all.

Oh little one…what I have I done?

Things had not gone at all according to his original plan, the one he formulated before agreeing to aid Thanos. Loki thought back to everything he said to Darcy while under the mind gem's enchantment and winced.

Never mind the Destroyer, after all those cruel words she'll never look upon you again without fear.

The thought made a pit of uneasiness form in his stomach and he realized he maybe should have taken Stark up on his offer of a drink.

The private jet that whisked them away was much better than first class, as Jane had said. Darcy was willing to bet it was a S.H.I.E.L.D. issued jet.

Once they arrived she they found that Norway was to New Mexico as night was to day. The climate was so much colder and the sun was up 24/7. If she didn't have a watch Darcy would have no idea when it was time to sleep, but Jane fell into a routine at the observatory immediately, going deep into mad science mode with the other scientists she was consulting.

Within a few hours of looking at the data gathered, Jane had finished the consultation on whether or not Near Earth Object number 214 was a threat or not in the near future. It wasn't and Jane confided in Darcy that the other astrophysicists occupying the observatory seemed wholly capable of finding that out on their own without her help, yet the Norwegians seemed reluctant to let their new American colleague leave just yet. They then began to claim that there were anomalous readings popping up all over Tromso, and hoped the women would out check them out.

Most of the "hot spots" had been dead ends, but strangely enough the equipment back at the observatory pointed out distinct locations on a monitor mapping out Tromso.

Though she threw herself into her work though it hardly seemed like work at all, and quickly forced herself to sleeping at least 7 hours earlier than she normally would back in New Mexico, Darcy could not get her unexpected meeting with the God of Mischief out of her head.

She felt hurt and betrayed and being that it was caused by someone she trusted since she was a child devastated her.
So why was she still looking for reasons and excuses for his behavior? Perhaps she was too loyal for her own good.

Then there was S.H.I.E.L.D.

The agents that escorted them to Tromso did not leave once they were there. Instead they seemed to be perpetually watching and guarding them. When Darcy tried to use her phone to check her Facebook, she found the Internet to be completely locked and the agents didn't even try to express interest in unlocking it for her.

It seemed like the scientists and the agents were intent on keeping them in Norway and away from any sort of media, but for whatever reason was kept dubiously secret. They were keeping something from her and Jane, which explained the sudden trip out of the country.

They must know about Loki. What do they have planned for him?

She Loki's plans for Earth and for her, but the shadow organization wasn't giving anything away, not even a hint that they had a heads up.

In spite of all he threatened her with some deep, primal part of her did not want him harmed. It conflicted strongly with the reasoning side of her brain, but she long since stopped trying to deny that she no longer cared about him.

Unlike her stint with the yearlong nightmares, Darcy didn't go through the couple of waking days in Norway with aplomb, but went through them with dragging feet and silence. There were a fair share of sadness in her life, but never before did she feel so…depressed.

Finally Jane seemed like she couldn't take it anymore.

"What's wrong?" she asked one morning after taking her attention off her phasemeter and placing it onto the table.

Uh oh, she's seriously onto me.

Darcy shrugged. "Probably just the climate and time zone change," she lied, "I used to get like this during winter back home, so now it's just 10 times worse."

Jane continued to stare at her and Darcy wondered if the astrophysicist really bought what she was selling.

After a beat her friend nodded and retrieved her device, but then strapped it to her belt and stood. "C'mon, we're going sight seeing."

"Wha- but what about science?" Darcy sputtered, but clamored from her seat to follow.

"I've got the meter on me, we might be able to track the anomalies with it instead of relying on the equipment here anyway."

"Ohh right, sure. Sounds like fun!" It really didn't, but she would probably forever be along for the ride when it came to Jane.

Together the young women toured Tromso for the rest of the day.

First were the botanical gardens, which featured arctic plants found all over the world. The Polaria by contrast displayed arctic animals. Then there were the Tromso museums: the University Museum
of Tromso, the Perspektivet Museum, the Contemporary Art Museum, and the Science Center. Jane seemed to like every place as equally as the first.

It was more fun than Darcy expected – she really enjoyed the seal exhibit – but her mind was endlessly consumed by more pressing thoughts.

Jane's phasemeter was remained quiet during their trip.

It wasn't until they were allowed some alone time away from the agents tailing them on the cable car climbing up to view Storsteinen Mountain that Darcy started to truly feel some semblance of peace. She didn't know what it was, but there was something about the desolate, snow-covered peaks of the mountain that calmed her.

The feeling was very nice until Darcy was blindsided by an intense vision, like a waking dream.

It wasn't a clear vision, but was blurry around the edges, but things were vaguely recognizable. There was a familiar cityscape with a blue stream of light beaming up into the sky. The hole in the sky was spitting out dark creatures on futuristic sea-doos (except that they operated in the air instead of water) throwing the city into a scene of chaos with a soundtrack of panic and explosions following it. Her vision narrowed in onto the tower from which the beam of blue light emanated.

There was a battle going on, metal clashing against metal, and though the movements blurred the figures, she knew just whom the flashes of red and green were.

Right about the same moment as the vision started, Jane's phasemeter started alarming like a time bomb. Jane reached for her device and peered down at the display with a mixture of confusion and awe. The readings must have been as huge as the power Darcy was sensing.

Before she could stop herself, Darcy blurted out, "Thor's back!"

Jane nearly dropped her meter. "What?"

"Thor's back…and so is Loki," Darcy swallowed, "And they're fighting."

"Where? And how do you know?" Jane said, her face lacking comprehension.

Darcy shrugged helplessly for she couldn't even begin to describe how, even with her quirky imagination, "I don't know the answer to either of those…I just know they are fighting…" Jane furrowed her eyebrows and examined her as if she were a piece of data she could find solution for. Her eyes and nose felt suddenly heavy with a sob that wanted to escape, which she tried to disguise as an allergy-related sniff. "Oh and…Loki is trying to take over the Earth."

"Can you tell me how you know that?" Jane asked incredulously. The other woman appeared to be trying to reign in her overanalyzing brain and perhaps her own emotions as well.

Darcy slowly nodded and her finally let her sadness pour from her eyes.

"Tell me," her friend urged.

And she did, recounting each encounter with Loki from the very first to the most recent, and by the end she was practically a puddle of emotion on the floor of the cable car, Jane's arms encircling her in a securing embrace.

"Jane…I feel like shit for not saying anything…" she sniffled after the worst of her sobbing passed, "and what's worse is that I'm still feeling defensive for the bastard…I'm like a traitor to the entire
"Shhh, calm down," Jane said soothingly, rubbing her shoulder and leaning her chin against her head, "You feel a connection to him, I know you do, and I don't blame you for it. But he's the trickster god, Darce, everything he does is for his own amusement and his mood changes like the wind."

Perhaps that's why Loki was known for telling his lies. The truth hurt.

"I-I know."

Jane's hand then stroked Darcy's hair and she felt so much younger than she was.

"Thor will win though, don't worry. And if Loki ever comes near you again, I'll kick his ass."

That made Darcy chuckle, though it was lacking some humor. "Thanks, Jane."

When the cable car ride of turmoil ended, Jane immediately laid into the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, grilling them like a seasoned lawyer. The agents kept pleading the fifth though, not even bothering to offer her any sort of misdirecting answers for why they were really in Tromso.

The only information they could attain was from the Norwegian news station covering the attack in New York once they were finally allowed near a television. They broadcasted some grainy cell phone images and video captured by brave citizens, showing Thor fighting an armored Loki alongside Captain America, Iron Man, and a gun-toting red-head and a archer that smacked her as being assassins. Even The Hulk joined forces to bring down the threat to Earth.

Thor and his fellow Avengers had defeated Loki and his army of alien goons. That should have been the only answer they needed, but both Jane and Darcy seemed unsatisfied. There were still secrets being kept and neither woman liked it.

Jane wanted to know why she was kept from knowing that Thor had returned and why he had left with his little brother in toe without so much as a goodbye to her.

Darcy on the other hand, despite knowing now that Loki was no good for her, couldn't help but keep looking at the only images captured of her once imaginary friend, wondering what would happen to him now that he had lost his war.

*Probably nothing good.*

She discreetly took the best freeze frame of him from the news coverage that she could and saved it to her phone, because it was almost a certainty that she'd never see his face again and she once heard that the human memory could be fallible thing.

Chapter End Notes

The scenes where Loki was conversing with Barton about the Avengers, as well as Loki's conversations with the Other during battle, were both deleted scenes from *Avengers*. I often times find deleted scenes shed more light on Loki's reasonings behind his behavior, so that's why I included them. Oh and here is Loki's bitchin' Jag.

I hoped you liked this chapter and find it feedback worthy and I hope you will find the time to leave a comment because I have a question of my readers. For my coverage of
Thor 2 in this fic, would you as a reader rather read it in two installments of regular sized chapters, or would you rather read it as one whole chapter. My usual chapters average around 5,000 to nearly 8,000 words, if I made this particular chapter stand alone, it would be a bit over 10,000 words. Even if you don’t know what to say about my latest update, it would really help if you commented on your preference. Thanks~!
Dream

Chapter Summary

Loki is a little shit and Odin is not amused :P

Chapter Notes

Just want to say thank you to everyone that left comments (and helped me decided how to cover Thor 2), kudos, and bookmarked (be sure to keep updated on this fic by subscribing to it!). And Happy Holidays! This chapter is titled off of "Dream" by Imagine Dragons. I felt a lot of the lyrics really fit Loki in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After his epic war resulted in the failure of securing Midgard, Loki was shackled with magic suppressant cuffs, and to add insult to his already wounded pride, he was muzzled like a dog, completely defenseless against the sneering of The Avengers surrounding him as they saw him and Thor off. Badly he wanted to rip off their insolent smirks and pluck out their mocking eyes, but he knew better than to attempt anything else but heed Thor's wishes and grab ahold of the other end of case containing the Tesseract, and thus sending them back to Asgard.

They all thought with him subdued that Earth was safe. If only they knew.

If only he was somehow able to foresee Thanos using the Mind Gem to completely warp his psyche, he'd be the one they'd be hailing as their savior.

Now the entire nine realms would soon be at Thanos' mercy – or lack there of. It mattered not that the monster was light-years away from the Tesseract, he would eventually retrieve it, Loki was sure of that.

And first he'd be coming for the head of the minion that failed him.

Loki didn't know what pill was harder to swallow; the fact that sooner or later he'd be hunted, or that he had once again played the part of someone's pawn.

The visage of Asgard's throne room shifted into place before his eyes a moment later. Thor relinquished the Tesseract to an Einherjar then laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and pushed him towards the steps leading to the All-Father's throne. Loki stumbled due to his still healing injuries, but pride kept him from falling to his knees. Nothing in this world, not even the threat of death, could get him to fall to his knees before Odin. Instead he fixed him with a defiant glare, eyes flashing with verdant fury.

A sound of rapid footfalls and whispering fabric broke his stare from Odin and he barely had time to register what was transpiring before two slender arms enveloped him in a familiarly warm embrace.

"Loki!" Frigga gasped against him, her voice trembling and weepy.
Loki closed his eyes and leaned into her arms, surrendering to her affections, and for the first time in a year allowed himself to relax. She hugged him tightly then drew back a little, her hands ghosting through the new length of his hair before they shifted and cupped his face so she was able to get a good look at him.

"Oh my son," her voice broke just a bit more and her thumb soothingly caressed his cheek, "what happened to you?"

Unable to speak thanks to the contraption holding his mouth prisoner, Loki merely looked back at her and covered her hand with his, hoping that alone could convey to her a hint of the demons currently haunting him.

"Enough, Frigga," Odin commanded and Frigga reluctantly released him to stand at the top of the stairs to the left of her husband, Sif and The Warriors Three occupying the steps to her opposite.

Loki once again fixed his gaze unwaveringly at the weathered figure settled upon the throne above him.

"Loki Odinson," Odin finally addressed him and Loki would have snorted if he could, "for your crimes against your family, Asgard, Jotunheim, and Midgard while as acting regent you should be thrown in the dungeons or executed, but I would have completely forgiven you…because you are my son. Yes I would have forgiven you had you not returned bringing more death and chaos on your heels. Now I won't be so forgiving."

The urge to roll his eyes upon hearing Odin calling him 'son,' was strong. As if the old man still had claim on him. Loki had long since unchained himself from that name. He resisted the ensuing eyeroll, instead focusing on playing with the chain linking his shackles together.

Odin leaned forward, bringing his good eye closer as if inspecting. "What say you?"

With a nod from his father, Thor stepped up, releasing his adopted brother from the muzzle. Loki shook himself loose from it and flexed his jaw, but did nothing more but bore his eyes into that of the All-Father.

"So you stand mute?"

Loki's only response was to give a smirk full of cheekiness with a dash of spite.

"Well then, if that's what you want, then that's what you'll have," Odin nodded again and Thor placed the horrid device back on his face, "Take him to his quarters, and he is not to be released from his bonds or leave unless I give word."

The Thunderer was so silent, his grip so tight, as he escorted the Trickster to his chamber that Loki suspected that he had truly given up on the brotherly ties they once shared. It was once they reached his large door ornately carved with wooden snakes and wolves, that he found his suspicions to be incorrect.

"Why didn't you defend your actions, brother?"

The God of Mischief lifted a brow at the oaf. *Clearly you're forgetting that this conversation can only be one-sided.*

Thor's expression softened, "I know you were only acting as someone else's puppet, that something awful happened to you after fell from the Bifrost. Why didn't you speak of it to father?"
You hold onto hope so insufferably Thor, I was only mildly controlled. My aim was more or less the same.

Still there were a great many things that he wished had turned out differently.

With the door open and two Einherjar posted on each side of the entryway, Thor said in a manner of parting, "Please don't continue to condemn yourself."

Loki turned away from him without hesitation and crossed the threshold, the door closing and locking behind him.

Everything was as it was when he last seen it; from the rumpled furs on his bed to the charred remains of wood in the hearth, from the door to his balcony left wide open to the unwound scroll he had been perusing upon his writing desk over a year ago, it was all the same.

He wasn't fooled though; his room had been visited in his absence. He could sense the residue of Frigga's magic like a footprint. The residue was thickest around his potion worktable, scrying pool, and collection of tomes, as well as the cage of Canute, his trained falcon. Apparently the queen had not only been keeping his room free of dust and caring for his pet, but also snooping around his things before putting them back in the state she found them. He wondered what she hoped to find.

When he took a closer look around he also found all of his daggers and other weapons to be missing.

Canute gazed keenly at him with intelligent eyes and called out eagerly for attention from his master. Slowly Loki acquiesced, strolling to the great cage and after covering one hand with a leather glove, opened the cage and offered it to the bird. Canute flew obediently to his hand, allowing him to stroke the soft feathers upon his breast before climbing up his arm to perch on his shoulder, lovingly nibbling on his cheek and hair.

The balcony appeared to be free and open to the eyes of the uninitiated, but Loki could feel a second residue, and it barred him from even thinking of escaping the palace. It was a magical barrier, the work of Odin. The only thing the barrier would permit to pass through was the air from outside. Loki loathed the realm he once called home, but it didn't stop him from deeply inhaling the pleasant air of Asgard. It certainly refreshed him better than the stagnant air of the realm Thanos kept him prisoner on.

As if sensing his master's tormented emotions, Canute crept closer, burrowed his featured face into his hair, and vocalized gently in his ear. Loki returned the gesture by running his fingers over the wings of his pet.

At least I am left here with pleasant company.

The first night back in his bed did little to ward off the torturous nightmare. It came unbidden like a plague, a twisted memory, taunting his already wounded mind.

He was thrown back into the moment he discovered his Frost Giant heritage on Jotunheim, except that his whole body faded to blue, and he wasn't the only witness. Thor was there, as well as his friends, and they were leering at him in disgust. Even the Frost Giants paused in battle to view him with displeasure.

Fear licked up Loki's body like a fire kindled at his feet as he slowly turned about to take in his surroundings, his eyes flickering from face to face, each one glowering at him and him alone. By the time he stopped upon making a full circle and he was again facing Thor, his body was wholly consumed by fear.
The Thunder God appeared livid.

Loki gulped and took a step back, "B-Brother…"

"Monster," Thor growled then lifted Mjolnir against him.

Loki awoke in a tangle of sheets and furs, his pillow and hair damp, upper lip uncomfortably wet with perspiration from being enclosed behind the muzzle and from the panting he was doing within it. The pressure was starting to become irksome, so he reached up with the intent of wrenching it off his head.

The buckles would not give under his ministrations, frustrating him, then he recalled where he was and the situation he was in. The buckles would only come undone with magic, and the shackles about his wrists suppressed his magic. Loki flopped back down on his bed and let out a long, furious exhale through his nose.

Sleep did not beckon him again for the rest of the night, and he didn't stir from his position until morning drew in and his usual handmaiden, Ragnheidr, brought a tray of breakfast to him. Only then was the muzzle removed for him to eat. He paid Ragnheidr no mind as she stood by, just wiped at his upper lip with his sleeve and ate his meal in silence. When he finished, she replaced his muzzle, claimed the tray, and slipped from the room without a backward glance.

For the rest of the day Loki spent his time alone, rereading through as many ancient books as he could – new knowledge could be gleaned even from books that were already read if he was thorough enough – he only paused to show Canute attention, and to pick through the trays of lunch and then dinner that were presented to him from Ragnheidr. He could only stomach the bread.

He wanted to know if there was a book in his possession that might hold the slightest information about Thanos and other beings residing in realms that might be lurking outside of Yggdrasil. Unfortunately for today he found nothing.

That night he tossed and turned and worked himself up into sweat while dreaming of Odin's rescue of him and his brother from Jotunheim. Thor was banished to Midgard and everything was as it should be, until Loki glanced down at himself and realized he was still blue.

Odin looked stern and let out a sigh of shame. "I was hoping this event would not come to pass."

"We should lock the monster up," Sif said uncharacteristically out of turn, the venom in her voice causing Loki to flinch.

Odin let out another sigh and shook his head, "No, we must do more than that...Asgard must not know I showed mercy to a Frost Giant, much less allowed one into my home."

The All-Father stepped up towards Loki with Gungnir pointed at him, forcing him to the edge of the Bifrost Bridge.

"Father..." Loki pleaded, tears brimming his eyes, "I-I didn't mean to become this..." he gesticulated helplessly at his Jotun form, "I-I'm sorry."

Odin powered up Gungnir, "I'm sorry too."

The blast of the mighty spear knocked him breathless and the air rushed up around him as he tumbled down with the waterfall, the void swallowing him up as it had in reality, throwing him into the hands of Thanos and the Other.
Loki sat upright in his bed, scream ripping from his throat only for it to be muffled by the abhorrent muzzle.

A week later Loki was summoned from his room and escorted to the throne room by his Einherjar sentries.

Odin looked down at him from his seat, his face a neutral mask, but Loki was the master of facades. He could sense mild frustration bubbling underneath the surface.

"How did you enjoy your self appointed silence, Loki?" the king asked, "Or have you grown bored? Is there anything you'd like to say now?"

An Einherjar stepped up from his position flanking Loki and removed the muzzle. The Trickster took in a greedy gulp of air and opened his mouth to speak, then gave a dramatic raise of his eyebrows before letting his lips fall back into a silent, mocking grin.

Odin's lips twisted into a frown. "Take him from my sight!" he snarled.

Day after day it was the same. Nibble his food, suffer nightmares throughout his slumber, and read; then repeat. Within a month – and he was thankful that he was able to at least count the days – Loki was able to finish off every tome and scroll in his room, but there was nothing in them about Thanos. Obviously the titan was alive and well long before the nine realms were born, and he kept his doings covert from any record keepers.

With his books all read, the God of Mischief turned to running drills with Canute. The hunting falcon was still sharp and remembered all the hand signals and commands. He could make his pet fly from his hand, hover midair, attack a rabbit-skinned decoy, and retrieve small items for him. At the end of each routine, Loki would procure a piece of jerky from a burlap pouch and watch as Canute gobbled it down with gusto.

Every couple of weeks Odin would again request his presence. He would either be asked if he wanted to speak or he was given lecture upon lecture about what a king was supposed to do and not do. It was the same ramblings he grew up with, only now he listened not with eagerness, but with contempt.

If only you actually listened to yourself Odin, perhaps you wouldn't be such a self-righteous hypocrite. Thor will make a better king once you die, if only marginally.

Loki stood mute each and every time, usually finding ways to enrage the All-Father without so much as making a sound. It was the only amusement he could really stir up for himself anymore.

And then there were the hoards of dreams every night, each one a different version of him falling off the Bifrost and facing the torture of the Other. Loki didn't know what was worse, the torture or the faces of the ones he once held dear casting him off like trash into the void.

The worst dream of them all involved Frigga.

She didn't call him any names or strike out at him. Instead she stood on the edge of the Bifrost, while he stood safely in the middle of the pathway. Her face lacked the coldness of the others, but it was filled anguish. One of her hands was wrapped into a fist and pressed against her bosom as if she were in physical pain.

Loki blinked owlishly at her, wondering just what had put her in such a state.
"I love you so much," she tearfully whispered, giving his cheek a brief caress, "but you've hurt so many, Loki, perhaps me most of all. You've broken my heart."

When Frigga took a step back, he lunged forward without hesitation to save her, but his movement was too sluggish. As slowly as it took for her to descend out of his reach, he was moving just that much slower. His attempt at preserving her life was futile.

Loki leapt out of bed with a roar and tore outside to peer over the railing of his balcony. The sleepy city of Asgard met his view in place of the void, finally breaking him completely from his dream state. His fist slammed onto the railing with enough force to splinter a few layers of stone, forming a small dust cloud.

The next morning Ragnheidr walked in to find him still in his sleep attire, sitting solemnly against the railing, one hand scabbed over with blood. Eir was sent in shortly after to take a look at his hand though it was only a minor irritation to him, a gesture that he was sure was his mother's doing.

The passing of time was experienced differently to the Aesir and other long-lived beings like him. A day was a heartbeat for mortals, a year not much more. Loki could while away a year without thought, and while he prided himself on his patience, this situation was steadily starting to wear it thin.

By now the daily routine that was set was becoming stale for Loki. He was a creature of change not stasis and he was itching for a modification in his life. Preferably a modification that could keep him entertained and his thoughts away from the horrors his dreams spoon-fed him each and every night. He was losing as much sleep since his return to Asgard as he did in Thanos' captivity.

He started by experimenting. Though he knew his magic was suppressed the urge to see just how many of his abilities were stunted bugged him, so he tested the waters. He long discovered he could shift his clothing in his containment – a huge relief because trying to change clothes while shackled could prove difficult. Now he learned that small visual illusions were possible and while he could still create projections, they lasted all but a few seconds before they flickered and died.

There was one last thing he could try.

Odin knew the extent of his magical abilities save for one, astral projection. It was an art that not even Frigga knew he had learned. He wasn't taught the skill by her or any other instructor, but had discovered it in the library of the Light Elves when his family had taken him and Thor to a retreat in Alfheim when they were but boys. He studied the book hungrily and practiced the art in secret until he had all but mastered it.

If he recalled how his mother explained the shackles to him, they could only suppress the known magic of the prisoner.

A mischievous smile unseen by all curled Loki's lips as he made himself comfortable on top of his bed and closed his eyes to the world around him. With several calming breaths he blanked his mind to everything but the flow of his magic within him. The shackles gripped violently at his magic in an attempt to secure it from slipping through, but the unfamiliar skill escaped their grasp and Loki's spirit sprung forth from his body.

His pleasure grew tenfold when he opened his eyes to see himself lying peacefully on the bed. At least Odin couldn't deny him this freedom.

Keeping himself invisible, the Trickster slipped out of his chamber and strolled about the halls. The
banquet hall was occupied with warriors partaking of food and ale served to them by handmaidens. No doubt a celebration of a victorious battle was being had. To his surprise Thor and his friends were absent, along with at least half of the warriors that normally would fill the hall to its capacity.

Loki continued on until he had unconsciously made his way to his weaving room. She often went there when she needed peace and quiet, but never turned away her sons. Frigga was inside, he could sense her magic, though he was careful not to alert her of his own presence. He nearly walked away until the reoccurring dream she featured in hit him like a blow from Mjolnir.

*I have to at least see how she's fairing.*

Frigga's stately back greeted him when he sifted his spirit through the unopened door. She was in the nearing the completion of an exquisite tapestry. Loki drew closer to examine her work. The background was black and dotted with twinkling constellations. Elaborate twisting gold and red knots framed the vision of a grand serpent woven in green shimery threads. The serpent was so large that it was able to circle around and bite its own tail.

The Vikings on Midgard had always regarded the symbol with a negative connotation, and went so far as to attribute it to him, being that they thought of him as unsavory. By contrast Asgard saw the image of a serpent biting its tail as a symbol of both continuity and renewal. Despite its unfavorable meaning on Earth, he was particularly fond of the symbol. And being that it bore his color, he realized with a pattering heart that she indeed had him in her thoughts.

*It's truly beautiful, mother.*

Frigga paused in her weaving and looked over her shoulder in his direction. He became statuesque hoping that it would keep her from sensing him, but when he felt her magic reaching out for him, he shrunk away until his spirit once again inhabited the body residing in his own chambers.

The following evening Frigga entered his room after he sent Ragnheidr away with his untouched tray of dinner.

He feigned indifference and carried on watching the little green lightshow of his magic as it spiraled upward from his hands, but in reality he was paying very close attention to sound of swishing fabric as she slowly but assuredly accosted him. Only when her magic reached out and mingled with his, creating an illusion of the very symbol he saw her weaving last night did he shoot up from his reclining posture on his bed and face her, the illusion disappearing altogether.

"You don't have to feel the need to retreat from me."

Loki averted his eyes to his shackled hands resting on his lap. Another pair of hands came into view and took his. His gaze flicked up to her face and the conviction behind her blue eyes kept his from turning elsewhere.

"No matter who you are or what you've done, you are still my son," her hand brushed his ever lengthening hair back from his face, "and I will never stop loving you."

She then wove her fingers into his hair and unbuckled the horrid muzzle from around his head. The absence of the contraption was a welcome reprieve and finally he felt the desire to vocalize.

"Mother," his voice was foreign to his own ears, such was the state of its disuse, but he paid it little mind in favor of pressing his forehead against his mother's shoulder in a semblance of an embrace. It was the best he could do right now.
"I apologize for not coming so much sooner, Odin would not permit me to enter. Then I heard of your condition and I demanded to see you, " her arms encircled his shoulders, holding him tightly. "You look weary and you haven't been eating..."

A light-hearted snort escaped him. "Odin's actions don't surprise me. And wouldn't be the first time I've dealt with this, no need to fret."

"Oh I think this is more than just the moodiness of years previous," she countered just as innocuously, but there was an undercurrent of trepidation as she pulled his head back to look him over, her thumbs tracing the puffiness under his eyes surely giving away his sleeplessness, "Tell me what happened to you."

"Simply night terrors, mother, they present me no harm."

She sighed, "We both know it's much more complicated than that. You don't need to keep it in, but know that I won't force you to speak of it either."

This time it was Loki who sighed, "You would not like what I would say…"

"It matters not whether or not I would like it," the bed shifted as she took a seat next to him, "what matters is that you don't let these demons consume you anymore than they already have."

"Too late for that," he meant for his chuckle to sound humorous, but instead it came out a bit unpalatable.

"It's never too late, my son."

Loki wanted desperately to believe those words, but he already felt neck-deep in his own personal hell without the possibility of return.

"Sleep now. You'll need your rest to face your father again soon."

"By Yggdrasil…his lectures will be the death of me," he grumbled, but didn't correct the familiar term she gave Odin in regards to him, nor fought her when she guided him down onto his side. Maybe he was wearier than he first suspected.

Frigga didn't deem him with a response and he felt his eyes begin to droop, only to snap open when he saw the beginning of another nightmare behind his eyelids. His hands fisted his sheets in a white-knuckled grasp.

Noticing his discomfort she immediately moved to sit further onto the bed and lifted his head onto her lap then proceeded to comb her fingers through his hair, to which Loki let out a half-hearted growl.

"I don't need your sympathy…I'm no longer a child…"

She didn't dispute him, simply kept her soothing voice, "I know."

Despite his protestations, he curled in on himself and shifted so his cheek was pillowed more comfortably on her thigh. His focus drifted to the calming sensation of her hand stroking his hair as she used to do when he needed such reassurance. His eyes soon fluttered shut again and he surrendered to slumber.

Cool air swept over suddenly over Loki and he realized he was sitting on something hard. When he reopened his eyes he found himself on a wooden bench in the still of the night. His gaze then turned
upward to see that the heavens above him were Midgardian.

This is…

A tiny cry derailed his train of thought and his pulse quickened. He didn't have to follow the sound of the sobbing to find his way this time. Soon his racing feet had him in the midst of a wooded area, the only signs of man being the cement laid path and the flickering lamp overhead.

"Darcy."

Though his voice came out as a whisper, the little girl before him lowered her hands from her tearful face.

"L-Loki…"

He stepped forward, intent on taking her up in his arms. "I'm here, little one."

"W-Where were you?" she whimpered, causing him to stop short, "I was looking for you…a-and calling out…but you…y-you never came back."

A lump formed in his throat when he recalled the times he thought he heard her voice after he returned to Asgard. *That really was you?* Loki screwed his eyes tightly with guilt and he spoke, "I'm so sorry, Darcy. Had I known—"

"I saw you get ripped away from me."

His eyes snapped open when Darcy's voice evolved, taking on a much more mature tone that matched the womanly curves that were now covered in a pair of shorts and a sleeveless top. Her sleep clothes. Her arms were hugging herself, keeping a semblance of smallness though she had grown. An ache worked itself up in his chest at the emotion in her blue eyes; they looked like they were breaking.

"I'm right here," he repeated, taking another step.

The park lamp above flickered out and when it came back on he physically recoiled.

"Then when you come back," she began again, her voice coming out in a wheeze, "You do this to me…"

Blood horizontally marred the delicate column of her neck, drops of crimson mixing with the tears that had streamed down into the wound, painting a horrific picture of murder.

"Darcy!" he jerked with a shout.

Warmth once again enveloped him and the soft hand on his head grounded him back into reality. Relieved breaths huffed out him rhythmically.

*Just a nightmare…I didn't really…it was just a nightmare,* he told himself in a mantra until he relaxed his head back onto Frigga's lap.

"Who was she?"

Loki jerked again and lurched up in bed.

"You peered into my mind," he accused with the beginnings of anger bristling at the edges.
Frigga's mouth parted and she shook her head, "No. Your dream reached out to me, I—"

"And you could have pushed it away," the volume of his words rose, "I've had enough of your comfort, mother," he said, lying back down and dismissively presenting her with his back.

"I'm so sorry Loki," her voice trembled from where she stood behind him, "please don't shut me out."

He enunciated his next words with ice-cold precision, "Leave me be."

The queen heeded his demand, the only sound of her departure being the graceful swishing of her skirts.

After his latest nightmare and his dismissal of Frigga, sleep no longer appealed to Loki at all. He warred with himself over his actions towards his mother for the rest of the night. While he knew the queen meant him no harm or disrespect and his words to her were harsh, he felt justified in sending her away.

His mind was his sanctuary and the idea of anyone scanning through it without first earning his permission angered and terrified him. Could she have seen other things? The very thought caused him to shudder. He'd make amends with her when he next saw her, but right now he was not ready to share his thoughts with anyone.

*She deserves to know though*, a little voice niggled at him from back of his consciousness, *after how you scared her to death.*

His teeth gritted in his mouth.

*I can't.*

*You can't or you won't?*

*She would not be happy to see me again.*

*Because she doesn't know the whole picture. Grow a spine and let her know, for soon her life will have passed you by.*

Astral projecting himself to Darcy was easy. Since his last meeting with her happened face-to-face and not face-to-spirit, his magical residue had been left on her. He could locate her anywhere on Midgard now.

He found her inside of a small living space accompanied by Thor's woman – who looked disheveled and vacant – so he kept himself hidden and out of the way.

"Why don't we go into the lab and check your meter, Jane?" Darcy asked around a mouthful of what looked to be a Midgardian pastry, "It's what we came to London for right? The readings."

"It's a waste of time…" Jane answered despondently, not once taking her eyes off the picture box he had learned was called a television on his last venture to Earth.

Darcy had polished off the pastry and was now licking the sticky glaze off her fingers. "You totally need to get out or something then, you've really let yourself go, Boss Lady. Ohh," she suddenly chirped, "how about Zoosk?"

"Darce, please…"
"Okay, okay," she acquiesced, "Just at least give it some thought," she stood and grabbed a jacket and satchel and headed for one of the plain doors, "I'm going for a walk."

Jane gave Darcy a backward wave, attention still fixed on the television, leaving younger woman to walk out the door with no one but the cloaked God of Mischief for company.

Nighttime in London was chillier than his time in America. He had to admit that the landscape and the architecture were more appealing though, for Midgardian standards anyway. Cars traversed the streets and the sidewalks were littered with humans, providing little to no opportunity for him to do anything more than to follow on her heels like a ghostly puppy, listening to the whimsical tune she was humming to herself.

As she roamed a less populated area of the city a couple of grungy men made crude advances towards her, calling out to her and making comments about her figure. She ignored them and kept walking, but they continued to pursue her.

If Loki were a dog he'd be raising his hackles at them.

"C'mon, love, just one little drink," one called.

"Fuck off," Darcy kept up a brave front, but she picked up her pace minutely.

"Ah now don't be so saucy!" shouted the second, "let's get ourselves acquainted."

Loki had enough and appeared in a flash of green front of the two men. They stopped to balk at him, the girl they were harassing forgotten. "I think the lady has refused your invitation," he muttered gruffly, "unless you require me to clear things up for you."

"Jesus fuck!" the first man cried before he and his associate nearly fell over themselves to get away from him.

The Trickster's hand twitched with a bloodlust. They should be squashed like the vermin they are...

"Turn around!"

And just like that his killer instincts vacated his mind. Loki shook loose the tense muscles of his hand, took a deep breath, and faced her. Darcy stood about ten feet away with her electrical weapon aimed for his unprotected chest. The taser couldn't really hurt him, but he wanted her to feel as secure as possible.

He raised his hands in the air to show her that he was unarmed and hoped to placate her. "I mean you no harm."

She swept over his sleep clothes and posture with a critical eye. Once the assessment was done her face lost some of its hardness, her finger relaxing slightly against the trigger.

"I know you didn't just come here to save me from creepy dudes; which I totally had under control by the way," her tone almost sounded jovial, but he could tell she was still nervous and full of suspicion, "So, Loki, why have you been skulking around Jane's flat and following me around like some phantom?"

She was aware of my presence all along? He wondered if the other human could sense him as well, but quickly decided Darcy was the only odd quirk of Midgardian nature he knew of.

Pushing his muddled thoughts aside Loki answered gently while keeping his hands visible, "To talk
and that is all, little one. There are some things I need you to know."

She swallowed thickly then licked her lips. "And what's that?" hesitantly her finger pulled away from the trigger. This caused relief to flood Loki and he took a tentative step forward only to stop short when her finger flew back to the trigger.

*Let her hold all the cards.*

Giving somebody any sort of advantage over him didn't settle well in his stomach, but he also wanted badly for her to know the truth. He wanted her to trust him again.

He flickered out of sight only to reappear in front of her a second later. The movement was too fast for her sensory perception to catch up and she jumped a few inches in the air, evoking a gasp from her lips.

Ten seconds passed – he counted them in his head – but the taser was never engaged. Still the air of fear surrounded her and he knew she would never listen to him properly unless he could erase more of her lingering doubt.

Loosening the first three buttons of his tunic he bared his clavicle, showing her a small amount of vulnerability as a cat might present its belly to its owner. Her azure eyes were wide behind her glasses, watching closely as he slowly cradled both of her fragile hands in his larger ones and pressed the weapon against his exposed skin.

"I do not wish you harm, but even if I did, I could not. Currently my magic is all but suppressed and my access to weapons denied absolutely. But if I appear at all threatening, feel free to pull the trigger," he released her hands, "I won't pull out the barbs…I won't stop it this time. I will allow you to electrocute me as long as you see fit. I'm at your mercy, you have my word."

Darcy's eyes found his and held gaze with him intently. For a brief eternity the only sound shared between them was their breathing as they gauged one another.

"I'm all ears," she readjusted her grip on the weapon.

With every encounter she never ceased to find a new way to impress him.

*Such an intriguing anomaly, but it's time to get back to the meat of the situation…*

He released her hands and took another deep breath to steel himself. "When last I saw you, I wasn't exactly…" he paused with a bite to his lip, "myself."

"Hn, I'd gathered that much," her voice retained its edge from earlier, telling him that he still had to work for her trust.

"After I fell into the void," he had to clear his throat as it decided to tighten up on its own accord, "you recall me telling you how I came to a…most unpleasant place?" a nod was all he received, so he continued on, "I was captured by a powerful and genocidal intergalactic being named Thanos…" he paused again to give his churning stomach a moment to calm.

Just thinking about the horrors he experienced on that dismal little realm turned him into a near quivering wreck.

*Damn this is harder than I thought it would be…*

Darcy suddenly stiffened and she looked up at him with a surprised countenance. The weapon
lowered from his chest to come to a rest at her side. "Did you say Thanos?"

His brows furrowed. "Yes."

"I…I know that name," her murmured.

Loki couldn't help himself; he grabbed her shoulders and swooped in so they were more at eye level. "How…how did you find out about that name?"

If his actions intimidated her, she didn't show it. "In these dreams I was having," she blinked rapidly, "they were more like nightmares."

"Please Darcy…tell me about them." His blood ran cold with tumultuous anticipation.

Worrying her lower lip between her teeth, she seemed to be as tormented as he felt. "It started a year before you tried to…and well, take over the planet. I had them about every night. Everything was dark and I could only make out shadowed figures, but I could hear voices talking and there was one of them…it was like he was a prisoner. The others…they were beating him in the worst ways, trying to get him to submit to them…and I could feel it all, through him."

She blinked several times before her eyes met his again. Despite her best efforts, the blue depths were glistening. Uneasiness gripped him.

"But no matter what they did, he wouldn't budge…not for the longest time. But finally he cracked and this Thanos guy…he came in and did something to him. I can't even describe it, but it was messed up, Loki, completely fucking messed up."

He felt disbelief wash over him and he released her as though she physically burned him, taking unsteady steps back from her. "That was you?"

"Huh, what are you talking about?" she asked, her heart shaped face shifting into a mixture of concern and bewilderment.

"There was another presence there," he watched her face closely, "one that only I could sense it seemed. At first it kept telling me to give in to the torture, then at the end begged for me not to. That was you wasn't it?"

Darcy's lips parted, another realization dawning on her.

"It's impossible…"

And yet he couldn't stop himself surveying her, studying her. Despite wearing her emotions on her sleeve, She was unlike the others of her kind. She was an utter mystery to him.

"Just what are you?"

"Well last I checked, I'm Darcy Lewis; college graduate, intern, coffee-maker aficionado. Oh and I know a couple of Norse gods, slash aliens." she answered with a casual shrug, but under all the nonchalance he could tell there was a certain tenseness in her muscles, "Now let's get back on track, buster. This is about you, not me."

"Of course" he relented, but continued to scrutinize her, "Thanos' henchmen, I called him the Other…he used a device on me, made me feel like my body was being shredded apart over and over. It didn't really injure me, but linked into my nervous system, causing my pain receptors to fire uncontrollably. It was the most maddening pain I've ever endured."
As she listened her features seemed to share in his refusal to believe what he was telling her.

"They wanted me to become subservient to Thanos," he went on, "and procure a relic called the Tesseract for him in return of any favor I wished. I resisted until I learned of Thanos' ultimate goal; to use the Tesseract as a means to gathering more power so he could destroy all of the nine realms, perhaps beyond. I thought...I thought if I agreed to help, if he allowed me possession of the Earth that I could spare you from the destruction. If only I had foreseen his other plans with me," he his lips twisted in self-loathing fury, casting his eyes to the side.

Asgardian or not, he was raised to have a strong pride. It was a hard habit to break.

Darcy stepped towards him, her face yet again changing; this time it was an expression of one that made her look so much younger than she was, "You did all that...for me?"

Conviction filled his breast and his eyes flashed resolutely back to hers. "I have always considered you my friend," he said fiercely, "...My only friend. So my answer is yes, I did that for you."

"So then why...all that flirting...and the threatening?" the material of her weapon creaked slightly under the pressure of her tightening grip.

The self-hatred then multiplied in him like a virus, causing his eyes to screw shut and his lips to twist.

*Look how much good you've did. You still couldn't protect her from witnessing the terrors of Thanos, but most of all you couldn't protect her from yourself.*

"That thing...that Thanos did to me, the thing you couldn't describe in your nightmares...the thing he used on me...it's called the Mind Gem, the same thing that was in my scepter. It allowed him to extract my mind..."

He licked his suddenly dry lips and a shaky breath unwittingly escaped. It took all of his courage to open his eyes to her.

"And he toyed with it, flipped it, twisted it...took all my thoughts, opinions, and feelings and enhanced them...enhanced them for the worse, not the better. As bad as the torture was...this was exponentially more devastating..."

With one hand, she played with the hem of her peacoat. "So what you said...what you did..." For the first time since their conversation started he had trouble reading her.

"What I did to you...it was never in my original plan. He took my fondness for you and twisted it into..." he winced, "lust...made me willing to do anything to have you. It doesn't excuse what I did to you...I...I could have killed you. I know I don't deserve your forgiveness, but I came here to enlighten you as to the reason behind that encounter...and to tell you that I am incredibly sorry."

Darcy stared up at him for a long time then finally put her weapon in her satchel. "I forgive you, Loki."

He blinked incredulously at her, "What?" he asked, still not quite believing his ears.

"I would have suspected this all to be some fabrication – hello, God of Lies—" she gestured her hand at him, "if I hadn't had those nightmares. I wouldn't have believed you at all, but I do. What you did...it hurt...a lot. But there's no sense in holding a grudge when you didn't mean it. So yeah, I forgive you."

The oppression of guilt was slightly alleviated from the God of Mischief and for the first time in a
long time a contented smile played across his face. "So does that mean we are as we were before all of this?"

She returned his smile tentatively, "I think that can be managed," then her expression turned serious, "so long as you also apologize for every life you took while invading Earth."

A chuckle puffed out from his chest, masking the sour turn of his mood, "I will not apologize for that, Darcy," he said with a shake of his head.

"How can you say that? What you did in New York…it was appalling!"

"It was necessary!" he snapped vehemently, "I would have killed them all over again to save you, to save the majority and protect Midgard from Thanos. If I had secured Midgard as planned those sacrifices would have been rewarded. I would have ushered in an era of peace among the humans and shielded Earth from any and all threats. I would have guided—"

"You still don't get it," Darcy cut him off, "mankind doesn't need a king."

"Oh it doesn't?" he snarled, "If you believe that then you are naïve. Mortals have warred with each other for eons…to hold power over one another, oppressed and murdered out of fear and misunderstanding. I've bore witness to the needless brutality of humans for over a hundred of years while on Midgard in the past, and considering what I've seen during my last visit the ways of mortal nature has hardly changed."

The God threw arms out at his sides in effort for her to fathom the depth of his words, "And man's precious world leaders, they lie and exploit for their own gain, and yet everyone hangs on their every word. With me as king I aimed to put man on the right path, expose their flaws and make them better."

Darcy shook her head, her visage displaying disappointment. "You don't understand, Loki, and I'm not condoning everything we've done. I know humans have flaws, but there are groups of people that know that want to get rid of those flaws. That's why I made political science my major; I wanted to help make the world a better place."

Her eyes softened minutely as though also trying to get him to understand, "Mankind will never be perfect, but you know what? That's what makes us human. Sure we need guidance, but we don't need an almighty king to tell us what to do. Ultimately as a race we need to learn from our own mistakes. It's the same as raising a child, we'll never truly grow unless we work the world out for ourselves."

For such a young Midgardian she was full of promise, full of boldness and intelligence. But he knew all too well that the voice of a few could not sway the blind masses, and the wholesome little could not topple the power and influence of the wicked mighty, no matter how hard they tried.

"You are naïve, little one—"

"No!" she snapped and it was probably the first time he really saw her angry with him, "You are the one that's naïve. Especially if you feel that you have done no wrong in taking those innocent lives!" She stood on her toes so that their height difference was decreased, "Don't come around here asking for my friendship again until you can feel remorse for what you've done to my planet!"

A sense of déjà vu swept over him and surprisingly it took some willpower for him school his features so that she didn't catch how much her dismissal affected him.

_Loki, forever the god cast aside._
He loomed ever closer, so close that their noses were nearly touching. "My dear mortal…I've seen things you can't even begin to dream of, so don't you dare presume to know better than I. And don't think for a second that my affections for you give you the power to change my mind or me."

His mouth spun an intricate web of words with the intent to insult, to hurt, but slowly the jagged edges of anger rounded off into something more melancholy. "It will be a hot day in Jotunheim before that happens…and with the way things are going we will both be dead and gone."

With a flash of green he returned his spirit to Asgard before he could see her reaction. If she wanted him gone from her sight then he would oblige her.

Chapter End Notes

Many myths featuring Loki depict him borrowing either Frigga or Frejya's falcon skin cloak, which allowed him to turn into a falcon and spy on the doings of the inhabitants of Midgard, thus his pet being a falcon in this fic. I hope this chapter was enjoyable~
Thought I'd break my usual rule of updating once a month, because tis the season ;) I decided to break Thor 2 into two chapters, and this chapter's title is linked to the song by Pop Evil. Also [here](#) is some Christmas Tasertricks I've drawn. Happy Holidays and enjoy~

When the next day dawned over Asgard and his door was not greeted by Ragnheidr nor his mother, but by two Einherjar carrying chains with which to bind him further, Loki knew that he would be facing his final judgment from Odin. The royal Enherjar that once guarded him as a prince now collared and shackled him like a common mongrel, even going so far as to attempt to goad him to act out with verbal jibes as he stepped willingly into their chains.

"What, no fight left in you?" asked Ingemar, who was adjusting the chain connecting his collar to his cuffs.

Loki did not miss the way Ingemar addressed him, referring to him as something less than sludge on his boot.

When he did not present them with a retort Gulbranr joined in, eyeing him much the same way as Ingemar implicated, "Indeed, I expected much more out of a Jotun," He then let out an inciting snicker that lead green eyes to flash dangerously at him, "even out of a pitiful runt such as yourself."

The Trickster glared pointedly at Gulbranr for a few moments longer before his mouth twisted into a mockery of a smile that did not reach his leering eyes. He did not grant them more than that, no matter how much more they provoked, so they finished securing his fetters and shoved him out of his quarters where more guards stood ready to escort him. Loki gracefully caught his footing and should an onlooker have been there to witness it, they would have thought he was merely adding a light step to his gait. The Enherjar didn't need to lead or prod him along, he knew where to go and eagerly wanted to have the whole ordeal done with.

During the last stretch of the walk, Loki and his entourage passed a large throng of Asgardians, noble and peasant alike, who had lined up along the public corridor just outside the throne room to get a look at the traitor. He ignored all of their critical stares until he felt the doe-eyed looks of a group of children peering up at him.

Their expressions were so curious and openly studying; a quality that he once would have found endearing, now made him feel exposed like a rat peeled open after dissection. It caused the miniscule primal, animalistic part of his brain to raise its hackles in discontent. He listened to that part of his brain just enough to it to feint an advance towards the little group, a feral growl breaking his otherwise stately visage.

He had barely made a threatening step in their direction before their bright eyes widened in fear and they skittered out of view, one emphatically screaming, "Loki's going to get us!"

Immediately a mild wave of guilt rippled at him, but he pushed it down to gaze piercingly at the rest
of the crowd. They all wilted under his stare and slowly they vacated the corridor.

"Get moving!" Gulbranr ordered, his heavy hand shoving Loki forward and this time he did stumble.

Loki whirled on his offender in a flash of twisting leather. The prince moved in close, so that they were standing uncomfortably toe-to-toe, using every bit of his two-inch height advantage over the Gulbranr to intimidate. The other Enherjar fixed their weapons on him, but Gulbranr was hilariously caught off his guard. And Loki just stood there for a good minute, letting the shorter man soak in his venomous glare.

"Touch me like that again," he finally hissed into Gulbranr's face," and whatever punishment I face, I'll be damn sure to take you down with me."

Gulgrandr wisely withered at his threat and fell back two uncertain steps.

"Glad we came to an agreement," this time his voice was almost cheery, but his crooked grin belied his true demeanor.

Loki wondered just exactly how Gulbranr had come upon his knowledge of his Jotun heritage, believing that Odin would rather go to the grave with it than let anyone outside the royal family know that he raised a frost child under his roof. Gulbranr struck him as the type to stand behind close doors with his ear pressed carefully to it, greedily listening for any hushed words said inside.

So who else knows the big scandal?

He regarded Gulbranr a moment longer then calmly continuing on his way.

Silence overcame the group again as the once second son of Asgard entered the throne room and came before the All-Father.

So intent was Loki to face his end – and he hoped it was a swift one –that he for once missed the presence of Frigga at the bottom of the great stairs laid out before Odin.

"Loki."  

"Hello, Mother," he turned her quickly as though his wits were about him all along, "Have I made you proud?"

"Please don't make this worse," her countenance begged for him to attempt to be upstanding, to plead his case so that he may be handed a lighter sentence.

"Define worse," he asked her, for the only thing he think of that was worse than death was to continue breathing in this farce of a life he'd been coerced into living since the day he was spirited away to Asgard.

No the best punishment he could receive would be oblivion.

Odin's booming voice broke them from their conversation. As Frigga was ordered to leave them she gave him one last pleading look before turning away in controlled despair. Once she was gone, Loki returned his attention to the weathered man seated on the throne above him. Gulbranr and Ingemar didn't hinder him as he took two steps further towards the steps, the last step ending in an imitation of a salute.

Here he was, stripped of wielding magic, cuffed and collared in chains, and surrounded by a small
battalion of Enherjar, all to face trial for simply trying to live up to the standards set for him when he was but a babe.

Loki found the entire event to be laughable.

"Do you not truly feel the gravity of your crimes?" Odin asked, "Wherever you go, there is war, ruin, and death."

"I went down to Midgard to rule the people of Earth as a benevolent god."

The All-Father's rebuttal to that was that they were not gods, simply that they wielded supernatural strength and abilities over humans and could outlive an entire civilization. A scoff almost escaped Loki's mouth, but he held it in check.

There were so many things he wanted to throw back at Odin's face about the how the All-Father conducted himself the last time he stepped upon Midgard.

He wanted to say, 'You, Odin were worshipped as the God of War for a reason. You incited the people to do unspeakable acts on each other, to die the most glorious of deaths, all because you promised them Valhalla.'

But he did not.

He wanted to say, 'You tricked the humans as much as I did and you even slew many of them yourself in pursuit of your unquenchable thirst for knowledge.'

He could have gone on and on, but he refrained from uttering a word of it. There was always a time and place for everything.

"All this because Loki desires a throne."

The volume of the God of Mischief's voice grew in its indignation, "It is my birthright."

"Your birthright was to die," Odin thundered, causing Loki's brow to furrow in contemplation, "as a child. Cast out onto a frozen rock."

Loki tuned out the rest of the King's speech as he came to a realization. Odin was right, his fate should have been that frozen rock. He was a Frost Giant, but not built to survive among them, and he could never fit in to mold that the Aesir presented for him. He wasn't meant to belong in either place.

The Norns had fated him to die, yet Odin spared him, but for what, to be a diplomat between Jotunheim and Asgard?

*If that were the case then he should have placed me with nobles. You don't tell a man he's meant to be a king when in reality you're planning a lesser role all along. What was Odin thinking? He should have just told me the truth from the beginning.*

He was a man reduced to scrabbling for a purpose and rather than please anyone, his endeavors only seemed to leave chaos in their wake. At least the manifested chaos was entertaining while it lasted.

Now all of that was gone and there was still no place for him. The empty feeling was a wild fire steadily consuming him and he felt that if he didn't take care of it soon, he'd be a burned and hollowed out shell. He'd rather die than live such a pitiful, meaningless existence.

Shuffling forward with expression of explicit imploring, he said, "If I am for the axe, then for mercy's
sake, just swing it. It's not that I don't love our little talks, it's just...I don't love them."

He had said his piece and he half expected Odin to strike him down on the spot himself with Gungnir.

"Frigga is the only reason you're still alive, and you will never see her again."

The God of Mischief's blood ran cold.

"You will spend the rest of your days in the dungeons."

Loki stood stupefied upon hearing the entirety of Odin's verdict. He was torn from reality and rent asunder by a torrent of disbelief and distress. His footing was off balance suddenly and he imagined this was what it was like to stand on a precipice, on the very edge, and inch away from a thousand foot descent with the wind buffering him even closer to his doom.

Thoughts of the void resurfaced and memories of the Other's scaly voice cooing, "prisoner," caused his skin to prickle with panic.

He knew it was unlikely for him to be tortured or even bothered upon in the dungeons, but he would still be a prisoner. The word and its meaning easily triggered traumatic memories and reopened wounds still fresh. That word meant he would be back in his own personal hell, but this time there would be people he knew nearby, yet no one would be allowed to come and pull him back from the brink. He'd surely go mad.

The present didn't begin to sink back in until either Ingemar or Gulbranr tugged on his trains to lead him away, breaking Loki from his momentary stupor.

So this is my fate...to be the pet of Asgard, locked away for going awry?

Resisting the guards he asked of Thor's fate, though he already knew, and Odin was an even bigger fool for confirming it. Ingemar took him by the shoulder to lead him away as did Gulbrandr, though the latter did so more roughly, but Loki had little heart to make good on his threat.

In the time since Loki dropped in to apologize then went a little flaky and left, Darcy was determined not to anything he said affect her.

That night Jane actually peeled herself from her mother's couch and the chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream and decided she wanted to try dating after all. Darcy was all too happy to help her set up a Zoosk account and profile. Unsurprisingly Jane got her first flirt within at least five minutes of the set up and Darcy couldn't help but prod her boss until she started sending flirts back. Jane's messages started exploding, prompting Darcy to start commentary while she spied every message exchanged.

"Dude, that Greg looks like he'd have some awesome bed head."

Jane's spine twisted so she could get a better look at her intern from her spot on the carpeted floor where was cradling her MacBook in her lap. Her dainty eyebrows drawing downward as her mouth dropped open in an expression of confused mortification.

Darcy prattled on anyway, "He's got fluffy hair, not too curly, but not too flat...ya know like perfect to run your fingers through or to grab a hold of—" she waggled her eyebrows for emphasis.

Jane blushed and her expression hedged more towards mortified. She couldn't even form any words as she closed the MacBook and pointed towards the guest room where Darcy was currently residing.
"Awww, c'mon. I'll totally be good!" she raised her hands in surrender.

Jane shifted so she was facing Darcy while remaining on the floor. "Darcy…I'm actually trying to work up the courage to go on decent date…" her palms came together as if in prayer, "I can't do that while you're in here…"

"Can I just like…face the corner or something?"

"We both know you'll peek and then you'll start up with your inappropriate comments, and then I'll get too embarrassed and this will all have been for naught."

Darcy sighed and pouted, "You suck all the entertainment out of it…" She reluctantly got up from the couch and went to her room, but not before throwing her last two cents over her shoulder, "pick the surfer-looking dude. I bet that long hair—" she barely just dodged a couch cushion to the face, "Okay! I'm leaving, sheesh!"

She honestly just wanted to hang out with Jane because there was no one else to communicate with and keep her mind from wandering to stuff she wasn't sure she wanted to touch upon with a 20 foot pole; the entertainment value was her bonus. Sadly when it came to intimate matters, Jane was a bit of a killjoy, making Darcy wonder if Jane ever got girl time growing up. But getting the astrophysicist to blush was fun.

Her other option was Erik but ever since Loki raided his brain with his space Viking mind control powers he was a bit loose-minded and tended to run around without any pants on, kind of reminding her of her first time attending a college party. It was a bit entertaining, but there was only so much crazy she could take.

Darcy plopped on the bed, determined to finish *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* while listening to Janis Joplin on her iPod (Janis was one of her nostalgic favorites). She was determined not to think about a pale face, centered by two darkly rimmed green eyes, and framed by dark, disheveled hair.

Except that she couldn't stop from thinking about it, and no matter how much she immersed herself in the book or the music, she couldn't get his last words to her out of her head.

"It will be a hot day in Jotunheim before that happens…and with the way things are going we will both be dead and gone."

The words themselves sounded like they were supposed to said in anger, yet when Loki said them he sounded more morose, defeated.

*What did he really mean by that?*

She put her book aside when she realized she wasn't even reading anymore, but kept her earbuds in. Right now all she wanted was to see him with that carefree smile of happiness on his face she discovered so many years ago, but those were getting fewer and far between and now he might not even come back.

"Little Girl Blue" came on over her iPod and Darcy couldn't help but think the song was oddly too appropriate for her current situation.

*Why did he say both of us would be dead and gone? He lives a very long time…right? But he spoke of it as if death was coming soon…*

Darcy sat ramrod straight up in bed causing her earbuds to fall out of her ears as the realization smacked her.
"Execution," she murmured thickly to herself, then shook the thought from her head. "That can't be right, he's a prince. His own family wouldn't put him to death. Would they?"

She bit down on a thumbnail. "But he did a lot of bad things here on Earth…"

By the time she realized she had been sitting in her own head while chomping on her nails almost a whole half hour had passed.

"No. Stop this Darcy! You're going to drive yourself bonkers!" she hissed angrily to herself.

*Heh bonkers...* her thoughts drifted back to Loki, *maybe that's why Loki tried to take over the world, he thought way too much and it made him bonkers. And now it's going to happen to me.*

**SHUT UP! Stop THINKING!**

Darcy flopped back onto the mattress and blew out a long exhale. "He's gonna be fine, they'll just slap him on the wrist and put him in time out. And nobody's going bonkers. Everything's gonna be okay."

*That's more positive thinking at least, thumbs up.*

"Everything's gonna be okay."

She repeated that phrase verbally to herself as she got up to change into her pajamas.

"Everything's gonna be okay."

By then she'd already said the word so much that it meant everything and nothing. Her surroundings melted away as she sank face-first onto her pillow, her body following in pursuit until she was cocooned under her blankets. For once the constant buzz her mind seemed to generate quieted and decided to take a break, leaving her more relaxed than she had been in at least a few years.

"...Everything's gonna be alright..."

The next day Darcy had gotten out of bed around lunchtime. She woke herself up by talking in her sleep. Apparently her mantra had followed her in her sleep. She expected to have to wake Jane up, but she was thoroughly thrilled to find a note on the fridge saying that her boss had gone on a lunch date at the Ledbury.

"Everything's gonna be alright," Darcy said with a hopeful smile.

After fixing herself a lunch consisting of a BLT sandwich and a bag of chips – crisps as they were called in England, she wandered into Jane's lab, which was set up in the garage of the flat.

She did her usual routine of checking through the cobbled together gadgets that Jane insisted on keeping even after S.H.I.E.L.D. had given her a cushy payment to fund her continued Einstein-Rosenbridge research. Jane no longer checked her equipment, because she got a bit angsty when anything even remotely related to Thor was brought up, so Darcy took it upon herself to check in on the data readings daily and to keep the equipment from collecting dust. Dust and technology just weren't good bedfellows.

Everything looked normal until Darcy thought she heard a faint humming sound coming from one of the last boxes of packed away equipment. She cocked an eyebrow and slowly approached it. The box was completely sealed and looked like it hadn't been opened since they had packed up back in America.
"Alright Pandora's box..." Darcy said, grabbing a box cutter and flicking out the blade, "what have you got for me?"

She ripped into the box and dug through its contents like it was Christmas morning while still managing to keep all the delicate gadgets intact.

"Aha!"

Finally she found the source of the sound. It was one of the older, less evolved phase meters that Jane still kept on hand since her work in New Mexico, and it was humming so loudly that it was practically vibrating in her hand. The readings looked incredibly high, sending an electric charge up Darcy's spine. She jumped up and raced to find Jane's little blue data book and flipped through the pages until she landed on the data from three years earlier, comparing the numbers to the readings on the meter.

"Hot damn..."

She pocketed the phase meter and rushed to Jane's car to crash the date. Hey she had the best of intentions here!

"A stupid high end restaurant next to one of the largest Ferris wheels in the world shouldn't be this hard to find," Darcy grumbled as she drove by said Ferris wheel all while looking for a sign that said Ledbury. Her phone wasn't giving her very reliable directions.

*Could be the readings the meter is detecting interfering with my phone's GPS. Wow that sounds like something Jane would say...*

That or her GPS decided was it liked giving her the run around. Either way she was starting to sound more like her boss

She was so intent on finding the sign that she nearly ran over a tall, gangly guy in a jacket and a beanie. He looked reliable about locations...that and freaked out.

Darcy rolled down her window and called out to her would-be victim, "Hey! Ya know where the Ledbury restuarant is?"

The guy blinked as if seeing an attractive girl for the first time before making his merry way over.

"Yes I do," he said while stooping over her window.

"Get in. I'll take you where you need to go since I almost turned you into road kill."

"Ah, thank you very much, Miss..."

"Darcy."

"Darcy," He repeated unsteadily and then made his way passenger side, he mumbled a little when he spoke again, "I'm Ian."

"Nice to meet you," she responded without really listening, the only thing she cared about right now was him getting her to Ledbury, "I've been trying to reach my friend Jane, but she won't answer her phone, and my stupid GPS isn't working right." She handed him her phone, "It keeps telling me my destination is just right here, but as much as I want to go into GameStop, I need to get to the Ledbury right now."
See Jane, I can prioritize!

He started scrolling through her phone and tapping the screen while she started driving again. "You're close but you're on the wrong side of the block, turn right. Oh and your GPS should work now."

She made her turn and inwardly praised herself when she didn't hop the curb. "Really? What was wrong with it?"

"It needed the latest version of the app installed and then the network and location recalibrated."

"Kay got ya…you seem to be good with technology and stuff."

"I like finding out how things work," he became a little more enthused, "I'm a biology major."

The gears in Darcy's head screeched to a halt then started rapidly turning in a new direction. She couldn't help the mischievous smile from lighting up her face and she hoped that he didn't gleam anything from it.

"Would you like to be an intern?"

In the course of their little field expedition Darcy suspected there could be some small chance that their lives could be put in danger – hello whirlwind tornado of death and consequential skirmish with giant robot of doom, but for awhile the worst thing that happened was her shiny new intern throwing their car keys into the portal and them not returning.

She did not expect to lose her boss. For five freaking hours.

Panic overcame her and she started losing the positive thoughts she'd been cultivating since waking up.

What do I do? What do I do? WHATDOIDO?!

She did the only sensible thing in a situation such a missing person and called the police.

A small army of officers had just arrived when Jane suddenly appeared, and the first thing her boss did was berate her on her decision-making. Well she wasn't the one that got lost for hours and never seemed to know how to answer her phone. Darcy had watched enough movies and got lost enough as a kid to know now not to break away from the group. And she ALWAYS answered her phone, even if they were just student loan collectors.

What was I supposed to do? I was freaking the hell out!

Then things got a whole lot weirder. Like the sudden thunderstorm cropping up, and the invisible shield wrapping around them, fending off the rain that was pouring everywhere else but on them. Then there was that crackly, electric feeling in the air like the last time—

Oh my god, it's Thor!

Jane took off like a bat out of hell and the weird force field-umbrella followed, leaving Darcy in the cold London rain. She thought Jane was going to play tonsil hockey with the big guy, but instead she slapped him. Twice. Then they started arguing before that dwindled into some sort of thing where they were gravitating towards each other, staring eye to eye with that dazed, dreamy gaze lovebirds get.
"Everything's gonna be alright!"

Darcy couldn't contain herself any longer and jogged over so she could ask Thor about Loki current state, that and to get herself out of the rain. The rain stopped right at that moment, which was always her luck.

"We're kind of in the middle of something," Jane said dismissively, but Darcy knew how to handle that.

"I'm pretty sure we're getting arrested."

While Jane went off to handle the authorities, Darcy couldn't help but appreciate the greatness that was the Asgardian male anatomy. "Look at you, still all muscly and everything~"

Even though he looked like hell during her last brush with him, even Loki was damn near enigmatically magnetic in appearance. Maybe Jane and Thor could hook her up with some godly-man meat. Fandral looked pretty available and interested when he kissed her hand in New Mexico.

"How's space?"

Thor nodded with a friendly smile, "Space is fine."

*Whew! That's nice to hear. Surely that means Loki is fine too.*

Darcy knew she had to know for sure though, so she could get on with her life without wondering if her sometimes-friend was all right.

However the chance never happened, because something else happened first. Like an explosion of energy and redness that washed over the scene, knocking people down and busting out car windows. Darcy didn't know what could have caused it until she saw Thor rushing over to Jane, who lay prone on the ground. The officers surrounded the couple in vain as Thor pulled Jane close and the telltale brightness of the rainbow light enveloped them.

Darcy stepped into the Bifrost's footprint while staring up in wonder, "Holy shit!"

*Everything's totally not okay…*

The cell that greeted Loki was not the one he was expecting. He had been waiting to be locked away in a one of the many bare and dismal cells lining the dungeon, the ones filled with scrappy prisoners from all around the nine realms – some of which were incarcerated because he helped bring them in. That would have mattered not to him for he was prepared to allow them to grant him his end, but not before he thoroughly maimed anyone who stepped up to the task. Just because he wanted to die didn't mean that he would make it easy on anybody.

Instead he was led to one of the unoccupied cells, a very conspicuously furnished one. The emotional numbness lifted minutely when Loki spied his unmistakable green velvet reading chair and matching footstool inside.

*What is this?*

As his green eyes sharpened on interior of the cell, he took note of the Vanir crafted potion table and scrying pool, as well as a small portion of his personal library that were a part of his chambers. Lastly the furnishings were completed by a minimalistic, yet elegantly crafted bed. It was a far cry from his luxurious bed of furs; in fact it was a cot by his standards, but it was truly more lavish than a servant's
Certainly not furnished by Odin or Thor's orders...

As if catching on to his thoughts, Ingemar uttered, "You don't deserve to have nice accommodations, even if you were once a prince."

Once Loki was inside, he and Gulbrandr removed the shackles and chains as the other Einherjar watched from outside the golden energy field. The Trickster rubbed at his liberated wrists, but gave no other sign of discomfort, not so much as a minute peek into his inner emotional turmoil. Ingemar on the other hand was all to eager to express his opinion.

"But this was ordered by my Queen," the guard nodded his head towards the cell's niceties, then bravely looked into Loki's countenance, "so you better enjoy it, Halfling."

Loki did not look at him, but looked through him as he left the cell and joined the rest of the Einherjar on whatever guard duties they were to take care of once the wayward prince was seen to.

Now that he was once again left to his own devices, Loki slowly strolled about, examining his surroundings, subtly searching for anything that might turn out to be a structural deficiency. When he saw no visual weaknesses he flexed his magic to every corner of the cell only for it to splash against the walls and flow back to him with the perfect ripples of a drop of liquid inside a cup of water.

Impenetrable and practically airtight…and yet I can still breath, he mused.

Loki walked up to the potion desk and determined that it only held mixtures he had been allowed to concoct as a child and thus held little more harm than a common plaything. Even the glass potion vials they were once housed in had been replaced by bottles made of synthetic polymers.

The scrying pool given to him by Frigga upon reaching his adolescence was eyed with both nostalgic reverence and disdain.

He remembered how excited he was to have the very same artifact that had belonged to his mother, the very one that she used to peer into while he watched from his perch upon her knee when he was a small boy.

His mother was always artful at peeling back the veils of the unknown. She could see hints of the future, or at least a few of several future outcomes, and she could read the nature of others more accurately than the All-Father himself. As he had inherited her magic, Frigga was equally hopeful that he shared in her gift of sight, so she entrusted him with her precious heirloom. In the end all the sight he was able to gleam was the ability to tell truth from lie.

And even that wasn't very good, now was it?

His lower jaw tightened until he could no longer hold the gaze into the scornful eyes of his own reflection. Hardened emerald orbs fell to the books piled in the corner. Most of the titles, though diversified, touched upon the politics and diplomacies of ruling.

Loki snorted in chagrin and threw himself upon the bed.

So I am to learn my lessons while I slowly rot within this cell, surrounded by reminders of a life steeped in lies? I'm sorry, mother, but I am a monster of your dear husband's making, nothing more and nothing less.

It didn't take long for him to become weary of the too-bright whiteness of the ceiling. He sat back up
and looked outside the energy field, at the other prisoners adjacent to his cell. A slow smirk crossed the Trickster's thin mouth.

Thunderous applause met the crown prince on his coronation day. As he approached the grand steps leading up to the throne, Sif, Volstagg, and Fandral greeted him happily with bows of respect and congratulations. It appeared as if all of Asgard could barely contain their delight when the prince ascended to his rightful place, his long royal red cape trailing behind him.

Upon reaching the top of the dais Loki turned to address his people, finally allowing himself to openly soak in the joyous cheers resounding about the hall. The cheering only increased at his display. The once outsider breathed it all in then raised his hand high. A metallic sound sliced through the air as Mjolnir obeyed its master's command. Loki caught it with ease and raised the mighty hammer triumphantly above his head, causing the applause and cheering to reach its crescendo.

"Loki," called his mother from his side and he lowered Mjolnir, "What are you doing?"

He could have stopped right then and there, but he decided to play it out for as long as he could.

"Giving the people what they want," he replied jovially, keeping up the visage of his fellow inmates participating as his loyal subjects instead.

Frigga sighed, "Does this all make you feel better?"

Loki's pleasant mood slowly started to devolve.

"It certainly doesn't make me feel worse."

"Cast enough illusions and you risk forgetting what is real."

Her words rang a bell in his head, pulling him from his imagined grandeur. It was one of the first lessons she taught him when he started learning illusions. Loki's no longer had the heart to maintain the illusion. The vision of the throne room slowly melted away, and he was met once again with the starkness of prison walls.

"Precisely."

Chapter End Notes

I thought up the idea of Darcy coming across Ian and tricking him into becoming her gopher based on an interview Kat Dennings did for the movie, describing how Darcy thought of Ian when they first meet. As for the last scene with Loki, I've could've drawn that deleted scene, but I haven't had the time. Plus I've already seen many great fan arts of it, and I'm sure adding my rendition might be a bit repetitive, so I wrote about it instead ;)
Yay first post of the new year! Thank you to those of you that have been sticking this out with me! Hope you all had an awesome Christmas and New Years! This chapter’s title is from the song "Hopeless Opus" by Imagine Dragons. Do enjoy and comments are very appreciated!

Odin had ordered it that he was never to see Frigga again, but Loki knew that not even the All-Father could always keep his queen from doing what she pleased. Though her presence in his cell was just projection, her actions still disobeyed direct orders.

Loki wanted to express his gratitude towards her appearance, towards all the trouble she went to secretly providing him with lavish furnishings and books, but all he could focus on was that he was stuck inside a cell in a dungeon filled with common criminals. It was never in his nature to be caged and he was starting to resent his mother for requesting his life to be spared.

I'm not some pet falcon to be trained and held captive.

Loki paced his cell despite his mother's presence, feeling inwardly keyed up at the arrival of more marauders, all lined up to be imprisoned. Again he was back in the void, where the Chitauri captured anything that came within reach, torturing and killing for their own amusement – or as in his case, determined if their prisoners were of use.

He was keeping his anxieties in check, but only just barely, managing to comment on Odin's seeming endless supply of prisoners while sounding unaffected.

"The books I sent, do they not interest you?" Frigga's projection asked.

Loki turned back from his first class view of the dungeon's goings, giving her his tight-lipped rebuttal.

Of course books were one of his chief interests, but he enjoyed reading most as an escape from the presence of others. Now there was nothing left to escape from, not physically anyway. His body was ensnared from the freedom it do desperately sought and his soul was a prisoner to the horrors of his own mind. He didn't much hold the desire to read anymore.

"I've done everything in my power to make you comfortable, Loki."

"Have you?" he inquired, thinking that he could have been comfortable and free in Death's embrace by now, "Does Odin share your concern?" his mother's brows rose at the condescending tone his voice held, "Does Thor?"

"You know full well it was your actions that brought you here," she got to the meat of the subject.

"My actions?" he queried again, he then not so subtly but quite elegantly pointed the finger of blame towards Odin and the great lie of his life as the cause of his actions, thus bringing him to this sorry existence. The great lie that Loki was meant to be a king.
"A king?" her voice chimed in, "A true king admits his faults."

It was the same tiresome lesson that Odin had been preaching to him since his capture. A lesson that seemed to apply to everyone except Odin himself, who had murdered and plundered on a scale that even Loki's doings could not touch. And they were speaking to him about faults?

"Your father—"

Loki's carefully crafted shield of emotions crumbled suddenly and he responded in the only way he knew how at the moment, erupting into anger, "He's not my father!"

The queen didn't bat an eyelash at his outburst and betrayed no intimidation in her calm words, "Then am I not your mother?"

Loki scoffed, his senses wild and on high alert and screaming at him to hurt her! Hurt her for denying you the peace of death!

"You're not."

As soon as the words were out he wished he could take them back. The hollowness in him increased in a way he didn't imagine possible, like he had ripped a part of himself off and tossed it away. Hurting her only seemed to reflect back at him and ultimately injure his fragile psyche even more.

Frigga – no his mother, allowed the words to flow off of her as though they held no contempt at all.

"You're always so perceptive about everyone but yourself."

He tried to remain firm on the conviction of his words, but the longer he stared at those eyes that continued to look on at him with love and devotion, he caved.

'I'm sorry, mother,' he wanted to say, but his pride was holding him in check.

Loki couldn't look at her any longer and it was all he could do to walk up to her, mournfully shaking his head and to pass his hand through the projection, disrupting the flow of her magic and silently dismissing her from him.

His mother slowly shimmered away in a green halo of light, all the while holding his gaze tearfully. The God of Mischief did not know if she understood how he truly felt, but he thought that she did. He wasn't sure how he would go on if she didn't.

For a while after his mother's visit, Loki spent his time with his boots rooted to the floor, staring at the place she previously occupied. Thoughts and memories flew anxiously around the little cage that was his mind, blending into one another until he could no longer tell one from the last.

At least try to find something to do instead of emotionally murdering yourself over and over again. It's growing immensely tiresome.

Loki quickly drew his attention to his cell and the few little things brought from his room and for once wished he had a cellmate. Then at least he could amuse himself at their expense.

As that was not the case, he busied himself by tossing and catching one of his potion bottles as he lay upon the his new bed. It was hardly an exercise in coordination, but at least it was something to keep his senses from completely dulling.

Bowm! Bowm! Bowm!
The repetitive sound of prisoners beating their fists on their shimmery cells while crying out broke Loki's concentration. It grabbed at his attention and the former prince decided to see what the entire ruckus was about.

From what he could see a cell several lengths down from his was being taken over by a strange beast of a prisoner. It convulsed and blackened as though it were being cooked from the inside out, then became bigger and more menacing. The man – if Loki could honestly call the thing that – grabbed one of his cellmates and pressed him against the energy field keeping him contained. The energy field couldn't handle the stress and fizzled out.

*Interesting. Odin told Thor and I that all the dark elves had been slaughtered…and yet right here before me is a fabled Kursed.*

Loki watched on with eagle eyes as the beast mercilessly killed two Einherjar. With no one else to stop him, the Kursed stomped from cell to cell, releasing every prisoner with brute efficiency. His power was a thing to behold and clearly matched Thor, perhaps even outmatching him. The more he saw, the more Loki's interest grew until it piqued when the Kursed came upon his cell.

Both beings scrutinized and measured each other with the cold precision of two ancient predators. The snake and the lizard.

*What a lovely chance at escape,* Loki's thoughts the mutated dark elf a conspirator's grin, Loki threw his baited line into the water and waited for a hint of a bite.

Loki thought he had the Kursed trapped on his hook when the latter stepped forward for a closer look, and he could see the beast's hatred for Asgard equaled his own. But then the Kursed's interest turned to skepticism. He quickly extracted himself from Loki's hook altogether and turned away, giving him no more regard than a callous shake of his head.

*Oh I will have a hand in this, even if it's from this cell.*

"You might want to take the stairs to the left."

The beast glanced back once more over his massive shoulder before heeding the words of the Trickster.

It wasn't long until more Einherjar, accompanied by Fandral and Volstagg, appeared to wrangle the unruly escapees into submission. Loki was quite pleased with the discord surrounding him, so much so that finally he finally decided to indulge in the reading material that Frigga provided him with.

Soon too Thor joined the fray with a grand entrance as was customary of his character. Uncharacteristically though, the Thunderer offered the marauders a chance to return to their cells peacefully, but it was to no avail. The skirmish continued much to the God of Mischief's delight.

A sudden series of intense crashes echoed above the dungeons and everyone, Asgardian and marauder alike paused mid-fight to contemplate what was going on. Even Loki was caught unawares. The more he trained his ears the more he also thought he heard the fire of longboats outside the palace.

*So this isn't just an isolated incident, but a full-scale attack on Asgard.*

Deep-gutted dread seeped into the primal part of Loki's brain, but he quickly stamped it back down.

*Isn't that what you wanted, Asgard in ruin? And once it is taken over surely you'll discover an avenue of escape.*
He silently agreed with the resentful side of his conscience and relaxed back into the world of his book.

So immersed in reading was he that he failed to notice the prisoners had been seen back to their cells, as well as the quiet the once again enveloped the dungeons. It wasn't until he heard his name being addressed that he regained his sense of the world around him. Before his cell stood an Einherjar with his helm cradled under his arm, such a position spoke of important news to be delivered.

The previous feeling of dread returned full force. It moved down to the pit of his stomach and settled there.

_Something's not right._ He sensed it, he knew it immediately without any words having to be spoken. When the Einherjar confirmed the suspicions of his gut instinct, Loki's heart sucked in on itself, transforming into a black hole in his chest. If he thought he hated Odin and Thor before, then he never truly hated anything in his life more than he despised himself at this very moment.

_I sent that beast off...I'm the reason mother is dead. I truly am a monster._

The black hole within him swirled and grew, searching through the vestigial emotions of his hollow being, until it found what it wanted. It began feeding, fueling itself on the rage and self-loathing coursing through his veins, swelling bigger and bigger.

Magic pulsed from him freely, uncaring of anything in harm's way. Furniture toppled over, but it wasn't enough. It wasn't enough when every piece of finery lay splintered, torn, and shattered around him. It wasn't enough when he tore at himself relentlessly, fingernails ripping into skin and hair, tearing at clothes, his feet cut from stepping on the broken remains of the scrying pool. It wasn't enough when he found himself on the floor, screaming out his rage and agony.

It wouldn't ever be mildly enough until Frigga's death was paid for it in blood.

He was no longer the God of Mischief.

No. He was Loki, the God of Vengeance.

"Jane isn't calling me back, Erik isn't calling me back, stupid S.H.I.E.L.D. isn't calling me back."

Darcy was a mess, a freaking wreck.

"What's S.H.I.E.L.D?" her intern piped up.

She almost forgot that she had invited him back to the flat, so that she wouldn't be alone. She hated being alone when she was freaking out.

"It's a secret," she said, proud of herself for maintaining an air of nonchalance.

On the inside she was a discombobulated ball of nerves.

What's going on with Jane and Thor up in Asgard?

Is she okay?

Where the hell is Erik?

Is space not really fine?
She tried Erik's cell again, but it went straight to voice mail so she left a concise message on how she was feeling.

"Darcy," the intern thankfully interrupted frantic train of thought, "you really need to look at this."

Darcy's attention was driven to the television where a news report showed recorded footage of man running around Stone Henge in the buff carrying some scientific do-dads. She paused the TiVo on the dazed face of the naked man. It was definitely Erik.

*Sometimes I hate it when I'm right...*

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Yet again Loki could sense the presence of the man he spent a 1,000 years of his life believing was his brother long before said man even arrived. Quickly he cast an illusion that encompassed his entire cell, depicting him as the calculating, unruffled prince that everyone knew him to be.

And yet Thor saw right through it. Loki grew weary of hiding behind his pride and bared all of his demons for the crowned prince of Asgard to see. If Thor was perturbed by the destruction of his cell or the distress of Loki's appearance, he did not voice it, but merely made his way around the cell to stand next to the energy field closest to the younger man.

Loki tilted his head to face him, "Did she suffer?"

"I did not come here to share in our grief," for once Thor sounded distant, cold, "Instead I offer you the chance of a far richer sacrament."

Even in his mourning, Loki was ever the curious creature. "Go on," he urged.

Thor gave him his terms; show him and his paramour through one of the secret pathways to Svartalfheim and Loki would be granted a what he craved most, vengeance upon their mother's murderers. Loki very much liked the bargain until Thor told him he would be returned to his cell. He looked about him in distasted, but realized this was the best offer he was going to get.

*Thor needing aid from his little brother, such an odd circumstance we find ourselves in.*

Loki chuckled lightly at the irony, not stopping himself from voicing it, "You must be truly desperate to come to me for help. What makes you think you can trust me?"

"I don't," Thor answered with an immediacy that almost made him proud, "Mother did."

Loki's eyes began to sting but he had long since vanquished himself of tears. He was dry of all sorrow and now only a dull pain remained, one he was not sure would ever go away.

"But you should know that when we fought each other in the past, I did so with a glimmer of hope that my brother was still in there somewhere. That hope no longer exists to protect you. You betray me, and I will kill you."

The only pinpoint of light in all this gloomy darkness was that now a purpose had once again been tossed into his lap. Loki latched onto it like a final lifeline.

This purpose he would not fail.

"When do we start?"

The second he was released Loki stretched limbs that had quickly become irritable and tight during his confinement. His magic surrounded him so that he was more presentable and battle ready. Then a
genuine sense of mischievousness that he hadn't felt in a few years over came him. He humored Thor – or more accurately himself – by transfiguring their appearances in amusing ways. It only resulted in Thor's hand over his mouth to keep them from being detected by passing Einherjar. When he thought he was making a judicial decision by asking for a weapon, Thor's only response was to cuff him in magic represent shackles.

He was no longer so amused.

Quick footsteps to his left alerted him and Sif and Thor's woman met up with them

"You're..." the mortal began.

He stepped closer in mild greeting, "I'm Loki, you may have heard of me."

Her form of greeting was to slap him across the face with enough force to whip his head around.

"That was for New York," she said, but there was a fiery determination in her eyes that had him wondering if she assaulted him for far more personal reasons. Reasons that perhaps involved one Darcy Lewis.

*You have aligned yourself with a worthy friend, little one.*

Loki grinned down at Jane, and whether Thor wanted his blessing or not, he said in admittance, "I like her."

Einherjar were already on their trail and Sif volunteered distract them. As he turned to leave with his brother, his throat was met by Sif's sword as she threatened him with death should he turn against Thor.

In return he smirked in that knowing way that she always hated, "It's good to see you, too, Sif."

Next they came upon Volstagg. The rotund man let Thor and his mortal pass onto the elven aircraft beyond, but made sure to stop Loki with the beginnings of a threat mirroring Sif and Thor's. Loki cut him off before he could even get to the real threatening for as fun as this all was, time was running away from all of them.

Once on the foreign vessel Thor started pressing the control panels, his misguided touches earning him little start up response. At this rate Volstagg would be overcome and the Einherjar would swarm the ship. The oaf continued hitting buttons, so in hopes to hurry things along, Loki suggested a lighter touch. This only frustrated Thor more into slamming his hands more vigorously and none so gently, but finally at least the ship powered up.

The engines provided thrust and in no time the ship was airborne. Thor's maneuvering however still needed adjustment for he took out nearly all the columns that remained standing on their escape from the palace. And Loki didn't even bother repressing his banter about it either. Soon they were flying over Asgard, causing a scene and they weren't free of pursuit for long. Gun turrets stationed throughout the city opened fire on them. Thor was forced into performing none-so-gracefully evasive maneuvers, causing his beloved Jane to faint.

They flew over the great body of water with which the Bifrost Bridge spanned, warriors in longboats hot on their heels and firing. Loki's remarks on Thor's piloting, which started as jests, were quickly devolving into insults on the sensibility of the entire plan. One moment he was questioning his brother's intelligence, the next he was airborne without the aid of the ship and descending fast. If he didn't possess the cat-like flexibility he honed over many centuries, he would have been taking a swim instead of landing on the longboat that Fandral was piloting below.
Thor had not been completely forthcoming on his escape plan after all, and he earned a little bit of Loki's respect, grudgingly as it was to admit. Finally some control was relented over to Loki. He took over the rudder, piloting the longboat towards the intended secret pathway. Fandral had to vacate the boat to distract straggler enemy longboats, leaving the two princes and the Midgardian to their journey on their own once again.

A thrill of excitement shot up Loki's spine now that he was allowed to show off his talents. Traveling through Yggdrasil's paths had been a joy of his that he shared with no one, a joy he also hadn't experienced in a few years. Loki was quite keen on enjoying it to the fullest.

As they drew closer to the rocky face of a particular mountain, Thor panicked, "Are you mad?"

"Possibly."

Loki increased the speed, and once inside the cave did so even further. He could not contain a gleeful "Ta-da~" when their longboat breached the pathway to bring them at once to Svartalfheim. Now it was simply a waiting game.

While they were at a lull in action, Loki took his time observing Thor and his Jane. She was handled with a delicate care that he'd never seen his brother before use, and not simply because of her mortality. Thor truly loved her.

Loki sighed and turned his focus towards the relic that Jane possessed. "What I could do with the power that flows through those veins."

Thor seemed skeptical of the Trickster's ability to contain the Aether, much less wield it; that to which the latter countered by remarking upon the mortal's fortitude of containing it thus far.

"She's stronger in ways you'd never even know," Thor defended

For once Loki had to agree. Darcy had proven to him time and again that she was more than the constitution of her mortal frame. She sassed, defied, and challenged him in ways he thought not possible of such a lowly being. But that did not delude him from reality. Humans lived fleeting lives. Jane was going to die.

Darcy was going to die.

Loki urged Thor to do what he'd surely never be allowed to tell his Darcy, "Say goodbye."

"Not this day."

"This day, the next, a hundred years, it's nothing. It's a heartbeat. You'll never be ready. The only woman whose love you've prizéd will be snatched from you."

For once he wasn't offering his brother this advice out of spite, but to spare him the pain. Last night Loki learned that not even the Aesir were guaranteed reprieve from death. Their mother was gone in the blink of an eye, so what hope was there for Thor to enjoy a short courtship with Jane? The Thunderer should just cut things off here.

And still you continued contact with Darcy once you located her again, his thoughts seemed to take on the quality of his mother's voice, you valued her companionship, did you not?

That's a mistake I won't be making again, this time thankfully his thoughts manifested in the form of
his own voice.

*Truly?*

That last thought was a mysterious and mildly frightening mixture of his mother's voice and his own. Loki was grateful to Thor for breaking him out of his thoughts.

"And will that satisfy you?"

"Satisfaction is not in my nature." And it wasn't, nor would it likely ever be.

"Surrender's not in mine."

Loki once again attempted to chastise his brother's foolish stubbornness, but Thor cut him off. In a flash their conversation switched from their opinions on human/Aesir love to a subject still fresh and more closer to home.

"You think you alone were loved of mother?" Thor stood to meet him eye to eye, "You had her tricks, but I had her trust."

"Trust?" Loki's mood darkened considerably, "Was that her last expression? Trust? When you let her die?"

Thor's voice rose in challenge, "What help were you in your cell?"

"Who put me there?!"

Thor shoved him and backward against the stern of the boat, telling him just who that was. Loki was certain he was about to be struck quite painfully, something he probably deserved. His brother was right after all. Frigga's death was on his shoulders most of all, but he was too much of a coward to speak of such blame. It was always easier, much less painful to lie and deflect blame. In the end Thor relented and released him.

Thor confessed his wish to trust him, no longer expressing that tone of hopefulness the Trickster had grown accustomed to during their last battles. No, there was only tinge of a sorrow as though he too had died. Perhaps a part of him had.

Loki straightened himself and spoke quietly, but with conviction, "Trust my rage."

Finally Malekith's mother ship convened with them on Svartalfheim. Loki landed the longboat and the brothers and their mortal charge took the high ground to scout their enemies and ready themselves for battle.

The plan was simple but dramatic. Jane was left out of the full details so that when Loki stabbed and thrust Thor down the cliff, her reaction to his "betrayal" was real. Malekith watched on with his men and when Loki offered Jane to him, he leant his ear to the Kursed. The beast growled something in their native tongue. Malekith stalked towards Thor forcing him to watch as he started draw the Aether out of Jane. This time Loki knew for certain his baited hook had been bitten, and he was planning to fry the whole lot of them.

Before Malekith could draw the Aether into himself, Loki quickly withdrew his illusion from Thor so he could again call Mjolnir. Shielding Jane was his next task allowing Thor to conjure his lightning and blast the Dark Elven relic to smithereens.

Everything had gone according to plan until the broken shards of the Aether started to shimmer and
rise, returning to their liquefied state. Malekith stepped forward, accepting the ancient power into his body. With the Aether residing in its intended host, the Dark Elves no longer believed it necessary to remain and headed for their ship.

Thor swiftly pursued them, taking down any of Malekith's men that got in his way. The Kursed tossed a sort of grenade over his shoulder, his aim more towards Loki and Jane than Thor.

No!

In the split second it took for Loki react, his mind was consumed with thoughts of Thor's expression should she die here today. And who else would take care of Darcy for him as well as this woman? He shoved Jane clear of the weapon's radius.

The grenade didn't explode, but imploded into a vacuum, sucking Loki straight up in line of its gaping maw. He looked down and saw that Jane was below him and safe and a slight sense of relief over came him.

He sucked in a calming breath to steel himself. Your friend is safe now. Goodbye, little one.

His brother hit him like a missile, tackling him around the middle to bring him out of harm's way, knocking the air right back out of his lungs. They quickly recovered their footing and the eldest went back on the attack.

Thor flew off to take out Malekith but was headed off by the Kursed, who stayed behind to finish the job while Malekith and a handful of his men retreated into their ship. They seemed quite content to sacrifice a bulk of their force to destroy their opposition.

Loki peered around him, finding himself surrounded by the remaining force of Dark Elves. Until he vanquished them all he could not aid Thor, but he kept his patience and waited for them to initiate the fight. When the first advanced on him offensively, he retaliated by redirecting the attack. With his opponent off balance, slicing open the neck was child's play. The others swooped in on him as one, and he evaded and stabbed them one by one with the precision of a serpentine strike.

After the last fell victim to his blade, Loki looked over the battlefield to see how his brother fared. His earlier assumption was proven correct as he witnessed Thor being pummeled by the Kursed. With silent but hasty steps, Loki took up an Elven sword and sunk hilt deep into the beast's back; surely piercing his heart.

The shock of what little affect it did left Loki off guard and wide open. Before he knew how to react, he was impaled chest to chest with his enemy. The Kursed glared mercilessly at him, holding him in place for several moments so he suffered heightened agony before he was tossed to the ground. Fortunately the extra time spent upon the blade afforded Loki one last trick.

"See you in Hel, monster."

The grenade imploded in furiously unstable colors mirroring that of fire. The Kursed's body was compacted, rearranged so that it reached the most optimal size, then was swallowed up by a pinprick of light. The sight was very pleasing, especially the surprised and horrified screams. Loki almost felt invigorated until a renewed wave of pain swept over him.

I was wrong about the Other's torture. This is...I never expected this much...this much pain...

His brother was at his side instantly, cradling his body even as he weakly chided.

"I know...I'm a fool, I'm a fool," he winced, feeling his strength waning enough for his Jotun form to
peek through the instinctual glamor of his magic.

"Stay with me, okay?"

_Thor, ever-loyal Thor. Could he still truly wish for me to be by his side?_

Knowing his time was quickening towards the end, the apology Loki wanted to say to his mother surfaced frantically from his lips.

Thor shushed him then nodded gravely, seemingly coming to terms that he was about to lose another member of his family.

"It's all right. I'll tell father what you did here today."

With the remainder of his strength Loki shook his head minutely, finding his neck too stiff to make the motion more distinguished. "I didn't do it for him."

He could only hope that Frigga too heard his confessions, wherever she was.

At last the pain subsided, leaving his body heavy yet relaxed within a shroud of calm where stillness accepted him.

She and the intern had managed to free Erik from the funny farm, but things only managed to get worse from there. Like _The Birds_ worse. And Jane still was on Asgard.

"The better be fixing what's wrong with Jane," Darcy muttered to herself while clacking away at the MacBook, "because if they just went up in the clouds to bump uglies then I'm gonna be pissed…"

No sooner had she said that, Jane and Thor came waltzing through the door. Darcy jumped up, torn between bear-hugging her boss and interrogating her.

She chose the latter, "You can't just leave like that! The whole world is going crazy. The stuff we've seen is spreading. Did you go to a party?"

Jane ignored her to hug Erik and talk science, even though her friend was once again pantless. Darcy assumed it could have been worse. Thor asked Erik how he was, considering the last time the two of them had a run in Loki had been traipsing around doing who knows what with Erik's head.

_Talk about skull-fuckery._

Erik laughed, but then his tone became a bit tense, "You're brother's not coming, his he?"

"Loki is dead."

Darcy barely caught Thor's answer from her side of the room, but she did. All the air seemed to get sucked right out of the room and her hands started shaking.

"Oh, thank god!" Erik sounded relieved before quickly back-pedaling, "I…I meant, I'm so sorry."

She could somewhat sympathize with Erik's relief, yet it stung to hear him talk about Loki in the manner he did; he didn't know the God of Mischief like she did. Clasping her hands together to keep them from trembling, Darcy kept herself turned away from the others until she took a good deep breath.

_Alright Darcy you can do this. Everything's gonna be okay…_
"Okay, so what's the plan?" she asked without tremor.

And so the all-important sciencey pow-wow commenced.

Darcy hoped that sleep would come to her a little more smoothly considering how she had taken events earlier. Instead she found herself staring blurrily up at the ceiling in the dimness of her borrowed room, thoughts drifting back and forth over a particular god and what she would face tomorrow.

*If Loki didn't make it, what the hell am I supposed to do? I am so toast…*

A soft knock at her door brought her out of her head. "Yeah?" she called. The door opened and she could just barely make out a willowy silhouette between the gap of the doorway. She sat up to switch the lamp on and retrieve her glasses. "Jane?"

"Darcy, are you okay?" her boss asked quietly, poking her head further into the room.

"Me? Oh, yeah. I'm pretty peachy," her air of nonchalance began to fade, "W-What…What was he like this time?"

Jane stepped in, closed the door behind her, and padded over to her bed. The astrophysicist stood there hesitantly for a few moments then slowly sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Well…" she began then paused contemplatively, "he was a real jerk when I first met him. I slapped him…"

"No…"

"Yep," Jane had the decency to bite her lip and look a little guilty, "And he kept on being a jerk until I kind of passed out on the way to Svartalfheim, so I don't know what happened in between. But when Malekith showed up, Loki and Thor worked together quite well. He…he kind of saved us."

Darcy snapped up straighter in her bed, her ears perked. "What?" Usually she was the one that couldn't stop talking, but here she was speaking single words to keep a conversation going.

Jane nodded, "When the Aether was pulled from me and Thor tried to destroy it, he bodily shielded me from the blast. Then he saved me from being pulled into a black hole grenade. And in the end, he gave his life to take down the creature trying to kill Thor."

"Wow."

"Yeah, surprising isn't it?"

It wasn't his actions that were so surprising to Darcy that moment, but she just nodded anyway as her mind once again went far a field.

"You okay?" Jane asked, hand on her shoulder.

Darcy shook herself from her thoughts, "Yeah, I'll be fine," she patted Jane's hand, "we should get some rest. Big day tomorrow, saving the world and all."

"Not the world, Darcy, the Universe," her boss corrected with a nervous grin, "so let's make a good impression."

"Heh, yeah and get on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s radar even further?" her mouth curved into a grin of her own, "Maybe we'll be enlisted by the Avengers. I hear Captain America is a dish~"
They shared a laugh before it got a little awkwardly quiet. Darcy didn't know what to do so she hugged Jane tightly.

"Darcy?"

"Shh…just accept my affection."

*I need this, because I may never get another chance again after tomorrow. I'll never have the chance to let Loki know how much he meant to me,* she thought a bit bitterly. Jane was one of the last people to see him alive and she didn't even like him. It wasn't fair…

She didn't blame Jane though. She blamed life and its general way of messing with people.

Slowly Jane accepted the embrace, then she returned it with a fierce grip of her own. They held each other like that for a while then parted, exchanging goodnights before Jane left the room.

Darcy flicked off her lamp, but kept her glasses on as she got out of bed and made her way to her window. She parted the curtains and looked up at the night sky, a few of the brightest stars catching her eye. Religion was always something of a mystery to her, even after the Norse God of Thunder dropped literally from the sky. She really didn't put much stock in it, but spirituality was another thing entirely.

*Loki said I had…astral projected…*

That had something to do with the spirit, right? So that surely meant that his spirit was out there somewhere beyond the death of his body.

*Oh what the hell…*

"I admit it, you're a bit of a Nostradamus when it came to knowing your time was coming up," she spoke to the stars, her hand fidgeting with the hem of her shirt at first until she got more comfortable with the idea of talking to the dead, "but you were wrong about something. You were able to change, even if just a little. But don't think I'm claiming that I was the person behind it. You did all that yourself and I'm proud of you."

She looked down as her fidgeting returned. "I'm sorry for turning you away how I did. Those weren't exactly nice parting words…and I never knew they'd be my last words to you. I wish I could have at least said goodbye or something," she then laughed nervously, "I might be joining you tomorrow if shit really hits the fan. But I'm not ready to die yet, so wherever that crazy spirit of yours is…I just wanted to ask if you'd give us some strength or just watch over us…however that sort of thing works, please…we could really use it. I could really use it."

Whether the fabled God of Mischief received her words or she just effectively spoke the craziest monologue of her life, Darcy felt better in just having said them. She was more at peace with herself and current role in the grand scheme of things.

*Whoever said venting doesn't work is a complete a chode,* were her last thoughts as her eyes fluttered in surrender to sleep.

The pain had long ago since drained from him as he drifted along a current where thought and physical sense no longer existed. He couldn't begin to explain the pleasant sensation washing over him continuously, sweeping him gently along with the current. He couldn't and he didn't want to bother to try.
All he knew what this was the most peaceful place he'd ever had the chance of visiting and that was enough for him.

Just as he was enjoying weightless journey to everywhere and nowhere, he halted so abruptly within the soothing current that it jarred his lower jaw against his upper teeth.

*Teeth...what are teeth? I don't have teeth here, nor have I need of them.*

The longer he remained static as the current passed on around him, the more he could feel the prickling numbness fighting against the cold.

*When did it get so cold?*

The prickling began all over, but gradually thinned out to his limbs along with the chill that racked his bones. That's when he became aware of the dull throbbing in his chest and the stitching sensation that seemed to sharpen the throbbing the more it went on.

*No. This isn't...This wasn't happening before. Why am I feeling? Why am I thinking? What's going on?*

The numbness receded further dwindling down to his fingers and toes. When the warmth slowly replaced the cold, it crashed him against some rocks and emblazoned the throbbing into a furious white-hot stab of pain.

A gasp was smacked out of him and he almost sat up from the dusty ground beneath him, had the agony of his wound not pushed him right back down. Eyes green and swift opened wide in their sockets to dart about and take in his surroundings.

"Impossible," he managed to choke out passed the harsh panting of his breaths.

Loki was back on the Svartalfheim.

The sense of being alone awhile seeped into his senses and he was able to see a sandstorm was raging in the distance when he turned his head to the side. His neck was considerably less stiff, but he still felt like death warmed over.

"H-How?"

He got his answer as mobility returned and he was able to duck his chin against his chest to examine himself. The sight that met him quickened the beat of his heart until it thundered anxiously within the cage of his ribs. Hovering just over his wounded torso was diaphanous green mass of what he could only describe to be his magical energy; only it was in its purest state and outside of his body. It undulated, never keeping the same shape twice except for a single thin tendril stretching from the edge of the mass. Never before had he seen his magic behave this way.

The god winced as the sharp, pointed end of the tendril disappeared quickly under the skin near his wound, only to come reappear on the other side of the incision. It crossed tightly over the slash, then repeated the earlier actions. The mass of magic was essentially stitching him shut and he really wanted it to stop for it annoyed him. That and he wished immensely to be returned to the tranquil flowing current of that place where nothing no longer mattered.

He attempted to sit up again but the pain continued to prevent such movement.

"Damnit..." he muttered as his thumped back and closed his eyes in defeat, begrudgingly allowing his traitorous magic to heal him.
A familiar caress of a hand pushed an unruly lock of hair behind his ear.

"Loki."

His body jerked reflexively, bringing his startled gaze to that of his mother's. Frigga was kneeling beside him, cradling his cheek with one hand while the other smoothed itself over his hair as she always had.

"M-Mother," he stammered, his brow knitting together, "I-I don't…I don't understand."

Why was she helping him after what he did?

She smiled down at him in that knowing way of hers and rubbed a smudge of dirt from his face with the sleeve of her gown.

"You are my son, Loki. And you still have so much purpose left in you."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if spending more time than usual on the lines from the movie annoyed anyone, but I really wanted to dissect those lines and how they might fit into this fic. My take on why Loki said this and said that. The covering of the movies in this fic are officially over and now the real story can begin.
It Comes Back to You

Chapter Notes

Today is both Tom Hiddleston's birthday and the release date of Crimson Peak (I've already pre-ordered my copy!), so I thought it was a good time to give you all an update. There are mentions of the ending segments of Thor 2, but otherwise this is where the fic starts to break away from the movies. This chapter is name after the song by Imagine Dragons (yet again). Anyways, thank you all for the comments, kudos, and bookmarks, and happy early Valentine's Day~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You really don't have to go, Darcy."

_Damnit, I thought he was asleep._

Darcy slapped Ian's hand away from her waist and slipped into her underwear, then went rooting around his messy room for her skirt and top. Oddly enough her bra and panties were always easiest to find after sex. It was the rest of her clothes that tended to land in the most random of places.

"I _really_ do," she found her skirt underneath the bed, "Jane's got these new readings and that means more numbers for me to log. I hadn't even meant to sleep over," it was a white lie, but he didn't need to know that.

Ian looked like a rain soaked kitten that had been kicked aside, making her feel immensely bad. "I thought she was occupied?" and by that he meant occupied by a 6'3 alien beefcake.

_Ugh, he's losing his gullible charm._

"You don't know her like I know her. Thor's her second love, behind science. Now where is my damn shirt?" he blinked owlishly before pointing upward. Darcy followed it, discovering her Creedence Clearwater Revival tee hanging from the ceiling fan. "Well that's a new one."

"At least stay for breakfast?"

She freed her beloved shirt and pulled it over her head "Can't. I was supposed to be logging in the data last night, but then you came over all distracting-like and pulled me from my work."

"You came to me, Darcy," he clarified as he stepped into his boxers.

"No, you came to me…in my thoughts and everything and distracted me. It's all your fault."

She briskly walked to the living room where she had deposited her hat and coat on the reclining chair the moment she walked into Ian's flat last night. He followed her, but didn't bother getting completely dressed.

_Oh yes, tell him it was him that distracted you, that'll keep from leading him on. Weren't you supposed to be ending it with him already?_

_What am I supposed to say? I can't exactly tell him the truth._
Because the truth hurts?

Ugh, shut up.

He stopped her before she could step out the door, taking her chin in the grip of his thumb and forefinger so he could gently coerce her to look up into his face. "Are you okay?" he asked.

For a fraction of a second she wasn't looking up at Ian, instead it was Loki towering over her as he always had on every occasion he visited her. Both men were so close to the same height it was uncanny, yet their personalities screamed of divergence so great that an ocean could have separated them. No not an ocean, but space and time itself.

"Darcy, what's wrong?" Both of his hands were cradling her face now.

Something's happening. Gotta get outta here.

"I need some space...we need some space. I need to think and you probably should too," removing his hands from her face, she smiled as apologetically as she could while keeping her voice firm, "I'll give you a call."

Ian opened his mouth to say something, but she cut him off by slipping away from him and out the door, which she may or may not have slammed on his face. She felt bad as she hastily escaped the apartment building and hailed a cab, but it was for the best that she put her foot down on this relationship now.

His heroics during the Dark Elf invasion had impressed her like no other man had ever done, not even Loki could touch him in that moment. And in that moment she loved him, or at least she thought she did. Once she got close to him however, and old habit of hers kicked in.

Ian was surprisingly good in the sack and shared her penchant for geeking out over pop culture references. Even though he sometimes went into excruciating detail – much like Jane – when explaining his college biology courses with her, she found that it greatly interested her, his passion for his studies.

Then there was the time she shared her interest in politics, which led to her discussing American politics. He listened to her intently, a sponge soaking up every word she had to say. His unwavering fascination in her chosen field of study matched what she felt when he spoke about his.

She should have been elated with their shared enthusiasms, but it only started to make her feel even more doubt about their relationship.

Take away the fact that he was a little clingy and tended to talk too much science-speak about the role of the optic vesicle in embryonic lens development of a frog; he was the type of guy that she would take home to her mother. The type that would treat her right and outside of a few disagreements, would give her a nice, uncomplicated life.

And that's where the paradox laid, the biggest issue Darcy had with their relationship and any other resembling relationship that came before. Ian was the "perfect guy", and it scared the hell out of her.

His will to make her happy was so strong that whenever she told him to jump, he asked how high and for how long. While she found that quality about him beneficial to her in countless ways, she really longed for the day he grew a backbone and told her to lay off once in awhile.

But she swiftly learned that this was simply Ian's nature and it might never change, and she'd be a horrible person for making him change simply to suit her needs.
She might have been able to put up with his lack of backbone, his clinginess, and his overly detailed discussions of homologous chromosomes if he had more of an edge to him, something that made him as imperfect as she was.

Ian loved her in spite of her flaws – and she was full of them – but she couldn't bring herself to love him for being almost flawless.

She had to let him go and fast.

For two weeks she had been actively friend zoning him, but all that went down the drain when she got distracted the other night.

It started out as one of the run of the mill dreams that made little sense at all then she thought she had awakened to the sound of her French casement windows swinging opening. Her head turned to the side to see a pair of leather boots stepping down from the windowsill and into her room.

She sat up quickly, hand reaching for her taser while her eyes took in the entirety of her windows. They were closed and there was no one at there, and how could there be? Her room was on the second level, unless someone got a ladder.

Slowly her hyper aware brain calmed down and she let go of her taser when she realized it was only a dream. She then tried to relax back to sleep, but a little niggling detail of her dream wouldn't let her mind rest.

The boots in her dream were very familiar, and yet she couldn't say she had seen them anywhere on anyone. They were just familiar and that was all there was to it. Most might forget it at that, but Darcy’s wakeful mind was not having it. She had to know what was so familiar about those boots.

The night flew by before it hit her. It wasn't the boots that were familiar, but who they belonged to, the presence that filled them and filled the room the moment they stepped into her room.

A hiccup escaped her so suddenly she jumped and wiped furiously at the stinging forming at the corners of her eyes, holding them at bay.

_ Ugh Loki...Why now? I was doing so good! _

And she had been. Though Darcy felt the pain from the god occupying her mind fleetingly, she had not shed a single tear over him since learning of his death.

Jane, Thor, and Ian for the most part had kept her from straying too deeply into her thoughts. Well at least before Jane and Thor had retreated to their little love nest from which they rarely left, but she didn't blame them. They needed their alone time after years apart.

Darcy thought her absence of tears meant she had become tougher, but as she fought the tears in her bed she wondered if she had just been fooling herself all along. She was about to give up and let herself cry when something Loki had said before surfaced in her mind.

"_Just what are you?_"

In the past, any time she had any resemblance of a dream or impression concerning Loki it was somehow connected to him in reality. He was dead though, which surely meant her dream of him was just that, a dream. A shard of her subconscious was clearly clinging to the memory of him.

Or could it be something of a sign from whatever beyond his soul now resided in?
She did kind of – and she was using this word loosely – pray to him, and the Dark Elves were beaten. Maybe he was just sending some confirmation that he had heard and had been looking out for them.

Once again Darcy tried to let sleeping dogs lie and get some more sleep of her own, but by now she was wide awake thanks to ponderings of a certain God of Mischief. So she whipped out her laptop and started up a Google search.

*You wanted to know what I am, so I'm going to find out.*

She looked up everything she could pertaining to her "gift" of perceiving Loki's presence, seeing him in the void, experiencing some of the terrible things he went through as if it were done to her, the visions of him attacking New York.

Everything the search seemed to bring up pointed towards a medium or an empath. While those seemed the most logical answers, Darcy couldn't help but feel they weren't quite on point.

If she were a medium she'd be able to feel the presence of a lot more than just Loki, and the same went for being an empath. She'd be able to experience the emotional trauma of other living people, not just Loki.

Darcy scoured over the top four paranormal websites, but none of them answered anything to her satisfaction, leaving the identity of her Loki-sense a mystery.

Being that she was still wide-awake, she found a handy site containing most of the Prose Edda in hopes of sifting past the myth and finding the grains of truth about the god in question. It took the rest of the night and into the next day for her to finish all of the myths of the Norsemen.

Some myths she found intriguing, others had her laughing, and the majority of them made her eyebrow feel like it was permanently frozen in the "What the fuck?" position.

Loki had never gone into any great detail about his past, which made picking the reality behind the myths literally impossible. All Darcy was quite sure of was that he couldn't have physically birthed an eight-legged horse or have fathered a giant wolf or serpent.

In later myths, the Norsemen seemed to tack an early Lucifer role onto Loki – Christians hoping to convert the pagans clearly latched onto him among other ancient prototypes to Satan when forming their religion. The Vikings told stories of Loki giving life to monsters to prove he was a being of trouble and evil.

*It couldn't be that cut and dry though. Nothing's ever black and white.*

Darcie considered the true Loki's behavior towards her. Despite his psychotic episode on Earth a year ago and the spat they had at the tail end of their last conversation, he had been genteel and protective towards her. His actions and his opinion of those actions during his war were wrong, but he had done it to protect her and Earth. If he cared only for her safety then he could have whisked her away and laid waste to everything.

"*With me as king I aimed to put man on the right path...*"

His views were skewed, but she could hear truth behind his words as she recalled how he said them with passion and intent.

*Loki's no angel, but he's not the devil either.*
So why did the Vikings think so lowly of him that he was one of the only gods to have never be worshipped or have a sacred shrine built to celebrate him?

Darcy continued analyzing his personality in hopes of catching a greater glimpse into what was real, to separate the man from the god. This went on for hours until she realized she hadn't ceased thinking about him and had barely left her room at all that day.

The next thing she knew she was jogging over to Ian's flat where she quite literally threw herself at him.

In hindsight it hadn't been the wisest of distractions, and now her mind was back where it had started. The haze of her thoughts parted just enough for her to pay the taxi once it stopped in front of Jane's apartment building. Her mind clouded over again on her journey inside the building and over Jane's front door.

A jolting tingle shot up Darcy's spine just as her hand hovered over the doorknob, and she stood there frozen for a long time.

Grief, exhilaration, fury, relief, resentment, contentment, and a myriad of other emotions welled up inside of her until she thought she would explode if she didn't open the damn door.

She somehow switched off her feelings long enough to regain movement and threw open the front door. The inside of the flat was quiet and seemed deserted of other occupants, but she wasn't about to go opening Jane's bedroom to see if she would be alone or not.

Darcy squared her shoulders, shut the front door, and powerwalked towards her room, her senses, whatever they were called or came from, tingling ever fiercer the closer she got.

No one greeted her when she came in, and when she came to Jane's room she quickly got up the courage to press an ear to the door. Only the deafly ringing of too much silence met her ears. She pressed on.

Now that only a vertical slab of wood stood between her and answers, did she feel the sense of trepidation return to her. Just how big was the can of worms on the other side of the door and did she want to even deal with it?

Brief thoughts of running far away, possibly returning to America, to Santa Rosa where things were less complicated swam laps around her head. Yet as complicated as the friendship was, no matter how different he was, he had magnetized her. And she wasn't sure she would ever be able to stay away from him.

Nodding with finality to herself, she pursed her lips, gripped the doorknob and twisted it. The door opened easily, not with the pulling supernatural force that she expected it to. In fact nothing inside her room seemed out of the ordinary.

Except for her windows being wide open, giving a free pass for the dreary London air to dance with her drapes.

Darcy senses had reached their peak and she could practically smell the crisp scent of snow in the air.

"Quit hiding Loki, I know you're there."

There was a whisper of a chuckle, "Still sharp I see."

The humming energy of the room crested and where there once appeared to be an empty space in the
window was now occupied by the God of Mischief. The first thing she noticed was his leather boots, then her eyes quickly soaked in the rest. Loki was the picture of perfect health, perched on her windowsill in feline crouch that would have read as predatory had his glimmering emerald eyes and smiling face not been beaming felicity.

He was a playful creature this time, matching the definition to his moniker very much to a T.

Loki unfurled on long leg from under him and stepped passed the threshold, the other one followed suit in an exact mirror reflection. The movement reminded Darcy of a swan gracefully dipping its neck, but she was not completely fooled by the wonder and beauty of his fluidity.

He was a sleek panther playing the role of her stray pussycat find its way home to her.

"Hello, Little One."

"Fandral, how fair our defenses?"

"Nearly fully repaired thanks to the power of the Tesseract, my king," the self-proclaimed dashing warrior said with a pleased grin.

Odin gave a single inclination of his head. "Good. Once they have been restored, the Tesseract is to be returned to the vault."

"All-Father, if I may?" Njord stood from his seat at the council table and Odin motioned for him to speak, "if we used the Tesseract to repair all the damages the Dark Elves caused to the palace and the kingdom, Asgard would be back to perfect condition by the middle of next month."

"We must be extremely prudent with the Tesseract. We still do not fully understand the extent of its powers," Odin countered, coming to his decision swiftly, "no we will only use it for important immediate repairs. Asgard was built without the help of the Tesseract and we will rebuild without it."

The king turned to Volstagg, "How are the displaced citizens fairing? Our rations?"

"They fair well, my lord. The households who were assigned to provide shelter for the displaced families are still giving more than their fair amount of charity. I believe they have really taken your speech very much to heart. As for our rations, we have enough supplies to last a two year siege."

"Good," he then turned his one eye to Tyr, "What is the current number of trained warriors and Einherjar?"

"The number is split right down the middle, Sire, giving Asgard a grand total of 216,000 warriors and Einherjar," the old war general seemed nervous in his seat as he relinquished his answer.

Then we have less than half our optimal number of elite Einherjar since the attack.

"Very well. I want you to take all 108,000 of the warriors and train them to Einherjar rank. Continue to recruit more able-bodied warriors and train them to become Einherjar as well. As for those in already of Einherjar rank, I want their skills honed to an even finer point. We may have a fraction of the warriors we once had, but quality can overcome quantity."

A sudden haze of weariness washed over the All-Father and he stood with the intention to adjourn the meeting.

Sif stood swiftly and bowed her head in great respect. "All-Father, if I may?"
The king stayed Gungnir. "You may, Lady Sif."

The shield maiden eagerly met his gaze, "You seem very weary today. If there is anything I can do to help unburden you, just say the word."

Odin studied her then seemed to come to a conclusion. "Yes, I do happen to have a special task for you," a hint of a smile formed, "the Aether should not be housed so closely to another Infinity Stone, it is unsafe. There is a place far removed from Yggdrasil that I would like for you to take it. The Aether will be safe there. And," he turned briefly to the largest of the Warriors Three, "Volstagg will accompany you as back up."

"Understood," Sif and Volstagg chorused.

"Then you are all dismissed," Odin stamped Gungnir upon the floor and everyone stood and filed out of the council room.

Odin retreated to slowly to his quarters, each foot forward a journey, each ascending step of the staircase a mountain. By the time he reached the golden doors and entered his private quarters, the king's posture had sunk and he had to rely on Gungnir to bring him to the large luxurious chair in front of the grandly carved hearth.

With no one within range, the illusion was dropped, revealing an exhausted and panting Loki, feverish and pale from exertion; and a comatose Odin sleeping upon his glowing royal bed.

Though his body was fully repaired, Loki's magic had little time to recover when he made his way through the portal from Svartalfheim to Asgard.

He had been confident in his abilities when he disguised himself as an Einharjar and ambushed Odin with the intent to kill him. He had been certain of himself when he entranced the old man into a forced Odin-sleep. A dagger was poised above the prone form, ready to deal the killing blow.

Loki was filled with hatred, fueling him towards revenge once again. He wanted to avenge himself for the multitude of lies he was told by the very man at his mercy, for being cast aside, but most of all the Trickster wanted Odin to pay for his blindness to Frigga's peril.

With a roar of rage and anguish he plunged the knife for Odin's remaining eye.

The blade sunk into the golden floor next to Odin's head with a resounding angry thunk.

Loki seethed through his teeth, willing himself to rear his arm back for another fatal attempt, but his hand stayed his dagger. It wasn't a matter that he wouldn't, he simply couldn't. Couldn't because Frigga wouldn't want him to. The realization sent him into another rage, one of self-hatred.

A second, sharper roar escaped him as he threw his offending weapon across the room where it clattered deafeningly.

No he couldn't kill Odin, but he quickly realized that he could not longer let Odin's blindness continue to reign.

Thor was currently out of the picture, so he was the only one viable enough to lead. Finally he was free to fulfill his purpose, the thing he ached for most. But it was a bittersweet victory, for history had taught him that Asgard would likely never respect him as king. He'd have to rule under the guise of another man, and the most optimal guise was that of the man he hated most.

*Ah well, it wouldn't do to pass up this opportunity.*
Loki was quite self-assured when he hid Odin away in the king's chambers under illusion and shifted his form to that of the weathered All-Father. Even when he faced Thor again since his "death," allowing the Odinson to return to his beloved, it did not daunt the intrepid new king. He was pleasantly surprised when Thor praised his deceased brother's insight and graciously declined the offer of the throne.

Even Thor had hope in him when Odin never did.

There was truly nothing that could stand in his way now. All he had to do was maintain his illusions until Odin really did kick the bucket, then perhaps a new generation of Asgardians would be more accepting of Loki as their ruler.

Unfortunately he hadn't counted on how much it would fatigue him so shockingly fast to keep up his dual illusions almost constantly.

When Loki finally caught his breath he wheezed a whisper, "This has worn me thinner than I expected it to…I…I don't know if I can keep this up much longer."

Do I even want to?

Despite his lack of ruling experience, Asgard was quickly on the mend and everyone appeared to be content with his efforts. Knowing that he had accomplished all of this without one single spiteful thought or action and that his people were flourishing in the face of adversity, filled him with something he never felt before on this scale: a strong sense of pride and satisfaction.

Nevertheless, he didn't feel complete.

A gaping hole continued to eat away at him, making him feel uneasy and conflicted. While Loki loved fulfilling his new duties as king, at the same time he wasn't exactly happy. He was utterly as alone as he was when he was imprisoned with no one to confide in. As much as he valued keeping his secrets to himself, there was also the growing need to be himself to someone, even if it were just one person.

There was not one soul left that he trusted to reveal himself to on Asgard.

Loki let out a shuddering breath and manually stoked the hearth to a gentle blaze. His magic was at an all time premium and he couldn't waste it on such menial tasks as he once had the freedom to do.

Being king is weakening me. If Asgard were attacked now not only would my secret be out, but I would not be able to defend her. I'm becoming a liability…

Loki tossed a long, suffering look over his shoulder at the peaceful form of the slumbering All-Father.

Getting back to his feet was a chore in and of itself; in spite of that, Loki gingerly stepped over to the bedside and rested Gungnir against the wall where Odin could easily find it when he awoke.

He stared down at the man he once called father, his gaze piercing even though the latter was for all intents and purposes dead to the world.

"I've started Asgard back onto the road to recovery, all on my own. You never thought I was capable of it, you never believed in me. Frigga, even to her dying breath knew I could be worthy. She always had faith in me. Hel even Thor's faith in me returned, yet you tossed your faith away so callously. Well old man, I've proved you wrong," he paused to catch his breath and moved to his mother's potion table, "as far as I'm concerned I've paid my debt to Asgard, so don't cause a blunder of my
good work."

Loki rummaged through his mother's potions, picking up a vile that was labeled with the Uruz rune. He tossed back the bitter concoction with a grimace, but silently rejoiced the immediate boost in strength. When his green eyes spied an Othala potion he placed it in a leather pouch and tucked it inside his interdimensional pocket.

With his vitality returning he glanced back and Odin, "My life was spared from the brink of death and Frigga told me I still have a purpose, perhaps more than one. I'm not going to let the opportunity I was given pass me by. It's time to find my own path. One far removed from you, old man."

Vestigial though his magic was, Loki had just enough left to teleport to the palace aviary to secure Canute, and then to transport them to the mouth of the portal to Svartalfheim.

"I hope you're still a sharp hunter Canute," he murmured to his hooded falcon while checking the amount of daggers strapped to his person, he counted twelve.

Loki regarded the kingdom of Asgard only last time before cradling Canute securely in his arms and taking an undaunted dive into the portal.

The rocks within inside rushed deafeningly by, some by missing him only by a hair. Canute's talons were digging into the skin of his torso where he was held, but Loki ignored the stings and further pressed his arms and legs closer so he better resembled a missile.

His magic hummed, searching for the rift where the boundary between the realms met. A bright white light engulfed him and he began to spiral viciously in the vacuum. His magic matched frequency with that of the portal and he began to descend in a more controlled spin.

Air rushed around them more freely when he rocketed out of the portal. Loki reached down and removed Canute's hood and released the falcon into the somber sky of Svartalfheim. Now that he no longer needed to protect his pet, Loki was able to change position mid-air. He spread his limbs out, creating as much of a drag as possible and slowing his descent.

As he fell, the long craggy edges of skeletal mountains rose up to meet him. Each time he came close to one, he grabbed at the edges.

His hands broke right through the rock, but it had the desired effect in slowing him down. By the time he reached the lower mountain range, he was able to land himself without breaking the delicate rock under his feet.

A whistle was tossed to the air and Canute swooped in to land on his outstretched arm, talons careful to grasp the metal vambrace instead of flesh this time around. Two pairs of eyes hungrily scanned the savage landscape below.

There seemed to be little more than dust and jagged stone.

Even here, there must be some source of nourishment...

After a few minutes Canute lunged forward on Loki's wrist and the Trickster was forced to grab the falcon's jesses before his pet took flight. He wanted to see their quarry before he sent Canute after it.

It was between two odd dead trees that he spotted movement. He narrowed his eyes in on the furry round, big-eared body of an alphirri.

"Not bad, Canute, but still a light meal."
Alphiiri were as defenseless as Midgardian mice, but bigger and more chimeric. They had elongated snouts for searching and rooting out insects, and a fat fuzzy little bodies with stubby legs, which barely enabled them to walk much less run. Making up for its shortcomings were ears that were twice the size than the body and shaped like membranous wings. Not only did they have very acute hearing, but also they could fly away from predators on their wings-like ears.

Unfortunately for the alphiiri, Loki had a winged companion whom could hit 200 miles per hour in under six seconds.

He launched Canute off his arm with a sharp whistle and watched as the falcon sliced through the air towards their game. The poor creature did not even get a chance to realize it was in danger.

At the foot of the mountains Loki made camp and tethered Canute's jesses. There he started a fire and began plucking fur and pulling entrails from the alphiiri. The other organs were taken out and eaten raw – the lungs given to Canute as a special treat. Loki roasted the remaining flesh then devoured everything, from the black rodent eyes to the marrow inside the tiny bones; whatever wouldn't make him sick or infect him with parasites was eaten.

And still it was barely an appetizer. His stomach and his dwindling magic were screaming out for more.

For three days Loki did nothing but hunt and eat on Svartalfheim. To gain rest without ignoring his voracious appetite, he switched off first the right hemisphere of his brain then the left, and alternated between the two. He and Canute ate more alphiiri as well as dozens of the spider-like kahamahi.

At the end of the third day, Loki retrieved the vial of Othala from his special pocket and downed it. Like with the extra strength he received from the Uruz potion, his magic was given a boost from the Othala potion.

With every morsel of protein he consumed, his body and magic grew stronger. Still he was only about half capacity without the potion, but with the extra boost, his levels were bursting at the seams.

At the "dawn" of the fourth day, Loki and Canute journeyed to a second portal and crossed over to the realm of Alfheim.

There he disguised himself as a Vanir vagabond whom had little, but was willing to resolve any problems for the simple price of food and a roof over his head. In this persona Loki hoped to find a purpose that fulfilled him, but was less taxing than impersonating the All-Father.

Unfortunately the Light Elves were too peaceful and self-sufficient to require his aid. Turned out they were far more concerned with his state of being than their own.

Often times they offered him food and shelter free of charge, which he had to graciously decline. He came there to work; he wasn't going to take handouts. He did however linger long enough to study more techniques of magic to add to his repertoire.

Next Loki traveled to in the form of a Light Elf to Nidavellir, the realm of the dwarves, where he hoped his magic would be welcomed. Fortunately for him, unlike the elves, the dwarves were stingy with their gold and always expected something in return for a favor.

For the first few weeks in the cavernous Nidavellir, Loki spent his time working around each and every colony he could find. The work was hard and menial, but he had to start somewhere to earn the trust of the covetous and suspicious dwarves.

Finally he came to the colony of Adalsteinn and after some time decided to settle there within the
dwelling of the large Hjalmar family.

At first he was charged with helping about the household, as he was not yet trusted to work in the mines. He was to keep things tidy, cook, and help keep an eye on the seemingly boundless number of Hjalmar children.

Being that he had been raised as a prince of Asgard, he knew what the tasks generally, but usually had them performed for him by handmaids. So often or not he let his magic do the work for him.

His hosts didn't like that at all and Loki quickly learned that dwarves were cautious of any magic that wasn't their own. Ingegerd, the matriarch of the family, begrudgingly took him aside to teach him the finer points of keeping house.

They both bickered back and forth at each other – Loki about how his magic was perfectly safe and more efficient, and Ingegerd about how elves needed to learn the quality of hard work – but he finally learned how to season food and fold clothes properly.

Ingegerd seemed pleased, until she surveyed his work of changing diapers of her youngest child.

"I see that look in your eyes. Don't you dare use your magic!" she scolded.

"You can't possibly expect my hands to come anywhere close to that!" Loki barked back with a gesture towards the changing table where little Bo lay sucking his fist into his mouth, uncaring of the mess he had created.

The female dwarf thrust her hands to her hips, "A fine father you'll make someday then…if you're really that afraid of getting dirty then you don't deserve a child."

Loki reddened with both embarrassment and anger. He grumbled, but found himself setting to work manually cleaning up the cooing baby before replacing the soiled cloth diaper with a fresh one.

"Who said I wanted a child?" he retorted as he gingerly gathered Bo up to present to his mother, "They're messy and cry at every odd hour they can think of."

"You want one. Most every man does," she pushed Loki's hands back so that he was cradling Bo, "Even when he believes he doesn't." She then exited the nursery to tend to her five older children, leaving Loki alone with the tiny infant.

The Trickster had never held a baby before; his experience was limited to youngsters of five and up, so learning how to handle a baby dwarf was a bit of a learning curve. Though Bo was a healthy 2-month-old, Loki's large hands seemed to further diminish his size, and Loki was never quite sure he was holding him correctly.

The little bundle continued to wriggle around for a more comfortable position. Loki considered putting Bo in his crib, but was caught by big hazel eyes staring unblinkingly up at him. At least the babe had stopped his incessant movement, allowing Loki to actually begin to see the rewards of holding new life in his hands.

"There, see?" he found himself gentling his voice, "It's nice to be quiet and still once in a while, is it not?"

Bo blinked once then let out a loud coo. He reached for Loki's index finger and tried to pull it to him. The god sighed and relaxed his finger, allowing Bo to cram as much of it into his mouth as he could. Bo expressed his pleasure by audibly blowing bubbles passed the finger jammed in his mouth.
Loki wanted to be annoyed with the lowly creature for its loathsome behavior, he really did. Instead of annoyance, a warm, gratified feeling blossomed in his chest and proceeded to fly about on wings made of dandelion fluff.

"I wonder…" he murmured then looked about him, then back to the baby resting in the crook of his arm.

Slowly the illusion faded, revealing Loki’s true form.

Bo’s big eyes grew wider and he popped Loki’s finger out of his mouth with a tiny gasp.

Loki became nervous that he had scared Bo, perhaps reverted to his monstrous Jotun form by accident, but when he saw Bo erupt into a fit of giggles before stuffing the curly ends of his inky hair into his mouth, a small smile graced the God of Mischief’s face.

"Never thought having someone chew on my hair would be so…welcomed," Loki mused as he started to unconsciously rock in his seat, "I am Loki, and this shall be our little secret."

Days passed and Loki soon gained camaraderie with everyone in the colony.

He showed the men and the boys the art of falconry, though the dwarves hardly needed the skill living underground as they did. He carved dolls and trinkets out of stone for the girls, and showed the women the medicinal properties of herbs and crystals.

The dwarves in turn taught him how to use a blacksmith’s forge, and then finally allowed him to work in the mines. He learned where to look for certain minerals and how to excavate them from the earth.

Loki was happier in his days living a simpler life with the dwarves than he had been in years, but there was still something bothering him.

He was back to living a lie. It would be a good many years yet before he could reveal himself to the colony without fear of being cast out and reported to Odin. Loki wasn’t sure if he wanted to wait that long, but he was unsure of what to do.

"Why such a long face, Elof?" Gunner, Ingegerd’s husband, asked while addressing him by his Elven alias, "Is something wrong?"

With a sigh Loki stopped tossing his dagger and sheathed it out of sight, "I really like it here Gunnar. I really do—"

"But?" Gunnar prodded as he sat down next to the disguised Trickster.

"But I don't know if this is my intended path. Quite honestly I don't have any idea what it should be."

The dwarf was silent for a while, puffing methodically on his long, elegantly carved pipe. Loki began to wonder if his host’s mind had drifted too far a field, but Gunnar suddenly broke the lull in conversation.

"Go to the Norns, lad. They will return you to your path."

"The Norns?" Loki scoffed, "They tell a man his destiny. I will to forge my own path."

"But you haven't even figured out what that is yet," Gunnar said shrewdly and Loki pursed his lips,
"They can tell a man his destiny, but merely part of it. Whether or not you choose to follow that path or not, as well as what you do once that part of the puzzle has been fulfilled, is entirely up to you."

With that knowledge deeply rooted in his mind, Loki lay awake all night in his makeshift bed. He pondered the Norns and his options.

He could easily stay here forever, but his happiness wouldn't be complete because he would be living another façade, and he was the only one of his kind residing in the underbelly of Nidavellir. That was a sense of loneliness in and of itself. But if he left for the Norns and he didn't agree with what they had to tell him, what else was there for him to do?

*It can't hurt to visit.*

The journey to Well of Urd proved to be more arduous than merely crossing one portal branched across two realms.

Loki had to backtrack to Alfheim – where he decided to release Canute, telling the falcon that it was time to become his own master after his long years of servitude – and take the portal that connected to Vanaheim.

He was careful of his disguise amongst the Vanir, choosing a face and wardrobe that warranted no unwanted attention, for the urgency of the search for him here would be second only to that of Asgard.

Only when he reached the portal to the well did he relax his heightened alert, but he didn't drop his illusionary persona. The portal to the Well of Urd, like the journey, was a long one, nearly as long as riding the Bifrost from Asgard to Niflheim. The portal was full of vivid flashing light, also not unlike the Bifrost, but it lacked the feeling of being launched forcefully. Here his descent was steady and measured.

Dim darkness met him over the threshold, lit only by glowing orbs of various shades of every hue imaginable and then some. The orbs hovered just above his head and thin threads of gently pulsing energy interconnected some of them. There were thousands, perhaps millions of them, stretching as far as the eye could see.

"Ah Loki, so nice of you to finally join us," a woman's voice broke the enthrallment the orbs held over him and he whirled to face her.

There weren't one, but two woman standing there.

One a feeble old crone, stooped over a pile of orbs cradled at the foot of her long red skirt. Unlike the glowing orbs already strung aloft, these orbs were dull and void of any color. The crone prudently picked through the pile before handing a couple of orbs to the second, younger woman.

This one appeared to be of middle age and dressed in a white tunic that made her sun kissed skin and platinum tangled mane of hair appear even brighter. She took the orbs from the crone, held them between her palms and blew over them.

The orbs illuminated to life, one a brilliant amber, the other deep-sea foam blue. The woman produced a string and strung them together before letting them drift up to join the other orbs.

Loki watched the whole silent exchange then looked to the blond he assumed had been the one to address him, "You knew I was coming," it was a statement more than a question.

"Indeed, just now," she smiled, "I am Verdandi, and this is my older sister, Urd."
"I knew he was coming for many millennia..." Urd, the old crone interjected with a sniff.

"Of course," Verdandi agreed jovially despite her sister's uppity demeanor, "that is why our youngest sister, Skuld, was sent to retrieve your fate a while ago. She should be here shortly."

The Trickster watched them continue their work wearily. They continuously placed new orbs into the inkiness above, some linked by ethereal strings, others floated up alone as islands.

Finally he dropped his illusionary disguise, as it was no use hiding from them any longer.

"You won't tell anyone I was here?" he encroached cautiously.

"By Valhalla no!" Urd cried in a shrill, trembling voice, "That would be against the code. This realm exists on neutral ground and all of our counsels are confidential."

With the knowledge in mind, Loki allowed himself to stand straighter, confidence returning to him. "Good to know."

He looked back up to the peculiar orbs and their odd tethers. "Why are some of them connected to one another and while others are solitary?"

Verdandi opened her mouth to supply an answer, but Urd hissed warningly, effectively shutting up the younger woman.

"What keeps you from telling me, old woman?" Loki's brows pinched, his voice darkening in timbre.

"You came here for another reason, Trickster" the crone said firmly, not at all affected by his flash of anger, "as of now the nature of the other souls afloat here are of no concern to you."

Loki felt his magic stir as his anger towards the craggy old Norn increased.

"You came here for us to divine your path," Verdandi interjected soothingly; clearly in an effort calm the volatile god and the tactless Norn before her.

"I don't want my destiny to be written for me, I want to do the writing," Loki clarified concisely, "I simply wish to know a worthy direction for which to start my journey."

"Bah! You think souls are so easily constrained by the your preconceived notions of "destiny"?" Urd retorted, "Destiny is not something set in stone. It is molded in clay and can be washed away with the steady rush of a river to be molded into something new. In other words, destiny has no set direction or outcome. We Norns simply read your souls and advise you on the most likely outcome."

Loki relaxed a little, but kept his gaze steely, "Even so...I only want a starting point, I do not desire to know any outcome. I'll be the one to decide my own fate."

"Hn...so pretentious...to think that you have any control," Urd spat, "You are but an infant in the grand scheme of things. No matter what path you choose, it matters not if you believe it is of your own construction. The result of your life is already written."

Despite his Jotun nature, fire burned in Loki's veins.

Urd reminded him so much of Odin that it was bordering on unhealthy for his sanity to remain in her presence much longer. He was about to bite out a scathing argument before giving the old woman a slow death when a new, grim voice spoke up

"I'm back."
Joining them was a shorter woman – no, a girl – with black hair bobbed into a pixie cut. Like her hair and her personality, she was dressed in a drab gray cloak. In her pale hands she cradled an orb of serpentine green.

"Thank you Skuld, I'll start," Urd forgot all about their bickering and took the orb from the youngest sister, concentrating, "Ah yes here it is…Thor was not the only one with a weapon of birthright. Frigga had one forged for you when you were but a babe."

Loki’s heart thudded painfully in his chest, his anger also deflating.

He swallowed thickly to control the emotions warring inside of him, and yet his voice still faltered, "Mother…she did that?"

The crone nodded, "She wanted you to be on a more equal footing with Thor's greatness. It is a special sword, called Laevateinn, forged in the fires of Muspelheim by the mighty Surtr himself. Like Mjolnir, this sword is a weapon only wielded by those worthy of it, however the only way to prove ones worth to the sword is to simply find it. Meaning if another finds it before you, your birthright to the sword will be forfeited."

"Where can it be found? Tell me," his voice grew stronger, his will dead set to follow this new path, if not for himself, then for Frigga.

Skuld took back the orb. "Only a riddle may be given," she looked up at him through detached eyes, "you must solve it yourself."

"Then tell me this riddle, so that I may solve it."

"As you wish," Skuld nodded grimly, "Laevateinn resides in the heart of the chest, nine times locked. You will need nine keys; the silver key forged to heal, the palladium key forged to promote understanding, the iron key forged to give courage, the plutonium key forged to reform, the gallium key forged to promote truth, the lead key forged from sacrifice, the bismuth key forged to promote love, the copper key forged to promote friendship, and the gold key to promote inner strength. The means for securing Laevateinn lie on Midgard. And heed this most of all, Loki. There is another ancient being that desires its power and should they find it, they will use it for devastating ill. You must find it first or all Hel will break loose."

Loki listened carefully and committed every word to memory.

"So my next destination is Midgard…" he said more so to himself than as an address to the women.

I already have a good idea just where to start my search. This should be easy. I will find Laevateinn first.

He bid the Norns thanks and farewell – mostly towards the two younger sisters –before leaving the Well of Urd.

And I know just who I wish to accompany me on this task.

Darcy watched as Loki sauntered further into her bedroom, his expression of barely restrained enthusiasm still in place.

Suddenly in a fit of anger she whipped out her shiny new S.H.I.E.L.D. issued taser, which was presented to her after surviving the attack of the Dark Elves and participating in saving the universe.
The god before her paused, his excitement faltering as his lips parted in a look of surprise. Darcy waited no longer and pulled the trigger. The thick barbs penetrated his armored chest plate, sending burning jolts of electricity through his body.

Loki hadn't expected the wallop this taser packed and with an undignified cry, fell face first into a convulsing heap on the floor. He tried to overpower the volts with his magic, but this weapon was clearly built specifically to take down beings of his caliber.

_Clever girl,_ he thought.

Over the hum of the electricity flowing uninhibited from the barbs in his chest, over his pitiful screams, he heard her yelling and cursing at him.

"You bastard! I thought you were dead…AGAIN! Next time you think it's sounds like fun to play fucking possum, I'm going to hunt your ass down and kill you myself! HELL, I should kill you right now!"

But the shocks stopped finally, mercifully, and he swore he heard smoke sizzling off his body. In spite of the pain and her harsh words he sat up jauntily on his haunches to face her flushed and furious face.

A ghost of a chuckle rumbled from his throat. "There…is that fire…that I admire so much…"

Darcy dropped her taser, her face falling from anger to something similar to anguish and turmoil.

With a whimper, she tackled him to the floor in a tight embrace, her face plastered to his collarbone as if she feared he would shove her away. Loki held her to him just as fiercely, his hand gripping her hair almost painfully.

Neither god nor mortal paid any mind to any of their aches or pains or the fact that their legs were hopelessly tangled together on the floor. At the moment the only thing that mattered to one was the other.

"You're a horrible friend, ya know that?" she muttered half-heartedlly, her words muffled by his chest plate.

He chuckled again and dislodged the strands of her hair that had managed to find their way inside his mouth, "I know…but I hope to make up for it."

Chapter End Notes

Nothing really to make note of except that simply ask to keep the feedback coming, I want to know what you think!
Thank you so much for all the comments, likes, and bookmarks! Reading all of your encouragement really helps me keep going with this project of mine. Nothing much else to say except enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Darcy shifted so she could look up at him, her God of Mischief. Her voice suddenly became raw with emotion, "I thought you were dead. Again."

She then turned into a tornado of flailing arms and legs, hitting any part of him that she could come into contact with, his chest, his arms, shins, his beautiful face.

This time he didn't hinder her assault merely clutched her to him like a lifeline and rode out her storm.

"Do you know what that does to a person?" she roared brokenly, slugging him in his marble jaw again and again, uncaring of the pain it that bloomed in her knuckles.

"Yes...yes I do, with the exception that a person I loved is never coming back," Loki said and Darcy could hear the tiny fissures in his tone, cracking his otherwise resolute statement.

His thinly masked words of sorrow gave her pause and finally the swell of anger abated. She opened her eyes and caught sight of a momentary fracture in his usual countenance of flippancy. There she saw a glimmer, a peek into his soul.

And there she saw a hint, a secret sadness more deep than any mourning she'd ever witnessed before.

The edges of Darcy's heart ached to see this powerful being, this god, whose spirit was as wild and as free as a wildfire caught on a high wind now reduced to glowing embers, so much had this sadness dampened and numbed him.

It was there for only the briefest of seconds before Loki repaired the chink in his armor, replacing his mask of neutrality.

"Loki," she breathed his name more than said it, "what I said...last time we met...I—"

"Don't..." his voice sliced through her apology before she could get it out, his arms hoarding her ever closer, "Don't ever be sorry for what you said. All right?"

Darcy couldn't speak, her throat blocked with emotion. She could only nod dumbly but there was a burning question on her tongue that was at the moment unable to escape the gate of her lips.

What happened this time?

"Let me explain," Loki said, seemingly reading her mind, probably seeing the question in her eyes.

He sighed and picked himself up off the floor, hauling her up with him as though she weighed
nothing. He released her and stepped back a few paces to sit on the windowsill. "I believe—no I was
dead," he swiftly amended, "and traveling the river of souls to Hel. There is no other explanation for
the things I experienced other than death."

"Wait," Darcy hastily shook her head, a returning sense of loss chasing on the heels of her fleeing
anger fluttered in her chest, "you died. You legit died?"

Oh god!

Her mind was a flopping fish out of water trying and failing miserably to comprehend how to breathe
on land.

He had died.

He had died and only some freak-of-nature event or miracle had brought him back.

He was alive now though, had defied death; but the fact that he had not just almost died, but had been
gone long enough for his soul to vacate his body was almost too much to handle.

Oh god, hold it together, Darcy!

Loki nodded minutely, "I believe I did, for but short time at least, maybe longer. Magic revived me,
healed my fatal wound."

"So you healed yourself?" she asked, her mouth and mind still feeling parched. She was starved for
insight as if starved for oxygen, and she needed to understand how he was truly alive and not some
mean figment of her imagination or she would drown.

"I don't know," he said, his gaze far away, "My mother might have had a hand in it."

Darcy shook her head again and blinked, clearly confused, "But she's dead. She is dead right?" she
immediately winced at her own words, but mentally rejoiced that she was finally starting to get her
focus back.

Whether or not they affected Loki, he gave no indication. "She is dead, but I think…I think her
essence lingered for a little while…I saw her as I lay recovering on Svartalfheim. She said I still…
had a purpose."

Loki's throat slowly bobbed and he looked to the side. Darcy had never seen the god look so
vulnerable. It smacked her hard, and where she would have normally prattled off another question,
she stayed silent and waited for him to decide to continue.

He spoke again, his face still in profile, "I thought that meant me being king of Asgard again. I
returned to the realm eternal to kill Odin," he turned to her again, his tone going bitter with hatred,
"it's what he deserved for not taking more care in protecting his queen. I tried to do it, I almost killed
him, but I could not."

"So what did you do?" she asked tentatively.

"I put him under the influence of a sleeping spell, hid him away, and took on his form and began
work on repairing Asgard after the attack of the Dark Elves. It was…pleasing to help others, to be
needed..." he trailed off.

Darcy could read something in him, in the uneasiness of his posture, the way his jaw worked. "But it
wasn't you they appreciated, and they wouldn't accept you if you revealed yourself."
His gaze upon her deepened with sense of reverence, "You're getting to be quite on point when regarding my character, little one."

She shrugged, "Sometimes you're an open book, but most of the time you're a complete mystery to me."

Loki pushed himself off the windowsill and approached her. The only thing betraying his smooth yet calculating gait was his leather and armor quietly creaking as he went. Darcy decided that if he wanted to, he could refine his movements so that he was silent. She trusted the nature with which he scrutinized her meant her no harm.

"You can be quite the mystery as well," he all but whispered. His long fingers carefully plucked the glasses from her the bridge of her nose, allowing him an unobstructed view of her face.

"Women are full of secrets," she humored him.

Loki smirked at her appreciatively. "I know that all too well," his voice donned a slight purr, and she imagined him picking the locks of a myriad of women after smooth talking them throughout the centuries. A moment later his tone became more appropriate again, "But I find you and your secrets most intriguing."

Darcy sucked in a breath, feeling even smaller under his study. She retrieved her glasses and put them back in place, a minute barrier to his piercing eyes.

"So what brought you here?" she switched directions, once again putting the subject back onto him.

"Not only had I decided I could no longer rule Asgard as I was," he answered without pause, "but my magic was quickly being depleted from both keeping Odin under a false Odin-sleep and maintaining my illusions. I thought perhaps my purpose lied outside of Asgard, so I left, recovered my magic, and went to Alfheim, home of the Light Elves."

"This sounds very Lord of the Rings."

Loki's brow crinkled, "I'm sorry?"

"Nothing," Darcy waved it off, "go on."

"There was nothing for me on Alfheim so I traveled to Nidavellir where I lived and worked with the dwarves."

"Very Lord of the Rings," Darcy snickered.

She had clearly confused Loki. "Who is this Lord of Rings and what does it have to do with any of this?" he asked, minute exasperation sharpening his tone.

"Sorry, it was all the talk of elves and dwarves. I'll be quiet now and I'll discuss the finer details of Midgardian culture with you another time."

Loki regarded her silently for a few moments before continuing, "Anyway, I enjoyed my time there. It was simple and fulfilling, but I was still forced to keep another alias. I was advised to visit the Norns, the great weavers of destiny as many call them, to gain a better understanding of my path. They said my path lies here on Midgard."

"And just what is that path?" she crossed her arms, "Surely not to subjugate humanity?"
He winced subtly at her jab, but she only just caught it, "Of course not. I've come to secure the sword Laevateinn. I must do it, I owe it to my mother."

"Laevateinn," Darcy repeated, "I know that from one of the myths." She quickly grabbed her laptop from her bed and booted it up. Loki was at her side in an instant, peering over her shoulder in earnest as she pulled up the webpage of the Prose Eddas she had bookmarked and began searching. "There," she pointed to a paragraph on the screen.

"'Its name is Lævateinn, made with magical runes by Loki beneath the gates of death; with Sinmara it lies in a chest of iron, secured with nine strong locks,'" Loki read, "certainly seems to be referring to the same sword, though it was not I who forged it," he took her laptop from her, "You've been looking into mythology of the North men?"

"Yeah, I was curious about you and stuff."

Loki hummed as he silently read through the rest of The Lay of Svipdagr, operating her MacBook with the ease of a common computer user, "Unfortunately what I know of the Midgardian tales is that they are littered with as many dramatizations as they are with honesties. It's best you hear the tales from me."

He then returned his eyes returned to the screen and frowned at it, "Skreyja mál..."

Darcy stared openly at him. Whoa. What was that?

Whatever words he uttered sounded like they could have been Old Norse, but something activated in his vocal chords that no human could possibly achieve, layering his voice with multiple, resonating tones. And despite the way he spat it at the computer – clearly some sort of curse or insult – it sounded ancient and ethereal, and Darcy found herself mesmerized by it.

What can I do to get him to speak Space Viking again?

"Save for the reference to Sinmara, this poem is useless to me," he continued on in perfect English.

"Who is she?" Darcy asked, taking her laptop back after the god closed it and handed it to her. She filed away his occasional speaking in alien tongue for another time.

"The half-blood whelp of the of a motral woman and the former king of Alfheim, Jalmari," Loki stood and paced at the end of her bed with his hands clasped at his back, "born here on Midgard before the Aesir made their first grand visit. She long ago decided to remain with her human mother and guard the relics left by her Elven ancestors. Perhaps your human myths are not so full of nonsense, perhaps she does guard Laevateinn's chest as the nine keys needed to unlock it are relics of the Light Elves."

The god ceased pacing and returned to her and took her hands into his, his form towering over her seated figure.

"Darcy, I know I didn't deserve your forgiveness before, I don't deserve it even now. I still find it… difficult…to feel much remorse for my actions here on Midgard given the situation I was forced into, and I am honestly unsure if I ever will. But maybe I can learn to be regretful. For you, I want to try," he squeezed her hands gently, "I have a proposition for you."

"I'm listening," she acquiesced.
"I wish for you to accompany me on my quest for Laevateinn, so that I may learn and understand more about you, about Midgard," he glanced down at their hands then back up into her face, and Darcy realized he had rather long eyelashes, "You're all I have left in the whole universe and for that I wish to mend what has been broken between us, if you'll have me."

Darcy in turn looked down at their hands as she thought over his invitation. Loki's hands were almost disproportionately large. They were cool to the touch, bordering on cold, but they still seemed to instill a sense of warmth and security within her.

"Definitely Lord of the Rings," she traced a pattern of prints on his palm with her thumb before looking up at him, "I want to go with you, but what about Thor? And then there's Jane. I still technically work for her even though she's been studying Thor more than she's been studying the stars lately."

Loki's face pinched, "I do not currently wish to deal with Thor. Things between us are still difficult. My feelings for my brother…I know not where to group them, but I do know that every time I see him I can only think of the man I hate most. I do not wish for Thor nor his woman to know of any of this," his thumb caressed a soothing path over the back of her hand as he contemplated something, "know that I will not come between you and your friend. I won't force you to choose. But whether you join me or not, I wish for you to be the only one in all of Yggdrasil to know I still live and breathe."

This time it was Darcy's turn to juggle thoughts in her head, going over his offer and her options. "He really misses you, ya know? He still beats himself over it," her fingers were now investigating the edges of his vambraces, tugging at the leather and fabric underneath, "letting him think you're dead is cruel, crueler than me thinking you're dead."

He nodded in detached agreement, "But necessary for now, he may cause my imprisonment for impersonating the All-Father should he find out I'm alive."

"Or he might just give you the world's biggest bear hug," she chuckled as his lips thinned further, "I really want to go with you, Loki, to get to know you too. And I want to know why you seem to think I'm so exceptional; ya know, that I'm supposedly astral projecting or whatever. I tried looking all that up, but nothing fit the bill. Whatever reason I'm doing what I do, I can't find the answers."

"I assure you, Darcy, whatever abilities you possess…no Midgardian research will be able to enlighten either of us," Loki studied at her with those archaic green pools, brimmed with ancient knowledge.

The idea that there was something in the universe that confounded a being such as him mildly unnerved her. The fact that she was the thing that confounded him frightened her just a little, because despite her impulsive personality, she liked being able to know just what she was capable of.

When someone is an unknown even to himself or herself, there's no way of knowing what they are capable of doing, especially to others.

Darcy Lewis never knew what it was like to fear herself before now.

As if sensing her inner turmoil, Loki's hard, almost cold observation of her melted into warm determination. He smoothly maneuvered their hands so that hers were safely enclosed in his and said, "I swear, it matters not if you agree to my proposal or not, I will help you find the answers you seek."

She thought of her options only briefly before coming to a conclusion, "I should be turning down all
propositions that might mean danger to my person, considering New Mexico and the Dark Elf incident," she looked down, but smiled in spite of her words, "I blame it on curiosity…"

When she looked back up Loki was matching her grin with a wolfish smirk of his own, eyes crinkling in genuine mirth and mischief and she ingrained that expression forever in her brain with the other more endearing memories of the Trickster.

_He actually looked like the old Loki just then._

"That and I just don't have anything else better to do at the moment," she continued, her smile widening minutely before dimming, "but what do I tell Jane? I mean this could take some time."

"Ask Jane for some time away from your occupation," came his answer after only a moment's thought.

"But I need a good reason so it doesn't look fishy."

He suddenly stilled, tensing a good few moments before Darcy heard the front door to Jane's flat open. Both of their heads whipped in the direction of the disturbance.

"Darcy, We're home," Jane called and then there was Thor's heavy footsteps following her inside.

The muscles in Loki's hands went immediately taut and he hastily pulled Darcy to her feet and crept towards her window, one of her hands still enveloped by his.

"I have it in my understanding that she knows of our relationship," he whispered in her ear.

The floor creaked loudly under Thor's feet, and the sound was getting closer. "We have brought home leftovers if you want to partake, Darcy."

Darcy nodded quickly.

"Tell her you have been withholding your mourning of my death and cannot bear it any longer," Loki continued quickly, already halfway out the window, "be convincing."

She could only stare at him wide-eyed as he hit the nail on the head on something within her. Her heart stuttered behind her ribs.

"Darcy?" Thor asked from just outside her door.

Loki's lips pecked once at her knuckles – a good luck charm of sorts as well as a soothing balm that caused the bruising on her hand to fade – and he was suddenly gone out the window, vanishing into thin air.

Darcy stood there in a daze. It was still a sight she couldn't get over, a person blinking in and out of existence. Then there was the fact that she could still sense him. According to Loki that was something she shouldn't be able to do, and yet it was something she had been able to do since she was a child.

A loud knock to her door broke her out of her reverie, causing her shuttering heart to quake with thuds.

"Darcy, are you there?"

_Oh shit, what do I do? Gah I'm supposed to be convincing!_
She looked over at her dresser drawers and inspiration struck. She grabbed her suitcase and threw it on her bed and began throwing her clothes inside haphazardly, all the while thinking of every sad thought a person could dream up; puppies getting kicked, friends moving away, starving children, iPods getting confiscated by shady men in black, New York getting attacked, your best friend dying.

Loki had died.

Granted he came back somehow, but was that a one-time deal? Darcy didn't want him to die again, even if he had some crazy regeneration powers.

He was right; she hadn't properly mourned his brief death.

The tears came easier than she thought they would and before she knew it she was a sniveling, snot-nosed mess. Perhaps it was from months of suppressing the natural reaction to loss. That or she was really good at whipping up crocodile tears.

Her door opened gingerly, "Darcy are you crying?" Thor asked delicately as though the volume of his voice would shatter her.

When she seemed to favor packing her suitcase over responding, Thor was obviously not used to dealing with weeping women, his voice almost meek as he called for Jane. Her boss hurried in and tried talking her into calming down.

"Darcy, you need to breathe," Jane finally grasped her shoulders and made her sit in her chair, "what's wrong?"

Darcy missed having something to do with her hands, so she played with the hem of her coat sleeve. She sniveled horrendously several times before she could finally speak.

"Loki's dead…"

Jane's brows knit together with confusion before worry took over. She swooped in and hugged her intern and friend tightly. "Oh hon," she murmured consolingly.

Thor stepped hesitantly into the room, but hovered just beyond the two women, his shoulders sagging where they had been picture perfect moments before. Darcy could see him over Jane's shoulder, could see that his heart too crying, even if his eyes remained free of tears. Those ancient blue eyes were not smiling and carefree, but on the brink of shattering.

Perhaps Jane was his distraction from the pain of losing his brother much more so than Thor was distracting Jane from her work as Darcy had thought. He needed her to lean on.

"I-I miss him…" Darcy's breathing stuttered into another sob, "I w-wanted to go h-home, so I-I bought a q-quick flight for tomorrow morning."

"You've been suffering this long and you didn't say anything?" Jane pulled back and wiped at Darcy's eyes, "I would have paid for you to fly home if you had only told me. You don't have to be strong for me, Darcy. We're more than an astrophysicist and an intern, we're friends. I have Erik and Ian here to help with my research, so just take as much time as you need."

"T-Thank you, Jane, s-seriously," she managed passed a hiccup then smiled weakly, "I-I'm sorry. It's just, I've been used to being there to help you for so long, that I didn't think about my own needs."

Jane shushed her from apologizing further, "Tell you what, I'll help you pack and then we'll have movies and ice cream. What do you say?"
Fresh tears welled up in her eyes, "Talladega Nights?"

"Sure," Jane smiled and then looked to Thor, "will you get us two containers of ice cream, one cookies 'n' cream and the other chocolate chip?"

"As my lady wishes," Thor replied with a smile of his own, but Darcy did not miss the dejection of his posture. The God of Thunder was learning the art of tempering his emotions behind a façade, something he probably gleaned from his lost little brother.

Situation and feelings aside, Thor and Jane were still the picture of domestic bliss.

"You two are so cute I could get cavities."

Jane giggled a little and wiped away the remainder of Darcy's tears, and when the younger girl was calm enough they began to reorder the chaotic method with which Darcy began packing. There was a pregnant silence where the only sound between them was their breathing and the folding of clothes.

"I'm sorry about what I said a year ago."

Darcy looked over as she gathered up personal hygiene items into her cosmetics bag, "What do you mean, Jane?"

"What I said about Loki," her friend said while folding up the last shirt in the stack, "that he only did what best suited him. I never really knew him, so I didn't have the right."

"It's okay. Considering the time frame, he wasn't giving off good first impressions."

"True, but he really did give us a hand in defeating those Dark Elves. If that really big one had survived to come to Earth with Malekith...I don't know if we would have pulled through."

"We would have," Darcy assured her, but was herself unsure, "You know when Loki tried to take over Earth he was being controlled by someone else, someone stronger."

Jane put down a pair of jeans, "That's what Thor thought, did he tell you?"

Darcy shook her head, "Loki visited me before his trial and told me, but we ended up bickering and I kind of told him I never wanted to see him again. I never thought he would die after I said that to him."

She placed her cosmetics bag in her purse, a very real lump in her throat. It didn't matter that she was fibbing right now, because Loki really had died. If it weren't for his magic or his mother or whatever brought him back, then she would have to live with those being her last words to him. She wasn't about to take his return for granted.

"You can't blame yourself for that though, it'll eat you up," Jane zipped up the suitcase and placed a hand her intern's elbow, "You couldn't have known that would happen."

"I knew he was in prison and I knew that there was the possibility of him being executed," Darcy ran her finger over her beloved iPod before also putting it safely away in her purse, "I should have been considering my words, but I was just so pissed at him."

"Darcy…"

The women heard Thor return with their ice cream.

"I'll be okay, let's just go start the movie."
Jane nodded and they joined the godly Avenger in the living room. Darcy logged into her Netflix account and pulled up her selection of comedies. Darcy always went to comedy whenever she was sad or having a bad day, so she had to stay true to herself in her characterization of mourning. First they watched Talladega Nights followed by Animal House and then Office Space.

Darcy and Jane treated themselves to a bowl of the ice cream of their preference; while Thor ended up eating the leftovers intended for Darcy from the restaurant he and Jane had attended on their lunch date.

Thor was still grasping Midgardian culture, so often times he would laugh at parts that weren't particularly funny, or not laugh at parts that were. Darcy chalked it up to the differences in Midgardian and Asgardian culture, but she couldn't complain. At least the big guy seemed to be enjoying himself a little, though he was still not his optimal self.

When dinnertime rolled around Darcy offered to cook, but no matter how much the younger girl protested Jane insisted on the task herself. Jane was a genius, a pro at putting together gadgets and machines, and interpreting scientific data that made Darcy's head hurt, but give her a recipe for carbonara and she'd catch it on fire. After dousing the flames and airing out the flat of smoke and the charred smell of burnt food, the trio decided to order some Indian take-out.

By the time the credits for Office Space began to roll up the TV screen, Jane was snuggled against Thor's side sleeping contently. Darcy was about to turn off the movie when the Thunderer spoke up, his voice quiet so as not to awake his love.

"I am glad my brother met you before he…" he looked away for a moment, "that day on Svartalfheim I not only saw my mother's goodness in him, but yours as well."

"My goodness?" Darcy parroted.

"Aye," Thor nodded, "You've sacrificed a lot to remain at Jane's side. You are loyal and dedicated to her. I saw those aspects of you reflected in Loki when he gave his life to protect Jane and I."

She hesitated, wishing she didn't have to go on with this charade, then choosing to instead analyze Thor's belief in her, she then sat back down in her easy chair, "You really think so? I mean…I haven't done anything that great."

"I do. You don't have to change the world Darcy, you just have to change the world for one person," he said, making sure to hold her gaze, "You were good for him. Maybe he would have become a better man had he lived to know you longer."

Darcy found herself unable to come up with anything to that except to tell him "Thank you" and to move towards the couch where he and Jane were seated, placing a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"I need to get ready for bed if I'm going to catch my flight. You should get some rest too, big guy," She said, stepping over to turn off the television for the still not Earth-tech savvy god.

"I will. Jane and I wish to transport you to the airport to see you off," he smiled sadly at her as he gathered his girlfriend up into his strong arms – Jane murmured in her sleep and clung desperately to Thor as though she were afraid he was moving to leave her.

"May sleep come on swift wings, Darcy."

"You too," she returned with a nod of her head.

Darcy walked to the small bathroom she shared with Jane to freshen up in the shower. She made
sure it was a good long one so that she had enough alone time to mull over all the things she wanted to ask Loki now that they were going to be partners on his little venture. There were a lot of questions on her mind.

They’d met when she was still a tot, barely out of diapers, but she only knew him as the young man he was still growing into. What was his childhood like with Thor on Asgard?

She understood that they were not related by blood, but that they were brothers by heart and only tentatively so now. Then there was the feeling that Thor was favored, by everyone, fostering a jealous streak in Loki. He had coveted Thor's rank, wanted to possess it. Then from what he said earlier, she gathered that Odin was high on Loki's shit list. But those little tidbits of information only told her so much.

There were still the whys of all of those things to understand.

Then there was also the feeling that Loki hadn't told her of everything that transpired while he was in the void. There was more to this Thanos guy, and she wanted to know why he seemed to bring out a thinly veiled terror in Loki that she had not seen in the god before.

Darcy considered Loki a friend as easy as breathing, but in all honesty he was still a bit of a stranger thanks to the way he breezed in and out of her life. So many details were left up in the air between them, and were so many sins for which Loki had to answer to. And like Loki, Darcy was unsure of whether or not he could feel the impact of the consequences of his actions.

What she did know during her time with Loki was that he seemed like he could be a reluctant talker. He had promised she would learn more about him and him about her, but how quickly and willingly would he divulge such information was debatable.

*Will Loki open up to in a way that was easy and natural or will it be like pulling teeth? Will I be able to put up with him if he stalls?*

Darcy paused on that thought while rinsing her hair, letting the hot water pepper her head.

She could be patient if she put her mind to it, but she didn't have the patience of someone that has lived her lifespan times ten and then some.

Her mind sifted to the origins of her "powers". Currently she noticed they only seemed to come alive when Loki was directly or indirectly involved, but was that the extent of it?

Would they be able to figure it out together or was it too big of a puzzle for even Loki’s remarkable intelligence to solve?

She shook that from her head.

*_No, I can do this. We can do this._*

Now that her thoughts were more or less resolved for the time being, she finished her shower and left the bathroom. She found that Thor and Jane were in their room, behind closed doors. Darcy tiptoed to their door and listened for voices or movement, but thankfully found none.

Once she was in her room Darcy placed her belongings beside her bed, her outfit for tomorrow on top of her suitcase. She turned towards her open window.

"You really are cruel," she said quietly out of the range of any prying ears.
Loki materialized before her eyes. "I didn't force your hand this time, little one," he stepped up to her, "don't make me out to the be the bad guy."

She cracked a ghost of a smile, "I know. But you still could have given me an excuse to leave that was less...sensitive."

"It worked did it not?" he asked with a shrug, but the light caress of his knuckles against her cheek belied his carelessness, "What you said amidst your ploy, you weren't acting, yes?"

She sighed and nodded, "Lets just say I drew from a deep well of feels. I told myself I wouldn't cry over you anymore, but look at me now. I'm a mess. I probably should have done it earlier."

Brilliant green eyes stared intently down into blue, his gaze both consuming and tender. Darcy felt vulnerable and exposed, but there was hardly anyone else she felt more comfortable sharing truths with than him.

Ironic that he was God of Lies.

*And you're quickly becoming a professional liar yourself, Darcy.*

Loki trailed his thumb over the puffy redness under her eye, "I'm not fond of you crying over me, Darcy. I'm—"

His words were cut off as her hand slapped over his mouth, "Shut it, Merlin. That's what friends do for each other. I cried over you and you know what? I feel better. So get over it."

The god seemed to bristle minutely at her addressing him with such a nickname, but waited for her to remove her hand herself.

"So we are friends once more?"

Darcy sighed and shook her head in good nature, "I thought you figured that out when I glomped you the moment I saw you."

"Correction, you tasered me the moment you saw me. You said yourself I was terrible at maintaining bonds such as friendship. I thought I needed to further prove myself before you would consider it."

Loki supplied, his eyebrows pinched in open bewilderment.

She very nearly laughed, thinking it was a very adorable look on the big bad God of Mischief, but then she sobered as she considered that Loki probably didn't have many people put their faith in him during his life.

"I'm not like that, Loki. You don't need to prove yourself any more to me. I trust you."

Loki's brows pinched further, almost into a frown of suspicion.

"How?"

"I just do," she replied with a casual shrug.

"Perhaps you're too trusting," he suggested, his voice darkening minutely.

Darcy sighed, "Do you trust me?"

This seemed to catch Loki off guard. His stern countenance wavered and his eyes widenedfractionally – which on Loki read as utter surprise – and he retreated backwards from her until he
once again sat on the sill of her window. He spoke not a word, only gazed out into the London night.

She let out another sigh, but didn't fight him over it and simply crawled into bed. Presenting him with her back, however, was not a simple action. She did it to prove her trust in him was not just merely fodder. Surely the distrust he was given on Asgard for over a thousand years bred the same emotion in him. All she could do was urge him on as best she could then wait for him to open himself up to her.

"I do."

The words were spoken so softly that she briefly thought she had imagined them. Darcy turned in her bed so she was facing him again.

"You do?"

Loki sat with one leg on the floor; the other bent at the knee and perched on the windowsill. The wrist of his right arm rested upon the top of his knee and his head was tilted to the side as he looked over the city. Most of him was swallowed in shadows, but the skin that the light of the moon was able to touch glowed marble; the stark contrast sharpening his angular face even further.

The presence of the bonafide Norse God Mischief watching over her room was both frightening and comforting. The thought of the first lone wolf to ever encroach upon the camp of man, seeking to serve and protect for the exchange of food of companionship crossed her mind. Yeah, this was kind of like that.

"I do, more than I would consider normal," he continued quietly, "it is a pleasant feeling, though."

When Darcy beamed a smile over at him, he tossed over his shoulder gruffly, "Just as long as you don't compare me to that paltry wizard."

"Oh c'mon, Merlin's awesome," she argued then teased him a little, "I bet he could totally pwn you."

Loki bristled again or so she thought, the more she observed, the more she understood that it was his magic. It ran up and down his body, displacing the environment around him with very tiny, subtle ripples. She was amazed into silence with what she saw.

His magic made one last angry pass over him before it stilled within him and he let out a scoff.

"I was doing what Merlin could before his myth was ever written. And unlike him, I am very real."

"Touché," she relented, "hey, can I ask you something personal?"

There was a long pause before he replied, "You may ask."

"Why do you hate Odin so much?"

Again there was a pause, this one longer than the last. She let the silence draw out as long as it needed to be, letting him decide to break it.

"Many reasons..." he trailed off and Darcy thought that he would leave it at that, but he eventually picked it back up, "He lied to me when he should have been forthcoming about my true parentage."

"That can be pretty predictable among adopted children," Darcy agreed, "but that isn't the root problem, is it?"

Loki shook his head, "Odin raised me with Thor, filling my head with the idea that I was equal to my
brother, and yet there was never a day in my life that he ever thought I could be Thor's equal. Only my mother, Frigga, treated me as such. She was the only one to give me encouragement in the pursuit of magic and knowledge, while all others praised Thor's shows of strength. She was the one that named me king in the absence of Odin and Thor," he trailed off again and began picking at invisible dirt off the leather wrap of the knee guard under his hand.

Darcy looked down and flicked some nonexistent lint off her bed in an unconscious mimicking of his action, feeling suddenly unsure of what to say. Finally she settled on steering him off the subject of his mother for the moment.

"Well it's still kind of predictable for parents to favor their biological child over the adopted one, sadly. Usually adults that have trouble having their own children adopt though, so no offense, but what I don't understand is why Odin adopted you if he was capable of having his own children?"

"A means to an end," the hand that was scrutinizing his knee guard bunched into a tight fist.

"What do you mean?" she asked, her brow crinkling in the dim light of night.

"When I was born, the Aesir and the Jotuns or Frost Giants, were at war. The war came to a standstill when Odin defeated King Laufey and stole away the Jotun's greatest power, the Casket of Ancient Winters…but that was not the only thing Asgard pillaged from Jotunheim that day…"

Darcy absorbed his words and mulled them around in her head, then it all came together, "You…you're a child of war. A Frost Giant."

The solemn god inclined his head slightly, eyes still locked to the view outside, "I was Laufey's heir, cast out and forgotten for my diminutive stature. Odin spirited me away to Asgard, trained me to be a loyal pet with the hopes that when the time came I would the perfect pawn for ending the tension between the two realms for good. Merely a means to an end."

"The reason I loathe Odin is because he raised me to believe I was meant for greatness while seeing my true race as monstrous, abominations," Loki finally looked at her, "In the past Odin committed acts of atrocities on more than one realm that makes what I did on Midgard look like child's play. He earned no punishments or repercussions for his crimes, and yet when I committed similar misdeeds, I was cast out and imprisoned," his tone became harsh, bordering on being dangerously loud, "I am Asgard's monster."

Darcy breath caught painfully in her throat as she felt Loki's intense discontent roil off of him. She envisioned herself as a child being taught to fear boogiemen when in reality she was one herself. What could that do to someone's psyche? It could turn a person inside out with self-hate and doubt. No wonder Loki had a few screws loose.

Loki was tense, his jaw tightly set. The hand that had been at his knee was now gripping the frame of her window, the wood threatening to splinter under his strength.

She had to calm him down before he alerted himself to Thor.

"You're not a monster, Loki."

He looked away from her again, but at least his hand relaxed. "How do you know that?" he whispered.

"Well you certainly don't look like one," she started teasingly, hoping to lighten his mood.

"You don't know what I look like…" this confused Darcy, leading him to elaborate a little, "The
form you see before you is an intuitive illusion. I've been unconsciously maintaining all my life, using it to blend in with the Aesir. It's become a part of me and I prefer it for my true form is quite frightening."

"I don't believe that."

"Suit yourself," he shrugged.

"Show me," Darcy urged as she propped herself up on her elbow.

The temperature in the room plummeted when Loki turned to face her, his eyes narrowed to sharp slits. Goosebumps prickled all over her body and ushered a gasp from her lungs, her breath misting the frigid air. Her natural reaction was to fend off the cold, but no matter how much she wrapped the blanket around herself and her thin pajamas, she continued to be chilled to the bone.

By the time her teeth started chattering Loki decided she had enough and his eyes softened, dissipating the cold instantly. Still throughout his little icy display of power she had not seen his form change one iota.

"T-that w-wasn't it," she complained through her residual shivers.

"Go to sleep, little one. We have a big day tomorrow," he said and returned his gaze out the window.

A few flakes of snow swirled down outside.

Darcy's interest was piqued, but she could tell by the Trickster's posture and dismissive words that he would not be giving her any more glimpses into his Frost Giant nature. But that didn't stop her from sticking out her lower lip and pouting like a five year old.

"Fine, yeah okay. Goodnight Mr. Freeze."

It might not have been good for her to tease him about his heritage, but it was something she couldn't help. Put Darcy Lewis in a volatile situation and she started cracking jokes. That's why she had gotten the taser. It usually diffused what her unfiltered mouth couldn't.

She turned her back to him and made herself cozy under the covers, offering him the chance to lash out at her for her sassiness should he choose to. She wanted to show him that even though he thought himself a devil, she wasn't afraid of him.

The Devil never felt that he should be repentant after all.

It wasn't until she started to doze off that she swore she heard the faint whisper.

"Goodnight, Darcy."

Chapter End Notes

Skreyja mál is Old Norse and if my source and how I wrote it is correct, it translates into "incompetent tale" (as you can tell Loki thinks little of the myths the Vikings have told about the Asgardians :P). The Lay of Svipdagr is one of the Viking tales if any of you are interested in checking them out. There are a lot of interesting and weird myths. I've also created a Spotify playlist for this fic if anyone is interested in listening to some of
the songs that run through my head as I'm writing: Theory of Entanglement Playlist. It covers all the songs that have anything to do with the currently posted chapters, more songs will be added as this story progresses. Anyways, please keep leaving feedback, I appreciate it!
Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the comments, kudos, bookmarks, and for just sticking it out with this fic and my slow updates. Seriously, you guys are awesome! I will be making a trip to Sweden to visit my best friend in about three months time and will be gone for a month an a half so I wanted to ask you guys if you would like to have the next two chapters quickly or for me to post them regularly? Also I'll try to get the next chapter written as soon as possible when I get back, but expect some delay. Anyway this chapter is entitled from the song "Tiptoe" by Imagine Dragons.

Darcy awoke very early the next morning. She half expected that Loki had been dreamed up all along and she would find her room empty. Instead she did a sleepy double take when she saw him still perched on her windowsill sifting through her MacBook while sipping from a mug like he was a regular at Starbucks.

As he stared at the glowing screen his face was a cocktail of speculation and either anger or disgust, maybe both. He must have felt her eyes on him because his quickly shifted up to meet hers while his face smoothed back into his neutral mask.

"Good Morning."

"Damn, I thought it was just a dream," Darcy murmured then stretched and got out of bed, reaching for her glasses along the way.

"You seemed to have more faith in me yesterday. Here, in case your friend asks to look at them," when she reached his side, he flicked his wrist smoothly towards her and a plane ticket appeared between his fingers.

"Holy shit," she gingerly took the plane ticket. It had legit looking times, terminals, flight numbers, and destinations. "How did you—"

He lifted his brow at her.

"Right, never mind."

"I have already secured us with private lodgings just outside the Jotunheimen Mountains. Our cabin is near an extensive network of Midgardian portals, which will be of extreme importance on our search for the keys."

"Wait…we're camping…in the Norwegian mountains?" her eyes widened fractionally and her mouth dropped open.

"Why yes," he blinked at her as if he didn't understand her surprise, "the area is remote and secluded. No one will see our comings or goings so we will be free to do what we please."

"And you like doing what you please," Loki gave her an unapologetic smirk, so she continued voicing her worries, "but it's cold as hell there, I don't have the right clothes. And what about food?"
"Hardly as cold as Jotunheim, but you are mortal. Fear not though, I will provide you with appropriate attire," his tone then turned teasing, "Have you not ever made camp, little one?"

"Well yeah, but that was during the summer in New Mexico," she argued, just thinking that she'd once again have to deal with Norway's freezing climate caused her to shiver – and she thought London was cold and dreary. "It was warm and we had hot dogs and cheeseburgers and snacks and a fire."

"You will have these hot dogs, hamburgers, and snacks with which you speak if you so desire," his eyes twinkled, "and if you doubt my hunting and fire-making prowess, I will be happy to demonstrate them for you."

She stared at him, trying to figure out what he couldn't do, "You figured all this out while I was sleeping?"

It could take her weeks to get her shit straight for a trip.

He shook his head, "Just before I arrived here."

Loki really knew how to plan and organize. He totally had his shit together.

"So what did you do all night, snoop through my files?" Darcy shuffled closer to peer over his shoulder at her laptop.

"I was searching the old myths for the grains of truth they might hold, should there be more hints on the keys' whereabouts hidden in them," he looked mildly disgruntled, "I did find some truths…"

Darcy's eyes widened again, "Don't tell me...you really did shack up with Angrboda and fathered a wolf, a serpent, and a half-dead girl?"

"No," he rolled his eyes and sighed at her, "and I know no one by the name Angrboda."

"Okay," she thought back through the myths, "so you really did entertain Skadi by pulling a goat around by your testicles?"

Loki tried to maintain his composure but he almost fell off the windowsill. She saw it no matter how hard he attempted to cover it up with nonchalance. She was tripping up the God of Mischief and she was enjoying every moment of it.

"No."

"Hmmmm," Darcy innocently rocked on her heels, watching through her eyelashes as he took a drink of tea, "You really did seduce a horse and gave birth to Sleipnir?"

Loki almost spit out his tea, but at the last possible second he saved a little face. Unfortunately though he clearly had swallowed it down the wrong pipe, causing him to begin coughing and sputtering rather loudly.

She panicked and quickly slapped a hand over his mouth to stifle his choking. A hand swiftly clamped around her wrist and gripped with enough force that her bones creaked underneath her skin. She squeaked and he backed off on his strength before it became more than a discomfort. His reaction had been instinctual, an animal reflex.

God and mortal froze into their new, uneasy position for several minutes, looking towards the bedroom door and listening for any voices or movements within the flat.
When nothing threatened barge in and give Loki away – not that Darcy doubted for a moment that he wouldn't just vanish and leave her to look silly – she looked back at him. Loki was outright glaring at her. In return she gave him an apologetic smile and extracted her hand from her mouth.

He continued to glower even as he allowed her to have her arm back. She gratefully rubbed the feeling back into it.

"No I did not birth Sleipnir, you chit," Loki hissed from behind seething teeth, "All of what you suggested as probably truths about me are nothing but fallacies, cooked up by the feeble minds of a group of ancient Midgardian sheep that wouldn't know it if they had their heads up their own asses."

One second her her laptop disappeared – hopefully to somewhere it wouldn't get lost or broken – with a wave of his hands, the next he was on his feet and she had to crane her neck to see him properly.

"No more frivolous questions," his eyes momentarily flickered to her clock, "it is soon 7 in the morning and time for you dress, say your goodbyes, and catch the taxi I've arranged to pick you up."

Darcy turned to look at the time.

"Shit!" she hissed and started grabbing her travel outfit.

The clock read 6:52.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she panicked again, "Jane and Thor planned to drive me to the airport. What do I say now?"

Loki seemed pleased by the flustered juggling of her belongings she was currently performing before him.

"You're becoming a proficient liar. I have the utmost trust in your newfound abilities," he smiled cheekily before turning so his back was facing her, "now get dressed."

"I'm not getting dressed with you standing there," she gawked, "stuff your skinny ass back out the window."

He tossed a devilish smirk over his shoulder, "I thought you trusted me?"

*Ohh he's playing that game huh? Trying to make me embarrassed because I embarrassed his royal ass.*

It worked.

"Face, meet wall," she huffed indigently at his throaty chuckle, but at least he afforded her the decency of looking away.

It wasn't difficult for Darcy to change with a man in the same room watching, but they were either boyfriends or booty calls. Loki was completely different territory.

He was an alien prince, considered a god. She wasn't sure she could categorize him as simply a man. Most important of all he was her friend, and even though she had plenty of boyfriends, she never really had a guy be nothing more than a friend. Her college friends talked in minor detail about such relationships, but what little was said told her nothing about male and female friends seeing each other naked and not caring.
The part of her that never chickened out from a dare told her she shouldn't care.

Then the girly-girl part of her reminded her that Loki had been her imaginary friend for the grand total of one night said she had better care.

She listened to her inner girly-girl and changed in record timing into her grey long-sleeved shirt, hip-hugger jeans, and slightly worn but well loved sneakers.

"You're an ass and I hate you."

"No you don't," he replied once he was facing her.

She narrowed her eyes at him and his face broke out into a teasing smile.

"No I got it. You're married to Sigyn."

Loki blinked a few times before his mouth parted silently and his brows rose in boyish shock. He then began to blanch, rosiness spreading from his cheeks to his ears and neck like a plague.

Darcy whipped out her phone and snapped a picture of his display of adorable humiliation then dashed out her bedroom door before he could confirm or deny it.

*I win.*

But now she had to face Jane and Thor and lie to them again. They were in their room, probably still asleep and Darcy could imagine that maybe Thor had a hard time sleeping.

She felt a bit of anger flare up towards Loki for planning out their trip so far ahead without her input, but the more she thought about it, the more she realized he was covering all his bases. And like hell she was going to back out of this now.

While brushing her teeth, Darcy's mind settled on writing a quick note.

On her boss's sticky-note pad she expressed that she was terribly sorry that she had to leave without saying goodbye, but she had found them still asleep and didn't want to disturb them. Satisfied with that excuse, she wrapped up the note with a short but truly heart-felt thank you, signed it, and stuck it to the refrigerator.

The time said 6:57.

Darcy quickly rushed back to her room to collect Loki and her things. She would eat something substantial when the time better presented itself.

"C'mon, let's go," she said upon re-entering her room.

Loki seemed to have recovered from his mini-meltdown and was looking out her window again. He turned his head and raised a brow.

"You can hardly think that I should—"

"They're still asleep, I left them a note," she explained as she crossed the room to grab her purse and to throw on her coat, "Now grab my suit case or we're going to keep the cabby waiting."

He studied her for a long moment before obeying and following her out of the room cautiously.

"What form shall I take?" he whispered.
"Form?" she whispered back.

"I can take many forms," his breath ghosted the shell of her ear and she shivered.

"Right, shape-shifting… ummm…" she licked her lips unconsciously, "just be you."

He stopped her with a firm hand on her shoulder, his hushed tone bordering on harsh, "Surely the one responsible for your transportation will recognize me, or have you forgotten my criminal role on Earth?"

"He won't," she turned so he was no longer sending chills up her spine, "there were only a few grainy images of you leaked from New York and Stuttgart, and S.H.I.E.L.D. covered it up fast."

Green eyes bore down into hers, painstakingly searching for something, perhaps deceit. Even now his trust in her was fragile, born of a millennia of hidden agendas and a feeling of never fitting in. Darcy wanted to be offended that he would suspect betrayal from her. Never once did she betray him, not even when he had been out of his mind and threatened her. She wanted to be angry, but she could only feel a heart-rending ache of desperation.

Desperation for what?

Those ancient eyes scanned deep, diving into her depths with the determination not to stop until he reached the bottom. Darcy inhaled a breath and held it, feeling barer than she had been undressing behind his back. He must have accepted her word because the intensity in his eyes shifted from mild distrust to something she couldn't place. If he kept staring at her like that she might not breath again.

The blast of a car horn jolted them from their silent conversation.

Loki swiftly grabbed her hand, twining their fingers together and pulled her along behind him. Now that she was free from the confines of his viridian gaze Darcy's lungs decided to start working again.

His body shimmered with green, his magic. It blanketed him even as they hurried through the flat, shifting and changing. By the time they reached the front door of the flat, his Asgardian gear had been swapped with a sharp three-piece suit consisting of a black blazer, slacks, a silken white dress shirt, and over that a forest green vest and tie. An elegant gold scarf, polished black dress shoes, and a long black topcoat completed his look.

Darcy could only gape behind him and feel like she was horrendously dressed.

Loki wore Earth clothes better than any human she'd ever seen. Even the male cabby was staring at him.

The young mortal stood awkwardly next to the taxi watching as the god in human clothing packed her suitcase into the trunk. When Loki closed the trunk, his eyes briefly caught hers before they both gave the outside of Jane's apartment building a once over in a way of a silent goodbye – and to check to make sure they weren't seen through any windows.

As Loki ushered her into the back of the taxi, the first signs of nerves began to flutter about her stomach.

She was moments away from embarking on a crazy road trip with the God of Mischief.

"Where to?" the middle aged cabby asked.

A gentle pressure squeezed her hand bringing Darcy back to Earth. She realized that she and Loki
were still tightly holding hands though they were sitting on opposite ends of the backseat. He was looking at her expectantly, giving her one last chance to back out.

She squeezed his hand back and shifted closer, their outer thighs brushing together in a way that showed friendly familiarity.

His thumb moved over the back of her hand once before he looked to the cabby, a steadfast resolve that wasn't there before etching his face.

"Battersea Power Station."

This is it.

The cabby nodded and they were off.

The first few minutes of the drive went on in a comfortable silence, the cabby driving, Loki resting his chin on his hand as he watched the scenery pass beyond the window, and Darcy's gaze bounced around from the view out the windshield, to her own window, to her hand interlocked with Loki's, then to the man himself.

To anyone else that just saw him for the first time, the god was a picture of perfect poise and calm. But then they couldn't feel what Darcy felt.

Loki's muscles – impossibly strong for his frame – were pulled taunt under the skin of his hand and thigh where their bodies touched. He wasn't relaxing, he was subtly poised to strike or flee at a moment's notice.

The more she observed him, listened to the anxious signs that only she seemed aware of, the more she realized that more than just his body was tense.

She couldn't describe how she knew what it was, but she knew it had to be his magic. It was stretched thin like a rubber band just on the verge of snapping.

Perhaps he was just as nervous about this trip as she was.

Had it been like this for him all the other times he visited Earth or just this time?

Darcy had the urge to talk, to calm him, but she wasn't sure what to say. Precious little of what she wanted to talk to Loki about did not involve things that might not be good for their cabby to hear. She wanted to know what did Asgard look like, or what he had spoken in Cosmic Norse last night?

Why did his magic bristle sometimes in reaction to his emotions? Did his magic have a mind of its own or was it just an extension of him and particular situations – like this situation right now - caused it to react?

Was there a way to calm his magic, to calm him?

Darcy bit her lip in thought as her heart once again wrenched behind her rib cage.

Suddenly Loki's attention focused on her, his eyebrows pinched with an unspoken concern that she would have found adorable on him had he not just seemed to notice her emotional conundrum without even looking at her.

It had happened earlier in the flat too, when they were staring at each other, him suspicious of her claim and her wanting him to trust her. All of it expressed without a single verbalization.
Maybe they were just good at reading expressions.

Darcy decided to test it, the link to this silent conversation they seemed to be able to share.

"I'm okay, are you okay?" She asked him through sheer effort of facial expression.

He stared at her then he turned back out the window, his body not relaxing an inch. In stark contrast his thumb caressed her hand tenderly, and something wrote itself into her flesh, into her atoms and cells.

"Just staying prepared," it said, and the clarity with which she felt it nearly had her jumping out of her skin.

It wasn't something that she could hear or see physically or mentally, more like a thoughts or spoken words translated from sensation to her brain. The closest Darcy could explain it to herself was that it functioned in a similar way to how a blind person could read brail.

Except she'd never been taught to read…whatever this was that she was reading.

Loki's head had snapped back towards her the same moment she had her inward freak out. He stared, seemingly studying. Whatever he was thinking or feeling now, it was closed off to her as he continued to search over her face. Then his face opened up minutely and she felt It again, writing into her very DNA.

"You understood? How?!"

"I don't know. You're not doing this?"

"No, this is not me."

"Are you sure?" she pressed, sweeping her thumb over his hand.

"Positive," he was examining her more thoroughly now, not bothering to hide it from prying eyes.

"Could this be me, part my abilities?"

"Quite possibly," his brow crinkled again, "Can you sense what I'm thinking right now?"

The easiness of reading It suddenly stopped, like a book slamming shut and no matter how hard she tried to pry It open, Loki was cut off from her again.

"I can't."

Then the paranoid idea that his side of It was stronger than hers and he could read her thoughts or feelings right now filtered into her mind. She didn't blame Loki for asking her that very question.

But she had to know the parameters of It, what worked and what didn't.

Darcy thought of a memory, something Loki would never be able to make a lucky guess on. The first one that came to mind was when she took a swim in the Atlantic Ocean one summer during her trip to Florida when she was 16.

She then asked, "What am I thinking about?"

His gaze sharpened with the intent to slice through her façade. The look intensified and his thumb moved shrewdly over her hand. He took in a deep breath.
Then there was a slight tugging on her mind, like a random thought butting in from her subconscious. She almost dismissed it, had the tugging not increased along with the pressure his thumb against her muscles in the back of her hand.

Loki’s lips tightened minutely, his eyes piercing, his thumb almost stabbing, while the tugging redoubled its efforts.

Finally he released a long breath, eyes softening, thumb relenting, and the tugging ceased.

"I cannot, even with my magic," she sensed his resignation, "it is but a blank page."

Darcy released her own breath she’d been holding captive.

"What a relief!"

"Indeed," he readily agreed then turned contemplative, "Not telepathy, but a strange form of mental communication. Fascinating."

Getting tired of calling whatever the link was It, Darcy skittered her thumb across his knuckle, "Let's call it brail, until we figure out what exactly it is."

"Brail? What sort of name is that?"

"It's a media that allows blind people to read here on Earth. I don't think they are exactly the same, but it's the closest thing I can think of to describe it."

Loki let out a quiet huff, "It's mental communication."

"That name is so lame," she bumped him with her shoulder.

"Here we are, Battersea Power Station," announced the cabby.

The jarring intrusion of an audible voice caused both god and mortal to jump and drop hands as though they had been physically scalded. They probably appeared about as awkward as when they first got into the taxi.

Loki paid with a credit card. Darcy held her breath, but when the transaction went smoothly without a hitch, she began wondering where in the hell he had gotten/made one so quickly.

"Magic card?" she asked once they retrieved her baggage from the trunk and the cabby drove away – feeling very grateful to be able to speak again.

"Mostly," Loki offered her his arm, continuing when she placed her hand in the crook of his elbow, "the card is magic, but the money is quite real."

"You stole money?" she hissed so that passersby couldn't hear, "How much and from who?"

"Don't fret, little one. No method of Midgardian technology can track my magic. We'll have money enough for a good while," the side-glance he gave her was playful while his tone was full of pride. Pride for what his magic could do.

"It better not be trackable…shit, Loki, we could get busted."

Paranoia was leaking into Darcy's system now, causing her to look around them frantically as they walked towards the massive Battersea Power Station. S.H.I.E.L.D. could be crawling around already.
"Fuck, we could be caught before we begin."

"Darcy," her name on Loki's tongue snapped her out of her thoughts.

She looked up at him and they both paused amidst the sea of people.

Long fingers pushed some errant locks behind her ear, then lost themselves in the thick waves of hair at the nape of her neck.

His face lost all jest when he said, "No harm will come to you, I promise."

A lump formed in Darcy's throat at the weight of his sincerity. It felt like swallowing a brick.

"Alright," her voice cracked horribly in her ears, "So where do we go now?"

The corner of Loki's mouth curved slightly upward, retrieving his hand from her dark tresses.

"We take an elevator, little one."

Surprisingly the elevator was empty when it opened up for them. Loki ushered her inside with a hand at the small of her back. Once inside he waved his hands over her luggage and like her laptop, it vanished to wherever it is his magic hands makes things disappear to.

Darcy was about to ask him if her things were floating around in space or something when he beat her to the verbal punch.

"The answer is no."

"Huh?" she fixed him with a look of confusion, wondering if he had Brailed the question from her

"I'm not married to Sigyn and I have no children, monster or otherwise."

"Okay, I guess that's good to know," she babbled on, thoughts about her belongings abandoned, "I mean you it would have been bad if you skipped out on your kids…at least without paying child support."

"The portal is nearing," he pulled her tight to his side causing her to swallow her tongue, "hold on tightly."

Mint and fresh snow assaulted Darcy's nose, dampening her will. She obeyed dumbly, arms wrapping loosely around his torso, bringing her face closer to his chest and his intoxicating scent.

One moment the elevator highlighted on number three of its floor count; the next a bright, white heat enveloped them and blinded her. She felt Loki's body begin to vibrate at such a high frequency that it hummed.

Then her body replied with a humming of its own, though her frequency was out of tune with his. Her melody was spiraling out of control and she could feel them separating.

Oh fu—

Loki's tune clamped around hers, dominating it into submission before forcing it to adopt his resonance.

The soles of her feet smacked the ground painfully.
"—uuck!"

Darcy was spinning.

The death grip on her wrist pulled, shifting her momentum and spinning her in the opposite direction. She spun until she collided face-first with a pliable wall, leaving her panting and breathless.

"I said hold on tightly," Loki growled against the crown of her head.

"I-I was," she gasped between deep gulps of air.

Another growl rumbled low in his chest, but deflated into a long, suffering sigh, "You're going to make my promise difficult to keep, aren't you?"

Darcy's breathing began to even out. "I didn't mean to," she argued vehemently at his chest because that was all she could see at the moment as he was holding her so very tightly.

"You didn't mean to," he agreed, "but something in your nature did. The very same something that urged a certain little girl to go chasing fireflies, running out from the shelter of her mother's wing."

She audibly swallowed her retort.

Lips ghosted down her head to press lightly at her temple, slowly shifting into a smile.

"And I wouldn't want you to be any other way."

The scent pleasantly invading her sense of smell abruptly retreated as Loki released his embraced, his hand once again leading her along.

The world around Darcy opened up as they exited the space between two buildings – an antique store and a bank by the looks of them – and entered the epicenter of a busy shopping district.

People were milling about everywhere; couples, families, groups of teens, single men and women. Some were in the midst of chatter with each other; others talked into their cell phones instead, most were toting around shopping bags. All were talking in a language Darcy could not understand.

"Where are we, Loki?"

His hand slipped from hers as he walked seamlessly into the flow of the crowd. With a bright smile he faced her and spread his arms wide.

"Our halfway point, Copenhagen, home of the once fierce Danes."

"Halfway point? We have to do that crazy ride of yours again?" she gulped.

"It's called using portals," he chastised and began walking without her, she had to jog to catch up with his long legs, "Don't worry, little one, we'll be staying here for a short duration. We must procure warmer clothing for you as well as your…" he paused to give her a snide side-long glance, "provisions."

"Hey! don't knock cheeseburgers, your highness. Thor loved pancakes, poptarts, and coffee when his princely ass fell from the sky."

Loki's lip curled into a sneer, "Thor's taste in food is appalling. Even Volstagg, as gluttonous as he is, has better culinary sense."
"Well wait until you try my Darcy Lewis' famous steakburgers," she sassed defiantly, even as she looped her arm around his so that they didn't risk separation again.

The next few hours were spent in Copenhagen's busy shopping district. Darcy was in awe of everything and wanted to explore longer, but her stomach wanted good food and badly.

She asked Loki about what sounded good since he was more familiar with Scandinavian culture than she was. He said he was not up to date with Denmark's current food fads, but thankfully she spotted a sign above a cozy hole-in-the-wall type joint that that read Sandwich Café. This was Darcy Lewis craved, comfort food.

This time the 6'2 god beside her was the one being dragged along.

It mattered not that the place had no seats available; she ordered a chicken and avocado sandwich and a potato and leek soup to go. With food in hand, Darcy was able to enjoy simply walking around and taking in the sights and sounds around her as they window-shopped for clothes. She talked Loki into accepting a sample of her sandwich – she wouldn't leave him alone until he did - and though he sniffed it wearily and cautiously nibble on it, the way the rest of it quickly disappeared told her that it satisfied his palette.

After polishing off her meal they began roaming from shop to shop, searching for proper mountain climate attire.

"What about this one?" Darcy asked, modeling a stylish winter ensemble that had to cost more than her car back home. If Loki got to dress to impress so could she.

Loki folded his arms. Clearly he wasn't impressed.

"It is pleasing to the eye, but hardly practical, Darcy. You will merely freeze to death in the latest fashion."

More like God of Lame, she thought. He was sucking the fun out of her once in a lifetime shopping spree.

"Then what do you suggest? You've been turning down everything I've tried on," she said with a pout.

He glared at her, but it was a weak attempt even for him.

"Come with me."

He got up from his chair near the dressing room and started crossing the store with purposeful strides.

"Hey, wait!" She quickly gathered her things and hurried after him, still dressed in the overpriced Danish outfit, "I've got to change!"

"You want the damned clothes?" he all but spat, "you can have them."

She hugged his arm when she caught up to him.

"You know you're my best friend?" she said sweetly.

He sighed, "I fear I may be your only friend…"

During their shopping blitzkrieg, Loki had bought her three more designer outfits from Baum und Pferdgarten – now she had one for each season – before they stopped by an outdoors store.
Darcy came out of the dressing room far less enthused by the numerous bundles of layers she was wearing.

Loki chuckled at her expense and said, "Perfect, you should very near be able to survive Jotunheim now."

He got her several changes of wool sweaters, insulated pants, socks and underwear, a pair of leather moccasins lined in faux-fur, a pair of wool mittens, and a wool scarf and hat.

Lastly they stopped by a sort of farmer's market where Darcy picked out a myriad of fresh breads, meats, produce, and homebrew coffee. Loki didn't bother to amend anything except for handing her some avocados. He assured her that fresh water would be available at their cabin.

In the end, with their load of shopping bags, they looked like anyone else in Copenhagen.

Loki led her back to the alley way sandwiched between the antique shop and bank from which they had first arrived at. When the coast was clear, he waved away their bags into thin air.

"Ya know that could almost look like some illusionary trick a magician would do?" Darcy asked, "Why hide it?"

"Because though my magic is capable of illusion, this act is more than illusion," both he and his magic bristled, "and the more humans that are able to witness it, the more they will talk about it. And the more they talk about it, the easier it will be for Heimdall's gaze to be drawn to Midgard. His hearing and vision can cover all nine realms of Yggdrasil. Thor being here doesn't help as it is."

"You're showing me your magic. Can't he see you anyway?"

"My magic is cloaking both of us from his view right now and with me believed dead, I'm sure his focus is on Thor and Jane among other more important things," he grinned, "Even with his extraordinary vision and hearing, he can only focus on either the big picture or one particular thing at any given time."

"So even the gods have blind spots?" she asked teasingly.

Loki didn't look so amused.

"Precisely."

His arm snaked around the small of her waist, cautiously drawing her against his body and back into the scent of winter.

"Now onto Jotunheimen," he offered her his hand, "and this time please...hang on for dear life."

They embraced again and she locked her arms around him in an anaconda vice grip and interlocked her fingers. She considered wrapping her legs around him, but the brightness that enveloped them spat them out so quickly she didn't have time.

Even though the portal hop was shorter this time around, as they landed Darcy found herself pirouetting away from him again.

Loki's hand tightened around her waist. His other hand found her wrist and spun her back to him.

It was like they were dancing every time they traveled the portals.

Tripping over her brand new moccasins in the middle of her twirl, Darcy braced herself with a hand
planted firmly on his solid chest, and yet it did little to stop her body from colliding firmly with his.

There was a sharp inhalation and the hand at her back tightened further into the thick fabric of her coat. When she tipped her head back to see his face, she found his pupils flaring wide inside of his eyes and he was staring with such fervent intensity that her stomach lurched. Darcy's breath hitched at the sight, her hand instinctively gripping the lapels of his blazer underneath his coat, as she still felt a bit dizzy. Though her face warmed significantly, her eyes daringly continued to meet his.

Loki blinked and his pupils were instantly normal, neutrality dominating his face once again as his eyes flickered upward, snow-capped mountains reflected in their green depths.

"We're here."

As if on cue a cold wind whipped at her hair, nipping at her cheeks, and she was suddenly grateful that she had on all those ungainly layers.

How was it that he was content to remain in his nothing more than his suit?

_Right, frost giant._

Despite the chill and Loki's considerably warmer temperature Darcy broke away, slowly turning against the battering of the wind to see the expanse of remote, crisp wilderness waiting for her.

"Oh my god," she murmured in wonder.

The temperature felt just above freezing and there was about an inch of snow on the ground, yet blades of grass poked through the whiteness and the sky was invitingly blue. The little patch of land they stood on jutted into a beautiful lake. Half naked trees and evergreen conifers dotted their tiny peninsula and the shoreline across the lake from them, displaying nature's life and death struggle. And the crowning glory of it all was the snowcapped Jotunheimen Mountains jaggedly dividing heaven from earth.

Born and raised in New Mexico as she was, Darcy never got to see so much snow. She expected to it to have an adverse affect on her, but instead she found the snow, the forest, and the bone chilling cold itself beaconing to a part of her as if she were a ship following the guiding beam of a lighthouse.

The scenery and the sensation it gave nearly brought her to tears.

A hand came to rest on her shoulder, she hardly noticed.

"Do you enjoy the view?" a silky voice said from somewhere to her left.

"Mhmmm," she nodded quickly, barely able to form words.

Loki chuckled and came within her line of sight, grinning toothily like a fool.

"Then," he paused, hands at her shoulders turning her in a 180, "it is all yours for the duration of our stay."

She almost didn't see it.

Camouflaged almost perfectly among the thick formation of trees nestled a rustic, log cabin. Snow and grass covering the entirety of the roof made it hard to pick out and only after a long moment of searching did the chimney and large lakeside window gave it away.

Darcy tried to say something intelligent. She really did. Instead her initial reaction was to let out a
completely unintelligible sound, somewhere between a word and a squeal. She then raced up the slight incline towards the cabin.

When she couldn't locate the entrance upon reaching it, in her enthusiasm she peered inside the window. A cozy living room greeted her and beyond that she saw a small, but well equipped kitchen with a dining table and fire pit.

"Holy shit!"

She hurried along the outside of the cabin, looking through each window until she finally found the front door. She tried to open it, but was thoroughly pissed to find it locked, barring her from entering.

"Patience, little one," Loki drawled, his voice the only indication he was near again since his footsteps produced no sound on the snow as he stepped up to join her on the front porch.

A key was dangled in front of her and she lunged for it like a horse after a carrot.

Loki lifted it just out of reach and she growled.

"Ah, ah, ah. What do you say?"

"Gimme?"

She jumped for it, swiping air. Seriously, she was getting tired of him making her wait already.

Keeping the key well without her range, he loomed his face over hers. "Your manners are atrocious…"

"I'd like to say they are precocious…” she snipped in retort, but swiftly relented when the god silently poised to throw her precious key, "I'm sorry! Thank you so much!"

He raised a brow expectantly.

"Please, Loki," she wasn't above begging.

He drew ever closer, their noses inches away. "Please what?"

"Please give me the key?" she pouted.

In response her answer the Trickster retreated, turning his attention to the key ring that he spun upon his pointer finger as he made show of considering her words. His dramatics lasted all of five seconds before he relinquished to the power of "the pout" and handed over the key.

Darcy snatched it, unlocked the door, and whipped it open.

The first sight that met them was a short hall decorated simplistically by a mounted rack of reindeer antlers. Beneath the antlers hung a series of key and coat hooks, painstakingly picked and crafted from naturally curving pieces of driftwood.

The hall opened up two ways; the left end led to the kitchen, the other to a more private sitting room. Darcy went right.

The sitting room contained a smaller window with a view of the wilderness outside. A handmade rocking chair and end table sat in the corner facing the window. Behind the chair a small sconce lamp protruded from the wall.
She tentatively walked up and turned the switch, jumping a little when the light bulb burned to life; it quite unexpected for there to be electricity in such remoteness.

"Solar powered," Loki explained.

Continuing her investigation, Darcy flitted from room to room with Loki on her heels. Each room had matching antique wooden doors and wall sconces.

The kitchen possessed a modern gas stove as well as an indoor fire pit with wooden benches surrounding it should the resident decide they wanted to cook their food with a primitive touch. The wooden cabinets held plates, glasses, bowls, and all the eating and cooking utensils a persona needed. Pots and pans and potholders dangled from more driftwood hooks above the sink.

The kitchen opened into the main living where Darcy had first looked inside. There was a cushy sofa and matching recliner where five people could sit comfortably while looking out over the lake. In front the sofa was an elaborately carved coffee table with matching end tables on either side of the sofa. A beautiful tree branch chandelier hung in the middle of the room from a thick log rafter.

She followed another small hallway that led a storage room that contained a stash of chopped firewood, a lay down freezer and refrigerator. Shelves lined the room with dry food supplies, spare sheets, blankets, towels, washcloths, toiletries, and even a pile of furs for keeping warm on particularly cold days.

The next room opened up into a small bathroom with another sink, toilet, and a small shower.

A small bedroom with a single-sized bed dressed in deep green sheets and matching comforter neighbored the bathroom. The room was minimal, only a handcrafted chest of drawers, bookshelf, chair, table, as well a large green throw rug in the middle of the floor as furnishings. A window provided a lake view.

The bookshelf was already full of ancient tomes, and what books wouldn't fit on the shelf lay on the floor against the wall. There were hundreds of them, making Darcy both giddy and envious.

The last things she noted were the items littering his table. There were various alchemic tools and magical instruments, a large stack of clean parchment, and a quill pen and ink well.

"This is my room," Loki said just behind her, confirming her suspicions.

Large hands engulfed her shoulders and guided her over to a master bedroom.

Behind the door was a full-sized, four poster bed, a more ornately carved dresser and vanity set, two end tables, a desk and chair. There was a small closet with wire hangers and on the wall beside it hung extra driftwood hangers. The bed had a purple theme and had a heavy fur blanket folded neatly at the foot. A plush rug of similar color was outstretched next to the bed. A large window also gave a clear view of the lake and mountains outside and another, smaller chandelier was centered in the room, giving the space plenty of light.

Her MacBook sat unharmed on the desk, while her suitcase rested against the bed next to her shopping bags of clothes.

*So this is where he sent my things.*

Darcy pulled away from Loki's grasp on her shoulders, stepping up to look out at the view she'd be waking up to every morning. Now she had an inking of what Mac felt when she first stepped foot inside Barron's Books and Baubles for the first time. She suspected this was what it felt like to fall in
love with a place.

Her eyes began to mist.

"Holy s-shit," her voice wavered with emotion.

Loki was at her side like a flash, taking in her weepy appearance with alarm.

"You're displeased?" he asked with a hint of uncertainty.

"U-Unpleased?" she wiped at her eye, lips trembling into a smile, "Are you kidding? I love it, ya big dummy."

He swallowed thickly, a confounded expression pulling at his brows. "But you are…crying."

A watery laugh bubbled up, "Because I-I'm so very happy."

The crinkle in his brow – that really shouldn't be as adorable as it was – slowly smoothed out.

"I have pleased you?" he inquired once more, seeking absolute confirmation.

"Very much so," her voice was finally evening back to normal.

Slowly Loki's face relaxed into possibly one of the biggest, most carefree smiles she had ever seen on his face. His smile revealed slight dimples and his eyes crinkled with affection. Gone was the man that had survived so much pain and hatred, in his place the boyish prince that she cared so deeply for.

"Seeing your immense satisfaction brings me joy," it almost sounded like a confession from his mouth.

Darcy's heart melted into warm goo.

The moment had to be savored, so she pulled out her phone and before he became wise to her intentions, capturing yet another photo. She caught his expression forever, but the moment he realized what she had done, his expression became guarded again.

"Why do you keep doing that?"

"Because," she beamed up at him, leaving it simply as that.

The only picture she had of him for the longest time was of him angry and Darcy wanted to replace it, filling up her phone with happier memories. She wanted to erase his pain much the same way, but knew that task would be far more difficult.

Chapter End Notes

So that scene in the cab with the nonverbal communication just came to me while I was writing and the more I wrote I couldn't stop (I hope it isn't corny), so I just decided it was going to stay. I managed to factor it into my story so the reason why they can talk like that will be revealed eventually. Got inspiration for the cabin while researching the Jotunheimen Mountain range and I hope you all fell in love with it as much as Darcy did (by the way Darcy's mentioning of Mac and Barron's Books and Baubles is a reference
to a spectacular book series by Karen Marie Moning called the Fever Series. If you enjoy reading dark and sexy material with strong female leads I'd recommend it to you!)
Oh and anyone want to take a shot at who Loki stole his money from? And what myths hold truths about Loki?
Okay I'm done with my long end note, be sure to let me know how you want the next to updates!
Silver Lining

Chapter Notes

Just wanted to say thank you very much for all the feedback on that last chapter, which prompted me to update early. Chapter title is a [song](#) by Kasey Musgraves (I don't listen to a whole lot of country, but I like this song.). I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

After surprising him with an impromptu snapshot of his face, Loki stalked from her room in a hurry. Moments later Darcy heard the faint snapping and crackling of wood catching fire in the fire pit, which preceded the smell of smoke.

She hurriedly unpacked her suitcase and placed all of her newly bought clothes away, making her new room more her style. The clothes were put away in the dresser and she hung her designer coats and jackets in the closet. She sat her pair of tennis shoes and heeled boots on the floor lined up neatly next to her door, her fluffy leopard print slippers beside her bed. As for the insulated coat, she hung it on the coat rack for easier access, as they would be spending most of their time in the coldness of Jotunheimen's shadow.

She opened her cosmetics bag and placed all her make up in an orderly fashion on top of the dresser in front of the mirror. Unlike Jane, she liked things a little more organized, a quality that made her a great intern for her often absent-minded boss.

When she was done, her purse, MacBook, notebook, pen, iPod, and sound dock occupied the surface of her table/desk, and the few novels she brought with her were placed on one of her nightstands along with the case for her glasses.

The only items left were her personal hygiene items, which she stashed away in the bathroom on her way to rejoin Loki.

He sat with his back to her on one of the benches surrounding the pit, seemingly entranced by the dancing flames of the fire.

"The cabin is solar powered as I mentioned earlier, and there is a hot water heater for showers," he spoke up without regarding her as he poked at the burning wood, "I also made certain to provide a wi-fi connection, though it was hard to convince the cabin owner to allow it. The Nordic people believe if you are going to camp in the wilderness that it should be as cut off from the comforts of civilized life as much possible while maintaining comfort. Therefore, this fire pit is our only source of heat, so I would advise you to wear your insulated attire as much as you can."

Darcy nodded and sat on the bench opposite of him.

She noticed he had switched clothes again and was wearing what she thought amounted to Asgardian casual. Gone was his layers of leather and armor and in its place were a pair of black cotton trousers, a loose green top that covered the length of his arms, and a thin black leather tunic that mimicked his armor yet retained a certain simplicity. The only element he kept from his full get up was his heavy leather boots. Still the outfit was elaborate and dramatic as all get out.
Now that they were alone and more or less settled in, Darcy was about to bring up the Brail they had shared in the cab when her phone started vibrating and playing David Guetta's "Rise." She pulled it out and looked at the screen, uttering a surprised curse when she was that it was Jane calling her.

"Darcy…I told you that you were more than my intern," Jane started when she answered, "I wanted to get a proper goodbye!"

Aw man, getting the shitty, guilty feels again…

"I know, I'm sorry…I just really hate goodbyes," and she honestly did, "plus you guys were out cold."

Loki was observing her conversation with emerald eyes that seemed even more enthralling behind the harsh glow of the fire. He really needed to stop looking at her like that.

"Nobody likes goodbyes, but who knows when I'll see you again!" her boss' voice brought her attention away from the god sharing the room with her; it was a much needed reprieve.

"I'll be fine, I promise, Jane. I'm safe and sound waiting at the airport for my connecting flight. Now don't worry about me and get back to the big guy and science – just don't over do it, and by that I mean the science, feel free to go all out in the bedroom."

Loki's nose wrinkled in disgust at her reference to his brother and in response she stuck her tongue out at him.

Jane got real quiet and Darcy could picture her friend's face burning with it's usual blush when the younger girl perversed their conversations. Then Jane said, "Fine, but I expect a call from you three times a week at least."

"Yes, mom," Darcy replied, sing-songing.

"And take care of yourself. If you need anything at let me know."

"I will. And you take care of yourself. Remember to take breaks for sleep, eat healthy food once in awhile. I don't want to hear about any complaints from Thor!"

"Yes, yes I promise," Jane giggled sheepishly.

Now that their conversation was wearing down, the thought that she wasn't going to have Jane around to bug set a heavy weight on her chest. But at least she had Loki to hang around. She wouldn't be alone.

She resisted the tears. "I'll talk to you soon, okay? And tell Thor and Erik I say yo."

"You bet, Darce."

She found her words unusually hard to get out, "Bye Boss Lady."

"Bye."

Darcy hesitated on the line then slowly tapped "end call."

No sooner had she started to put her phone away it began to ring again.

"What sort of auditory drivel is that?" Loki asked, nodding to her phone in clear indication of her ringtone.
"Hey, don't knock my music!"

He could tease her about anything but her spectacular musical taste. Her playlist was stellar!

Loki snorted elegantly and arched a brow, "Music? You call that cacophony of noise music?"

"Dude, it's got a hella beat and good lyrics, besides you're supposed to be learning to appreciate Earth," she said in warning to remember his promise.

"My apologies," he bowed his head, but she could tell he wasn't putting much merit in David Guetta, Skylar Grey, and Travis Barker.

She had time to make him understand just what he was dismissing so quickly

"Shit, Ian…" she muttered as she saw his name pop up on her screen, wondering how to handle him.

Her eyes darted back to Loki silently asking him for help, but the god simply shrugged a regal shoulder.

_Damnit…_

"Yeah?" she answered casually and with a hint of brusqueness.

Ian started off by firing off a series of 20 questions, wondering why she left, where she was, and if she was coming back. Darcy answered each to the best of her ability without flubbing her cover story for leaving and keeping irritation and anxiety from overtaking her.

"I might be back, but if I do, I'll be coming back as your friend, not your girlfriend," she made her statement straight and to the point.

Ian hesitated for a long time, and Darcy thought perhaps he had dropped the phone or something, then with a solemn voice he said, "I understand."

_Damn it_ he was tugging a little at her heartstrings.

"Hey, there are plenty of pretty fish in the sea to reel in," she chirped, "I'm not really much of a catch."

"You're pretty, Darcy," he breathed, "And brilliant too."

She felt a sudden blush creeping up on her cheeks and part of her questioned leaving him was really so brilliant. Then she remembered that she still wanted her valued freedom for a bit longer.

"And you're a dashing fellow, but you're totally more brilliant than me. You'll make a lucky girl happy one day, I know it."

"Perhaps…"

"Go do something heroic, women dig that. Even the independent ones," she chuckled.

Ian joined in with a deep laugh of his own, then it slowly evaporated and they were both silent.

"Good luck, Darcy," he said finally.

"You too, Superman," she replied and ended the call.
When her attention returned to Loki, she saw an impish grin on his face.

_Uh oh, what's he up to?_

"Was that your lover?" he asked smoothly.

Darcy's face flamed and before she could correct him, he effectively cut her off as her phone magically vanished from her hand and appeared in his and the snap of the camera erupted from the device.

"Hey!"

"You deserved it and you know it."

"Oh is that payback for the Sigyn jab?" she quipped, poking the bear.

Loki's eyes were focused on the screen, "Among other things."

Darcy started getting paranoid with her phone in his seemingly capable hands. _He better not be posting shit to Instagram…_

"What are you doing?" she asked, rising to her feet to get a better view.

"Appreciating your Midgardian…technology," he teased, a slow smirk blooming on his lips as his eyes remaining glued to her phone.

Her cheeks grew hotter with indignation. First S.H.I.E.L.D stole her original iPod, now the Norse trickster god was commandeering her cell.

Loki's smirk only widened at her irritation and he snapped another photo. Darcy quickly decided this game was no longer fun. She was supposed to be taking awkward pictures of him.

When his hand dodged her attempt to snatch her phone away, she tried to tackle him down to the floor before he could rise to his full height. She already learned her lesson about trying to wrestle things from a tall Asgardians when they were on their feet.

He shuffled to the side and banded one arm around her waist and maneuvered her into a playful headlock, all the while not moving from his seat on the bench. Outstretching his arm, he framed them both into the screen and snapped another photo.

"Loki!" she growled.

"Rule of life, little one, you can't out play the God of Mischief."

That made her want to challenge him all the more, "You're gonna get it!"

Ignoring her threat, Loki released her head and pulled her down beside him on the bench. He returned her phone just as easily, then went back to staring at the fire looking mildly broody all of a sudden.

_What now?_

"Sigyn exists and I knew her, but we were never married, never lovers for that matter," he said simply and yet it still seemed that it troubled him to talk about it.

"Tell me about her—" a reemerging thought caused her to shake her head, "wait, Brail me. I wanna
test it."

His brow pinched in confusion, but when she held out her hand, he quickly recalled events from earlier in their day. He reached for her and they loosely held hands, his thumb rubbing over her skin.

Unlike in the cab, there were no words working their way into her flesh, her DNA. The sensation of his contact provided nothing for her to read, only the cool, pleasantly rough texture of the ridges of his thumbprint marking a back and forth path on her hand.

Darcy's brows furrowed as she studied their linked hands then she shifted to look up into his face, his eyes, in an attempt to discern something from them instead. Viridian pools poured deep into her clear blue wells, breaching the watery depths and touching her soul.

Though the intensity of his eyes and the sure strokes of his thumb told her that the connection was still there, neither his touch nor his countenance spoke of Sigyn to her, or anything else for that matter. The link remained, but was somehow one or both sides were closed off.

"It's not working," she said, "You're not opening up enough."

"I am, you're not receiving."

"Yes I am," she argued vehemently.

"Try harder," he coaxed, holding her gaze.

This time his hand shifted and his thumb drew a slow circular pattern over the pulse point in her wrist.

Darcy jolted back a bit, but it had nothing to do with their Brail connection. It was as if his touch had scorched her, his skin no longer cool.

Loki's eyes flashed, his pupils blowing wide before retreating his soul-piercing gaze completely. He released her hand and turned back to the fire.

Darcy had to take a couple of deep breaths so that she didn't end up panting. She closed her eyes tight and pulled her electrified arm closer to her body, hoping not to make the sensations she was feeling super obvious.

"It didn't work. Why didn't it work?" she huffed, hoping to mask how flustered she was.

Detailed flashbacks of two years ago when it wasn't Loki's thumb, but his lips instead sinfully, erotically marking her pulse. Marking her as his.

The recollection caused a fluttering to gather in her belly.

_Dude, he was being manipulated then. Don't complicate things by eyeing up your former imaginary friend!_

She cautiously hedged a sidelong glance in his direction.

There was an elbow propped on one knee and the thumb that had just caressed a jolting response from her was currently tip first between his teeth. He wasn't biting down on it, just holding it there casually while seemingly deep in thought. As though she weren't there his were eyes straight ahead, focused on something else.

Darcy found herself secretly willing to give up her left arm to know what he was thinking about and
yet she didn't want to know. She could be fickle like that.

He removed his thumb from his teeth, the movement making her look away quickly.

"The conditions weren't met."

Her head whirled to face him fully. "Huh?"

"This…Brail…I believe certain conditions must be met for it to work."

"Like what?" she asked, mentally shaking her mind of its previous thoughts.

Loki looked at her then, "Could be many variables to take into account, but think back. What was present last time that is absent now?"

He was challenging her to solve the equation he had set before her and she wasn't about to let it beat her.

The variables…let's see…

It occurred first in the flat, when they were sneaking away from Jane and Thor. Loki had seemed distrustful of her claims that he wouldn't be readily recognized, and she wanted him to trust her. He grabbed her hand and moved forward, as though understanding what she wanted without her uttering a word.

They continued to hold hands getting into in the taxi, and had done so during the entire the drive through London. There had been someone else there with them, the cabbi. She remembered there was little for them to talk about in his presence. And though he denied it, Loki's stress level had skyrocketed since getting inside the vehicle. She in turn got stressed watching him sitting there so tense in his seat, so she had tried to comfort him.

That was when the connection between seemed to open fully.

Darcy pinned all of those details in her brain and moved the scene forward to their attempt at Brailing a just a minute ago.

They had been talking calmly prior to attempting to Brail, they were alone, and they were both unperturbed from any real stressful situations.

The pieces instantly clicked.

"It's like the connection can only be opened when speaking may prove dangerous in certain, stressful situations."

Loki gave her an appraising smile, "By my current considerations you are correct, well done. However I think it should be tested further to eliminate all the variables so that we may know without doubt how it works, and most importantly, why it works."

"Awesome," she smiled, then added, "how do we plan to do that, though?"

His smile stretched into a conspiratorial grin, "You will find out soon enough," his smile faded as he turned the subject, "you wanted to know about Sigyn."

"Well yes," she answered, though he presented her with more of a statement than a question.

"I will tell you while I put on a stew. Would you fetch the beef tenderloin while I get the other
ingrediants?" he asked while getting up from the bench.

She nodded and followed him to the storage room. Loki grabbed a basket and filled it with a couple of market fresh potatoes, a few stalks of celery, carrots, garlic, an onion, a bottle of white wine, and two water bottles. Darcy found the juicy tenderloin in the refrigerator. Together they returned to the kitchen and where she chopped up the vegetables while he peeled and sliced the potatoes into chunks.

"Twas several hundred years ago when I first met her," he began, eyes never straying from his task. He then began cutting up the meat. "Sigyn was a Vanir noble, daughter of Vanaheim's ambassador, so she was often traveling with her family to Asgard when her mother and Odin needed to discuss policies."

"Her mother was the ambassador?"

"Yes. Women of Vanaheim wield more power than those of Asgard. Over the centuries they've had quite a few ruling queens, even my mother hailed from there and became queen of Asgard," he continued on, "I had just hit my growth spurt when I first saw her. Blond hair like a halo about her head, porcelain skin, violet eyes, and delicate features; there were many who wanted to catch her fancy. While our parents attended lengthy meetings, Thor and I were charged with giving her a tour of Asgard and its palace, and escorting her wherever she wanted to go. Thor did more dallying trying to win her affections than actually informing her of anything."

Darcy found herself engrossed in his story, completely forgetting thoughts of Brailing, as well as thoughts of his innocent, yet sizzling touch. She was getting the real scoop on a myth and she wanted to know more. It took all her mental focus not to cut herself while chopping.

"How did she take it?" she asked eagerly.

He looked at her then, a hint of a cheeky smile on his face, "Sigyn didn't take to him at all," he then chuckled, "Shortly after he started making his advances, she began placing her arm in the crook of my elbow, subtly using me as a shield. It took the oaf awhile to get it, but finally he let her be."

"So what did you think about her?"

Loki hung a cast iron skillet over the fire pit and put some butter inside to melt. Gracefully he sat down in his spot on the bench as he watched the butter's progress.

"Her rejection of Thor astonished me, but I did not put much hope that she was doing nothing more than using me to be rid of him. There were few who approached me unless they wanted to use me to pursue a higher goal. Hand me the potatoes, carrots, and the celery, please."

She nodded and grabbed the cutting board, pushing them into the skillet with her knife. Stirring them occasionally the god covered the skillet with a lid to quicken the cooking of the potatoes.

"So she caught me a little off guard when she searched me out, asking me if I would tutor her in magic," he gestured for the diced onions to be added, "It is very common for women in most realms to study magic, however she did not request to join Asgard's arcane guild. She came to me."

The crushed garlic and a dash of salt were added next.

"Still…I thought Sigyn was merely wanting my association for my skills, but I acquiesced to her wishes and I tutored her in the study everyday. She was a quick learner and soon she graduated from books and lectures to actual magical practice in the courtyard."
Just as the vegetables began to waft a pleasant culinary smell throughout the room, Loki levitated the skillet from the fire with his magic and dumped its contents into a large empty bowl. The skillet floated back to hang over the pit and he manually added more butter. He asked her to season the tenderloin then it was placed into the skillet when the butter was liquefied.

"She turned out to be quite pleasant company," he went on as he browned the meat, "kind, gentle, modest, and yet she was certain of herself and she possessed a sharp wit that many other women of the court did not. Soon our time was spent beyond that of her tutoring to spending leisure time in the library, sharing our tastes in books. There were picnics, excursions on horseback, and we even played tricks on the guards together. Then there were times where we simply talked, and still other times where silence filled up our space, but never was it unwelcome."

"Geez, you fell hard for her," Darcy realized aloud.

Loki's cheeks colored a little, but he focused on magicking the tenderloin from the skillet to the bowl of vegetables where Darcy mixed them together with a wooden spoon.

"The wine and the chicken broth please," he requested.

He took the items from her and added portions of both to the skillet to bring to a boil. Then the skillet floated over to the bowl and the sauce was poured over the meat and vegetables. The bowl floated up to join the skillet in the air. The skillet landed gently in the sink while the bowl came to rest in on the kitchen counter.

They stood silently and together, Loki gathering two plates and utensils, then Darcy gave each plate a helping of stew. The silence dragged on as they seated themselves at the dining table.

Darcy knew there was more to Loki's story, but she thought he was done talking for the time being. She really wanted to know more, but before she could urge him to continue he spoke up for himself.

"Indeed, I was enamored of her from that time on. She visited during the spring months several years following that first visit, and each time she arrived, every second she stayed, I wanted her more and more."

Darcy scooped a forkful of her stew and blew on it. The bite exploded with flavor inside of her mouth and she couldn't help her small moan of pleasure as her eyes slid closed. That little morsel warmed her to the very soul.

She could survive a whole winter here on Loki's stew alone.

When she opened her eyes Loki was peering at her shrewdly from over his uneaten forkful, his eyes almost shivering.

"Do you enjoy my cooking, Darcy?"

"Mhmmm~" she could barely talk due to the culinary heaven she was experiencing in her mouth.

A gratified smirk suddenly crossed his face in a way that said her incoherent praise was most certainly feeding his ego. "'Tis something I picked up in my short time in Nidavellir."

As quickly as it appeared, his expression of pleasure faded into a self-depreciating frown.

"I should have said something," he said absently after swallowing his next bite.

"Why didn't you?" she asked around a mouthful, understanding that he steered their conversation
"I...I'm not sure," he stared at his plate before steadily and precisely shoveling bite after bite into his mouth. Even when he was stuffing his face he made it look flawless, unlike Thor.

"So what happened?"

Loki stalled in answering her by gathering another plateful of stew. He was being stately, but she could see the ravenous appetite just below the surface. Apparently even a Jotun could eat small feasts to all on his own.

"She didn't come back the one year, nor the year after that," he said before taking the first bite of his second helping, "I cautiously asked mother about her, but she was unsure for the reason Sigyn had not come, for she previously returned even when there were no need for diplomatic attentions between our realms. After a few decades of Sigyn's absence I continued on, choosing to forget her."

Darcy finished her plate and rinsed it off in the sink, then rejoined him at the table.

"You didn't forget her though, that's obvious."

"I did...for many years in fact. Decades turned to centuries. For a mortal that's many lifetimes, but it's nothing for an Æsir – or a Jotun. We age vastly differently compared to humans," he wasn't speaking condescendingly, but she could tell it was hard for him not to – he was being courteous for her sake, "the first couple hundred years pass by with the blink of an eye and before long we've grown to adolescence. From then on our aging begins to slow, and it can take nearly three millennia for us to hit half of our life expectancy."

Loki shifted in his seat, taking a sip of water before he returned to his original subject, "It wasn't until I attended mother on a short visit to Vanaheim to see her kin that I was forced to remember her. I had just become a man shortly before I saw her again among the Vanir court. And to my new eyes the multitude of her appearance only magnified, becoming the most beautiful, elegant creature I've ever seen. Seeing Sigyn, even lovelier than before, smacked me awake from whatever stupor I was in all those years previous, and the first instance I was able to speak with her in relative privacy, without much preamble, I asked for her hand in courtship."

He dropped off there and carried on eating in his swift yet polished manner. Second helping gone, he went back for a third.

"Whoa, dude don't just leave me with a cliffhanger! Finish the story!"

His face seemed to sour at the prospect, "Only if you tell me about this Ian of yours."

"C'mon!" she cried in exasperation, "he's not mine and I'm not his. There's not even that much to tell."

Loki leaned forward and steepled his fingers in front of his once again empty plate (seriously, how did he eat so fast, but with such manners, and where did he put it all?), his voice full of sneaking suspicion, "Ah, but he was yours wasn't he?"

Darcy nearly enlightened him when she realized what the god was doing. She snapped her jaw shut at the last minute and backpedaled.

"Finish your story first and I'll tell you."

He shook his head, not taking her offer, "I can already read that much from you, I need something I
can sink my teeth into."

"I just said that there wasn't much to tell, your story is more exciting.

Never once did it occur to her from the onset of his invitation to join him on his little adventure did she think that she might have difficulty talking about herself. She had been more worried about getting him to open up.

The Trickster's arms spread out on either side in a gesture of welcome, "I'll be the judge of that," he said and then he leaned back in his chair in a languid manner, arms smoothly coming to rest behind his head.

She didn't want to cross this bridge with him, not really, but she would cross it anyway if that meant that he would let her know the results of his proposal to Sigyn.

"I met Ian after I almost ran him over with my car."

Darcy was prepared to could go on, but Loki first snorted as though trying to he was either calling her bluff and thought better of it, or he was trying to keep something in. A rich chuckle bubbled to the surface, soon turning into laughter she was sure she never heard from him before, open and uncontained.

She wasn't sure whether to be shocked or pissed at his behavior.

"Truly," he enunciated fully once he had caught his breath, "already off to an interesting start."

Her cheeks heated under the teasing scrutiny he was joyously employing. His eyes were positively glittering.

She huffed.

"I tricked him into becoming my intern shortly before Jane got infected with the weird cosmic flu and Thor swooped her up to Asgard. I kept forgetting his name and honestly I thought he was just some dude, struck dumb by a girl. I mean he threw our car keys into one of the portals caused by the convergence, for Christ's sake."

Loki blinked and shifted in his seat so that his arms were crossed over his chest a perturbed look upon his face.

"You're attracted to acts of idiocy?" he asked, voice scoffing.

"No!" she retorted defensively, "He saved me."

"From what?"

"Space elves, during Malekith's attack," she clarified, "he used an anomaly of the convergence; a car that was defying gravity nearby. He lifted it and smashed the elves that were about to flay me alive. So I kissed him."

Loki digested her words silently, his expression gaining thoughtfulness to it, though he still seemed bothered by something.

"I started recognizing him and spending time with him. For all Ian's stupidity around women, he's super smart. He knows the workings of so many things. I realized he was just not used to interacting with the opposite gender. He's smart, understanding, awesome at X Box, and so very nice."
"Then why are you not with him now?" he questioned, confusion crossing his face and furrowing his brow.

Darcy shrugged as she gathered her thoughts, "He was falling in love with me, and I thought I was in love with him, but I really wasn't."

"But why?" he pressed urgently.

A silence fell over them. Him leaning forward in his seat, awaiting her answer as she considered what he would think of her when he learned the truth. Asgardian standards for women were different than that of Midgard, clinging to medieval values. Would he agree with her or would he blatantly call her a fool, or worse?

Who am I kidding? He's Loki, the black sheep of the family.

Finally she swallowed all preconceptions, positive and negative, and told him, "He's a good guy and all, but he wanted to settle whereas I'm not ready for that yet. I still like having my independence. I like having options. And quite frankly he didn't have enough of a spine to handle me like I'd like to be handled."

The god tilted his head to the side as he continued to regard her, "In Asgard, they would revile you as a harlot for such behavior."

"And would you?" she asked without hesitation.

"No," his answer was short but a certain respect could be heard in it.

"No more stalling, finish your story, Loki."

He heaved a suffering sigh, "I did put the deal on the table and you delivered, I suppose."

"You know I delivered," she corrected snippily.

"Very well, little one," he made a consenting nod, "she refused me as a suitor."

"What?!" she demanded, slamming a palm on the table, "Why?"

Loki raised a hand to silence her, his voice a subtle warning, "Do not blame Sigyn. If anyone was to blame, I would be the one."

She said nothing, her face a slightly skeptical as her hand upon the table curled into a fist.

"Sigyn did not reject me lightly, but appeared pained as she told me of her betrothal to another, a Vanir sorcerer of high standing. You see, all along she had wanted me too, but I had waited too long to let it be known and she fell in love with another."

As she listened, Darcy's shoulders relaxed and her fist loosened.

"How did it make you feel?" she inquired gently.

His own shoulders slumped, "Defeated and withdrawn," he stood and gathered his plate and fork into the sink. "My magic started to build up frequently to unstable levels in my inactivity," he meticulously washed the plate, "one night I astral projected to Midgard to exorcise my excess magic on unsuspecting humans." He finished and looked over his shoulder at her, "Worry not, I did no serious harm."
The faucet was shut off and he glided back to his chair, "I met you that night, Darcy."

Her lips parted in silence.

"I felt so alone and starved for companionship, and you so much appreciated my magic, my presence, that as I held you in my arms my thoughts drifted towards plans of stealing you away from your realm."

A thudding punched at her sternum from the inside. Her heart was racing with anxiety. As much as she trusted him, his confession caused duress to bloom in her chest.

What if he had taken her then?

"Your mother came calling for you then," he said, his gaze barely meeting hers "And I knew I couldn't keep you. I followed you home and whispered a spell over you as you slept so that you would remember me as nothing but a dream," his eyes flicked up to hers then, "Apparently it didn't quite work."

Darcy shook from her the panic that was creeping over, thankful to know his logical conscious overrode hasty emotions.

His chest rose and fell with a shaky breath and his eyebrows knitted a little, "I've distressed you… haven't I? I'm sorry."

"Only a little," she admitted.

Green eyes glistened with an earnest sheen, "I lost Sigyn, but I gained you. You're a silver lining to me, Darcy, and one I do not regret enduring cloudy days to find. My… brainwashed episode aside…" he sighed heavily upon remembering his thrall under Thanos, "I never would force you anywhere with me you did not want to go, ever."

"I know," resolution filled her voice, touched by his words.

Magic shimmered over Loki's body and his attire shifted into another set of human formal wear, a thin wool coat over it. He stood and rounded the table, coming to a stop beside her. He extended his hand.

"Then will you accompany me to Finland? There is an ancient site I wish to search."

Part of her felt tired, as if she was feeling a bit jetlagged. The opposing side of her however was warmed and energized by the stew she ate as well as by the thought of mystery and exploration.

Door number two it was.

She took his hand and he gingerly helped her to her feet.

"It shouldn't be as cold there, but you will still need your coat for the journey," he advised, and she suspected that he met the trip between here and the portal they'd be using for travel.

Darcy grabbed her coat, taser, and on second thought, her small notebook and pen from her room, then met Loki at the entrance of the cabin. From there they trekked towards the spot where they popped through the portal from Denmark. Loki guided her a few yards from there, further into the surrounding trees.

"It's here," he said and they stopped in the snow.
Long arms welcomed her close as she pressed against him. She didn't allow his proximity to unnerve her and crushed herself to him. The last two rides on the interdimensional tilt-a-whirl were fostering a greater fear than that of puncturing her personal bubble, and that fear was of getting separated from her alien compadre.

White light filtered in and Darcy screwed her eyes shut and clung to him. The humming followed; jarring her so much that she was sure that she was vibrating down to the molecular level. There was the familiar but horrendous spinning, then a new sensation trickled in.

A feeling of being reduced to her basest structure poured over her.

Her molecules tried spinning in some wild direction, but something tethered them, forcing them back to their previous position, something distinctly Loki. She wondered vaguely how he could keep her from separating from him when she had in fact separated from herself?

The white light evaporated and she was suddenly whole again and Loki was pulling her to back to his body.

Darcy chuckled nervously up at him, "What should we call this little dance?"

He let out a snort, "I would call it, Seinn…"

There was that layering of vocal chords again, and being so close to him she could feel the inhuman resonance in his chest as he enunciated the last word.

"W-What does that mean?" she asked, suppressing an embarrassingly pleasant shiver.

He removed himself from her personal bubble. "Tedious," he replied dispassionately.

They were standing in frosty clearing in the midst of a forest, a manmade stone and mound formation just in the distance. His hands disappeared into his coat pocket as he stalked towards the site before them.

"So is that like…Asgardian?" she hedged, nearly resorting to jogging to keep up with him.

"Yes," he caught her by the elbow as she tripped over the terrain, "Or your people would call it Old Norse. The North men learned the language of the Æsir, but they butchered it."

"Maybe they just didn't have the right anatomy."

Darcy was suddenly feeling defensive of her race.

Beside her the Trickster’s face grew into a lecherous grin though he stared straight ahead.

"They definitely had the right anatomy."

"I meant their vocal chords, you perve…" when she narrowed her eyes at him he only shrugged.

"Perhaps you are right."

"So how come you don't butcher our language?"

"All-Tongue," he answered, "All that dwell within the nine realms possess it, well except for humans," he added, this time openly teasing of humanity’s inadequacies, "It's like a natural ability that allows me to understand and speak any language I encounter. I only need hear it once."
A look of awe passed over Darcy's face. "Dude, can you teach me?"

"Tch…All-Tongue cannot be taught…you're either born with it or you'll never have it."

"Lame!"

They journeyed slowly towards the site, mostly because Darcy had to watch out for slippery stones and uneven ground. After her third stumble, Loki let out a grumble and his hand closed around her upper arm to keep her steady.

Once they came upon the formation she suddenly felt like walking off on her own. The god beside her tugged on her arm.

"Where are you going?"

She turned to face him wondering that herself. "I don't know, just to look around I guess. What are we here for anyway?"

"If I recall my memory and research correctly King Jalmari's human mistress is buried here. Where she is found, we are sure to find the keys to Laevateinn's chest."

"We're going to go grave robbing?" she asked in wide-eyed alarm, snatching her arm from his grasp.

"She's been dead for a long time, little one," he said reassuringly.

It didn't reassure her at all.

"We have no shovels."

"I have my magic. Now don't stray too far."

Loki ended the discussion there and walked towards the small, gravely silent army of mounds. They were lined up, forming several rows; while monolithic stones stood guard on the perimeter.

He stepped up to the closest mound and made a rising motion with his dominant hand. The raised ground before him shimmered green then rumbled as a six-foot clump of earth separated and lifted into the air. His hand made swiping gesture and the dirt collapsed to the side and out of his way before he crouched to peer into the hole he created.

Though she really didn't want to look at dead bodies, Darcy found herself edging towards the unearthed grave. Resting inside was a yellowing, incomplete skeleton. Decaying scraps of fabric, weathered weapons, and other Bronze Age tokens scattered the cavity.

By the time she discerned everything, Loki was well on his way to disturbing the next mound. She stood quickly and marched over just as the dirt was shifting at his command.

"Hey!" she snapped.

"What is it?" he looked over but did not lose concentration of his magic.

"You can't go digging them all up!"

Loki made noncommittal shrug and went on razing the ground. "I must not leave any stone unturned."

"At least cover them back up."
A disgruntled sound issued from the god's mouth and after finding nothing, dumped the hard frozen earth back into the deep indentation. He mimicked the motion with the first grave he dug up.

"I hope you're happy…" he groused.

"Not exactly happy," she quipped, "but it's better, at least."

Loki rolled his eyes before moving on.

While he carried on desecrating one burial mound after another, Darcy once again felt the need to do her own searching, a sort of pull leading her along. If she could chalk it up to aimless curiosity to explore, she would. Except it didn't seem aimless when she realized she was passing up other sights to investigate for something else. What or where that was, she didn't know. But she didn't question it and simply went on with the flow.

The further Darcy walked, the stronger she felt her feet were propelled forward. She weaved through burial mounds, walked over slick rocks, avoiding detritus and fallen limbs. In the end her destination was a huge megalithic boulder balanced precariously on top another one.

She gaped up at the formation; unsure whether it was natural or manmade. The boulder looked too big for even an army of men to haul into place, but the precision with which it was balanced seemed too coincidental for it to have just spontaneously landed itself there.

The longer she stared at the boulder, the more it seemed like it could topple over onto her any second. She was about to leave – she so wasn't going to end up a Darcy pancake – when her eyes caught sight of something that almost blended in with the surrounding nature.

An inconspicuous lone burial mound was planted at the foot of the megalith.

She had no desire to help Loki unearth ancient people's graves, but she was overcome with the compulsion to poke around with this one. With her hands, she began clearing away the dirt and organic debris from the mound. Her fingernails began getting encrusted with cold earth, but she continued to scratch and claw until her nail scraped something hard and she started bleeding.

"Shit."

Even with blood and dirt staining her hands, the need to uncover the mound was a driving force. A rock broke the surface and she was about to bypass it, until she noticed the runic symbols carved into it. She went to exhume it further when Loki's voice cut into her focus.

"I told you not to stray," he sounded vexed and kept glancing warily up at the megalith every few moments.

"But I wanted to look around."

The god narrowed his glancing between her and the rock, his countenance stone-faced. "And you just had to search the most dangerous area of the site?"

"It's secure. Look at it, it's been here for millions of years," she brushed away some dirt from the rune stone, "Anyway I found this."

Giving the boulder one last skeptical look Loki knelt beside her, but he didn't focus on the stone. He tsked at her then said, "Look at you…constantly getting into trouble. I can't take my eyes off of you
for a second."

"Wha—"

He took her hand in his, examining the angry redness of her finger,

"It's nothing, just a broken nail."

Ignoring her, he brought it to his lips. He closed his eyes in concentration and a soothing coolness seeped into the throbbing heat of her abused flesh. Despite herself, she let out a soft sigh of relief.

Still she protested, "I'm not a baby, ya know."

"Even so, I don't like seeing you carelessly marring yourself," he released her finger, "be more attentive."

Switching gears, he studied the stone and the raised earth of the mound. He then placed his hand on the soil, his face concentrating on something deep within the mound.

He seemed to approve of what he found for his face lit up subtly. Swiftly he stood and used he his magic to gouge the frozen earth from the grave, forming a crater.

Interred within the mound was a more delicate skeleton adorned with age-old trinkets and jewelry. A golden filigree key rested upon the crumbling rib cage, tethered to the neck by decaying cordage. The key looked normal enough, except that it possessed an otherworldly shimmer, very much like the apple Loki once had.

"The Golden Key of Inner Strength," Loki announced proudly, but the gratification quickly fell away as his gaze darted about the grave, magic still holding the substrate aloft, "But I see no other keys…" green eyes hardened then glanced sharply at the runes stone she had been picking at. They skimmed the exposed runes with scrupulous detail. His form relaxed minutely, "Perhaps there is something."

Loki deposited the soil nearby and raised his other hand beckoningly. Green energy swirled around the key, manipulating it into the air. His fingers continued to beseech the key to come to him, but the cord was caught on the spiny protrusions on the back of the cervical vertebrae. Irritation clouded Loki's eyes as he kept pulling. He quickly gave up on the gentle approach, his magic yanking so hard that the cord decapitated the skull from the neck with a sickening crack.

Darcy gasped and covered her mouth at the display. Loki didn't bat a lash, as his attention was elsewhere.

The key floated into Loki's eager grasp while he re-piled the dirt upon the deceased's bones. She wanted to scold him for such callous disrespect of the dead, but the words died on her lips as the golden key demanded her attention. She eased in closer to get a better look. It had a rather simple shaft and a filigree design carved painstakingly into the metal of the head and the bit.

Turning the ordinary, yet ethereal object over in his hand, Loki seemed to be checking it over as well.

"Yes, definitely one of the nine," he breathed, a slow smile crooking his mouth as he moved on to the rune stone.

Like wafting smoke, his magic brushed lightly against the partially uncovered stone so as not to damage the inscriptions as he, rid it of remaining dirt.
"We are so getting cursed…"

"Humans lack the proper functionality to do much more than pitiful parlor tricks," Loki said dismissively, his attention all but claimed by the stone.

"If I get cursed, I'm going to curse your royal alien ass with my taser," her threat was ignored, so she went with a more diplomatic approach, "So what does it say?"

Once the stone was mostly devoid of obstruction, Loki took a closer look at it. Narrowing his eyes, he briefly looked confused while reading, then snorted and remarked quietly to himself, "They even managed to butcher our writing…"

"Loki…"

"Fine," he relented as though it were a real pain to do so, "it tells of King Jarmari and his mistress, Aila, who lies here," he explained, "how he met her through a valiant rescue and how he wanted to stay with her, but could not leave his kingdom nor was she allowed to step foot on Alfheim. Thus inspiring the king to create keys that could unlock special doorways from Midgard to Alfheim, and more importantly, to his private quarters.

Darcy listened intently as her companion read on, clearly giving her the summarized version. Digging out her notebook and pen, she prepared to take notes should the stone hold anything important to their mission.

"Aila used different doorways with each visit, so that she may not be tracked. The keys also had the power to enhance her character, strengthen her weaknesses. They lived many years happily this way. Then after she discovered that Jarmari had fallen in a siege Malekith had wrought upon Alfheim, she could not bare to live. She took her life, but not before charging their daughter, Sinmara, with scattering the keys; three to Finland, three to Denmark, and three to Sweden. Sinmara then went to reside alone on Mount Hornatær in Iceland."

Loki scanned over the runes once again – a desperate look on his face, before cursing quietly, "Without knowing their exact locations, finding the other keys will be as though searching for a grey hair on a sheep. We have a possible specific location of the chest, if this mindless scrawl is to be trusted," his voice became a growl, "but unless we find the keys everything will be for naught."

"Do not tell me this road trip was for nothing," Darcy griped hands tightening on her notebook, "maybe you're just forgetting something. There's gotta be a way."

Loki's eyes were far away, and Darcy almost thought he was spacing out, but then she realized what his mien truly conveyed: thousands of gears turning at a furious pace inside of his head.

He was cooking something up, and judging by the concentration Darcy he was going to hatch a plan at breakneck speed.

A wry smile crooked his mouth as his gears reached beyond Mach one.

"Indeed there is a way, little one," he face became adorably enlivened by his scheming, "I know of one ancient settlement in Sweden personally, but I want you to help me root out as many known Viking age settlements spanning Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, as we can using your research device. But for now, let us retire for the remainder of the day."

As though on cue a yawn threatened to issue from her mouth. She bit it back and gazed up at the darkening sky.
"Yeah sleep sounds pretty good, right about now."

They made it all but two steps from the Aila's burial mound when a thunderous rumbling shook the ground and they were cast in an ominous shadow. Trickster God and human turned tandem, frantic green and blue gazes peering over their shoulders.

The gigantic moss covered boulder had lodged free of its rocky cradle and was quickly bearing down on them. Everything was happening too fast and they were way too close to have any chance of dodging it.

The last thing Darcy registered before closing her eyes was Loki closing his arms tightly around her. She buried her face in his chest and waited for the onslaught of crushing tonnage. There was only the hope that getting crushed to death wasn’t overly slow and painful.

There was a popping sensation just preceding a sharp gust of wind. Air whooshed by, whipping their hair and clothes for the briefest of seconds.

*Wow, was that it? Did it kill us so quickly that it felt like breeze?*

The rumbling thundered and crashed beyond them, jolting Darcy from her thoughts. Her eyes snapped open and she shifted her face against his chest so that she could look outward from it.

The boulder was crashing downhill from them, taking out massive trees in its wake, trees that came crashing down from above them. There was no time to resume breathing as her brain processed that they were still in a danger zone.

Loki’s arms tightened around her ribcage, both observing the descent of the forest giants upon them with upturned heads.

A scream tried to bubble up from her mouth, but it was strangled back by a strange sensation of popped out of existence.

Her scream echoed in the Finland forest when they popped back, arriving a good safe distance from the carnage so that nothing else could threaten them.

The rumbling finally stopped below them and she peered down to see that the cantankerous boulder stopped just on top of the site of burial mounds Loki had been poking around earlier.

The chest under her head rumbled with laughter.

"I dare say they have been thoroughly desecrated now."

"Better them than me," Darcy said instantly and without compunction.

**Chapter End Notes**

When writing about Sigyn, I really wanted to put her in a good light instead of bad, because though she is mentioned little in the myths she really was good to Loki. Also the giant boulder that Loki and Darcy encounter in Finland is based on a very real site called the **Kummakivi Stone**. Again hope you enjoyed!
All That's In Between

Chapter Notes

First of all this will be the last update for this fic for a few months as I mentioned before going to Sweden soon. I will keep a notebook handy as I'm sure going there will fill me with more inspiration to write! If you want more Tasertricks to sink your teeth into, next month I will be posting some smutty one shots I wrote for Darcy Lewis Smut Week's prompts. I also just wanted to say thank you for the feedback, kudos, and bookmarks. Keep them coming as they fuel my writing and updates! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After dodging natural elements that seemingly possessed homicidal tendencies and safely procuring the first of Jarmari's nine keys, Loki and Darcy portal hopped back to their Norwegian cabin. Darcy promptly went to her room, proclaiming that she needed a good night's rest before she continued key hunting, and Loki left her to it without complaint. A touch of weariness from the day's events had settled into his Jotun bones as well.

Upon retiring to his own room Loki placed the golden key on the nightstand before grabbing up a book from the bookcase. Shifting into a more comfortable set of clothes and with ancient tome in hand the God of Mischief reclined on top of the comforter. He turned the pages, tenderly revering their age, and arrived at the table of contents to find the section he wanted. Then he gradually worked his way to the part of the book that potentially held the information he sought. There it was, among chapter 8, page 305, a section entitled Telepathy Among Beings.

Sharp eyes skimmed word by word, page by page, mentally digesting knowledge at the rate a sponge absorbed water.

Mental communication, not to be confused with Telepathy is the ability to speak or convey words from individual to individual without use of physical vocal chords. It is different from telepathy for it leaves the thoughts of the individual private. This ability is a trait only to the Fire Giants of Muspellheim have mastered. Because their bodies are largely made up of fire and noxious vapors, the Fire Giants developed a way to communicate with through wavelengths of the mind.

Loki paused, his lips pursing as his eyes flickered upward in thought. What he read matched the description of this "Brail" that he and Darcy shared in the Taxi, and yet the same information denied that they could have that ability. There had to be exceptional cases.

A skill such as this has not been observed among any other intelligent entity, therefore cannot be learned from study or mental training. It can only be attained if one is born a Fire—

A presence next the bed startled his attention from the book, the suddenness nearly causing him to drop the ancient tome none too gently. Loki swiftly recovered, catching the book with his magic and pocketing it between dimensions, before confronting the intruder. His brow creased instantly in puzzlement.

"Darcy, what are you doing?"
Clad only in her thin sleeping pants and shirt Darcy stood staring down at the elven-made key on his nightstand, and intense fervor clouding her eyes and shrouding her senses from everything else except the key. The girl certainly wasn't herself, seemingly caught in trance.

*Sleep walking perhaps?* Loki thought to himself.

Slowly she stretched out a pale arm, dainty fingers reaching for the key. The key in turn shimmered in a sort of recognition. Loki watched the strange scene with baited breath, curiously wondering what would unfold.

A hair's breadth away from grabbing the key Darcy's hand passed through the key and partway into the wood of the nightstand. Mildly stupefied, the prince blinked and shook his head, then watched on as Darcy continued to make for the key, completely oblivious to the problem impeding her. He focused his observations more thoroughly.

Darcy was fully visible, but intangible. Her gaze was far afield and she was unresponsive to the sound of his voice. But the most telling sign was the dancing hummingbird-wing flutter of essence emanating from her. He knew from that alone what was happening.

Finally giving up on the key, Darcy turned and took floating footsteps towards the southern wall of his room. The thought of stopping her strongly crossed his mind, but discovering the intent his companion in this form captured Loki's curiosity.

*Just a little bit longer...then I will stop her.*

Loki watched her phase through the wall, ending up outside, and immediately teleported himself so he could join her. She walked upon the freezing ground with ease, telling him that she was completely unfeeling of her surroundings. The speed of her gait also increased almost supernaturally.

At first he thought her nighttime stroll an aimless one, but the longer he followed her the clearer her destination became. She was traveling to the mountain and the secret it held within, and the closer she came, the speed of her gait seemed to increase abnormally.

If she reached the mountain in this state, he could easily lose her between realms.

"Stop!" he called sharply over the whistling of the arctic wind, forgetting the situation they were both in.

Darcy ignored him, marching straight for the foot of the mountain. Undoubtedly she could float right through the dense rock and reach the portal unhindered and there was nothing he could do because Darcy, though she made herself visible, sh currently was not occupying the same plane as him. Not even his magic could stop her.

Loki cursed and hurried himself through the process of casting his spirit from his body. Without the comfort of a relaxed position and a calm surroundings, it was an uphill battle.

And that wasn't even half.

Once he became a part of the astral realm he had to seek the exact plane her spirit inhabited. Like using walkie, Loki had to turn to the right station for Darcy to receive his message or else he'd be talking to nothing but static. He had mere seconds to find the right wavelength or she'd be gone to Yggdrasil knows where.

Loki thanked the Norns that her spiritual signature was quite noticeable amidst the static, allowing him to swoop into her wavelength, and with a stern but careful grip on her forearm, he halted her just
in front of the portal. The scene that Darcy saw came into sharp focus, melting away the Norwegian landscape to reveal a lush jungle that belonged nowhere on Midgard.

Though Darcy turned her gaze to him, her eyes remained unfocused and dazed. Something otherworldly was calling to her astral form; first it was the key and now the portal hidden within the Jotunheimen mountain range.

The more god thought he was making some headway in getting answers, the more questions rose up to take their place.

He looked over the girl in front of him with a critical eye. What is calling to you, little one?

As much as he wanted to find the keys and unlock Laevateinn, far more pressing matters called for his immediate attention. His birthright could wait a bit longer.

Darcy watched with detached eyes as Loki drew a set of runes in the air before her, his magic flowing green and glowing from his index finger.

"Fara heimili andi," he commanded in Æsir tongue and with a flick of his palm towards her, pressed the runes into her spiritual body with a light blast of magic. The runes imbedded themselves within Darcy's torso, the force knocking her a step backwards. She then disappeared.

Loki inhaled deeply with slight trepidation, returned himself to his physical vessel – the familiar Earthly mountains and forest reappearing - then teleported himself to Darcy's room. Only when he saw Darcy stirring sleepily in her bed did he allow himself to relax and let his breath out shakily.

It had worked.

She was half asleep and appeared ignorant to her short astral travel. It was just as well to Loki. He would tell her about what transpired in the morning; first he needed anchor her spirit inside her body so that it wouldn't go wandering in the night again.

Before she could awaken further, Loki pressed his palm soothingly on her forehead and chanted a sleeping charm upon her. Darcy fought it a little to keep awake, but ultimately her own tiredness won out and she succumbed to the lulling effects of his magic. He then set to work tracing more runes.

"Andi heimdragi," he ordered as he magically pushed the runes into her sternum.

It was only a temporary fix and he'd have to perform it again the next time she went to sleep, but he planned to make it more permanent as quickly as he could. Darcy's spirit needed to be anchored, at least so long as her physical self had no leash over her astral self with which she could use to find her way back to her body on her own.

After witnessing a slight shiver of Darcy's body in reaction to the cold Loki tugged the comforter up further and shaped it around her form, then he unfolded the fur at the foot of her bed and bundled it around her. Though he didn't directly touch her, her body seemed to curl in towards the placement of his hands, seeking him out. Loki stilled, his hands hovering over the warmth of her blanketed body and remained that way for an infinitesimal eternity until he finally permitted himself to cautiously tuck some wayward strands of hair back from her porcelain face.

Darcy leaned once more into his touch, eliciting a sound of contentment, and Loki's hand darted in swift retreat. The god released a long sigh then returned to his room. He had much work to do.

The next morning Darcy awakened to the pleasant smell of sauted potatoes, beckoning her out of
bed. Even though the cabin was mildly cool, it was well insulated, and the lit fire pit put off a lot of heat through out the entire cabin. Darcy grabbed a light jacket and toed on her slippers before trekking to the kitchen. There she found Loki in what amounted as Asgardian pajamas cooking potatoes in the large cast iron skillet.

"I can cook too, ya know?" she spoke while faced with his broad back.

With a teasing chuckle over his shoulder Loki replied, "I gathered as much, little one. But this skill is new in my repertoire. I like exercising it and I've found it quite relaxing."

"And here I took you for a misogynist," Darcy joked, jutted out one hip for extra effect.

"Are you referring to the kneeling?" he asked, playing along as he added pork to skillet.

"Among other things."

"My lady," he turned away from his cooking to face her directly, hands clasped behind his back, "I hold nothing against subjects kneeling to their superiors, but I was quite mad at that point, so you are sadly mistaken," slowly he crossed the few feet separating them, his face sobering some, "If things were my way, I would have gladly seen my mother presiding over the throne of Asgard in place of that one-eyed old fool and would have served faithfully."

Darcy broke eye contact first, their jesting suddenly turning in towards a different tone, a tone whose meaning she was uncertain of. There were only two meanings his words could mean.

Either the joking had turned Loki morose as he spoke of his mother, thinking of how things might have been if they had transpired differently; or, if she tilted things side ways and squinted real hard, in a round about way he could be flirting with her.

Factored in those few fleeting yet burning gazes he directed at her yesterday made Darcy wonder. Did Loki held more interest in her other than friendly affections, or were they simply side affects of having a madman inside his head, twisting this emotions?

There was no way to be sure of any of these things without her zero-filter of a mouth potentially making a fool of her, so Darcy quickly evaded it.

"How do I know you're not crossing your fingers behind your back there, mister?"

"What?"

Try as she might to hold back her grin, his earnest confusion coaxed it out of her. Darcy stifled her laughter and pointed tentatively, "Breakfast is burning."

Loki gave a flustered curse and turned to pull the skillet off the fire pit in the most elegant scramble to save food that Darcy had ever seen.

"Smooth, real smooth..."

Darcy shook her head as she watched him juggle the skillet in one hand while he used to other to reduce the height of the flame with his magic so he could cook the rest of the ingredients without causing further burns. It was subtle but she could pick out the unusual clumsiness of his hands as he dropped the sauted onions that had been previously set aside, the slight tremor of his fingers as they cracked two eggs to join the rest of the food, cooking them over easy.

Even taking his upbringing in Thor's shadow into account, it was hard to imagine the God of
Mischief wooing the dames without swagger. And right now Loki was anything but swagger or any relating synonyms of the word, so much so that he seemed like he could be related to Ian.

*Yeah, definitely not flirting.* Darcy decided for herself with a sigh of relief. There was absolutely no reason for him to be flirting with her. Teasing maybe, but not for flirting. She let out a sigh as her conscience relieved her through logic.

But if it wasn't that, then what he heck was wrong with him?

The god fixed both of their plates in a sort of frenzied silence before setting the table, then held out a chair for her, "Please take your seat."

She slid into the proffered seat and proceeded to watch him hurry to around to his own. The speed of his actions clashed a little with his usual fluidity causing her to wonder once more.

Leaving her hash untouched while he instantly partook, she asked, "Dude, are you okay?"

Loki looked up at her, still chewing, eyes minutely sharpening as they started to study her face, and abruptly his frantic movements leveled out to their usual speed. His throat constricted in a measured swallowing of his food before expanding to normal again.

"I'm fine," he said evenly, scooping another bite of hash with nimble fingers.

Seriously…

Was she losing it or was he?

"Okay…" she switched directions, "I'll start looking up Viking settlements after breakfast."

"No need," Loki paused again, "because unlike me, you are not quite fine, therefore we must fix this little problem of yours."

Darcy's jaw actually dropped. "What are you talking about?"

Clearly he was the one that had lost it.

Loki placed his fork on the table and leveled with her with a look that said that all fun and games were over. "Last night your spirit tried to pick up the key before deciding instead to take a little stroll for mountains."

A shiver wound it's way down Darcy's spine.

"My spirit?"

"You astral projected in your sleep again. Now," Loki leaned forward on the table, "can you tell me what was calling you to the key and to the mountain, or do you not remember any of it?"

"Calling to me?" she asked, startled, "All I remember is waking up cold. I must have covered up again because I slept through the rest of the night." A fleeting expression passed over Loki's eyes that she could not read. "Why would the key and the mountains be calling to my spirit?"

"The key?" Loki pulled the elven artifact from his pocket, "Well there could be endless possibilities there. As for the mountains, there is a reason they are called the Jotunheimen mountain range. Within them is a portal to Jotunheim, a portal whose existence is known to only a select few, myself being among them. If your spirit had entered the portal unencumbered, you could have ended up in the frozen wastes of Jotunheim or worse," the key was put away again, "if you think it is cold here, the
realm of the Jotuns makes the harshest winter here seem like a light dusting."

Darcy felt the weight of the situation sink in with all the gentleness of a flying brick to the head. So that's why he's been acting weird, what happened last night made him nervous. For a while she simply looked at her own hands until a marginal amount of courage flooded back into her and she looked up at him.

Even so she was still a bit jealous of Jane getting to magical interstellar worlds before her.

"So does that mean we get to take a detour to Jotunheim?"

Taking one hard look at her Loki dismissed her request by returning to his breakfast, adding a verbal rejection for good measure, "Absolutely out of the question."

"Ah c'mon," she pleaded, "maybe we could find some more answers about all this there."

The slamming of the god's fist upon the table sent their plates flying at least a good inch off the surface – she jumped as well – his eyes blazing with emerald fire, "The only thing we will find there is a plethora of homicidal Frost Giants, who will see us both as hostiles and will try to kill us. You are forbidden from going there and you are forbidden from traversing Jotunheimen without me. Do you understand?"

Shocked by his outburst she could only nod dumbly.

"Good. Now eat your hash, it's quickly cooling. Afterwards you will immediately undergo training in the art of astral projecting safely. Until you can keep a leash on your own spirit, nothing else matters," that said, Loki shoveled the last bit of hash into his mouth before gathering his dishes to go in the sink.

He then disappeared into his room much the same way The Bats entered his Batcave, leaving Darcy to finish her lukewarm hash alone.

"So you'll be teaching me magic?"

Darcy sat on the edge of her bed, practically bouncing with excitement. Her eyes eagerly followed Loki's tall frame as he closed the curtains of her window. The dimness of the room added to the thrill of anticipation thrumming in her veins.

A soft green glow of an orb appeared in the palm of a dexterous hand, shedding some light into the room and illuminating Loki's face in a way that cast the sharp planes of his face in harsh shadows. Two subsequent orbs came into existence just above his shoulders, transporting Darcy to a night that had came to pass many years ago when she was so very young.

She needed to cling to the here and now before memories swept her up and she started thinking about what ifs.

He inclined his head once, "It is a form of magic, yes."

"Can you teach me how to make those?" she pointed to the orbs.

A rich chuckle reverberated from Loki's chest and out into the room, "Getting a bit ahead of yourself, are we, little one?"

"So you could teach me then?"
"I could teach you…” Loki agreed, fastening a long, thin gold chain around first his wrist then to hers, "But humans simply lack the mental fortitude to affect such physical changes upon their surroundings. Shamans believe they can perform magic, to cure an ailment or attain whatever means they are aiming for, when in fact the only thing they are changing is their mind set, thus the reason their "spells" appear to bear fruit. Merely a placebo."

Darcy could easily pick up on the air quotes in Loki's words, "You still think we are inferior."

"I never said that, Darcy, I'm just stating facts."

"Your facts are dripping with a supremacy complex," Darcy wiggled her wrist, testing the chain. It was loose, but not so much that it would slip off her hand, and though the metal was thin and at first glance breakable, she sensed an underlying current running the length of it. She had to admit that the Æsir did most everything better. "What are we getting hand cuffed for?"

"All part of the lesson," Loki sat down in the chair next to the bed, "I will talk you through how to consciously astral project, and once you have journeyed to the astral plane, I will join you," he tapped the thin gold encircling his wrist, "this will tell me when you've achieved spirit/body separation. It also allows me to choose which plane we will occupy during your lesson. And should we travel anywhere, which will be wherever I decide, this will force you to follow. You're doing this with me or not at all, at least until you can control your astral self," he lowered his chained forearm to the armrest with a sense of certainty, "there is no escaping me this time."

Darcy stuck out her tongue, "Control freak much?"

"Do you ever take anything seriously?"

"Typically only gods falling from the sky, raging robots, and invading space elves."

"You better start taking things serious, unless you want your spirit to become lost from your body or worse. Now lie down and be silent."

"Sir, yes sir," Darcy let out one last quip before making herself comfortable on top of her bed.

Loki ignored her jest altogether, "Empty your mind and focus on nothing else but the orbs and the sound of my voice. Do not speak, think, or feel; just relax and let whatever happens be."

The orbs of light left him and came to levitate directly above her body. Slowly from green to blue to purple the orbs began to flicker, never at a seizure-inducing rate, but a gentle exchange of hues on the cool color scale. They had a calm lulling affect, even so, Darcy found it hard to empty her mind. There was always something occupying her thoughts, calling for her attention.

Okay, emptying my mind.

Is Thor making sure Jane is getting enough food and sleep?

Emptying my mind.

Need to call mom.

Emptying my mind.

What's Loki planning to do once he finds his sword?

Emptying my mind.
Emptying my mind.

Emptying my mind.

"You're holding on too much to material worries, to yourself," Loki said, sensing her internal struggle, "let yourself come to the edge of sleep and wakefulness," he began turning the last eight words into a mantra, voice void of any distracting emotion.

His neutral, repetitive command coupled with the almost hypnotic strobe of the orbs was what it took for Darcy's mind to clear, for her eyes to get heavy and fall closed.

Darcy barely registered Loki's voice beginning to tell her something else, "Do not fall asleep," she heard him vaguely at first, then her focus on it returned, "Let your spirit separate from your body," became his new mantra.

Even behind her eyelids, the gradual flashing of green, blue, and purple managed to filter in through the darkness, mingling in harmony with the god's voice. It was powerful, but not how Thor's hammer was powerful. It didn't crush rock to dust; it was a power that mesmerized, evoking something timeless and otherworldly within her.

It started with a tingle of electricity, running from her scalp to the ends of her toes. Darcy tried to ignore them, to remain in her current state, but when they changed from tingles to a strong tugging sensation centered in her chest – like she was being pulled inside out, she felt panic erupt inside her.

"If you are experiencing a strange pull, it is the process of your spirit separating from your body and connecting with the astral plane," Loki explained, his voice sounding almost distant, "do not pull back from it, go with it."

Swallowing her fear before it could overtake her, Darcy slowly let go of the grip she had on herself. The sensation pulled more easily this time as though she was letting rope run smoothly through her hands instead of giving herself rope burn. The feeling of being pulled out of her own chest continued until the sensation yanked so hard that she was catapulted across the room.

With a thunderous gasp exploding from her lungs, Darcy came fully awake and opened her eyes, darting them side to side. She saw the ceiling of her room, the orbs blinking above her, and Loki was still seated to her right, her ever-present over watch.

She blinked, "Er…I don't think…it worked."

"It's working," Loki disagreed.

"But I'm still lying here."

A smirk pulled at his lips, "It's all perspective, little one. Why don't you get out of bed?"

When she got up and turned to look around her, she nearly had a heart attack. Sitting on the bed was Darcy Lewis, looking asleep to the world. Or dead.

"Oh Jesus!" she cried, her hands flying up to her head.

"Calling upon a made up deity will not help the situation," Loki looked mildly chaffed by her exclamation, but kept his gaze on the body that rested on the bed.

"I'm not dead am I? Please tell me I'm not dead," Darcy quivered in shock.
He lifted a brow, eyes still trained on the other her, then echoed, "You're not dead."

"Stop kidding around!" she snapped when he didn't look at her.

"I don't know what you mean by kidding," his head shifted then and he looked about, but his eyes passed right over her, only able to lock onto her general location, "your spirit has just left your body, Darcy, relax."

"How do I know that didn't kill me?" she argued frantically unable to process anything, "You're still there, in your body!"

An amused chuckle rolled up from the god's chest. He leaned back in the chair and let his eyelids fall. From his reclined position up rose another Loki, one whose eyes were able to pin her down.

"You have transitioned into the astral before without dying, haven't you?" the chain attached at her wrist shifted as he neared her, "And now I am here."

Witnessing Loki's spirit separating from his body – quite smoothly compared to her separation – to join hers brought a little relief back to Darcy.

She reached out to touch his chest and felt herself relax completely. She couldn't describe it as touching him in a physical sense, more like her essence brushed against his. His spirit held a steady drumming rhythm and it felt soothing, like home.

Loki stiffened in response, standing ramrod at his full height, and sucked in a sharp inhale, his teeth bared. He looked on the verge of retreat, but after a moment the tension eased out of him. He tentatively placed his hand over hers.

"I've never had another's spirit touch mine," he spoke almost in a whisper.

Darcy glanced down from his face to his chest where their hands met then back up again. "What does it feel like to you?" she asked.

"I…" he uncharacteristically fumbled for words before settling on, "I don't know. All I know is that your spiritual signature has the beat of a little bird's wings."

Her lips twitched at the corners. "And yours sounds like a drum, one of those primitive deerskin ones."

"Hm, what music that would make together?" his face almost looked wistful before his hand dropped away, "probably sounds horrendous," Darcy removed her hand and he returned to business, "first you need to try and connect your spiritual cord to your body."

"Spiritual cord?" she parroted.

"Look at my body and me. What do you see?"

Since they had both made the transition into the astral plane, Darcy had been keeping herself from looking at their physical bodies; it just felt incredibly weird. Now that Loki was prompting her she shifted her eyes between his astral self and his material self. At first whatever she was supposed to see eluded her, but as she looked harder she caught glimpses of a shimmering cord of silver linking the two together.

"A silver cord."
Loki nodded, "With it I can travel wherever I want, as far as I want and still find my way back. You've been quite lucky traveling without it before, but it might not always be so."

Darcy thought back to the first "dream" she had of Loki, "After that first time I found you…I remember you flung me back and I woke up."

"I sent you back to your body," his expression turned thoughtful, "you must have subconsciously mapped the way, enabling your spirit to return without a hitch. I did not expect that outcome when I sent you back."

Changing the subject so that he would get that guilty look of his face, Darcy asked, "So how do I connect my cord?"

Loki's eyes seemed to refocus to the present and he looked at her, "Creating it for me is as simple as willing it into existence using the astral plane, but generally you need to place a small fraction of your spirit back into your body, one foot in, one foot out. The cord will happen automatically connect from there."

She only heard a small fraction of what he said. "Will it into existence?"

"Yes. The astral plane with which we now reside does not abide by the same rules as the material world. Nearly everything can be shaped and attained by the mind."

"Wait, does that mean I could do magic like you?"

"Connect your spiritual cord first and perhaps—"

Before he could finish Darcy had already created set of matching floating glowing orbs. She began bouncing on her feet while shrieking, "I can! I can!" The orbs flashed through every hue imaginable at a nauseating level before settling with on violet. "This is so cool!"

Loki ran a hand through his hair and down his face, but couldn't help but smile a little at her display. "You've hardly grown at all, still entertained by little fireflies."

"You said I couldn't do magic," she turned back to him, "In your face, Merlin."

"Why don't you put your newfound skills to use and connect your spiritual cord then?" he was clearly unimpressed.

"Fine I will." Darcy faced her body and concentrated hard, expecting a silver cord to sprout into being as she had with the orbs. When nothing happened, she looked over at Loki and threw up her hands.

"Not so cocky now are you?" he grinned almost in triumph, "You're not willing for it hard enough."

She glowered at him, "Yes I am, and I'm giving it all I've got."

Loki made a sound and paced as far as the thin gold chain would allow. "Darcy Lewis…always wandering off on her own…" he stopped and faced her, "you said you value your freedom…perhaps trying to create that silver cord is going against your very nature. Even here that is quite hard to change."

"So what do we do?" she asked, feeling a little deflated.

"We're going to explore your limits. Find out just what you can do here."
Darcy's excitement returned tenfold, as she was sure that he was going to stop with the lesson and she would have to go back the material plane. Existing as a spirit outside of her body was probably the most liberating thing she ever experienced – once she got over the initial shock of course – and she eagerly wanted to do more.

Loki looked around the room, his eyes settling on the pen sitting next to her notebook on the desk. "First I want you to pick up that writing utensil."

"That should be easy," she said, strutting up to the tablet and reaching for the black ballpoint. Her hand passed through it, and Loki laughed as though that was exactly what he was expecting. He had set her up for that one. "Hey that's not fair. I can do magic, but I can't lift a stinking pen?"

"To put things clearly," he started once he stemmed his laughter, "the orbs are not magic but in fact are a visual manifestation of your thoughts. Remember the mind has power here. However enabling your spirit to interact with the material plane is a completely different matter."

"So how do I do it?" she crossed her arms, quickly tiring of his humor at her expense, "I'm just a muggle, so you have to dumb things down for me just a little bit."

"The more physical energy you give your astral self, the more you will be enabled to interact with the physical plane," he came to stand next to her, "that energy spike you felt when you separated from your body is physical energy. It takes a lot of concentration, but with time and practice you should be able to pick it up as you did your thought manifestations."

Darcy turned back to the pen and tried to remember how she tapped into the well of physical energy before. It all started with sensation. She reached out for it again, hoping to feel something, anything she could work with, only to have her hand slip through.

Taking in a deep breath then letting it out again, Darcy stared at the pen, imagining the feel of it against the skin of her hand. The smoothness of the synthetic plastic running across the ridges of her fingerprints, there was solidity and yet she could feel the breakability of the material in her grasp should she grip it too hard.

A jolt of energy slipped down her hand and she tapped into it before it could vanish. She closed her hand.

"I did it!" Darcy shouted and did a victory dance, pen still in hand.

"I admit, your progress is…impressive," Loki said while watching her movements with his adorable confused-look, "…for a human."

"Oh shut it, Merlin. There is nothing you can say to ruin my moment."

"Of course, I wouldn't dream of ruining your essential astral baby steps. Shall I do what you Midgardians call taking baby pictures to remember this momentous occasion?"

Darcy felt like throwing the pen at him, but she was sure it would either go through him or the bastard would catch it. Instead she chose to open her notebook and write.

**I'm not a baby.**

*Hows that for baby steps?* she thought as she glanced back at him with a wry grin.

Loki's eyes locked with hers before drifting to the lined notebook paper. "Come with me."
In three footsteps Loki crossed the room and walked through her bedroom wall, the chain linking them becoming taunt as the distance between them grew in distance. Darcy paused to think what it would feel like to walk through the wall, then scrapped it and followed him to the other side.

What greeted her behind the wall was a sight that not even the most fantastical book or movie do justice in recreating. Rooted to the spot Darcy could only take in the visual information and try to process it.

She and Loki stood on a rocky outcropping of a fertile mountain that gave them a perfect view of a landscape that defied logic. Massive islands dominated by waterfalls and architecture blending ancient temples and futuristic monasteries floated seemingly just out of reach, connected to the mountain by long bridges. Throngs of people walked to and fro along the bridges, protected from a long fall to the luscious valley below by large ornate balustrades. Some of the gravity defying islands floated high while others gently descended to the ground. Even the colors of this place were alien and indescribable.

"Loki…w-where are we?" Darcy asked shakily when she was finally able to form thoughts again.

The God of Mischief stepped forward, seemingly in awe of the view as well. "Flaugunkastali or Floating Castle, capital of the realm of Vanaheim, and in my opinion one of the most beautiful of Yggdrasil's branches," he looked over his shoulder at her, "I wasn't going to bring you here as I shouldn't be myself, but I wanted to see it…" he turned back to overlook the city, "and I wanted to show you. If we are careful not to disturb anything we should be safe."

"I-It's incredible," Darcy murmured, then realizing she was barely capable of words shook her head to clear it, "s-so…this isn't some thought manifestation from your head? We're really here, on a different planet?" She had to be sure.

"Aye, thus why I explained the need to be discreet," he fixed her with a deadly serious stare, "Can I trust that you will not cause trouble here?"

"Trouble? Me?" she placed her hand over her chest, "Do I look like someone that would cause trouble on another world?"

"No, but," Loki stepped closer until he loomed over her, "you are traveling with someone who has," his lips quirked up mildly, "and I must call your judgment into question. So are you certain you won't be stirring trouble?"

"Quite certain, Mister Inspector," she saluted, then added, "so that means we can't like…make someone think that we're ghosts or something?"

Loki sighed wearily and she thought that he was going to tell her flat out no, but he surprised her letting his usual mask fall away into an impish grin, "If we find ourselves a place where no sorcerers can be found, perhaps then," when Darcy started to gleefully rub her hands together, he added sternly, "but don't get your hopes too high."

It was her turn to sigh, "And there you go, making things lame when they could be pretty awesome."

"Do you want to see or not?" he lifted a questioning brow, offering her his arm.

Darcy took his arm in answer and they began to tread towards the closest bridge.

As they came upon the crowd of people making their crossing either to the islands or to the mountain, she felt the overwhelming urge to dodge them. Loki held no such compulsions, and like a typical Viking, forged on without letting anything give him pause. The first time someone passed
through her astral form it left Darcy shivering, gripping onto Loki as a buffer.

People always talked about feeling spirits go through them, but no one ever said how spirits – dead or not – felt having people walk through them.

A large hand came to rest over hers and she didn't need visual confirmation to know that it was Loki's.

"You'll get used to it," he reassured.

And she did. After the first half dozen soul chilling pass-throughs Darcy found herself able to concentrate a little more on her surroundings.

The balustrades were decorated with otherworldly flowers and foliage of varying sizes and colors, but all were beautiful. Women and children wore flowers in their hair, skipping and walking with a joyous bounce in their step, and lovers, young and old walked hand in hand in pairs.

Once arriving on the largest and most central of all the floating islands, more decorations and rituals became more apparent. Cheerful foliage clung to each home, business, and edifice. A makeshift artisan market of elaborately tented stalls came into view, venders making and selling wreathes, sweets, figurines made of straw, and small to moderately large ship-like containers among other things.

Further on in the epicenter of the island stood a large cross shaped pole, dressed in flowers and greens, and on each arm hung a wreath. The largest conglomeration of people she had seen since arriving on Vanaheim congregated and danced around the pole.

Darcy was sure she had never seen such a cultured celebration in all her life.

"Tis Midsummer here," Loki explained, gently releasing her arm, "the time when life and fertility are celebrated, as well as a time to discard regrets and start new action. Corn dollies and model ships are made and sold and at night are burned along with bon fires to cast off old ill feelings. Crops are planted and maidens pick flowers and place them under their pillows in hopes of divining the identity of their future lovers in a dream. Those looking for bountiful families dance about the maypole."

"It's amazing," Darcy went back to short word responses as she spun in a slow circle in a futile attempt to absorb it all, and sorely wishing that Apple made an astral iPhone. Maybe Stark would get in on it. She stopped spinning; thankful her astral self need not worry about dizziness, and noticed that Loki had fallen somber and quiet. Her hand reached out to tug uncertainly on his sleeve. "What's wrong?"

The god's throat worked and his hands tightened into fists, "I came here to my mother's home realm because…I'm afraid," his voice was tinged with guilt but for what exactly she didn't know. After a pause that he continued, "I'm afraid there will come a time when I've forgotten her face, the sound of her voice. What will I do when I can no longer remember her?"

"Stop..." her voice soft, but full of command, "You get those thoughts out of your head. You will never forget her, Loki."

"How can you be so certain?"

Darcy stretched up on her toes, giving her the extra height to cradle his face in her hands. "You won't."

Loki's visage was on the verge of crumbling, but in the end he patched the crack with mortar and
nodded. The urge to preserve face and put on a strong front obviously drilled into him from birth held sway over him. The bottled up emotions he was keeping hidden from her, even in some respects from himself, chipped at Darcy's heart. But she knew that when the time was right Loki would uncork that bottle.

She softly stroked his cheek and slowly pulled away, "Alright, well I was hoping to see more of this Midsummer."

"And you shall," a hint of a smile returned, "come."

Though they could do little to participate, Darcy happily became engrossed in the happenings of the festival. She listened intently to speeches and tales, songs and incantations. Examined every type of food served, the steps to every dance, and observed every rite and ritual.

Gradually Loki led her to the next island, stopping patiently at every stall so she could investigate the wares to her heart's content. A delicate piece of jewelry caught Darcy's eye, a silver pendant in the shape of what appeared to be a rune. It was simple but she liked it. She made to grab it when no one was looking so she could have a souvenir of Vanaheim.

To her disappointment her hand passed through it, no matter how much she focused on affecting it as she had earlier with the pen.

"You may manipulate physical objects within their home environment to your liking," Loki explained after watching her efforts in amusement, "however the astral form is incapable of transporting a physical object with it back to the physical body."

Darcy pouted but left the pendant alone and together they continued their tour of Flaugunkastali.

Each floating island possessed its own community – like micro villages within the capital – and Darcy was amazed to see how many different ways Midsummer could be celebrated in one city. Eventually they reached the solid grassy ground of the valley where the celebration of Midsummer continued to spill forth.

Over all the Vanir were genial and Darcy felt no need to meddle, but to simply observe their affairs from afar. However while watching a group of children participating in a game of tug o war, boys against girls, she felt compelled to give the girls a hand. She took the rope just behind the last girl so as not to arouse suspicion and started tugging. The girls began to cheer as they saw that they were suddenly giving the boys a run for their money. Darcy's meddling began with mostly pure intentions, but soon evolved into an all out war of the sexes when Loki joined the ranks of the boys and stonewalled progress. The boys were once again winning.

"Not fair Loki," Darcy grunted with effort.

"I disagree, you made things unfair by interfering in the first place. I'd say I'm leveling the playing field," he grinned wolfishly.

No matter how hard she pulled, Loki remained unfazed and unmoved, and with one hand he was practically winning the match. "But you're a god and I'm human. That's the epitome of unfair!"

"Perhaps your right," he agreed, swiftly letting go of the rope.

All the pent up power Darcy was exerting in the opposite direction had to go somewhere and she found herself on the ground, the little girls falling down with her, but none of them sensed her. They immediately set off for another game.
"Congratulations, little one," the God of Mischief applauded as he approached.

"I hate you."

"You don't," he chuckled and when he offered his hand, she took it without hesitation.

They continued on through the valley, exploring the smaller but no less festive settlements residing at ground level. Scattered about the vast expanse of land, Vanir of all ages and genders enjoyed the lively nature blooming all around them. Some were already lighting bon fires as the sun began to descend towards the horizon.

The grassland was plush and unbelievably green, prompting Darcy pluck off her shoes to feel the cushion of it under her bare feet.

"I wish I had a camera," she admitted aloud this time, "even if I wrote down every detail I wouldn't be able to describe this place with words."

"Don't worry, we may visit again in the future. Besides, I hardly think a mind like yours will easily forget. It is sharper than many give you credit."

"Aww," Darcy playfully shoved his shoulder, "I didn't think you did compliments."

Loki nudged her back clearly with a tiny fraction of his strength, a playful look on his face, "Consider yourself privileged."

She beamed at him then crouched in front of a patch of wild flowers. "So you think I could at least take one of these flowers back as a souvenir?" When he left her unanswered she peered up at his tall, lean form, "Loki?"

Standing in rigid silence, Loki's green eyes locked with something in the distance. Darcy left the flowers forgotten and rose to her full height, following his line of sight.

About a dozen yards away was a sparkling pond with a fountain of water in the middle. Two boys played and wrestled in the grass nearby under the watchful eye of a gorgeous woman. Corn silk blond hair cascaded from the crown of flowers around her head in exquisite ringlets, framing her porcelain pixie face perfectly. Next to her stood an equally attractive man, his arm lovingly wrapped around her shoulders.

Darcy blinked owlishly between Loki and the woman before everything dawned on her.

**Sigyn.**

Guilt and a new expression minutely marred Loki's face as he watched the happy family taking in the remnants of Midsummer. Regret.

Loki stared on longingly for a few moments longer before turning on his heels and storming in the opposite direction at an alarming speed, the chain linking them forcing Darcy to follow him.

"Loki!" Darcy called while trying to keep up with the unhinged god. Over and over she called his name, but to no avail. They were trudging halfway up a steep hill to towards the floating islands when she began yanking on the chain. "Wait, damnit!"

Loki whipped around, "What?" he snarled.

His sudden outburst caught her off guard, but she stood her ground waiting for her fleeing courage to
return. She took a slow step forward, speaking in a calm voice, "Just please wait."

Huffing puffs of air flared Loki's nostrils as he glowered temperamentally at her. Darcy gulped under the intensity he was throwing off, yet she edged closer until she could rest her hand on his chest and feel the drumming of his spirit with hers.

Long eyelashes lowered slowly, hiding the god's eyes from her view. The strong chest beneath her hand expanded greatly, then with the next exhale, all the tension seemed to flow out from the man before her.

"What is it Darcy?" he asked evenly.

Shakily she removed her hand and wrung her hands together, "I…I wanted to give you something… before we leave."

Loki blinked slowly, showing his efforts at keeping himself placated, as the edges of his earlier anger still appeared raw and jagged. He did not say anything.

_Might as well just get it over with._

Nervousness rushed through Darcy as she conjured a small wooden Viking boat with her mind, letting it levitate in the small space between them. A flicker of recognition crossed his eyes and that was all.

"Y-You said Midsummer is a time to cast way all your regrets and sorrows," his deafening silence unnerved her, causing her to look to the side, "I just thought that maybe you needed to…"

"This boat cannot possibly contain all my regrets and sorrows," came Loki's broken whisper.

Darcy shifted her head back to face him, "Maybe not, but maybe it can at least lighten the load."

Loki was silent again for a long time, his stare intensifying in a way that made her suspect that he wasn't buying into her mortal sentiments. Her eyes widened as he took the boat into his hands anyway, looked down meaningfully at it.

"Perhaps you're right," he murmured. Relief flooded her and she smiled encouragingly at him. His eyes flicked up to meet hers, "What about you?"

"Me? Do I have any regrets?" she shook her head and shrugged, "maybe a few, but none that mean anything anyway."

He studied her again before holding the boat out to her, "Then might you aid me in setting this boat alight?"

With a smile Darcy nodded and helped Loki cradle the boat between them. She closed her eyes, imagined the thin wood begin to smoke from small embers then bursting to life with heat and fire. A pop, then a crackle was heard, and then there was a roaring. Darcy opened her eyes to see the little boat ablaze. Her first instinct was to drop it, but she quickly learned that the fire they had created could not harm her.

Across the fire fierce ancient eyes seemed to dance in harmony with the flames. She thought she could see his demons within those green depths, some of them consumed by the fire, but still more stubbornly occupied him. Haunting him.

As though catching a tranquil breeze, the boat started to coast up into the air, sailing higher and
higher. Darcy shifted to stand next to Loki; firmly locking their hands together as they watched the flaming thought manifestation slowly disappear into the sky.

Loki squeezed her hand and said, "Thank you, Darcy."

The moment suddenly came to an abrupt halt when he took her forearm and she watched in a mixture of confusion and horror as the god deftly unfastened the gold chain from her wrist before disappearing from sight.

His voice carried on the wind like that of a specter's.

"Forgive me."

Chapter End Notes

"Fara heimili andi" - "Go home spirit."
"Andi heimdragi" - "Spirit stay at home."
Midsummer is a real holiday and is still widely celebrated in the Nordic regions. As for the astral projecting and the laws of magic, I sort of dipped into what I know of it from when I studied Wicca more extensively, except that I changed the rules with the silver cord. The spirit is supposed to always form one when projecting and can never be lost from the body, but for a piece of fiction, how fun and dramatic is that? As for everything else, I kind of pulled it from my head and tried to write it in a way that made sense. I really hope it did.

I decided for Sigyn's children to make them basically Narvi and Vali, but without Loki being their father, again my way of messing with Norse Mythology :p

*Edit* Just from some initial reactions to this chapter I wanted to say sorry for the cliffy and how things dropped off like that, but everything will be explained in the next chapter, don't worry. Also again to make up for the cliffy and the long wait for an update, I will be posting quite a bit of unrelated smutty one-shots next month.
Dear readers.

I know you all might hate me for this, but I just wanted to make sure everyone knows that Theory of Entanglement is currently on hiatus. This is not because I don't know where to go with this story, I have everything outlined and know where I want to go. However, I've currently lost my muse for this pairing and it's gone to another of my otps, so I feel if I tried to keep writing this fic in the state I currently am in would not do it justice. I would rather leave it as it is now than to force out chapters that I'm not feeling. I also don't want to make any promises that I'm going to come back to this fic, because I may not, but it's definitely a possibility that I might.

I also just wanted to take time to thank everyone who read and left feedback or followed this fic. All of it really meant a lot to me.

-Gingersnap87

End Notes

This originally spawned itself from a dream I had where Loki meets Darcy as a child, but the circumstances were drastically different. I drew some inspiration from watching videos on youtube of Loki/Tom Hiddleston interacting with children; if you've seen the ones I'm thinking of, you know what I mean about cuteness overload. I originally had this under a different title as well, but changed it. I like the Theory of Entanglement and how Adam describes it in Only Lovers Left Alive is perfect (Another good Tom Hiddleston movie btw). I wanted to include some Norse mythology in with this story a little, but changed some of it up to fit with the movie's universe as well. Also if I totally butchered the Viking ceremony, (which wouldn't surprise me) I'm incredibly sorry! It was a mix of stuff I researched and stuff I saw on the series Vikings.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](http://example.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!