Lost Boys

by thisisnotwhoyouthink

Summary

When Loki is captured by Shield, they discover a dark secret between Loki and Odin. A different take on Loki's 'monster' kids.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

The reason for this fic is this. I was on norsekink and found a thread that ruined me. Basically the prompt was that Loki gets pregnant and gives birth only to kill the infant before the Avengers arrive because he would rather the child be given a merciful death than be taken away by Odin like the rest of his kids. This prompt was filled not once but four times. Did I read those fills? Yes I did. Did I weep uncontrollably? You bet your sweet kester I did. And after reading all these terribly sad stories I was left feeling extremely morose and desperate for a happy ending. So I'm writing it.

So be warned! This fic may not have any romance but its going to be fluffy. Because I need this fluff like Thor needs a haircut. If you dont want fluff, just keep on walking because I will not apologize for this fic. Its therapy for my soul and for all the fictional babies Loki had to kill.

Original NorseKink prompt is here: [http://norsekink.livejournal.com/3415.html?thread=8384599#8384599](http://norsekink.livejournal.com/3415.html?thread=8384599#8384599)

He was out of time.

That was the main thought going through Loki's head as his lair shook from another blow to the main entrance. Dust poured from the ceiling catching in his eyes as he tried yet again to open one of the secret pathways out to no avail. It was useless of course, he knew that. He'd made these 'emergency exits' to be impossible to open by a mortal so that if his sanctuary was ever discovered, none could follow his escape. Not that it would be of any help to him now as he was.

Out of frustration he tried once more to reach for his magic to open the gateway, but received nothing.

Loki had to forcibly clamp down on the panic that threatened to overcome him when he felt the building give another powerful shudder. It wouldn't be long now. They would be inside soon and he was trapped, left to scurry from corner to corner like a small rodent trying desperately and uselessly to escape. They would get in, there was so little to keep them out now. All of his spells, so carefully and meticulously constructed into the very stonework of his domain to make it completely impenetrable, gone. Fallen into so many pieces like glass. It wasn't long after they had fallen that they had come. His brother and his mortal friends.

He glanced around helplessly for something that might aid him, anything at all. His eyes scanned over mountains of spell books that were about as useful to him now as his secret exits. The rest of the objects just as much so. Bowls and herbs for more complex spells littered a nearby table. But then his eyes caught sight of a glimmer of metal among the dried vegetation. Reaching for it he found a small blade, useful more for chopping ingredients rather than defense but he'd take anything he could get. All of his more glamorous weapons were entirely out of his reach. Fingering the blade absently he considered the instrument. It would be a rather barbaric means to end of at least one part of his situation. In all the occurrences before he'd had time, time to brew a potion to end it.
His mind flashed back to memories of the taste of death in his mouth, the crippling pain that would seize his insides and the mess of blood and half formed bones between his legs, diluted by bitter tears.

A thunderous crash brought him back to the present, signaling the entrance of the Avengers. He considered hiding, it wasn't like he had anything left to lose. But in the end he stood his ground, sliding his meager weapon up one of his long sleeves. It didn't take long for them to find him.

Thor was first, eying his still form warily before the rest of them marched in, weapons drawn and looking nervous. Good. At least he'd done that much. They all stood there for a moment, each side waiting for the other to make the first move, and despite the panic that threatened to consume him, he found their stupidly baffled expressions humorous.

Eventually it was the shield wielding captain that spoke first, claiming that he was under arrest. He also mentioned something about coming along quietly. As if he had a choice in the matter. But almost all of his attention was on Thor.

His brother noticed the attention and narrowed his eyes in suspicion. "What are you up to brother?" he asked suddenly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean." Loki said, feeling rather proud that his voice betrayed none if his emotions. He sounded just as he ever did. But Thor just shook his head and took a step forward. Loki stayed exactly where he was despite the fact that every instinct within him was demanding that he run. It didn't matter where to, as long as it wasn't here, with him.

"You are acting unusual. Even for you."

"Well I'd hate to think I'd become predictable." Loki countered as Thor drew closer. His teammates watched the exchange with sharp eyes, their weapons never wavering.

"There is something different about you." Thor observed, and of course he could see it. Despite his distaste of magic, Thor was Asgardian, and was just as sensitive to the dramatic changes in the invisible power as the rest of his kind. That wasn't to say he knew what it meant of course, just that he knew that something about Loki was now fundamentally different.

Feeling his panic spike he allowed himself a step backwards but froze at the barked order of "Don't move!" from the single woman on the team. She had a gun trained in him, a weapon that normally would be completely useless on him, but now... now his mind saw the danger and his body reacted as instinct compelled him to, even as his mind screamed that he was giving himself away. His left arm shifted to hold his midsection, shielding it from the perceived threat and every eye in the room caught the movement. Only one knew what it meant though. Thor's eyes widened suddenly and then became very sad.

"Again brother?"

Loki felt his pulse speed up as Thor realized the truth. He felt cornered, completely helpless and he knew there was no escaping his fate.

Thor was addressing his teammates now, though he couldn't hear the words over the roaring in his ears. He could see him though; saw how his brother had turned his back on him to face the others. Acting on panic and instinct and a basic knowledge that Thor would bring him the worst pain of all, he let the small knife fall into his hand and made the plunge it into Thor's neck. He forgot about the others, only the threat of his brother existed in his mind. So when a dart landed on his bicep, he froze in shock. The knife fell from suddenly numb fingers, clattering uselessly to the
floor. And then he was joining it, his world blacking out.

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Tony looked over the prone form on the floor. All his sensors told him Loki was out cold but experience had taught him to always be cautious when it came to this particular enemy.

"Define gone." Clint was asking.

"Yeah," he added. "I'm kinda liking the fact that we can take him out with a single tranq."

Thor was looking at his brother with a pitying expression but made no attempt to move him yet. "His magic is gone completely, he is mortal for now. That is likely how we were suddenly able to find him."

"For now?" Natasha repeated, glaring wearily at the still body. "It will come back?"

Thor nodded. "When the child is born."

All the earth born Avengers shared a look, silently asking who wanted to take this one. Finally Tony took his eyes off his unconscious enemy to face Thor. "What child?"

The blonde warrior grimaced. "The one by brother is carrying, although I suppose child would be a kind term."

"He's- Thor are you telling us your brother, your male brother, is pregnant?"

"Yes."

There was a stunned silence before Clint raised his hand. "Uh, not that I'm doubting you here, but how do you know this?"

"This is not the first time my brother has done this, though I still can't imagine why he continues to do so. In any matter, he is unable to use his magic at all until he gives birth. Actually from what I remember from last time it took almost a month after Hela was born before he was able to cast anything."

Tony jerked in surprise. "Hela? You mean all the stories are true? Even the one with the horse?"

Thor grimaced again but nodded. "Huh. Kinky."

"What horse?" Steve asked.

"I'll tell you later." Tony promised as Natasha sent him one of her no nonsense glares. "So since I've never actually read the Avenger manual, what's the protocol for dealing with knocked up Norse guys?"

"Same as before, we're bringing him in." she answered swiftly. Tony half expected Thor to argue with her, but he was unusually silent, and just picked his brother up from the floor. As they made their way back to the helicarrier, Tony was struck with the feeling that this was only the beginning.
Chapter 2

Loki had remained unconscious throughout the ride back to base. In fact, he didn't rouse until hours after he had been placed in a secure cell deep in the bowels of the building. Even then it was just to bolt from the cot he had been placed on to the toilet where he vomited up the meager contents of his stomach. Apparently Norse gods weren't immune to morning sickness. And it was morning sickness. Shield scientists had managed to get a sample of his blood and confirmed what Thor had told them. Loki was up the duff. Thor had then, at the request of Fury, explained to all of them the details of his brothers previous pregnancies. They were pretty much the same as the stories from the Vikings, so it was less shocking for Tony and anyone else who had done their research. Steve on the other hand, he was practically falling out of his chair with shock.

Loki hadn't moved far from the toilet, and had sat against the wall, legs crossed, his cuffed hands in his lap. He hadn't said a word either, not even when Thor had visited to inform him that as soon as Shield approved it, he was taking Loki back to Asgard so he could birth whatever creature he was incubating at home. He remained silent for hours, just sitting there until stating in a quiet voice to the empty room that he had information for Shield.

And that's where they were now, standing on the other side of the double-sided glass watching as Loki was escorted into the interrogation room. It was just four of them, Steve, Bruce, Natasha and himself. Thor didn't know about this little exchange, and Clint was probably trying to see how much liquor it took to get rid of the mental picture of Loki giving birth to an eight legged foal. Loki looked like shit. Tony had heard that pregnant women were often described as 'glowing', but he didn't see it here at all. Their enemy was pale and drawn looking, with dark bags under his eyes. Still, as unwell as he looked, his expression was devoid of any emotion. He merely waited patiently with both hands on the table as he waited for Coulson to arrive.

When he did, he took the seat opposite the depowered god and folded his hands on the table, his face the picture of neutrality. "I've been told you have something to say," he said as an opening statement.

Loki nodded and his fingers twitched. "I wish to offer an exchange of services. I have a great deal of information on many of your enemies. I am willing to part with this information in return for a favor from your organization."

"We're really not in the habit of making deals with terrorists." Coulson replied evenly, neither accepting nor denying the offer. "What favor would you be asking for?"

Loki's eyes flicked to the mirror for the briefest of moments but came back to meet Coulson's. "I'm assuming that by now Thor has informed you of my condition?"

"He has told us that you are pregnant."

"Indeed," he paused, "The favor I would request of you would be to preform an abortion."

Tony heard Steve make a quiet noise beside him but Tony didn't spare him a glance. "You want to terminate your pregnancy?" Coulson asked, his voice still calm and impassive.

Loki's face may well have been carved out if stone for all the emotion that it held. He nodded once and then waited for his answer.

"Why?"
Loki blinked, apparently not expecting to have to further explain himself. "Why?" he repeated and for the first time since he'd been shot by Tony's dart he showed a sliver of emotion. Frustration.

"Why? Other than the fact that without the baby you would have full use of your magic again."

It was a full minute before Loki answered, his voice suddenly thicker and sounding more real. "Because it would be a far kinder fate than that dealt by the All Father."

Thor would have raged at the insult at his father, Fury would have assumed Loki was trying to play them. Coulson just tilted his head a fraction and asked "How so?"

Loki studied the man in front of him, and Tony watched as physical signs of distress started to show despite Loki's efforts to remain calm. His breathing pattern had picked up, and his fingers would twitch in repeated patterns. "I suppose it is safe to assume that Thor has told you about my children?" he asked, his voice going for casual but falling short.

"He gave us the basic overview, nothing we wouldn't have known already from the recordings from Norse mythology."

"Ah yes, then you should know that it would probably be in your best interest to kill the beast before it is born, Odin has a bad habit of throwing my children into other realms."

Loki gave a smirk but it was hollow. Every word he spoke was hollow. He was lying about something, Tony realized. Thankfully Coulson picked up on it too.

"How old were they?" he asked, his tone mildly curious. "When Odin sent them away."

Loki seemed thrown by the question, and drew his hands off the table. "What does that matter?"

"Maybe I'm just concerned about more giant animals falling to earth." he answered with a shrug. "But considering that we're about to send you back to Asgard, I'm curious to know how long you'll be with your child."

Loki was staring at Coulson as if he had never seen the man before, he hadn't looked back at the mirror once. When he spoke his voice was hollow again, but this time Tony knew he was telling the truth.

"Sleipnir, I had him for five years before Odin found us. Jorgumand, four years, Fenris, not even two." he took an unsteady breath and looked down at his hands as they twisted in his lap. "Hela wasn't even born yet when he found me. He took her the moment the cord was cut. It took me nearly a year to find her but even then it was too late."

"What do you mean?"

"No living creature can survive in Niflheim. By the time I found her, her body was already half dead, and wasting away." Loki explained tonelessly.

Coulson visibly considered this. "So she wasn't like that when she was born? It was an effect brought on by the conditions of her environment?"

Loki's head snapped up and he glared with wet eyes at the man in front of him. "She was perfect, they all were before he-" he cut himself off but it was too late. The words had already been spoken.

Coulson allowed Loki a moment to compose himself before pushing forward. "What did Sleipnir look like? When he was almost five?"
Lokis face crumpled a little at the mention of his sons name and Tony suddenly felt a stab of pity go through him. "He was tall, for his age. He had coal black hair, my eyes but darker." His mouth twisted as his eyes unfocused in memory. "He had his fathers smile though, and his laugh. He was very smart, and very kind."

"How can a horse smile?" Steve quietly asked the small dark room, his eyes still trained on the broken figure that was Loki.

"He wasn't a horse," Tony said, his voice sounding strange to his own ears. "Not in the beginning."

Coulson had apparently come to the same conclusion. "He was human." It wasn't a question but Loki nodded slowly anyways. "Was it the same for the others?"

"Yes." Loki took a deep shuddering breath and tried to collect himself before continuing. "When Odin found us he said it was for the best. That if the people of Asgard were to know… Sleipnir he transformed into an eight-legged horse, whom he then bridled and rode as though he were a common beast. Jorgumand he turned into a serpent and banished him to the seas of Midgard. Fenris was changed into a wolf that he chained. He is still chained, alone and deep under Asgard. Hela, he did nothing to her. Just sent her away to die." He brought his eyes up to Coulsons and his tone went cold. "What choice do I have but to kill this child before Odin can get to it. To be turned into a monster and punished for all of eternity, simply for the crime of being mine."

Coulson regarded Loki for a long moment before abruptly standing. "We will consider your offer."

He said smoothly, "In the meantime these guards will escort you back to your cell." And with that he turned and left. No one in the adjacent room moved. They just watched as Loki stared numbly at the door that Coulson had just exited through. He came back to himself when the guards approached him and got up without a fuss and allowed them to lead him back to his cell.

Tony cleared his throat. "Well. That was illuminating."

"If its true." Natasha added though her expression was just a little less severe than usual. "He is the god of lies, and there's no way to prove he's telling the truth. This could all be some big game to him."

"Tricking us into giving him an abortion? Really?"

"Even Thor believes all of Loki's kids were born as monsters. If Loki's telling the truth here, then only he and Odin know about it." Bruce muttered quietly. "And if Loki is telling the truth, then Odin would deny it simply to keep the secret. There's no way to prove his story either way."

Steve remained silent throughout the exchange and excused himself shortly after. Tony watched him go with a critical eye but said nothing to stop him.

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Steve didn't sleep that night. He moved through the next day in a daze before finally napping in a comfortable armchair in the common room. He missed Thor being shown the footage from the interview, and the subsequent tantrum he threw afterwards. He woke though when Thor loudly stormed into the common room and nearly threw the couch out the window in his frustration.

"I'm sorry friend," he said tersely as Steve blinked owlishly at him as he set the furniture to rights "I did not see you there."

"It's ok," he said automatically, taking in Thors appearance. "They told you about last night then?"
The larger man nodded with a scowl on his face. "My brother has always been skilled with his words, manipulating us all, but this... it is too much. For him to accuse Father of such a crime, all to force us to kill his child before it even draws breath... I knew my brother had fallen but this madness is unimaginable." The thunderer collapsed into the sofa and ran a hand through his hair.

Steve mulled over his words before tentatively asking, "Can we really be sure that it's all a lie?" The look Thor gave him would have had a lesser man running out of the room but Steve had never been one to run. "I'm not trying to accuse your father of anything, I'm just saying that we need to consider all the options here."

"My father would not be so cruel," Thor said shortly.

"What if he didn't think of it as cruel?" Steve countered. "If Loki got pregnant then that means he must have slept with another man right? I know that sort of thing is ok now, but back where I'm from, or I guess when I'm from, that wasn't a good thing. Would your dad have been ok with Loki being with another man?"

That seemed to make some kind of impact on Thor, and he paused before answering. "No. In Asgard men do not lay with other men. It is disgraceful, and it would bring shame to them and their families."

"So maybe Odin was just trying to protect Loki." Steve theorized. "I don't know Thor, I don't know if he's telling the truth or not. What I do know is that it's our job to protect the innocent. Loki's child, monster or not, is innocent. It's the one I'm the most concerned about right now." With that he got up and left. He needed to speak with Fury before anything was decided. But before he did that he needed to find some paper.

Fury had his back to the door when he entered, facing the window and looking out at the city lights, so Steve shut the door behind him and waited to be addressed. It didn't take long. "What's on your mind Rogers?" he asked without turning his head.

"I was wondering where we stood in regards to the situation with Loki." he said, holding an envelope in his hands behind his back.

"The situation remains the same for the time being."

"Are you thinking about agreeing to his deal?" Steve asked boldly.

Fury turned his head a fraction towards him. "Why do I get the feeling you have an opinion on that?"

"Probably because I do."

"You and every other member of your team." At this Fury turned to face him fully, his expression impassive. "Well, let's hear what you've got to say."

"You can't accept his offer Colonel. It's not right."

"Son, people have been debating whether or not abortion is right since the day it started. But in the end it comes down to one thing. It was Loki's idea, it's his choice."

"But it's the wrong choice." Steve argued. "Because he has no other options. He said so himself, it's a decision between killing the baby now or letting Odin do whatever he's going to do to it. He's
going with the lesser of two evils and that doesn't make it right."

"What would you have us do then?" Fury asked looking interested in his answer.

Steve took a breath. "Give him a third option."

Fury crossed his arms and stared him down. "Which would be?"

"The way I see it, no one knows if Loki's lying about his kids being turned into monsters, and it doesn't look like there's anything we can do to prove it either way except to wait. I think we should hold off on extraditing him to Asgard until after he gives birth. If it's a baby then we know he was telling the truth. If it's a monster, well, we deal with that kind of stuff on a daily basis. I think we could handle it." He finished his small speech with a wry smile that Fury didn't return, not that he was expecting him to. Pulling the envelope from behind his back, he placed it on the desk between them. "I don't want to force your hand sir, but you should also know that if you do take Loki's offer without giving him some other way of dealing with this situation, I'm going to have to resign from the Avengers. I know that Loki is our enemy, and we don't owe him any favors, but his kid hasn't done anything."

Fury looked down at the paper on his desk and then back up at Steve. "I'll take that into consideration Captain. Under the agreement that until a decision is made that you will remain on duty. We're already down one team member."

Steve frowned. "Who?"

"Thor. He's gone back to Asgard for a little father-son talk. Apparently someone convinced him that Odin might actually be guilty of what Loki's accused him of, so he's taken off to confront his father face to face." The look Fury gave him left Steve with the impression that he was blaming him for Thors absence.

"Is that all Rogers?"

"Yes sir."
Chapter 3

Loki sat on the cot in his cell, lost in thought. He didn't know how long he'd been there. Other than Thor's single visit and his meeting with the Shield representative, he'd been alone with his thoughts. Half formed plans whirled around his head, all of them useless. Without his magic he had no chance of escape. He was completely at the mercy of the mortals he'd made enemies of. The best he could hope for would be for them to allow his child a quick and painless death before handing him over to Odin for punishment. The chances of that were slim though. They knew his magic was bound as long as he was with child, and it would be far easier to hand him over as a mortal than with his powers returning. But maybe they would be merciful. He had after all told them what was likely to happen to his child when it was born. Not that they had any reason to believe him. He felt his heart twist at the thought and placed a hand on his stomach, just over where he could feel his magic pool. Under that he felt the tiny flutter of life and he felt depression grip him tightly. He could do nothing to save his own child, he couldn't save any of them.

Suddenly there was a sound by the large metal door to his room, and he heard the locks shift before it slid open. Several guards entered and without a word they pulled him to his feet, placed metal cuffs on his wrists and marched him out of the cell. Each soldier was wearing a helmet, making it impossible to see their faces. None of them spoke to him, or even to each other leaving him with no idea where they were taking him. He considered putting up at least a token fight, but then realized they would probably only knock him out again if he did, and he'd rather be conscious for whatever was to happen next. They went through a series of halls and elevators, and he noticed the walls becoming less uniform, even passing a few windows. The floor went from cement to tiles to lush carpet and Loki became more and more confused. Where were they taking him? Finally they stopped in a brightly lit hallway lined with numbered dark wooden doors spread far apart. One of the doors was ajar and when they approached it, one of the guards took him by the arms and removed the cuffs. The rest of them took formation down the hallway. Feeling more confused and out of place than anything, Loki pushed the door open and looked inside. It was an apartment, one of many that the building offered. He had known these rooms existed when he memorized the layout of Shield headquarters months ago, but for the life of him he could not fathom why he was here.

"You look confused," came a voice from inside and instantly Loki recognized the Director of Shield standing near a set of couches. "Have a seat. We have a lot to talk about."

Loki glanced back at the hallway full of armed guards and realizing he didn't have much of a choice, he stepped into the room. At a gesture from Fury he sat in an armchair that was surprisingly comfortable. He blamed this on the fact that he'd had nothing else to sit on other that a flat cot for the past few days. Thankfully Fury sat as well, claiming a section of the matching sofa and outright lounging with an arm up on the back cushions.

"So first off, you should know that we aren't going to accept the deal you offered." The words were spoken casually but Loki could see that one dark eye watched him carefully. Still, as much as he fought not to show it, he felt the bottom go out of his stomach. That was it then. He had nothing left to bargain with, no escape was even remotely feasible.

"I'm bound for Asgard then?" he asked, making an effort to keep his voice even.

"Well that's up to you."

"What do you mean?"
"As I said, we aren't interested in your deal, but we are willing to offer one of our own instead."
The man paused to glance at some papers that lay on a table nearby before regarding Loki casually.
"You claim that any child of yours is in danger if it goes anywhere near Odin. Unfortunately we
have no way of verifying that, and because of this we aren't offering any sort of procedure that
would terminate your pregnancy. But because we can't prove that you are telling the truth, we can't
also prove that it's a lie either. So what we can offer is this: you will remain here, under Shield
custody, until your child is born. If it is in fact a child, it will be a citizen of Earth, which will put it
under Earth's protection. Us. That means if Odin wants to turn it into some kind of animal, he'll
have to go through the Avengers and all of Shield to do it. If your kid is born and it turns out to be
some kind of giant parakeet, we'll wrap you both up and send you to Asgard with a bow on your
heads."

Loki stared at the man in front of him with wide eyes. What he was offering was more than he
could have ever expected. It was more than anyone had ever offered. He felt a flare of hope in his
chest at the notion that perhaps at least one of his children would be able to live, and do so freely.
"What are your conditions?" he asked, not that it mattered. Whatever the man demanded he would
do, gratefully.

"Well first off you're going to give up your life of crime, and you're going to start paying your debt
to society by working for us instead."

"Done."

Fury raised a brow at his quick response but continued without comment. "You won't be joining
the team obviously, but there's been a rise in the amount of magic related trouble we've been
dealing with lately, and not all of it is you." He gestured to the room around him. "Since you're
going to be staying a while, these rooms are yours, unless you'd rather stay in the holding cells. For
the time being you may not leave this building, which is more for your safety and our piece of
mind than anything else. Sound fair?" It was a rhetorical question, but Loki nodded anyways. Fury
then stood and retrieved the papers from the table and returned with a pen in hand. He held
everything out to the still seated Loki. "If you're going to accept our proposal, we want it in
writing."

With a hand that was shaking only a little, Loki took the papers and at a glance realized it was a
contract, stating everything Fury had just explained. Apparently his official role within Shield was
to be a consultant towards things of magical nature. At the bottom of the last page there was a
blank spot, and he took the pen and signed his name. Looking over the runes that spelled out his
title, he added 'Loki' in plain English as an afterthought. He handed both the pen and the contract
over to the waiting Fury without making eye contact. He had one last question, but feared the
answer. But it had to be asked, and now before he had time to torture himself over the possible
answers.

"What will you do with the child after it is born?"

Fury didn't say anything at first, but then eventually said, "What do you mean?"

Loki felt his face grimace before he could stop it. "I assume you will put it in hiding somewhere. I
was inquiring more to the nature it will be concealed," and if he would be allowed to see it, perhaps
visit it under a different guise.

Again Fury took his time before responding. "The plan was for it to stay here."

At this Loki jerked to face the man who was now looking at him with a strange impression.
"Here?"
"I'm not sure if you had the time to notice but this apartment comes with two bedrooms."

Loki knew his mouth was open, but he couldn't spare a thought to close it. He didn't dare allow himself to believe what he was hearing. "You-" but he couldn't get the words out. Thankfully Fury seemed to understand.
"We're not taking your kid away Loki. We're the good guys; we're not really in the baby stealing business."

Loki was silently very glad that he was already sitting as his body went numb with shock. He didn't notice Fury fold and pocket the contract he had signed, or that he had moved from beside him to the door. He faintly heard him welcome him to Shield and the sound of a door shutting but that barely registered. He sat in that armchair for a long time, one hand absently rubbing a spot on his stomach and relishing in the feeling of the life that lay beneath his fingers. He could keep this one. It would be his and no one was going to take it from him.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Warnings: brief mention of previous abortions
Also, I wrote this story long before the Avengers came out, so there will be some inconsistencies

Eventually Loki had to move from the chair, and decided to look over his new residence. The walls were painted a dusty blue with dark wooden accents and he faintly approved of the colours. He would have of course preferred green, but he was aware that beggars could not be choosers, and he was certainly the supplicant in this scenario. There was a small kitchen with all the usual Midgardian appliances as well as a table with four chairs. As if he had plans to entertain. A brief thought crossed his mind of Thor, and he wondered what the blonde idiot thought of all this. Pushing all thoughts of his foster brother aside he continued his inspection.

There was a lavatory with a bath and shower. He avoided looking directly at his reflection as he turned off the light and went back into the main room. The sitting area consisted of the sofa and matching armchair, a small coffee table and a large empty bookshelf. There was also a stand with a small flatscreen TV on top of it that Loki seriously doubted would get much use. The one wall was mostly made of glass, and he could see the city and ocean beyond that. Moving over to a set of doors, he pushed one open and found it to be a bedroom, complete with a double bed, nightstand with an elegant lamp, closet and a set of drawers. The room was decorated in the same colours of the rest of the apartment, and the drawers were empty reminding him that he had no belongings. Most of everything he needed he usually fashioned with magic. That included clothes.

He left the door to that room open and looked into the second room. It was completely bare, even the walls were painted only a generic white. None of his previous children had ever had a room to their own. He'd always kept them close, especially after Sleipnir. He stood in the doorway to the empty room for a while, lost in thought again only to be interrupted by the sound knocking.

Someone was at the door.

He approached it cautiously, reminding himself that mortals were very particular about contracts, especially government mortals. So there was no reason to worry that they were here to tell him that they had changed their minds. They wouldn't knock if that were the case.

He opened the door a small amount, just enough to see who was on the other side, and was surprised to see the Ironman, or rather the Ironman without his suit. Tony Stark stood in the hallway in his civilian clothes wearing one of his trademark smirks. Loki decided he was not in the mood for this.

"To what do I owe the pleasure Mr. Stark?" he asked not bothering to hide his sarcasm.

Stark just smiled winningly. "I'm the welcoming committee."

Loki stared at him. "Really?" he asked, his voice completely deadpan.

"Well no not really. Technically its Natashas job, I just beat her to the punch. You know it's considered rude here on earth not to invite someone inside when they come to visit."
"And in Asgard, one does not welcome a visitor inside when they are not in the first place welcome."

Stark grinned wider at his response. "There it is! I was worried for a minute that all the snark had gone right out of you!"

Loki tried not to roll his eyes, he really did. "Indeed, we wouldn't want you to go without having someone to verbally spar with. You might get bored and invent a new way to nearly rip the planet in half."

"Hey, I only built the engine and it was not supposed to be stolen by Doom. It was originally designed for the space program, not to power a subterranean nuke."

"Ah yes, of course. How could I forget, your work constantly seems to find its way into your enemies hands. But then I suppose its something you must be used to by now."

Stark stared at him for a moment before raising a hand. Loki braced himself for the blow he probably deserved but no strike landed. The mortal just shook a finger at him. "Too mean."

The two of them stared at each other after he dropped his hand and waited for the other to make the next move. Finally Loki gave in to his curiosity and opened the door fully so that Stark could waltz in.

"What exactly is a welcoming committee?" he asked with a wince as Stark practically threw himself on the sofa.

"Mostly someone to show you around, make sure you're all settled in. I'm just guessing here though. You're our first evil guest."

"I already know the layout to every level of this building, I probably know more about it than you do. And I am not evil. I'm... complicated."

Stark raised an eyebrow. "I'm starting to get that." He glanced around the apartment and noticed the bare bookshelf. "Seriously though, I guess you're going to need some things."

"Clothes for example." Loki found himself saying and Stark blinked in surprise.

"You don't have-" Loki stopped him with a look. "Huh, well that makes sense. Clothes it is." And with that he whipped out his cell phone and began tapping away at it.

"What are you doing?"

"Telling Pepper you need clothes." He muttered as he continued to tap away. "What are you? Like, six four? Nope never mind its right here on your file."

Loki waited with his arms crossed until Stark finished whatever he was doing with his phone and looked up. "Why are you here?" he demanded.

"That's what I'm wondering." came a feminine voice from behind him and Loki turned to see the Black Widow standing in in the open doorway glaring at Stark. She was in business clothes rather than the usual outfit he saw her in, with a small stack of paper held under one arm.

Stark pocketed his phone. "Doing your job. You don't have to get him clothes by the way, already got it covered."

She scowled and strode in with quick efficient steps and dropped the paper on the table with more
force than was strictly necessary. Ignoring Stark completely she turned to Loki and held out a small black device. "You are to keep this in you at all times, no exceptions. Also, since you would likely cause a panic if seen in the general public, you are not to leave this building."

Loki took what turned out to be a cell phone from her hand and decided to refrain from telling her he had no intention of leaving. Without his magic he could not shield himself from Heimdell, which meant that by now Odin must know of his pregnancy. Shield was the only protection he had against his foster father, he wasn't going to leave it.

The woman gestured to the papers. "As you can not leave and we are not giving you access to the Internet, anything you need you can pick out of those. Your request will be reviewed before being ordered and brought here. And I've been asked to remind you that you've caused billions of dollars worth of property damage in the past, so keep it simple. I'm also to show you the areas that you are allowed to frequent, but I think I'll leave that up to Stark here since I have actual work to do." and with that she turned and left, shutting the door firmly behind her.

"She's sweet. It's a wonder why I ever let her go." Stark quipped once she was gone and got up to look at the paper on the table. "Please tell me she didn't leave you a Sears catalogue."

Loki stared at him for a moment before finally his patience ran out. "Why are you here Stark?" he asked again.

"Why didn't you kill me?"

Loki blinked. "What?"

"The last time you went up against us, you had me. Seriously I was updating my Will on Jarvis and then suddenly that goblin thing was gone. You controlled the goblin, you let me go. Why?"

Loki remembered the incident he was referring to, and he had indeed spared his life but he didn't dare try and explain his reasoning.

Stark continued to talk anyways. "It's not just me either. I've been going over the records of all our little scuffles and you've been pulling your punches with all of us, even Thor. Which brought my attention to something that makes you singularly different from all our other bad guys. You don't kill. Yes, people have died because of your schemes, but none died by your hand. Which leads me to think that if you won't even kill your enemies, why would you kill your own kid? Unless you really honestly believed that you are doing it a kindness."

Loki stared at the man feeling confused. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that maybe I believe you." Stark said simply though his eyes were sharp, waiting for a reaction.

Loki found he didn't know what to say to that so eventually he answered with a quiet "Thank you."

Stark nodded and then looked him over. "When was the last time you ate something?"

"How long have I been here?"

"Almost four days."

"A week then." Loki answered and smirked at his dumbfounded expression. "I'm a god Stark, even without my magic. I do not need food to survive."
"Tell that to Thor. What about the kid?" He waved his hand in the general direction of Loki's stomach. "Shouldn't you be eating for two or something?"

Loki sighed in irritation and wondered if the mortal was ever going to leave. "The reason I can not use my magic is because it is sustaining the child." he admitted.

"Uh huh, come on." the man suddenly started walking towards the door and turned when Loki did not follow. "Look, you might be able to survive without food, but honestly you look like you're wasting away and none of the clothes Pepper is currently getting for you are going to fit if you continue to starve yourself."

"I do not need your help Stark." Loki growled but the man was unmoved.

"You can't spend the next nine months locked in this room."

"I think you'll find that I can."

Stark glared at him and Loki had to wonder why he was pushing so hard for this. What could he possibly hope to achieve? Suddenly the mortals face cleared and a disbelieving smile appeared.

"Wait, are you scared?" Lokis back stiffened at the accusation but before he could let loose any number of scathing retorts, Stark grabbed his arm and was pulling him out the door, promising that the team will keep the hazing to a minimum.

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Hours later Loki was laying on his side in his new bed, which was of a much better quality than the cot from his cell. Still, as comfortable as the mattress under him was, and though he was completely exhausted, he couldn't sleep. Over the course of a day, every aspect of his life had changed. He was no longer an enemy of the avengers, but their ally. All his future plans of world domination and mischief had been replaced with a future where it was now his job to stop others from doing so. He was pregnant, and for the first time in centuries, he could allow himself to feel joy for it.

When he had been carrying Sleipnir, he remembered being cautiously hopeful. He had known that perhaps his family would hesitate to welcome his son to the court, considering the method of his birth. That was why he had hidden for so long. But he had hoped that they would be able to see past that, see that he had a son, a perfect clever son. But when Odin had found him, he only saw Sleipnir as proof of Loki's depravity. The shame of a prince that would lay with another man.

After that, each pregnancy consisted of months of anxiety and hiding. Praying that this time things would be different. And then after Hela he realized he couldn't take it anymore. Could not bear the pain of watching his father carry away another one of his children. So the next time he found his magic pooling, signaling a new life within him, he brewed a potion to end it. He'd done so for centuries now, so many babes that never saw the light of day. But he comforted himself with the knowledge that they had never known Odins cruelty either. It was the only comfort he had.

He sighed and sat up, deciding that if sleep was so determined to avoid him there was no point in lying there. Making his way into the main room, he absently picked up the catalogue that had been left for him and began to leaf through it. It mostly consisted of mortal furnishings and clothes, neither of which he needed. Miss Potts was both thorough and efficient, and by the end if the day his once empty set of drawers and closet was now filled with an assortment of mortal garments in a variety of colours but with a healthy amount of green and black. He would possibly have to thank her, and probably apologize for that one time he nearly killed her. There was one page with a list of
literature and he made note of them all.

Turning to the next page he froze at the sight of its contents. It was furniture again, only miniature in size and garishly decorated.

He closed the small book with a snap and pushed it away. It was to soon for that. There was too much time between now and then for something to go wrong. Odin didn't have to come for him personally, there was always Thor. Stark had told him that his foster brother was in Asgard confronting Odin, but Loki knew the old man would deflect him somehow. Loki may very well be the god of lies but he had learned from the best. Of course Thor would believe his father over his treacherous little brother. After that it was just a matter of Odin charging Thor with the task of bringing his mad brother back to Asgard, and Thor would do so. No matter that Shield had promised to protect him, Odins word was law, and Thor would follow that over any mortal's rules.

The only comfort he had for himself was that he had at least two of the Avengers on his side. During his unnecessary tour of the common areas Stark had let slip that Captain America had threatened to quit the team if Shield hadn't extended an offer of sanctuary. Loki felt he'd done a good job at hiding his surprise at the news.

At least he wasn't without some defenders. Now he just had to stay safe and far away from any Aesir for the next ten or eleven months until after the child was born and his magic fully restored.

Loki sighed and buried his face in his hands. How terribly depressing. To have to hide within the ranks of his enemy, relying on them to spare both him and his child's life and to protect them from the family who raised him. Were this happening to anyone else he might've laughed. Instead he only felt the overwhelming urge to weep.
Chapter 5

Loki decided that Thor was well matched with his mortal friends. They all seemed to find Loki's desire for solitude ridiculous and did everything they could to drag him out of the safety of his quarters. And not that he was ever going to admit it out loud, but he was vaguely thankful. There was nothing to do in his rooms other than stare out the window. At least in the common room there were books. There were of course other methods of entertainment provided, such as a very large television and an extensive collection of movies and video games. But even if such things appealed to Loki he doubted he would have a chance to participate. The machine was in near constant use by others. Usually it was the Archer and a young man who was known publicly as Spiderman, but told Loki that he could call him Peter if he liked.

Luckily he was well practiced in the art of fading into the background and passed most of his days in a very comfortable armchair by the window, slowly and methodically going through the small library of books offered.

On the fifth day after he had signed the deal with Shield, he was halfway through the third Harry Potter book (the fact that he was reading the series was apparently the source of great hilarity for Stark,) when he noticed the room darkening. Part of the reason he preferred the armchair was half for it's comfort, and half for the floor to ceiling window it was next to which offered excellent reading light. But the clear blue skies of summer had suddenly darkened with rolling thunderclouds.

Loki felt the first stirrings of fear.

Others in the room noticed the drastic change in the weather and he heard someone ask if the X-men were in town. Loki noticed Captain America -or Steve as he preferred to be called when out of costume - give him a worried look. He then voiced what Loki already knew. "Thor must be back." And he isn't happy was unspoken but understood by all. Unanimously everyone decided that they didn't want to know what had caused Thor's foul mood and continued with whatever they were doing in the first place. Loki decided to stay close to wherever the largest amount of superheroes congregated. Two hours later Loki remained in the same spot, book still in hand though he hadn't read another word. The clouds above had yet to diminish but Thor hadn't come looking for him yet.

When it became late in the afternoon and the games had ended, the occupants of the common room started making their way to the dining area and Loki ended up following. When Stark had given his tour, Loki had been confused why there would be a separate dining area when his rooms came fully equipped with a kitchen. But apparently his set of rooms were one of few that did, and most of the permanent members ate in a communal area.

He moved to take a seat apart from where the Avengers gathered and a few Shield field agents were, making sure there was a wall to his back and he had a clear view of the two possible entrances. Suddenly a plate was set on the table in front of him and Loki looked to his right to see Rogers sit down next to him with a plate of his own.

"Eat something." he said shortly when Loki raised a brow at him.
"Thank you, but I'm fine."

Rogers studied Loki for a moment before sighing and shaking his head. "Look, I know you're probably not thrilled to be here, but you could try a little harder."

"Excuse me?" he whispered icily.

Rogers was unaffected. "We're making an effort to make sure your ok here, and you just keep acting like we're going to throw you out any minute. That's not going to happen."

"I'm your enemy, forgive me for being hesitant to trust you completely."

"But you aren't our enemy, not anymore at least."

Loki stared at the man as he started to eat his meal, acting as though that was the beginning and end of it. As if it could be that simple. But Rogers was as incapable of telling a lie as was Thor, which meant that he believed it.

The Steve noticed that he still hadn't moved and frowned again. "At least eat the vegetables, when your done I can walk you back to your room and then I'll go find out what's happened with Thor for you."

Loki decided to play nonchalant and speared a carrot on his fork. "What makes you think I care what that oaf is doing?" he asked as he eyed the orange root.

"Well since you suddenly won't let anyone get behind you, and you've joined us for dinner for the first time without being dragged, not to mention you've barely breathed since those thunderclouds appeared, I'm guessing you're a little nervous."

Loki had to stop equating big and blonde with Thor-like intelligence.

Fortunately, Rogers also lacked Thor's ego, so rather than making it obvious that his point had been proven, he simply went back to eating. True to his word he waited until Loki had eaten his fill, which was not much, but Loki didn't dare eat more with his stomach twisting with nerves as it was. It would be poor thanks to vomit on the Captain. They then walked back to Loki's quarters, and it was an exercise in restraint for him not to constantly be looking over his shoulder. When they arrived Rogers repeated that he would investigate what was happening with Thor, and left him to enter his small sanctuary.

Thor was already there.

Loki froze in the doorframe, eyeing the figure hunched over on the sofa and cursed his lack of forethought. If Thor were looking for him, of course he would just lay in wait in his rooms. He eyed Milonir where it sat on the floor by Thor's feet and realized that even if he were to shout for help there was little the Captain could do without his shield.

But Thor had yet to move and it gave Loki pause. The room was dark; the late afternoon sun was blotted out by Thor's clouds, but even in the low light he could see the heavy set to Thor's brow. He seemed different in a way he couldn't find a word for, but it gave him courage to step into the room and close the door.

"It would seem that it doesn't matter what realm I take up residence in, you will always assume a closed door is an invitation to invade my rooms."

"Forgive the invasion brother," the seated god asked quietly and Loki narrowed his eyes. "I only
wished to speak with you, and thought it best to wait for you here."

Loki crossed his arms and watched the other man carefully. "Only to speak? Not bring me back to Asgard? To face the punishment for my crimes?"

"You have been punished too much Loki. I have returned from Asgard to offer my protection as my comrades have." He finally looked up to meet Loki's startled gaze and added with a small smile, "Mother also sends her love."

"How is she?" he asked, because it was easier then asking what he meant by 'punished too much'.

"Not well actually," Thor admitted and then hurriedly added, "She is not ill, not at all! She is just… when she learned what had happened, she became sick at heart. I admit I have never seen her so upset, nor have I ever seen her so incensed with father. It's actually quite frightening."

"When she… what did you tell her?"

"Loki, I went to Asgard to speak to father about your claims, and I admit freely that I did not believe you. Or I suppose, I could not believe that Father could do such a thing to you. But my friend Steve Rogers spoke to me and explained how Father might have thought he was protecting you rather than punishing. So I confronted our father, and he said that it was all a lie. That when he found you with your children they were already monsters. Products of your magic rather than of encounters with men. He said that your madness had made you paranoid, and insisted that I bring you home."

Loki closed his eyes and swallowed back bitter words as he knew they would do him no good. He had predicted what would happen exactly. Thor continued on with his tale.

"I told him I couldn't, that Shield had captured you and hesitated to release you when your child's fate was still unknown. He insisted that I bring you back anyways, even as I told him that we could handle any creature that you might produce. We quarreled and eventually began to fight in earnest, him demanding that I bring you to Asgard and I questioning why it was so important." Thor paused to let out a weary sigh. "He eventually told me the truth."

At this point Loki found that he had stepped forward so that he could put a bracing hand on the back of the armchair, his eyes glued to the form of his foster brother that was suddenly looking at him with a look of such sorrow that he felt his breath catch.

"He claimed that at first his actions were to protect you from the truth of your heritage. It is apparently the way of the Frost Giants to both sire or carry their offspring, their genders are nonspecific, and even if at the time you didn't know, many in Asgard did. He promoted the idea that it was your sorcery that allowed you to beget monsters so that none would search out another reason and realize that you were not Aesir by blood." Thor stood then and stepped towards him tentatively, and Loki watched him warily as he drew closer. Thor's expression was one of great sadness as he read the distrust in his brother's eyes. But instead of stepping back, Thor came to stand in front of him and Loki was pulled into an embrace.

Thor's arms held him tight, but Loki didn't immediately push him away, though he realized he could have if he wanted to. Thor's grip was gentle, like he was afraid to injure, completely opposite to the bruising hugs Loki had learned to twist away from.

"I am so sorry brother."

It was said softly, with genuine remorse and Loki shoved away from Thor viciously. "You're
"Sorry?" he hissed angrily, "What have you to be sorry about? Is it remorse that you and your friends mocked my suffering at every available opportunity, or is it regret that you have learned that your father is as skilled a liar as I am?"

"I am sorry that I never knew the truth Loki! If I had, you must know I would have done anything-"

"But you did know!" he shouted, stunning Thor into silence. "You knew that they were mine! My children! It shouldn't matter what form they were in, they were innocent, and mine and you stood by and made cruel jokes as they were taken from me! Do not claim that learning the truth of it all changes anything!"

Thor stared at his brother with wide eyes as he finished his rant before hanging his head. "You are right Loki, of course. I will not ask for forgiveness for my actions, I don't deserve it. I can only promise to do all that I can to protect you so that it never happens again. To try and make this right."

"You can not undo what has been done Thor."

"I know."

Loki took a calming breath and looked over Thor's form. He looked as contrite as he'd ever seen him. "You say that Odin's rationale for transforming my children was to hide proof of my Jotun nature; if that were true, why does he want this child? Everyone knows by now what I am, there is no secret to hide."

Thor grimaced. "I had thought the same, and questioned him why it was so important that I bring you home before the babe is born. He admitted that part of the reason he bound them into the forms of beasts was because they had inherited your magic, and that in time they would grow to be as powerful as you. He fears that this child you carry now will become your equal, and one day the two of you will conspire to bring down Asgard."

"He will continue to try to take it then?"

The look that crossed over Thor's face was a dangerous one indeed. "He may try brother, but he will not succeed."
Chapter 6

Two months had passed since Loki’s sudden residence within the Avengers’ tower, and little had changed since those first few days. Thor realized that perhaps Loki was a little too practiced in the art of doing nothing, or at least what he thought was nothing. If for some reason he’d been the one in his brother’s situation, he would have gone mad within a week. But Loki however, seemed unaffected. He woke, spent most of his days in the common room reading silently, ate his meals with the rest if them, but only spoke when spoken to, and he went back to his rooms, presumably to sleep. Thor had offered to try and see if Fury would allow him out for a day, at least to get some sun on his pale skin, but his brother had just shook his head and went back to his book.

His friends seemed less bothered by it, and said that at least he wasn’t causing any trouble. Still, they were kind and did their best to include Loki in their conversations. Out of all of them, Bruce Banner seemed to make the most progress. He had been seen lending books of science to his brother, and Loki had gone through them quickly. Now sometimes late at night Thor would pass by the common room to see his brother and Banner seated at opposite ends of a couch quietly discussing the theories between science and magic.

But despite the small improvements, Loki remained cold and unfriendly towards him, and Thor was forced to think that perhaps he would never be able to have his little brother back.

Everything changed with the appearance of the Warriors Three and Lady Sif in New York. Loki had disappeared the moment their names were mentioned, hiding somewhere in the building. Steve Rogers had said he was reminded of a house cat whose home had been shortly invaded by a dog. Steve had assured him that Loki would come out of whatever hiding place he had found once the perceived threat was gone. But that meant he wouldn't have a chance to say goodbye to his brother. Instead he was forced to leave a short note, explaining that father had fallen into the Odinsleep and he had to return to Asgard to act as king until he woke. The note was placed in Loki’s rooms, and Thor left with a promise to his mortal friends that he would return to fight alongside them soon.

Asgard was much the same when he arrived, and his mother embraced him, asking after Loki with worried eyes. He went to see his father as he slept and sat with his mother and told her about Midgard and what Loki had been up to. He went about his royal duties, speaking to members of the court, the master of the guards and others who sought the help of the king. By the time night had fallen he was exhausted, but on his way to his rooms he paused by a familiar set of doors.

Loki’s old rooms were untouched from the last time he'd used them so long ago. As he stepped in Thor looked around wondering if there was anything his brother might want for his new home with the Avengers. His rooms were so bare from what he'd seen, the only belongings he had were his clothes. Walking further in he made note of a few books left out that were well worn, perhaps favorites of his brothers. There were fewer trinkets and he couldn't be sure which might be for sentimental reasons and which for spell work. He would just have to guess and hope that his brother didn’t become angry that he’d been rummaging through his old rooms. It hit him then that he barely knew his brother. Thor stood in Loki’s rooms, surrounded by all the things Loki had collected and kept, and he barely knew what most of them were.

Deciding that he needed some fresh air, Thor stepped out onto the wide balcony that overlooked the gardens and the western lands of Asgard. The moon was high and bright casting everything below in pale light. Thor let his eyes wander past his mother’s gardens, the training fields in the...
distance and the royal stables. Suddenly a thought occurred to him and Thor was soon marching out of his brother's rooms, all signs of exhaustion gone.

The stables were quiet, with only the small sounds of large sleeping beasts to break the silence. He passed his own horse without a glance and made his way towards the largest stall where Sleipnir stood. His nephew looked up curiously when he entered the stall but allowed him to come closer without fuss. Thor smiled sadly as he ran a hand over the horse's flank.

"I am sorry I have not visited before nephew." he said softly and Sleipnir nickered quietly, butting him with his head. "I wonder, can you understand me? If you are Loki's son, then you are bound to be intelligent, probably more than me even as a horse." He looked into his dark equine eyes and Thor sighed. "I wish I knew what to do, it is not right what was done to you, but I have no head for magic, and I'm sure Loki has already tried everything imaginable." Thor trailed off when he realized he would be getting no answers from his nephew. Instead he ran his hand along his mane, scratched at his ears and under his chin. Sleipnir seemed to enjoy the attention, pressing his huge head towards him when he stopped. Thor chuckled and continued to scratch under the leather of his bridle, but paused when he felt how the hair under it had been rubbed off from its use.

"Do they never take this off of you?" he asked, not really expecting an answer. He reached up to take hold of the top of the bridle and tried to remove it but it would not budge. Frowning, he tried again but still he could not move it enough to fit over Sleipnir's ears. He ran his hands over the leather searching in the dark for a buckle but found something else instead. Where a buckle might have been was a seal with Odins knot on it. It was there so that no one could open it except his father. Thor stepped out for a moment to find a lantern and returned for a better look, and under his inspection he saw several gouges and score marks from where someone had tried to pry it off. He was willing to bet anything that it was Loki who left those marks.

"He tried to free you? Well I suppose a life running free in Asgard would be better than carrying father around." he said ruefully patting Sleipnir's side again and he considered the seal. Loki would have tried every form of magic to remove the thing, but there was one force he could not have tried. Without giving himself time to think about what he was about to do Thor led Sleipnir out of his stall and towards one of the outside walls where an anvil sat. He moved aside a small pile of old horseshoes and held out his hand and called Mjolnir to him. Sure enough, he heard his hammer flying through the air before it landed firmly in his hand. Sparing a thought to find a rag to tie over Sleipnir's eyes, he took hold of the magiked bridle and pulled his head down towards the anvil. The bridle didn't give much, but he managed to maneuver it so that the seal rested on the metal anvil a good inch from the horses skin.

"Be brave nephew, and try not to trample me," he said before bringing his hammer down forcefully onto the seal.

Sleipnir's shrill whinnying was likely heard all over Asgard but Thor kept hold of his thrashing head and brought his hammer down for another blow. Soon he heard the shouts of the stable master, but he ignored the man and looked closely at the seal. It looked no different and Thor scowled. He would not fail in this he decided; he owed his brother that much.

Over and over Mjolnir came down upon the bridle. Sleipnir was near frantic with fear, and Thor had to divide his attention between his aim and avoiding eight hooves as they kicked about. The stable master had fallen silent behind him, not brave enough to come to close to the frightened horse and his mad prince.

He brought his hammer down once more and felt something give. He jerked the seal into the light and saw that there was a crack nearly halfway through and he doubled his efforts. It took three
more swings before the seal snapped entirely and the bridle fell off effortlessly. Thor barely
managed to pull off the blindfold before Sleipnir danced away from him, very agitated and tossing
his head about.

"My prince," Thor turned to face the stable master who was looking him as though he'd lost his
mind. "He is your fathers horse..."

"Not anymore," Thor said, his tone full of warning and the man dared not deny him. He turned
away, dismissing the man from his thoughts and went to open the gate that led to open fields.
Sleipnir stayed by the fence, pawing at the ground and grunting unhappily. "Come, if I can give
you but one thing, let it be your freedom."

But Sleipnir wasn't having it, and his agitation only grew. His great head tossed about and he
couldn't seem to stand still and Thor began to worry that something might be wrong. Suddenly the
horse's form flickered, and a cloud of grey mist covered the beast. Thor darted forward with a
shout but by the time he reached the fence the mist had faded away and the giant horse was gone.
In its place was a small naked form, curled up in the grass and hay. Kneeling down, Thor gently
turned it over and realized it was a boy, no older than five or six. He had short black hair and when
his eyes opened for a brief moment, the moonlight caught in his deep green irises.

"Sleipnir..." he breathed but the boy had fallen unconscious.

Ignoring the sputtered questions of the stable master behind him, Thor pulled free his cape and
bundled the boy in it. It made him look tiny as he cradled the small form to his chest and he made
his way quickly to the healing chambers. He would first make sure the child was well, and then he
would send for several people to wake. He would leave for Midgard before dawn.
Chapter 7

Loki bit back a aggravated sigh and reminded himself for what felt like the hundredth time in five minutes that murdering the Ironman with his own breakfast spoon would reflect badly on the contract he had with Shield. But the more the man spoke, the more he became convinced that he would be doing Shield a favor.

Tony Stark had apparently decided that they had reached a level of familiarity where he was now comfortable asking him any number of personal questions. Loki did his best to ignore him but luck was not (if ever) on his side. He had awoken with a hopeful start to the day, it would seem that the usual bout of morning sickness was not forthcoming. He had in fact felt hungry and decided to seek out food in the dining hall. That had been his first mistake.

His second mistake was informing Steve Rogers that he was feeling well that morning when the man had politely asked. His third mistake was not getting out of his seat and leaving the room as soon as Stark began asking his ridiculous questions. His latest being "Will you grow breasts?"

"No but if you would like some yourself I'm sure I can find a way to grant you your own pair."

"You'd think you would need magic for that."

"Not the way I'm imagining."

Unfortunately, instead of backing off, the threat only seemed to amuse the idiot. Loki gripped his own spoon and mentally began listing the many different ways he could kill the mortal with it. He was up to seventy two when the mortal known as Coulson arrived. His appearance triggered odd reactions among those gathered. Most seemed to tolerate him, but given the opportunity they would go into detail about the tortures of his debriefings. Clearly these mortals had never been faced with true torture. But then after thinking about it, being forced in a room with Tony Stark and unable to silence him would probably classify as an effective form of cruelty.

Most conversations tapered off as the suited man approached and Loki spotted a few worried faces and wondered whom the man was to discipline today.

"Loki, if you'll come with me?"

Loki blinked in surprise. He hadn't done anything. He had of course thought about it but unless Shield was suddenly employing telepaths there was no way for them to know that. "I wasn't actually going to give him breasts." he said carefully, leaving out the silent yet at the end. While at the moment he had to play nice, the second he got his magic back, all bets were off.

His sharp eyes caught the small twitch at the corner of Coulson's mouth but the man remained otherwise pleasantly passive. "You have a visitor, if you would please follow me I will take you to him."

Oh, well that was unexpected. Loki was sure Shield wouldn't be foolish enough to let in one of their enemies, or even someone from Asgard, and he couldn't think of anyone else who would come to visit him. He briefly thought of his mother (and Frigga would always be his mother) but immediately disregarded the idea. If Odin was asleep, she would not leave his side.
Thankfully he didn't have to remain guessing for long. He had followed Coulson out of the dinning room and was barely halfway down the hall when Thor's instantly recognizable figure appeared at the other end. "Brother! There you are! Hurry, you must come!" he shouted and Loki felt his feet slow to a stop.

"Thor? What are you doing here?"

But Thor wasn't listening, he had bounded up to them and before he could twist out of reach, he had taken hold of one of Loki's arms and was practically dragging him back down the way he had come.

"Thor unhand me! What are you even doing here? Shouldn't you be in Asgard?"

"I was, but I have returned!" The blonde idiot replied. As if that statement weren't obvious.

"Yes, but why? Isn't the king in the Odin sleep? Did you tire of being King so quickly? Too much duty and responsibility and not enough time to hunt down trolls?"

"I have been busy Loki, but not in the way you would believe. Father is still in the Odin sleep, and Mother believes he will remain so for some time. So you can at least take comfort that while he sleeps you might relax a little."

Loki ignored the last comment and latched onto the one before. "Thor if Odin still sleeps and you are here, who sits on his throne?"

"Balder of course." Thor replied easily as he pulled Loki down another hallway, Coulson long since gone.

Loki gaped at the back of Thors head. "Balder? You left Balder as king?"

"I did not leave him alone, my friends have sworn to help him as he needs it, and mother is there as well. I needed to come back Loki, something has happened that is more important to me than my duties to the crown."

"What could possibly be more important?" Loki demanded as Thor led them into an elevator and released his arm to push a button to direct them down.

"I visited Sleipnir." He admitted and Loki felt all of his ire vanish.

"How was he?" he asked quietly. Odin had forbidden him from visiting his son, not that he'd ever listened. Sleipnir was the only one of his children he had access too, and he would sneak into the stables as often as he could to sit with his son. But after the destruction of the Bifrost, and all the events that followed, he had not dared to go back to Asgard. He hadn't seen his son in years.

"He was happy, for a horse." Thor responded simply and Loki grit his teeth. "I noticed though that I have never seen him without his bridle on, even at night."

"Its how Odin keeps him there. No one can remove it." Loki explained as the elevator slowed and the doors opened to a floor he had yet to visit.

"I know. I saw the seal. It looked like someone had tried very hard to destroy it. There were marks all over it. Was that you?" Thor looked to him, appearing more amused than anything, though Loki didn't see what was so funny about their discussion.

"Of course it was me. I tried everything to get that blasted bridle off of him. But even when I was
king it made no difference. No magic can break Odins seal."

"I thought as much." Thor said with a smug smile before beginning to walk down a white tiled hall, trusting Loki to follow. "That is why I decided to see if Mjolnir would make a difference."

Loki froze. Surely Thor didn't mean... but then of course that's what he would do. If something was in his way, his natural response was to hit it with his hammer.

Thor was still ahead of him, and he hadn't turned back to see if Loki was following, so he didn't see the blow coming until he was pitching forward as Loki's fist connected with the back of his head. "You did NOT take your hammer to my sons face!" he seethed as Thor stumbled away from him.

"I was very careful, I did not strike him once." Thor insisted and Loki went to attack him again. "It worked brother!" he shouted, stopping Loki in his tracks. "It worked, the seal broke under Mjolnirs might. The bridle is gone."

Loki stared at Thor, his hands still curled into fists as his mind struggled to catch up. "He's free?" he asked, not caring that there was a desperate tinge to his voice.

Thor's smile grew warm. "Yes Loki, he is free. He is here as well, I thought you might like to see him."

Loki felt himself divided in two. One part of him rejoiced in the opportunity to see his son again, without worry of being caught by a stable boy or worse, Odin himself. But the other part of him feared what Shield would do with an eight-legged horse. He imagined they would want to study him, and Loki couldn't decide if that would be a worse fate than the one he'd just escaped.

"Where is he?" he asked and Thor just smiled and led him down one last short hallway. It ended up leading them into the medical wing and Loki felt his heart lurch in fear that they had already begun their examinations. But Thor pushed him towards a small room that was mostly made of windows covered by cream coloured blinds. The door was open and inside the small room were two small armchairs, a bedside table with a lamp and the bed itself. Certainly no room for a horse. But then he saw the dark head of hair on the pillows and realized a child slept in the room. And then he recognized the child.

For a long moment, he could only stand there and look at the slight form on the bed. Blankets covered him up to his chest but his face was turned toward the door and Loki stared. Distantly he realized someone behind him was talking, but that barely registered because he was stepping forward. With an unsteady hand he was reaching out to feel what his eyes were seeing but his mind was telling him was impossible. Sleipnir's hair was as soft as he remembered it, and he tucked a few short strands behind the delicate shell of his ear. His skin was warm with sleep as Loki traced his fingers over the contours of his face. He was unblemished and unharmed, no mark from the bridle or a hammer or anything. He was exactly as he was when he'd been taken.

Sitting sideways on the edge of the bed, he leaned over to place a kiss on Sleipnir's brow, then his temple, then his cheek. His arms slipped under the sleeping body and the child did not stir as he was pulled out from under the covers and into his lap. He cradled the boy to himself, despite the fact that he was almost too large to do so. He just relished in the feel of the familiar weight, the smell of his child. Sleipnir's hair soon grew damp but Loki could not stop the tears if he tried.

He sat like that for a long time, at times rocking the both of them back and forth, or else just stroking Sleipnir's hair as he watched his son's sleeping face. Time faded away entirely, and Loki just wanted to stay in this small room forever.
Eventually the rest of the world came into focus and Loki realized Thor was sitting in one of the chairs, his elbows on his knees, his large hands clasped in front of him. Sleipnir slept on, and Loki felt a twinge of worry. His son was never this heavy a sleeper before. "Why won't he wake?" he asked suddenly, his voice sounding hoarse and raw.

Thor blinked from the daze he had fallen into and took a moment to think about his question. "Oh, Eir said he might be like this for a while. She thought it might be a side effect of Fathers spell being removed after so long. He's fine, he just needs some rest that all."

Loki nodded numbly and went back to staring at Sleipnir's face. "How is this even possible?" he asked.

"I'm not sure exactly, spells aren't really where my talents lay. But Eir believes that the bridle did more than keep Sleipnir tethered to Asgard. She said a spell like the one Father cast on him to turn him into a horse, it's a powerful thing and takes a great deal of energy to maintain. She thinks the seal acted as both a tether and permanent source of magic to hold the spell in place. Once the seal was destroyed…"

"And with Odin still asleep and unable to maintain the spells, the enchantment fell." Loki finished, and it made sense. Sleipnir shifted in his sleep and Loki adjusted his arms to accommodate him, his smile growing all the while. He was aware of Thor watching him.

"Was he this way when you last saw him? Before father…" Thor didn't have to finish.

"He hasn't aged a day." Loki admitted with wonder as he carded his fingers through the child's short hair. "Look at him, he's perfect."

Thor smiled in agreement but it waivered for a moment and Loki's sharp eyes caught it.

"What is it?"

Thor looked reluctant to speak so Loki pinned him with a look that demanded that he get out with it. "On Asgard, he woke briefly. Eir was with him at the time, but I was near enough to hear that he was asking for his mother." He winced at the last word but Loki just raised an eyebrow at him.

"Thor, I carried and gave birth to him. Did you think he would call me Father?"

Thor stared at him for a moment before letting out a relieved laugh. "Fair enough." He stood and stretched. "I must go Loki, but I promise to return soon. I have already spoken with Fury, and Sleipnir has been granted amnesty by this country. He now has the same protection as you."

"Odin will not forgive this Thor, you must know that."

Thor just gave him a wry smile that looked strange on his honest face. "A brother of mine once taught me that sometimes it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. And even if that forgiveness never comes, I will never regret my actions today." With that Thor stepped forward and clasping him behind the neck so that he couldn't escape; he pressed a kiss to Loki's forehead. "Take care brother, I will see you both again soon." With that he stepped back and turned to leave, pausing only when Loki called out to him.

"Thank you Thor." He said quietly, but with every ounce of honesty he had. Thor just smiled at him one last time before stepping out and shutting the door behind him.

Alone, Loki gazed back down at his sons sleeping form and didn't bother to hide the smile that threatened to split his face in half. Toing off his shoes, he maneuvered them both under the
covers, clothes and all, pulled Sleipnir close and let the delirious joy overcome him.
Chapter 8

Sleipnir woke a number of times over the course of the day, and each time he got stronger and more aware. The first time he woke he was barely conscious for more than a minute. Loki watched as his dark green eyes opened and searched him out. When Sleipnir's eyes landed on his face he let out a small sigh and curled closer.

"Mama," the child breathed and Loki pressed a kiss into the hair at the top of his head. "I had a bad dream." he muttered sleepily.

"Did you now? What did you dream?"

Sleipnir's face made a small frown as he struggled to remember. "I don't know." he admitted as his eyelids drooped.

Loki ran a soothing hand down the child's back and smiled encouragingly. "Go back to sleep, and no more nightmares."

Sleipnir murmured something else but it was too quiet to hear. Soon enough he was breathing evenly again.

The next time he woke, Loki had been dozing lightly. He glanced down and noticed that Sleipnir's eyes were wide open and looking about the room curiously.

"Where are we?" he asked when he noticed Loki watching him.

"We are on Midgard." he answered and smiled when Sleipnir's eyes widened comically.

"Why are we on Midgard?"

Loki searched his sons face, but Sleipnir's expression was simply curious. "What is the last thing you remember? Where were you before you went to sleep?" he questioned softly.

The boys brow furrowed as he thought, and Loki wondered if he remembered the stable or Thor's attempts to take off his bridle. "We were on Vaniheim, and you said we could go to the valley today so I could learn some more magic," he answered and then looked to him with a worried expression. "Have I fallen sick?"

"Why would you ask that? You're not ill at all!". Loki assured him, his mind whirling at the revelation that Sleipnir didn't remember being a horse. They had been on Vaniheim when Odin had found them.

"I'm so tired, I feel like I've slept for days and days." he rubbed at his eyes, as if he could rub away the exhaustion.

"You slept for more than that, you have slept for years." Loki said softly.

Sleipnir was looking at him with wide eyes again. "I did?"

"I'm afraid so," Loki said gravely. "A man put a spell on you that made you sleep for centuries. No harm came to you, and as you can see you didn't age, but no one could wake you."
"Not even you?"

Loki recalled all the times in the stables, armed with charmed daggers and spells, trying fruitlessly to remove the seal. All the while being watched by his son's sad dark eyes. "No, I tried very hard but not even I could undo the spell."

"How did I wake up then?" Sleipnir asked, waiting eagerly for the end of the story.

"A man with a giant hammer came by, he found a way to wake you."

"How? Was he magic as well?"

"No, he used his hammer. He knocked you right out of bed with it and you woke up."

Sleipnir let out a laugh and Loki just relished in the sound of it. "He did not!"

"He did," Loki insisted with his own smile. "He told me when he brought you here. He didn't know why you were sleeping though, he only knocked you out of bed because your snoring was so loud it was keeping everyone else awake."

Sleipnir laughed again, "No! I wasn't snoring!"

"How would you know? You were asleep," he reasoned and the boy just grinned at him.

"Is that story true?"

"Some of it." Loki responded honestly and Sleipnir's smile turned into a wide yawn. "That's enough questions for now, you should sleep."

"But I slept for so long already." Sleipnir murmured even as he snuggled into the blankets.

"It won't be for as long this time, I promise to wake you if you sleep for more than a year." he teased as he watched Sleipnir make himself comfortable but resolutely kept his eyes open.

"Can't you tell me another story?"

"Of course, how about another one about the man with the hammer? There was a time he lost his hammer and had to wear a clever disguise to get it back."

The child nodded weakly before resting his head on his chest, and Loki placed a hand over his hair before beginning the tale. Sleipnir was fast asleep within minutes.

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Loki woke aware that there was a weight missing from his chest. He realized Sleipnir was sitting up in bed next to him as he felt the mattress shift.

"Who are you?" he heard the boy ask and his eyes flew open in surprise.

"My name is Bruce," the Avenger was saying from his position from the open door. "I'm kinda a friend of your... Mom." he glanced over and met Loki's eyes with a weak smile before looking back at the curious child. "What's your name?"

"Sleipnir." The boy answered promptly and Banner favored him with a warm smile.

"Well it's nice to meet you Sleipnir. I've heard a lot about you. Actually I brought you something."
Sleipnir suddenly sat up straighter. "A present?" he asked eagerly.

"Uh huh," Bruce said and came into the room with one of his hands carrying something behind his back. He brought the item into view and placed the large blue bucket on the bed in front of Sleipnir. The thing was sealed by a plastic lid and rattled when it was tipped slightly as Sleipnir inspected it.

"Here," the scientist offered and turned the lid a fraction before pulling it off, revealing the multi coloured blocks inside. "I doubt you've ever seen these things before but here on earth most little boys have at least a tub of Lego."

Sleipnir pulled out a handful of the plastic blocks and studied them closely. "What are they for?"

Bruce patiently took a handful of his own and instructed the child on how the pieces fit together to build shapes while Loki watched on silently. Sleipnir caught onto the concept quickly and soon enough the bucket was turned over and the blanket was covered with piles of Lego as he began building a boat.

"He looks like he's doing pretty well." Banner said once Sleipnir was distracted and Loki met the mans eyes easily. "You can probably take him up to your rooms whenever you want to. I think someone was put in charge of stocking up your fridge so there should be something for him to eat."

He paused before gently saying in a quiet voice, "Fury gave the official order an hour ago, no one is to bother you for a couple of days. We figure you'll want some time, so you don't have to worry about Tony or anyone banging down your door."

Loki felt both surprise and a large amount of gratitude towards the Shield director. It was one thing to extend their protection to cover his rescued son, but this show of compassion left him stunned.

"You will pass on my thanks?" he asked of Bruce who nodded.

"No problem. Anyways I'll leave you to it, it was really nice to meet you Sleipnir!"

Sleipnir looked up from the half constructed hull in his hands to smile brilliantly at the scientist. "Goodbye! Thank you very much for the gift!"

"You're very welcome. Bye Loki," Bruce turned with a wave and closed the door behind him. Loki watched as Sleipnir continued with his boat, helping him find certain colours or sizes when asked. Soon enough a crude multi coloured miniature replica of an Elven war ship was held up proudly and Loki had to applaud the idea of the gift.

"How do you feel?" he asked as Sleipnir started sorting through the remaining pieces. He'd been watching for any lingering exhaustion but so far the boy seemed well rested at last.

"Much better, I don't feel tired at all." he said earnestly, as if afraid that he wouldn't be believed and be forced to sleep some more.

"Very good, if you are recovered we can leave this place. I can show you where we are going to live for now."

Sleipnir looked around the small area, which he knew must look like a good enough room. "We don't live here?"

"We live in this building, but no, not in these rooms. These are their healing rooms. Only meant to hold the sick or injured and since you and I are neither of those things, we ought not to linger."
"Oh, can I bring my Lego with me?" he asked with a concerned look towards his toys.

"Of course, make sure you get them all out of the sheets though." he reminded as Sleipnir began collecting all of the small bits of Lego and placing them back into the bucket. The boat just barely fit and the lid was placed on securely. Smoothing out his sleep rumbled clothes was a useless effort so Loki just pulled on his shoes and turned to see Sleipnir sitting on the edge of the bed looking up at him expectantly, his bucket beside him. Loki hadn't missed the fact that his son was dressed in Asgardian clothes. He had studied them closely earlier and knew that they were fine garments. Fit for a young prince, and Loki knew that Thor hadn't been the one to dress him. And though he hadn't mentioned her in his tale, Loki knew that his mother had seen to her grandson. The only thing he was missing though was shoes.

He stared down at Sleipnir's bare feet as they swung in the air. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to carry you." Loki said and watched as the smile slid off his son's face.

"I can walk! I'm not a baby!" he protested.

"Not without shoes you can't."

Sleipnir looked down at his bare toes then back at him. "Can't you make me some?" he asked.

It was a fair question. As far as Sleipnir remembered, whenever they lacked something, Loki would produce it by way of his magic. Unfortunately such a thing was impossible now. "I can't be afraid, my magic is gone for a while. So we will have to endure without for the time being. Which includes letting me carry you without a fuss. Yes?"

Sleipnir sighed as though he were greatly put upon and dramatically held out his arms. It was an easy thing, picking him up, feeling his legs wrap securely around his waist and his arms loop around his neck. Apparently some things the body did not forget, no matter how much time had passed and he shifted their weight until they were both balanced.

Not forgetting the bucket, Loki gave his son a reassuring smile and stepped out of the room.

The rest of the medical center was dark and silent, with only a few lights lit to show the way. He had no way to determine the time but by the lack of people they ran into he was guessing it was quite late. Sleipnir was instantly interested with the elevator, and asked several questions on how it worked. Loki found that he could only give him a basic explanation of the pullies and weights that moved the machine, but drew a blank when asked how the elevator knew when to stop. How do you explain to a child who didn't even know what electricity was, how a computer program works?

"Why is your magic gone?" Sleipnir asked suddenly once they had reached their floor.

"It is not gone exactly," he answered carefully. "It is more that it is being used for something else."

"What are you using it for? Are you building something?"

Loki couldn't help the laugh that escaped him. "Not exactly."

"Is it a secret?" he asked next, and there was no reproach in his voice at all.

"It is not a secret Sleipnir, it is simply part of a long story. I promise I will tell you all about it soon, just not tonight."

"Alright." he said simply, and that was that. Loki shook his head in amazement. If Odin had told him that, he would have obsessed over discovering the secret that was being kept from him.
Sleipnir just accepted that he would be told eventually and let it go.

They approached the door to his rooms and Loki pushed the door open into darkness. He had to put down the bucket of Lego so that he could blindly feel for the light switch. It was funny how the little things made him miss his magic all the more. Once the switch was found and the main room was bathed in artificial light he let Sleipnir slide to the floor and shut the door, locking it for good measure. He turned back to see Sleipnir looking around curiously.

"Are you hungry?" he asked him and Sleipnir nodded so Loki held out his hand for him to take and lead him into the kitchen. A bowl of fruit sat on the counter, and a little rummaging through the drawers found him a knife. With their easy meal procured, Loki led them towards the sofa, pointing at certain objects and explaining what they were. The television was left out of his small tour, he knew eventually Sleipnir would figure out what it did, but until that time Loki was going to enjoy the quiet while it lasted.

The sofa was already occupied it would seem; a small collection of bags had taken up residence while he was gone. A careful inspection revealed them to filled with clothes, all in Sleipnir's size and height, including a pair of shoes. There weren't that many clothes, just a small selection, and another catalogue filled with children's clothes, toys and books. He moved the bags aside, making note that he would have to go through the catalogue soon with Sleipnir. Once the sofa was cleared he sat down and began peeling a pear, letting the skin fall into a bowl in his lap. Sleipnir climbed up to sit next to him and accepted the pieces of fruit as they were offered. Once the pear was gone, a peach followed it, and then an orange. The apples were ignored entirely.

He was considering the banana next when Sleipnir began to move around and when he glanced down next to him, the boy was on his knees looking over the back of the sofa and out the dark window. "We must be very high up! The stars are on the ground! Look!"

Loki looked at where he was pointing and laughed quietly. "Those aren't stars Sleipnir. They are just lights. The stars are still in the sky, you just can't see them right now."

"But what are the lights for then?"

"Most of them are where someone is living."

Sleipnir's eyes grew wide, "But there are so many!"

"Yes, you have never been to a city before, but this is one of the larger ones on Midgard." he watched as Sleipnir continued to stare out at the city lights.

"Are you still hungry?" he asked and the boy shook his head. "Tired?"

"No."

Loki nodded and stood up to put the bowl of fruit peels away before sitting back down and pulling the catalogue closer with a pen he had found in one of the drawers in the kitchen. "What is that?" Sleipnir asked when he began to look through it, and leaned on his arm to peer at the images.

"It is something to help me acquire items I can no longer make with magic. If I want something, I simply make a mark next to it and it will be brought to us. Like so." He demonstrated by circling a number of books for children.

"Who brings them?"

"Servants who work here I suppose," he said, knowing that people like Miss Potts would balk at
the use of the term servant.

"Are we in a palace?" Sleipnir asked after some thought.

"It's actually more of a fortress. The strongest warriors of Midgard live here. The man who gave you your present is one of them."

"Bruce is a warrior? He doesn't look like one!"

Loki just smiled. "You'll find that in regards to Bruce Banner, looks can be very deceiving."

Sleipnir seemed to consider that before becoming distracted by an item in the book. "Look, that's what I have!" Loki looked at what he was pointing and saw it was more Lego.

"Indeed, would you like some more?"

"Can I?"

"I don't see a reason why not." he said as he circled the item on the page. He eventually moved on to clothes and Sleipnir grew bored beside him. Rather than watch Loki, he slid off the couch and went to retrieve the bucket of Lego from where it had been left by the door.

Loki looked up briefly to watch as Sleipnir turned the bucket upside down, spilling it's contents over the carpet and began constructing something new. An excellent gift indeed. With his son happily occupied Loki went through the entirety of the catalogue, ordering more clothes in an array of colours. Just because he preferred green did not mean he was going to make his son a clone. He also took the time to place the items that had already been delivered into the bottom two drawers in his room. He then went back to the book to see if there was any furniture in it. He circled a small set of drawers but ignored the beds. He wasn't planning on letting Sleipnir out of his sight if he could help it, and his own double bed would be large enough for the both of them.

With nothing left to do Loki was forced to admit that he was quite tired and he had noticed Sleipnir struggling to hide a few yawns. Leaving the door to his room open so that he could hear the sounds of Lego being fit together, he quickly changed out of his stale clothes and traded them for some more comfortable sleepwear. Sleipnir looked up when he reappeared and took in his appearance, which consisted of dark flannel pants and a soft green shirt.

"Your clothes are strange." he said quite bluntly.

"Thank you, you have a set just like them and it is time to put them on."

Sleipnir put down the Lego he held in his hand, the beginnings of a construction Loki couldn't guess what of, and followed him back into his room. He allowed himself to be helped into the soft garments and grinned as he ran his fingers over the material. "Why did we have to change our clothes?"

"These ones were made specifically for sleeping, which it is now time to do. It is quite late."

"But I've already slept so much today."

"Yes, but that does not alter the fact that it is time for bed." he said patiently and Sleipnir just sighed and clambered into Loki's bed without further complaint. Loki followed after turning off all the lights and slid under the covers, sighing in contentment when Sleipnir scooted up to his side. He couldn't stop himself from curling his arms around the smaller body, securing him in a tight embrace.
He had wanted to hold his son like this for hundreds and hundreds of years, and he'd thought he'd never do so again. By all rights once Odin's spell had been removed Sleipnir should have transformed into the grown man he would have been by now. But for once Loki didn't care about the how or the why. He just held on to the gift he'd been given.

Sleipnir remained quiet for a long time, not pulling away. "I slept for a really long time, didn't I?" he asked quietly and Loki couldn't lie to his son.

"Yes, you did."

Small fingers played with the fabric of his bedclothes and Loki ran a soothing hand over Sleipnir's back. "You couldn't wake me up?" he asked, remembering the story he'd been told earlier.

"I tried very hard, I did everything I could, but I couldn't wake you. I'm so so sorry Sleipnir."

"How long did I sleep for?"

Loki sighed. "Hundreds of years. Too long."

"Did you miss me?"

Loki gripped the small body even closer, "Sleipnir, I have missed you more than you could ever possibly understand. And you are going to suffer for it I'm afraid because I am never letting you out of my sight again."

Sleipnir hummed as the breath was temporarily squeezed out of him and hugged back as much as he could. "I missed you too. Even if I can't remember sleeping." he added as an afterthought.

Loki gave one last squeeze before loosening his hold. Sleipnir stayed mostly in his arms, his breathing evening out as he eventually fell into slumber. Loki stayed awake though, just listening to his breathing as he formed plans in his mind. Plans that he would ultimately need Thor's help with, and Thor would help him with this. Even if he had to drag him about by his hair. Because if Mjolnir could break the seal holding Sleipnir in his form, then it could do the same to another. It was just a matter of locating the others. Because now he knew it could be done, and there wasn't a force in all the universe that was going to stop him. He would have his children back.
"Why can't we go outside?"

Loki looked up from the pages of the book he was reading to see Sleipnir no longer playing with his growing pile of Lego. The child was looking at the door that led to the rest of the building with a serious expression on his face. Loki sighed, already resigned for the conversation that was about to happen. He'd known that while he would have no difficulty remaining in these small rooms for years if necessary, Sleipnir was used to wandering about. Loki was actually rather surprised that it had taken him three days before asking. Putting his book down, he gestured for Sleipnir to come closer, and the boy clamored onto his lap.

Without preamble, he lifted the hem of his shirt so that the small bulge of his pregnancy could be seen and placed one of Sleipnir's hands on it. "What do you feel?" he asked.

Sleipnir waited a beat before answering with a mischievous smile. "Lucky Charms."

"Very clever, what else? Other than breakfast?"

The boy's expression became serious once more and Loki waited. Sure enough, he soon felt a small tendril of foreign magic echo against his own he smiled as Sleipnir blinked in confusion. "It's your magic, and something else as well. What is it?"

"It's a baby," he said slowly, "It will be your brother or sister."

Sleipnir's eyes grew wide, and a smile spread across his face. "Really? I will have a brother?"

"Or a sister, it is too soon to tell what it will be." he explained, relieved beyond measure that Sleipnir was pleased with the news.

Sleipnir looked down at the skin of his stomach and flexed his hands against it before nodding. "It will be a brother. I can tell."

Loki smiled indulgently at the confident expression on his son's face. "Is that so? How can you be sure?"

"Because I would like to have a brother." he said as if that was all the reason he needed.

It was a struggle to keep his smile in place and not to let it waiver. Sleipnir did have brothers, two of them as well as a sister, but he could not tell him that yet.

"Well, brother or sister, it is the reason I can not use my magic. It is protecting the baby until it is time to be born. The same as it did with you, and because of that, I can not use my magic to protect the two of us. That is why we are here in this fortress where we are safe; we can not leave until my magic is back so that I can protect us all. Do you understand?"

Sleipnir frowned. "But why do we have to stay inside? Are we hiding?" Loki paused before answering, and Sleipnir must have noticed the apprehension on his face. "It's the man who put a spell on me, isn't it?"
Loki nodded and pulled him closer so that Sleipnir's head rested against his chest, holding him there with a hand on top of his head. "You have done nothing wrong Sleipnir, this man made you sleep to punish me, but he can not get to us here. As long as we do not leave this building we are safe. Alright?"

He felt Sleipnir nod against his chest and he patted his head before sitting up and holding him by his narrow shoulders. "But we do not have to stay in these rooms. Would you like to explore a little?"

Instantly all the seriousness dropped from Sleipnir's expression as a huge smile took its place. "Can we?"

"We certainly can. Go put on your shoes."

The boy scrambled off his lap to do so and Loki fixed the front of his shirt, frowning at how the material was beginning to grow tight. He would have to start to wear looser clothes soon, or at least ones with more give. Sleipnir reappeared at his elbow a moment later, shoes on and looking at him expectantly. "My that was fast."

Sleipnir grinned and pointed at the Velcro straps. "These ones are easy, there are no laces."

"So I can see, shall we be on our way then?"

"Do we need to bring anything?" he asked, eyeing his Lego.

"We are not wandering far." Loki said as he pulled on his own shoes and did the laces. As soon as his hands were free Sleipnir put a hand in one and Loki gave it a reassuring squeeze before undoing the lock and opening the door.

Outside Sleipnir seemed to vibrate with a sudden onslaught of energy and pulled on his arm. "Which way?"

Loki directed him down the hall, and soon Sleipnir's head was moving on a swivel, turning this way and that looking out windows and open doors they passed. When they reached their destination Loki let go of Sleipnir's hand so that he could wander further into the common room. It was still mostly empty early in the morning, it's only occupant sitting in Loki's favorite chair, a sketchpad balanced in one knee.

Steve Rogers looked up when they entered and blinked in surprise at the sight of them. "Uh, hi!" he greeted and Sleipnir looked back at him to see what he would do.

Loki just nodded in greeting. "Sleipnir, this is Steven Rogers. Captain, this is my son Sleipnir." he traded the introductions and the mortal waved a little at the suddenly shy child.

"Hi Sleipnir"

Sleipnir took a moment before politely replying with a quiet hello. If the Captain was disappointed with the less than enthusiastic response he didn't let it show, and just continued to smile kindly as the boy looked over the room. It was a large space, with one section dedicated to the large television and all the devices attached to it, but there were also shelves of board games, tables with cards and chess. At one end of the room was a collection of tables for table tennis and foosball, and the walls were decorated with dartboards. What caught Sleipnir's attention first though was the large bookshelf. His smile returned the instant he set eyes on it.

"Look at all the books mama!" he exclaimed happily.
"Oh yeah, definitely your kid." Rogers remarked but when he looked Loki found there was no malice in the man's expression. It took him a moment to realize that he hadn't said it as a jibe, just as a comment of a shared passion. He had to remind himself that he was on Midgard, and a love of books wasn't a trait that brought instant scorn as it would in the golden halls of Asgard.

"What are you reading?" Sleipnir asked, his voice quiet but curious as he glanced at the book that remained in the captain's lap.

"Oh, this isn't- well it's a different kind of book. You draw in it. See?" he held up the sketchbook so that Sleipnir could see the doodles contained within. "Do you like to draw?"

Sleipnir stepped a little closer to Rogers, eyes still on the drawing and shook his head. "No, not really." he took another step forward and tilted his head to the side. "That one looks like Bruce.," he said pointing at a drawing on the page.

Rogers looked down at the page and smiled. "That's him, you know Bruce?"

Sleipnir nodded, his hands absently playing with the edge of his shirt. "He gave me Lego."

"That was really nice of him."

Sleipnir nodded in agreement. "I slept for a really long time.," he said abruptly.

Steve grinned and leaned onto his knees. "Really? Me too."

"You did?"

"Yep, I slept for seventy years."

Sleipnir stared at the man, almost as if he didn't quite believe him before stating that he'd slept for hundreds of years.

"Almost eight hundred." Loki said softly.

Rogers put on an impressed face. "Wow, you sure got me beat there. Makes my coma look like a quick nap!"

"Did someone put a spell on you as well?" Sleipnir asked curiously.

Steve blinked at the question before shaking his head. "No, I fell into some really cold ice and got frozen there. It took them seventy years to thaw me out."

"Oh." was Sleipnir's response.

"Hey, would you like to play a game?" Steve asked suddenly and Sleipnir's eyes brightened at the offer.

"What kind of game?"

"Well we've got a ton of games in here." he gestured to the shelf. Do you want to pick one out? Is that ok?" Steve directed the last question towards Loki, as Sleipnir was already at the shelf examining the colourful boxes.

Loki just nodded. They ended up spending most of the day in the common room. Steve taught Sleipnir how to play checkers, and introduced him whenever someone new would enter. For the most part Loki watched on, participating when asked but otherwise he observed as Earth's
mightiest heroes made friends with a five year old. Sleipnir was delighted to meet so many new people, sitting happily next to Spiderman as he was told about some of the wall crawler's favorite foods of the 21st century.

"I like it here." Sleipnir told him as he led his son back to their rooms later in the afternoon.
Chapter 10

The next day, at Sleipnir's request, they returned to the rec room. It was empty when they entered, leaving Sleipnir to explore the books and games curiously while Loki watched from his perch by the window. He eventually settled to look through some books that had been left out on one of the side tables, and Loki searched through the bookshelves for one in particular. Finding it he sat on the couch near to Sleipnir who looked up at him curiously. "Would you like to hear a story?" Loki asked and Sleipnir all but leaped up onto the couch.

"What is it about?" he asked, his eyes peering at the printed cover.

"It's a Midgard tale. And as for what it's about you will have to wait and find out for yourself. You will have to be patient though, it's a rather long tale." Sleipnir just grinned and made himself comfortable at his side. "Very well, chapter one," he began. "'Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense...'"

By the time Harry had acquired his wand, Sleipnir was enraptured by the tale. He was so taken in by the story that he hadn't noticed that someone else had entered the room and was listening from the door. When the chapter ended, Loki paused in his reading to greet the man properly. "Good morning Dr. Banner."

Sleipnir bounced up from his seat to look over the back of the couch. "Hello Bruce!"

The man smiled easily at the child, "Hi Sleipnir. Taking advantage of everyone being gone huh?"

"Where did everyone go?" The boy asked.

Banner paused, glancing at Loki before answering. "Most of them are uh... working. Don't worry, they'll be back eventually."

"Do you remember how I told you how the warriors of Midgard lived here." Loki asked and Sleipnir nodded. "They are out defending the peace now. I'm sure when they return they will regale you with the tale if you ask."

"Especially if you ask Clint." Bruce added.

"Why didn't you go with them? Mama said you were a warrior too."

"Oh well," the man blushed a little, likely from being referred to as a warrior. "The mission they're on now requires a more delicate hand, and I uh, I don't do delicate well."

Sleipnir still looked puzzled but nodded anyways. "Would you like to play a game with us?" he asked suddenly. "Steve showed me how to play checkers but he said there were a lot more games to play."

"Um sure, why not? How about you pick the game alright?" Sleipnir's smile was blinding as he slid off the couch and ran over to inspect the collection of board games. "I can't get over how much he looks like you.,” he said quietly and Loki nodded.
"He has much of his father in him as well though." he admitted and Bruce glanced at him.

"Who was he? I know it's not the horse now..."

"Not the horse but the horses master. A man by the name of Sumarlidr." Loki watched as Sleipnir pulled a game out off the shelf, inspected the picture on the front and put it back. "Sleipnir may look like me but has Sumarlidr's temperament. It is probably why he likes your gift so much. He shares his father's desire to build."

"He likes the Lego?"

"Very much."

Sleipnir came over then, a box held in both hands. "What does this one say?"

Loki looked down at the small box, "It is called Jenga."

"I've played that, ages ago now but the rules are easy." Bruce took the box from Loki and poured the rectangular blocks inside it onto the coffee table. He then started to build them on top of each other to make a small tower with Sleipnir watching on avidly. The rules were indeed quite simple, and they played several games in a row, Loki included.

It was actually quite fun, and Sleipnir took it very seriously, especially when the tower grew tall and began to wobble. Bruce was a good sport when he lost the game, admitting that he didn't have the steadiest of hands. They were having such a good time that Agent Phil Coulson had to clear his throat twice to be noticed.

"Loki, if you would please follow me, we have a situation that requires your help," he said with his usual benign smile and Loki tensed, glancing at Sleipnir then back at the human. Bruce must have picked up on his sudden unease because he was suddenly saying "Hey, don't worry about the kid, I'll look after him till you get back. We can grab something to eat in the lunchroom and meet you back in your rooms when you're done. How's that sound? You hungry Sleipnir?"

"No," Loki said before he could answer. "He will come with me."

"Actually it would be better if he remained up here." Coulson said and Loki turned a dangerous glare in his direction. To the human's credit, he didn't look to be intimidated.

"I am not going anywhere without my son." Loki stated firmly.

"While I understand your concern-"

"No." he said again, cutting the man off.

"Loki--"

"Mama?"

Loki looked down when he felt Sleipnir's hand slip into his. His face was tight with distress and he looked up at him with worry clear in his eyes.

"Loki," Bruce said quietly, "Nothings going to happen to him up here. He's safe, I wouldn't let anything happen to him, you know I won't." but Loki shook his head. "He can't go down to the lower levels. You don't want him around that many soldiers with guns and whatever they're dealing with down there. It's all right, he's safe with me. Trust me."
Loki glared at the man and gritted his teeth together. Agent Colson remained quiet but it was an oppressive silence. Loki knew he had to go. He gave his word to lend his assistance in exchange for his protection, and that protection included Sleipnir now as well. But the idea of leaving his son, even for as little as a few minutes, had his instincts raging.

Sleipnir was pulling on his arm now and Loki looked down to meet his fearful gaze. "What's wrong?" the boy asked and Loki swallowed thickly. Sleipnir was afraid, and he was the reason for it.

He took a deep breath and tried to calm his nerves. "Nothing is wrong Sleipnir," he said, kneeling down so that he could be at eye level. "I am needed somewhere else in this building, and children aren't allowed there. You will have to stay here with Bruce, I won't be long, I promise."

Sleipnir wasn't fooled by his calm tone and shook his head. "I want to go with you."

"I know, but you can't. You must stay here. I will be back as soon as I can." He kissed the boys forehead and stood to meet Bruce's eyes. "If anything happens-"

"You'll invent a whole new level of hell just for me, I know. Don't worry. Come on Sleipnir, I'm going to introduce you to one of the lesser known culinary masterpieces. Its called the tuna melt."

Sleipnir looked between them a few times, his eyes lingering on Loki before taking Bruce's offered hand.

"Let's get this over with." Loki bit out after they left and Coulson was smart enough to remain silent as he led them from the room. The agent had to use a special card to get them through several security points, but eventually they ended up in a large hangar.

"I do apologize for taking you away from your son." Coulson stated as the large hanger doors began to open. "I hope you know that we understand that with his history, leaving him in the care of an Avenger must be very difficult. But we thought considering the sensitive matter of this situation, it would be best if he remained behind."

"As clever as my son is Agent Colson, I doubt he would understand much of your terminology." he responded in his driest tones, watching as three large helicopters flew in and landed in the center of the room. Whatever he was to help with must be on those helicopters because Colson began striding towards them, with Loki easily keeping pace.

The machines were truly enormous, with two sets of blades and multiple entrances. "It's not so much the information we were worried about," Coulson said over the slowing engines. "It's the subject matter."

One of the side doors opened on the middle helicopter and Loki was surprised to see Thor climb out. His hair was matted and wet, and his cape hung off him heavily, but he was smiling as wide as he could. "Loki!" he greeted.

"Thor? What are you-"

"I've been fishing!" he declared, and Loki had to wonder if somehow his brother had lost his mind. He certainly looked it, standing there in soggy armor and grinning like an idiot. "Come see what I've caught!" he said as he reached back into the helicopter to pull a small figure bundled in a large brown blanket.

"Mama!" the thing in Thor's arms screeched and leaped out of the large blanket it was swaddled in and suddenly Loki was looking down at a pair of sea green eyes as Jorgumand attached himself
firmly to his legs.

"Watch it, that kid bites." Hawkeye warned as he climbed out, pointing at Jorgumand with a hard look.

Jorgumand wrapped his arms more tightly around Loki's leg. "He threw me into the sea!" he replied petulantly.

"No, I dropped you because you bit me, then you fell out of the helicopter into the ocean."

"He threw me out of a ellicoper mama!"

"You little brat-"

"Barton! Are you seriously still arguing with a four year old?" the Black Widow asked with a certain amount of exasperation that lead him to believe the argument had been going on for a while.

"To be fair, the kid started it." reasoned the Ironman, but Romanoff just silenced him with a glare.

Loki ignored them all and hauled Jorgumand up into his arms and held on. Thin arms wound around his neck and his hand came up to cradle the back of his head. His hair was as damp and as wild as Thor's and he smelled strongly of the sea, but it was undeniably Jorgumand.

Thor stepped forward with the discarded blanket and covered the boy's naked figure with it. Loki tucked it around him and pulled back enough to search his son's face. "Are you alright?" he asked urgently but Jorgumand just smiled hugely.

"I was swimming! I fell into the sea and then I was in a big metal room and we were flying!" He explained with no small amount of enthusiasm and Loki could only return his smile.

"You look surprised Loki." Thor commented and Loki looked past his son's happy face to meet Thor's eyes.

"I thought you went back to Asgard." Loki confessed and Thor frowned.

"Why would I go back when I still had two nephews and a niece to find?" Loki found he had no answer for that, and Thor shook his head at him. "You thought I would be content with returning only one of your children? I told you Loki, I wish to make things right again. I am off to Asgard next, my friends the warriors three and Sif have been searching the catacombs for Fenris' chamber. After I find him and free him I will retrieve Hela next."

Loki knew his mouth was open, just as he knew Jorgumand was falling asleep on his shoulder but he found he was unable to do anything other than stand and stare at Thor in shock. He'd thought he would have to convince Thor to help him free his children. Thor was already going to be in enough trouble with Odin for losing his steed, and Loki was sure that he would have had to bargain and guilt Thor into helping him.

"Thor, I-" he began but the Thunderer just waved him off. The rest of the Avengers had come out of the helicopters by now and Loki realized they were all either soaking wet or covered with sea spray. "Thank you,", he said without really thinking about it.

"Just keep him muzzled around me." Clint muttered and Jorgumand clicked his teeth together a few times from his shoulder.
"No biting mortals Jorgumand," he commanded gently, "You might catch something."

There was a soft laugh that turned into a small snore, signaling that Jorgumand had fallen asleep. Coulson offered to escort him part of the way back to his rooms and after nodding a quick farewell to Thor and his sodden friends Loki was soon back in his empty rooms. Sleipnir was still with Bruce, likely eating lunch which gave him some time alone with his second son.

Under the blanket Jorgumand's skin was cold and wet so Loki took him into the bathroom first and filled the tub with warm water. Careful of keeping his head above water, Loki washed away the layer of sea salt that coated the boy. Jorgumand warmed up in the water, his skin returning to a healthy pink as Loki gently eased the salt and knots from his hair. It was longer than Sleipnir's, nearly to his shoulders so he took his time with it.

When he was warm and clean Loki wrapped him in towels, drying him off before dressing him in one of his short-sleeved shirts. It was large enough to be a nightgown on the boy but it would do for sleeping until Jorgumand had his own clothes. He put the boy in his bed, tucking the blankets around him and sat down on the edge of the mattress. Jorgumand hadn't woken since he had fallen asleep in the hanger, but his face was constantly moving as he dreamed. Now he smiled softly and Loki let one of his hands stroke through his hair.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the door, and from the open doorway Loki saw Sleipnir run in towards the pile of Lego that had been left out. Casting one last glance at the sleeping body on his bed, he stepped out to see Sleipnir showing Bruce some of the things he had made with his toys. The scientist saw him first and was looking at him with a carefully blank expression.

"You knew." it wasn't a question.

Bruce blinked a few times before answering. "I knew they were looking for him. No one told you anything before because we didn't know if we'd find him, or even if we could change him back. Is he ok?"

Sleipnir was looking between them curiously, his Lego forgotten for the time being. "He is fine, he is sleeping now." Loki admitted and held a hand out towards his son. Sleipnir came over and allowed him to run a hand through his short hair. "Did you eat?"

"Yes, and we saw Steve again. He said you would be back."

"I'll get out of your hair," Bruce said. "See you later Sleipnir."

Sleipnir smiled and waved goodbye but that was it. He waited until the mortal man had left before looking back at Loki with a serious expression.

"What's wrong Sleipnir?" Loki asked, kneeling down to be at his level again.

"I don't know." The boy replied and Loki frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone was acting strange, but they all said everything was ok and that I shouldn't worry, but it only made me worry more."

Loki felt a genuine smile stretch across his face. "You are my son," he declared proudly and some of the uneasiness faded from Sleipnir's expression. "Something has happened, but it is a very good something. Come with me." he led the boy into the bedroom and Sleipnir peered at the figure slumbering under the sheets. Loki sat back down on the edge of the bed and pulled Sleipnir up to
sit sideways on his lap. "He is your younger brother," Loki explained as gently as he could.

Sleipnir's brows drew together in confusion. "But you said it was a baby." he reasoned, glancing down at Loki's stomach.

"I am still with child, and in time you will have another brother or sister. You slept for a very long time Sleipnir. During that time I had other children. You are my first born, but you have two younger brothers as well as a sister. The man who took you away from me took them as well."

"Why?" Sleipnir asked.

Loki sighed and pulled the boy closer. "He has given many reasons now, and I don't know which one is the truth. But none of those reasons were because of you. None of you did anything do deserve what happened to you. Do you understand?"

Sleipnir nodded slowly and looked back at the sleeping figure. "He's my brother then?"

"Yes, his name is Jorgumand." Loki said and watched as Sleipnir crawled off his lap to sit on the bed next to his brother.

"Is he still under the spell?"

"No, the spell is gone, but he will sleep for most of the day. He will be well by tomorrow." He paused as Sleipnir reached out and touched Jorgumand's hand. The sleeping boy stirred and Sleipnir froze when his brother's eyes cracked open.

The two boys stared at each other for a long moment as Loki watched on, and eventually Sleipnir offered up a shy smile. Jorgumand blinked slowly, his face lax from sleep before his lips twirched up in a returning smile. The small smile remained even as the boy's eyes drifted shut and he fell back into slumber, but Sleipnir turned to Loki with a large grin on his face. "I like him! Is he going to stay?"

"Yes," he answered with a laugh and Sleipnir crawled back over to him.

"What about my other brother, and my sister, are they here too?"

Loki felt some of his joy fade but tried not to let it show. "No, but hopefully your other brother will be here soon."

"What about my sister?" he pressed and Loki sighed.

"You will meet her one day, but not for a very long time. She lives in a place that is very hard to get to, and she can not leave it." he explained.

Sleipnir frowned at the news and Loki pulled him to his side but there were no more questions coming. It didn't worry him though; Sleipnir would corner him with a hundred questions once he'd had time to sort through what he knew. "I brought the book back," he said instead. "Bruce said I could because we didn't finish the story. Can we read more of it now?"

Loki nodded, and Sleipnir climbed off the bed, careful not to jostle his brother, and walked off into the main room to retrieve the book. While he was gone Loki adjusted the blinds to let a little light in and then sat on the bed against the headboard. Jorgumand slept on his left and when Sleipnir climbed back up he took a seat at his right, handing the book over.

"Should we start from the beginning?" he asked, glancing at the slumbering Jorgumand.
"I think we can continue on where we left off, perhaps you could tell him all about Harry tomorrow when he is more awake." Sleipnir nodded and after finding his place Loki began to read.

The rest of the day passed as such, with Sleipnir either being quietly read to, or entertaining himself on the floor with his Lego while Loki kept watch over Jorgumand. He woke briefly after dinnertime, but didn't do much other than wrap himself around Loki's leg. When it became late he sent Sleipnir to brush his teeth (a new experience for the child) while he changed his clothes and the both of them slid under the covers to join Jorgumand. He fell asleep with a child in each arm and dreamed of dark winding caves. It would be the last peaceful sleep he was to have for a long time.
In the morning Loki woke to the sounds of soft voices and the sensation of several small hands on
the skin of his stomach.

Cracking an eye open, he saw that his sons were awake and inspecting his belly. The blankets had
been pulled down to his waist and his shirt had been pushed up, and the two of them had both
hands pressed flat against the swollen area. He closed his eyes again with a smile and stretched out
his awareness to feel the two tendrils of magic curiously brushing up against his own.

"-then a man with a hammer came and woke me up and took me here." Sleipnir was saying quietly.

"How did he wake you?" Jorgumand questioned.

"Mama said he used his hammer to knock me out of bed, but I think that was just part of the story."

"I saw a man with a big hammer!" Jorgumand whispered eagerly. "He was in a room that flew, and
he had a beard and long hair and a very big hammer. It was as big as I am! And he brought me here
as well."

"Really? I bet he's gone to get our other brother now! Mama said we would see him soon!"

"Why doesn't Mama go rescue our brother?" Jorgumand asked.

"Mama doesn't have any of his magic," Sleipnir answered promptly. "Because of the baby. That's
why we have to stay here. Its safe here." Loki felt the mattress shift as Sleipnir pulled Jorgumand
from the bed. "Come here, I want to show you something."

Loki opened his eyes in time to see the boys dash out the bedroom door but before he could jump
up in alarm, he heard the now familiar sounds of Lego. If he strained his ears he could hear
Sleipnir explaining his toys, and then what else was in the rooms. With a sigh he relaxed back into
the bed and pulled down the edge of his top so that he was covered once more. He laid there for a
while, just listening to the faint noises that came drifting in through the open door. At one point he
heard the toilet flush, and then the sink running. Then the toilet flushed again. And then again,
followed by Jorgumands giggle.

After that Loki tried harder to follow the sounds of their exploration as cupboard doors opened and
shut in the kitchen. Then the fridge was opened which was followed by the sound of something
wet hitting the floor. The complete silence that followed had Loki's lips twitching with amusement
as he imagined the scene in the kitchen. Suddenly there was a rush of whispers and running water
and more cupboards opening and closing. He assumed whatever mess had been made was gone
when the sounds tapered off. Small crisis averted, and all evidence of it likely hidden, the boys
continued their search.

He heard the sound of cereal boxes and was about to rise and join them for breakfast when they
both were suddenly running back into the bedroom. Jorgumand even jumped up onto the bed and
began shaking his arm.

"Wake up Mama!"
Loki opened his eyes as commanded and raised a questioning eyebrow at the excited face over his.  

"May we have waffles?" Jorgumand asked and Loki simply stared.

"Waffles?" he repeated, his tone just shy of incredulous. There was only one way that the boy could even know what a waffle was, and he turned his head towards Sleipnir who had his arms folded on the mattress, his chin resting on his arms.

The boy smiled shyly, "Steve said he was going to make waffles in the morning, and Bruce said that they are the best breakfast food, especially if Steve is making them."

Loki looked between the two, Sleipnir looked curious and hopeful, and Jorgumand seemed to be holding his breath in anticipation. "Very well." he said at last and both boys let out triumphant cries. Detangling himself from his blankets, Loki walked over to the chest of drawers next to his and began pulling clothes out for the day while Sleipnir told Jorgumand about the dining room and all of the new foods he'd had since he'd woken up from the spell. For Sleipnir he gathered a dark red sweater and brown trousers. Jorgumand was more difficult as he had no clothes of his own yet, and though there were physically close in age, Sleipnir was much taller than his brother. Eventually he settled on a navy t-shirt and a pair of overalls.

Sleipnir dressed quickly, and waited with barely restrained excitement as Loki helped Jorgumand into his borrowed clothes.

"Why don't you go put on your shoes Sleipnir," Loki suggested as he rolled up the hem of Jorgumand's overalls so that his feet could poke through. Sleipnir dashed off to do as he was told and Loki looked over his second son. The shirt was still too big, but the overalls hid that. He made one last adjustment to the bottom of his pants and looked up to see Jorgumand smiling crookedly at him.

He felt his heart clench tightly at the sight of that smile. It was the smile he remembered most about his son. A crooked half-smile that left one with the impression that he knew a secret. Jorgumand had been smiling just so when he'd told Loki that there was an old man outside, a man with one eye.

Loki swallowed thickly and fought back the memories of watching his son go to embrace the man he was told was his grandfather, only to be returned to him in the form of a serpent. Instead Loki gave the best smile he could in return and whispered, "Give us a kiss."

Jorgumand leaned forward immediately and kissed Loki's cheek and put his arms around his neck in a hug. Loki returned it, wrapping his arms around the boy, pressing a kiss to the side of his head.

"What is a waffle?" Jorgumand asked suddenly and Loki laughed.

"It is a kind of sweet bread, I have had them before. I'm sure you will like them."

He rose to his feet, keeping Jorgumand in his arms and strode out to see Sleipnir waiting impatiently by the door.

"Jorgumand doesn't have any shoes." Sleipnir observed as Loki slid his own on.

"Indeed, which is why I will be carrying him, unless you are offering the use of yours?" he suggested teasingly.

Sleipnir looked down at his shoes, and for a moment looked as if he might but Jorgumand piped up insisting that he didn't want any shoes anyways. With that matter settled Loki led them out into the
hall, and with an additional warning to both boys not to try and slip away without him, they were on their way. Upon arriving at the dinning hall they discovered that Steve Rogers had indeed made waffles, and judging by the larger than usual breakfast crowd, they were quite popular.

The meal that followed was by far the most random Loki had experienced in a long time. Up until then during his stay with the Avengers he'd kept a stoic composure whenever he was outside of his rooms. Sleipnir had picked up on this same behavior when they ate with the others, and would be very quiet and well behaved without even having to be asked. Jorgumand apparently had no intentions to follow in his family's footsteps. He behaved as he did in all aspects of his young life, exuberant and eager to make new friends. He might have been more reserved if Loki had taken the time to ask him to be so, but Loki found he quite enjoyed watching the bewildered faces of the Avengers as Jorgumand chattered away with anyone who would listen. Hawkeye was the only one whom he was at all distrustful of, but even that didn't last. Jorgumand had been making faces at the archer when he'd thought Loki wasn't looking, and the mortal had responded with a face of his own, complete with an orange peel in his mouth. Jorgumand, clearly thinking this was the funniest thing he'd ever seen, fell bonelessly to the floor in a fit of giggles. After that, apparently Hawkeye was forgiven for anything that had happened the day before.

It didn't take long for Sleipnir to join in, regaling Bruce with tales of Harry Potter and his plans to make a Hogwarts out of Lego. When the Black Widow entered the room both boys stopped what they were doing to look at her. Then Jorgumand was slid out of his seat and climbed into the empty one next to her. The assassin said nothing as she served herself some fruit from a bowl, so Jorgumand leaned both of his arms on the table, waiting to be noticed. Conversation resumed around the table when nothing else happened.

Sleipnir tugged on his hand lightly and Loki winced at the increasing stickiness from the syrup. "May we go to the common room after breakfast? Peter said he would play with us!"

Loki glanced across the table at the young man who was still in costume. Only his mouth was visible where he'd pulled the mask up so he could eat. He looked back at Sleipnir and nodded his assent, and the wide grin that spread across his face was a little alarming. Suddenly it occurred to him that this might be the most amusing prank he could play on the Avengers, setting his hyper sugared up offspring upon them.

"Your hair is really pretty."

The Natasha paused and then looked beside her where Jorgumand still sat, head upon his arms and crooked smile in place. "Thank you," she said, a warm smile gracing her features. "What's your name?"

Loki knew that the woman already had that information, and that she was just asking because it was polite to do so, he found he was surprised that she was willing to play along.

"My name is Jorgumand." the boy replied and gave a concerned look at the bowl of fruit she was consuming. "Aren't you going to have any waffles?"

She favored him with another small smile. "I wasn't planning on it. I don't really like waffles that much."

Jorgumand looked horrified. "But they are so good!" he insisted.

Natasha raised an eyebrow at him before glancing down the table to see that pretty much everyone was listening to the conversation. Steve even gave her an expectant smile. With a resigned sigh she turned back to Jorgumand. "I suppose I could have one." she said as though it were a huge
concession on her part. Hawkeye said something under his breath beside her and she shot him a look but Jorgumand didn't notice as he was too busy reaching for the syrup.

After breakfast Loki led his children to the common room with Sleipnir keeping up a constant commentary of the rooms many attributes as they went. Once there Loki took a seat in his favorite armchair and continued to watch as the boys burned through their sugar high. As promised Peter played with them for most of the morning before finally tapping out, exhaustion tugging at his movements as Steve took over. Jorgumand began to slow down at lunch, and his movements became sluggish as he followed Sleipnir around the rec room after. He ended up climbing into Loki's lap and falling asleep against his chest while Sleipnir was learning how to play on the foosball table.

"What's wrong?" Sleipnir asked when he realized Jorgumand was no longer beside him. He abandoned the game and walked over to lean onto Loki's legs and watch his brother sleep with a worried expression.

"Nothing is wrong, he his simply tired. He just needs to rest for a while."

Sleipnir thought that over. "For how long?"

Amused, Loki shrugged. "It will likely just be today that he is like this. You can keep playing if you like." Sleipnir shook his head. "Very well, would you like to sit here with me and read?"

That got a more spirited response, and Loki soon found himself crowded into the armchair with a boy in each arm, and Sleipnir supporting a book while he read from it. If any of the occupants in the room thought it looked strange to see one of earth's most dangerous villains reading a children's book to two little boys in his lap, they kept it to themselves.
Chapter 12

Loki was wondering if he would ever sleep again. The last five days had been simultaneously wonderful and disheartening, and the change between the two were entirely dependent on the time of day. During the waking hours Loki spent his time with his two sons, watching how they fell into step in a modern Midgard without pause. Both Sleipnir and Jorgumand were naturally curious, and met each new discovery with enthusiasm. On Jorgumand's second day in the Avengers tower, Peter had come prepared with a bag full of DVD's, and Loki's sons were introduced to television and 'the magic of the movies'. The boys were instantly enamored, and Loki found himself on the couch rather than his armchair, a son leaning on him from each side while a small blue creature learned about 'Ohana'. There was but one small hitch when Natasha Romanof pulled one of the movies from the bag and took Peter aside to tell him to remove it from the collection. Loki waited until the young man was alone before cornering him and asking why. His answer was surprising; apparently the Black Widow was concerned because the small mice friends of the princess were turned into horses at one point, and she worried for Sleipnir. He'd been rather touched by the woman's thoughtfulness.

Clothes for Jorgumand were acquired along with toys to add to the boy's growing collection, but in the end it was Steve who discovered that while Sleipnir had no mind to draw, Jorgumand would gladly adorn any flat surface available with his art. Now the coffee table in their apartment featured a healthy stack of colouring books and boxes of crayons.

The boys themselves got along like they'd known each other their entire lives, and were best friends rather than brothers. There was no fighting, or demanding for more of Loki's attention than the other. It was wonderful and Loki had never been more relieved.

The days passed mostly in the common room playing games or reading. Loki taught his sons the English alphabet and within a day they were both reading through their collection of children's books. For lunch they would eat with the rest of the tower's occupants in the dining hall, but breakfast and dinner were taken in their own apartment. Loki may have been raised as a prince but that did not mean he did not know how to cook. After dinner the boys would share a bath, dress in their nightclothes and the three of them would sit together on the sofa while Loki told them stories.

Unfortunately, it was after they went to bed that things always took a turn for the worse. Sleipnir and Jorgumand had suffered from nightmares all week, ever since Jorgumand's first night. Loki found he had to sleep between them so that one didn't set the other off. That, and Sleipnir had a habit of kicking about in the middle of his nightmares and nearly knocked Jorgumand out of the bed once. Whatever they dreamed though, they forgot upon waking. Which meant that while they weren't haunted by their night terrors throughout the day, it also meant that Loki had no idea what to do to assuage them of their fears or whatever was causing them.

He wished for his magic, if only he could glance into their minds for a moment to see what troubled them, to clear away the horrors so that either of them could sleep through the night without waking three or four times. Instead all he could do was be there to comfort them when they woke, and ease them back into slumber.

Jorgumand whimpered quietly in his sleep, curling closer and Loki rubbed his back and made soothing noises. It worked, at least for the moment, as the boy settled and Loki closed his tired eyes. It seemed only seconds later when he heard someone knocking at the front door. He waited,
not sure if he'd heard correctly, but then the knocking came again only slightly louder. Detangling himself from the bed without waking the boys took some effort, and he half ran to the door before the knocking became any louder and woke them both anyways.

Steve Rogers was on the other side looking apologetic. "Sorry, I know it's late."

"What is it?" Loki asked irritably, glancing at the Shield agent that stood nearby before looking back at the Avenger.

"Thor's back."

"He's back?"

"Yeah, and they need your help downstairs. This is agent Harris, he can take you down to where your brother is. I can stay here with the kids, if that's ok?"

"What is it they need my help with?"

"What happened? They couldn't reverse the spell? Is that it?"

"No they got it, he's human shaped and everything."

"Is he hurt?"

"We don't know," the mortal said and before Loki could demand a better answer he continued. "He's freaking out Loki, and we don't know if he's injured or if it's magic or something else entirely. You need to get down there now and calm him down so one of the doctors can see if he's even ok. I'll stay up here with the other two, just get moving will you?"

Rogers didn't really have to tell him to move faster. Upon hearing that his son was in the building Loki was already pulling his shoes on. "They are sleeping, but there have been ... nightmares." he said quickly as he let Rogers in.

"I'll listen for them, now get going."

The agent remained silent while he led Loki down to the medical center, and when the elevator doors opened on the correct floor Loki blew past the useless man. He didn't need directions anymore; he could hear the crying echoing down the halls. The medical wing was lit up and filled with a number of men and women in white coats, as well as several Shield agents. They were surrounding the easy to spot Thor and his friends. Thor saw him enter and with a gesture the small crowd parted and Loki strode through. Thor's arms were empty, as were Sif's. Instead it was Volstagg who was trying in vain to comfort a wailing toddler.

The moment he was within reach, Loki snatched the boy from the warrior's arms and tucked him close to his body. Almost instantly the angry wailing became quiet whimpers as Fenris clung to him, pressing his face into Loki's shoulder. He could feel his shirt become wet as the child continued to cry softly, and he did his best to comfort him while their audience watched on.

"Thank the Norns!" Fandral said suddenly, looking very relieved. "He's been at that all day. For such a small person he can make quite a racket, I'll give him that."

"Be kind," Volstagg said with a reproachful tone. "He can't help being frightened."
"Still, I'm glad I don't have any of those."

"How do you know you don't? You know I saw Sigdis just the other day and she had a fair haired child." Thor teased but Loki ignored the banter. Fenris' cries began to taper off, and Loki looked up to see Sif watching him with a strange expression on his face. "Lady Sif." he said in greeting.

"Loki." she said in return.

He realized then that the last time he'd been in a room with Sif and the Warriors Three was in the throne room, as they asked him to end Thor's banishment. And then shortly after that he'd sent the Destroyer after them and Thor. They certainly owed him no favors, and yet here they were, dirty and tired looking, with deep gouges in their armor probably made by a large set of claws.

"Thank you." he said sincerely and Thor beamed at him.

"Think nothing of it." Fandral said gamely and Volstag nodded but they all were giving Loki strange looks.

He wondered what it was that they found so strange, if it was the sincerity in his voice? Or perhaps it was his appearance, dressed only in thin Midgardian pajamas. He knew his hair must be an alarming sight by itself. His usual slicked back hair was now in its natural form, curling up and sticking out in random directions from bed.

Then he saw Fandral's eyes glance down towards his navel and it became clear what they were all looking at. The shirt he was wearing made his condition quite obvious. Loki set his jaw and met their eyes, daring any of them to speak a word on the subject. Not that they would, not with Thor standing beside him, beaming obviously at his nephew. A nephew who was crying weakly, his face hidden from all the curious stares around him.

Only Volstagg seemed to notice Fenris' upset and stepped forward, concern colouring his face. "I think it might be this crowd of strangers that's got him all worked up," he said with a reproachful look towards the agents that were standing about.

Loki allowed a small hint of a smile to grace his lips as Thor turned a fierce scowl onto the mortals in the room, amused as some of them even began to shuffle away to a safe distance. Only one of the doctors dared to come close enough to suggest the use of one of the small patient rooms for privacy. Loki smirked and followed his direction towards a room that was identical to the one he had first found Sleipnir in. No one had followed them, and Loki shut the door for good measure. Now alone with his youngest son, he let the smirk drop from his face and allowed the real concern show. Fenris was still crying pathetically so Loki sat down on one of the chairs in the room and sat the boy in his lap, gently pulling his fists from his clothes. Fenris' face was red and blotchy from crying, and Loki wiped the tears away making soothing sounds. It took some time but the crying tapered off slowly as he looked around and realized they were alone.

"It's alright my son, your safe, I have you," he said gently as Fenris leaned into his chest with a tired moan. Loki stroked the boy's dark hair, his fingers slipping through the curls easily. Out of all of his children, only Fenris had inherited his hair. He skillfully moved over the child's scalp, checking for bumps or cuts and found none, placing a kiss to the top of his head when he was done. "Let me look at you," he said quietly once it seemed that he'd calmed down a little. Fenris allowed himself to be drawn back with only a hiccup of protest and Loki found he had to dry the boy's eyes again. "There you are," he said, stroking Fenris' face. He eased down the blanket that covered him and methodically checked over his limbs for injury. There were none that he could find and so he covered the boy once more in the soft material and brought him back to his chest.
Slowly Fenris began to relax against him as Loki quietly reassured him that everything was all right, they were safe, soothing him until the toddler's eyes began to droop. Of course it was with perfect timing that Thor chose to enter, looking rather disappointed when Fenris began to cry again.

"Is he hurt?" the blond idiot asked, completely missing the glare Loki was leveling him with. "Should I send in one if these healers?"

Loki stopped himself from letting loose several verbal barbs, only because he knew the tone of his voice would only upset Fenris. "No Thor. There are no injuries for them to treat." Thor looked at the crying toddler with an expression of frank disbelief. "Truly Thor, he is frightened and over tired, he will be fine if I can only get him to sleep."

His foster brother seemed to consider that and finally nodded. "I am glad he is not injured. I was sure that when he would not calm, that he had become hurt somehow. That I had... it was particularly hard to remove fathers seal this time. I thought perhaps I had stuck him with Mjlonir." he admitted guiltily. He looked so disquieted by some imagined injury that Loki could only roll his eyes.

"Fortunately your aim remains ever true." he said, his voice sounding tired to his own ears. Fenris' cries had softened again but Loki suspected it was more likely that he was simply running out of energy rather than that he was becoming comfortable with Thor's presence. Personally he thought his son might take to Thor better if the man would sit down or something rather than loom in the doorway, but if his shifting feet were any indicator, Thor did not plan to stay long.

As if reading his thoughts Thor said in a quieter voice, "I would like to stay, but I fear time is running out. Father could wake any day now, so my friends and I are making for Hel as soon as we can. But perhaps when I return I might meet this young man when he is a better mood? And his brothers as well?" the question came out weakly, as if Thor thought he would not allow him to see the children he had rescued.

Loki supposed Thor might be suddenly unsure of his welcome might have something to do with the expression that he was currently wearing. "Of course." Loki assured him, and did not move away when Thor clasped his shoulder in farewell. He was determined to hold his tongue, but when Thor reached the doorway he found himself speaking anyway.

"You won't be able to save her." The words were spoken softly, but he might have screamed for the way Thor froze. Loki sighed and held Fenris closer. "There is no seal on her for you to break."

The room remained silent, and Loki could not look up to meet Thor's eyes. The silence stretched on, broken only by Fenris' weak cries and Loki stroked the boys hair in an offer of comfort.

"I must try Loki." Thor said finally, pausing for a moment to see if there would be a response. When there was none Loki heard him turn and leave, the door shutting quietly behind him.

Alone again, Loki rocked his son in his lap, holding him close until the child's remaining tears faded away. He continued the motion well after Fenris became heavy in his arms having finally fallen into a fitful sleep. When he eventually left their small sanctuary there were only a handful of Shields staff about, and he paid them no mind as he strode out of the room and made his way back to his apartment.

Steve Rogers had moved the armchair into the bedroom and was watching over the two sleeping boys with a vigilance that Loki found himself admiring despite himself. Jorgumand and Sleipnir were curled up together under the sheets, still asleep though Sleipnir's cheeks bore traces of tears. The captain stood when he saw Loki, and smiled gratefully at the sight of the child sleeping in his
"He's ok then?" the mortal asked.

"Yes, thank you for watching over them while I was gone. Did they wake at all?"

Steve grimaced and rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, Sleipnir woke up a while ago, he was pretty upset when you weren't here."

Loki nodded and walked the Avenger to the door, thanking him once more as he left. Back in his rooms, Loki blindly pulled one of Jorgumand's shirts out and dressed Fenris in it as a nightshirt, taking care not to wake the child. Sleipnir stirred when he slid under the covers beside him, and Loki looked down at his sons sleep filled eyes with a small smile.

"All is well Sleipnir, go back to sleep," he said quietly but his oldest stubbornly sat up.

"You were gone."

Loki laid back onto a pillow, adjusting Fenris so that he was held closely to his chest. With his other hand he reached out and pulled Sleipnir to lay beside him. Jorgumand shifted in his sleep and made use of the free space, sprawling onto his stomach with all of his limbs spread in different directions. "I know," Loki said addressing Sleipnir. "and I am sorry for worrying you. I had to leave to retrieve your brother."

Sleipnir peered at the little form on his chest before tucking himself closer to Loki's body. "Ok," was his sleepy response and soon enough his breathing evened out as he fell back into slumber.

Loki sighed and stared up at the dark ceiling, listening to the quiet breathing of his three children.
Jorgumand woke to the strange sensation of half his body feeling uncomfortably warm, while the other half was cold. It took his sleep-muddled brain a moment to figure out why. Somehow during the night he had slid out from the many blankets that made up their bed, and his right arm and leg were hanging off the mattress in the air. He also noticed during this self-evaluation that he definitely needed to go to the toilet. Urgently.

Suddenly completely awake, Jorgumand slid bodily from the bed and made his way through the apartment to the bathroom. Once he had relieved himself he walked out into the main room and climbed up onto the sofa to look out the window. The view of the city was still very new but he knew enough that the long shadows made by the buildings meant that it was still quite early. Hopping off the sofa, Jorgumand quietly went back into the bedroom hoping that at least Sleipnir would wake soon.

He sighed when he climbed back into bed to see that his brother was still quite asleep. He considered poking at him until he woke but then he ran a chance that Sleipnir would be cross with him enough to refuse to play. Feeling bored, Jorgumand sighed, looked over to his mother and blinked in surprise. There was a boy sleeping on top of Mama. It was a small boy, maybe half his size, curled up on Mama's chest with a thumb stuck in his mouth with dark curly hair.

Surely Sleipnir would want to be woken up for this? He shook his brother's shoulder, and poked at his sides when the shaking got no reaction. He then dodged the kick that Sleipnir aimed at him, grinning sheepishly when his brother glared at him from over his shoulder.

"Hey! Wake up!" Jorgumand whispered urgently when Sleipnir turned back to press his face into their mother's side. His brother groaned in response but made no move to get up so Jorgumand started to poke at him again.

"Stop it!" Sleipnir bit out, turning around and trying to grab at his hands, but Jorgumand sat back out of reach.

"Look!" he said, pointing at the new boy and Sleipnir looked over as directed. His reaction was less than spectacular. Jorgumand watched as his older brother took in the sight beside him, yawn widely, and then settle back under the covers.

"It's our younger brother." he explained tiredly.

"But where did he come from?" Jorgumand whispered.

Sleipnir sighed and rolled over to face him. "Mama went and got him last night."

"Oh." was Jorgumand's only response and he looked back over to the little boy.

Sleipnir didn't close his eyes again; apparently content just to lay there. Jorgumand shook his head at him and without warning he rolled back out of the bed and walked out of the bedroom. The corner of the room that had been claimed by their toys was as it was last night, and Jorgumand sat down in the middle of the pile and started sorting through Sleipnir's lego. It wasn't long before his older brother wandered in, rubbing his eyes but no longer grumpy with him.
"What are you making?" Sleipnir asked after he had sat down and watched him for a while.

"A tower," he answered and continued to add on pieces.

Sleipnir eyed his creation critically. "The bottom needs to be bigger." he said finally.

"No it doesn't."

"Yes it does, it's too thin. It's going to fall over."

Jorgumand responded by sticking his tongue out and continued to add more height to his creation. A few minutes later he was not able to avoid the wobbling of the tower and watched with disappointed eyes as it toppled over. Sleipnir looked up from the fort he was making and Jorgumand glowered at him as if the whole thing was his fault. His brother didn't say a word though; he simply moved over to the ruins of Jorgumand's tower and began making the base wider.

Soon enough, between the two of them a new tower was created that was taller than Jorgumand himself.

"I'm hungry." Jorgumand said suddenly as Sleipnir continued to add Lego to the top as he was the only one of the two of them that could reach that high anymore. Seeing his brother was completely engrossed in construction and was no longer listening to him, Jorgumand walked carefully around the piles of plastic blocks and marched back into the bedroom. His mother was still sleeping, as was their new little brother so Jorgumand climbed up onto the bed and scooted closer to the two of them. Unfortunately he wasn't as quiet as he thought and he found that the little boy was awake and looking at him.

Jorgumand blinked, and smiled when his brother copied the gesture. "Hello." Jorgumand whispered in greeting. The little boy gave no response, he just stared at Jorgumand for what felt like hour before suddenly his face scrunched up from behind his hand and he looked for all the world that he was about to cry. "Oh no! I'm sorry! Please don't..." but it was too late and before Jorgumand could do anything his brother yanked his thumb out of his mouth to let out an angry cry.

His mother was jerking awake instantly, his arm curling around the little boy automatically and Jorgumand sheepishly met his eyes when they turned to him.

"I'm sorry!" he repeated desperately. "I didn't mean to!"

His mother stared at him for a moment, as if he didn't understand what he was seeing, but then he slumped a little back into the pillows and released a sigh that didn't sound upset.

"It's alright Jorgumand, it is not your fault." Mama assured him before sitting up in bed and wincing. "Although I don't think I will be sleeping on my back for much longer." he gave Jorgumand a tired smile and patted the little boys back. "Hush Fenris, it's alright."

Thankful that it seemed that he wouldn't be in trouble, Jorgumand inched forward, frowning a little when his little brother continued to cry. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong; he just doesn't know you yet. Come here, and you as well Sleipnir."

Jorgumand looked to see his older brother peeking from around to doorway, and Sleipnir walked in as directed. The little boy in Mama's lap continued to make small crying noises so both of the older boys were reluctant to get too close.
"Boys, this is your youngest brother. His name is Fenris." Mama said, and both Jorgumand and Sleipnir offered their new brother smiles. Fenris did not respond in kind, instead he turned his head to hide his face in their mother's shirt. "He is very shy; you both will have to be very patient with him, alright?" Mama explained and they nodded.

"May we have breakfast?" Jorgumand asked and was happy to see Mama smile at him gratefully.

"Yes of course. How do eggs and toast sound?"

"With jam?" Sleipnir asked.

Mama smiled wider and agreed. Sleipnir and Jorgumand ended up helping make breakfast that day. Sleipnir carefully set plates and cups on the table and Jorgumand pushed a chair up to the counter and manned the toaster. Fenris remained in Mama's arms while he prepared the eggs, and when they sat down he remained in Mama's lap and ate chopped up egg whites off Mama's plate. He had stopped crying for the most part, for which Jorgumand was thankful, but he was still unhappy looking.

After breakfast the two older boys returned to their tower while their mother took away the dishes to clean. After, Mama walked over to where they were and sat Fenris on the floor near them. Fenris was not happy with this, and began crying immediately. Surprisingly Mama did not pick him back up, instead he sat down on the floor with his legs crossed and rubbed Fenris' back. "It's alright my son, you are still safe." he looked up to see the two older boys watching curiously. "Keep playing boys; just let him get used to you."

They did as they were told but kept looking back every few minutes to check the situation. When Fenris had stopped crying again Jorgumand had an idea. Picking up one of Sleipnir's earlier creations, some kind of boat made out of Lego, he brought it to Fenris who watched his approach warily.

"Here!" he held the boat out as an offering.

Fenris leaned away and began to sniffle so Jorgumand stepped back and fiddled with the boat in his hands. "I thought he'd like to play with our toys." he explained.

His mother smiled at him. "That's very thoughtful Jorgumand, but perhaps he is a little young for Lego."

"What about our other toys?" Sleipnir asked from where he was standing by the forgotten tower.

Jorgumand didn't even bother waiting to hear his mother's response. Instead he dropped the rejected boat to the floor and bounded over to the chest that contained all the toys they had collected. Sleipnir was at his side seconds later and the two of them began presenting each item from the chest to their brother one by one. When Fenris didn't seem interested in taking any of them, they would just lay them on the ground near enough that he could reach them should he change his mind.

Soon enough a pile had grown around Fenris, toy soldiers, balls, action figures - all were passed over. Sleipnir showed off their slinkie, demonstrating how it worked while Jorgumand pulled one of the last items out. Steve had given them it, but neither Jorgumand nor Sleipnir found it very interesting, at least not when compared to all their other toys. Still, it was worth a try.

Sleipnir had just added the slinkee to the pile of discarded toys when Jorgumand walked up and presented the last toy. "This is a Teddy bear." he explained, holding up the soft stuffed bear.
"You're supposed to hug it." he did so with enthusiasm and when he let go he was ready to drop it in the pile with the rest of the toys but Fenris suddenly held his arms out. Jorgumand blinked in surprise before a grin spread across his face. "Do you want it? Here!" He pressed the bear into Fenris' reaching hands and he stood close by as his little brother curled his fingers into the soft brown fur.

Fenris held the toy at arm's length for a long moment, studying it with sharp eyes and Jorgumand held his breath. Finally, he apparently decided that the tribute was satisfactory because Fenris slowly pulled the bear closer to his body and his lips twitched up into the smallest of smiles.

It was nothing compared to the huge smile that appeared on their mother's face, a mix of relief and pride. "Well done." He commended softly.

The rest of the morning, Jorgumand and Sleipnir spent playing with their new brother. It became almost a game to see who could get Fenris to do something, to play with one of their favorite toys, or get him to smile again. Sleipnir managed to get him to laugh by making silly faces. By lunchtime Fenris was half curled up in Jorgumand's lap while Sleipnir showed off some of their books. When their mother got up off the floor and went into the kitchen to prepare their lunch, the little boy barely noticed. Fenris fell asleep halfway through the meal, but Mama said that it was expected. Instead of putting the boy to bed though, their mother brought blankets out and let Fenris sleep on the sofa while Jorgumand and Sleipnir watched television. The only disturbance in the afternoon they had was the arrival of Fenris' clothes. Mama pulled out the garments from the bags and set them all in their drawers while Jorgumand and Sleipnir discovered the toys that had been packed in as well. They were much different from their toys, Jorgumand thought as he set aside a box full of wooden blocks with Midgardian letters on them.

"What are those?" he heard Sleipnir ask and looked up to see their mother setting aside a brightly coloured package.

"They are diapers and thankfully they are not necessary." Mama answered before a hand went to his belly. He smiled suddenly. "Not yet anyways."

Fenris woke not long after that, and after ama changed him into his own clothes, Jorgumand and Sleipnir showed the boy his new toys. For dinner, their mother made something called pasta, which Jorgumand quickly decided was his favorite dish yet. Fenris sat on their mothers lap again and ate plain noodles from a small bowl set in front of him, but laughed when Jorgumand made faces at him. The little boy even threw a small handful of his noodles at him.

"Don't even think about it." Mama said before he could reach for his own plate to deliver retaliation.

"But he-

"You are older and know better Jorgumand." Mama intoned, deftly catching Fenris' fist that was about to lob another handful before gently scolding the younger boy.

Jorgumand stuck his tongue out at his little brother, but Fenris just replied with a bubble of laughter which made it difficult to remain angry with him.

After dinner they shared a bath together, and then dressed in their night-clothes. Sleipnir sat in the middle of his Lego pile playing while Mama bushed their damp hair, and Jorgumand went to join him when it was Fenris' turn.

It was quiet in the room, and Jorgumand yawned a bit as their mother quietly spoke to Fenris as he
pulled the comb through the boy's wet curls. Standing on sluggish feet, Jorgumand walked over to
the bookshelf, and looked for one that their mother would read to them before bed.

It took Jorgumand a moment before he realized that his mother had stopped talking abruptly. He
looked over to see their mother still sitting on the sofa, comb in one hand, and the other braced
against his stomach. The expression on his face was strange. One moment he looked confused
about something, and then a smile spread across his face.

"Come here," he said with a gesture, and he shifted Fenris so that the boy was seated on his leg
sideways. Jorgumand climbed up onto the side opposite of Fenris, and Sleipnir stood by their
mother's knee. "Place one of your hands here," he gestured to a section of his stomach, and gently
took one of Fenris' hands and placed it flat against the spot. Jorgumand and Sleipnir followed suit,
pressing their palms as close to the area as three little hands could fit. Then they waited.

Jorgumand waited for Mama to tell them what to do next, but then he felt something move against
his hand. He knew it wasn't just him who felt it either because Sleipnir jumped a little and Mama's
smile grew larger.

"What's happening?" Jorgumand asked when he realized he was feeling something move inside his
mother.

"That is the baby, it is saying hello." Mama explained.

A rush of excitement filled him at the idea and he fought hard to stay seated. "Is it coming out
now?" he asked excitedly.

Mama laughed and leaned over to kiss his head. "No, there are a few months left before that
happens."

"Oh." was all he said, and he tried to hide his disappointment. Instead, he focused again on the
fluttering movement that beat lightly against his hand. He waited for it to stop and when it did he
drummed his fingers against the spot. The movement started up again in response and Jorgumand
let out a laugh and looked up to his mothers face. His laughter died at what he saw. His mother
looked as though he were about to cry.

"What's wrong?" he asked, feeling alarmed.

"Nothing," Mama said quietly, and wound an arm around him so that he could be pulled close. "I
am simply very happy."

Jorgumand shared a bewildered look with Sleipnir who shrugged, equally confused.

That night they all climbed into the same bed, and suddenly Jorgumand was thankful the baby
would take longer to arrive, as there was no room for it in the bed now. Mama laid on his side, as
close to one edge as he could get and Fenris curled into the space between his chin and stomach.
Jorgumand lay next to them, boxed in with Sleipnir on the other side, and found he rather liked it,
despite the crowding. It made it very easy to close his eyes and let sleep take him with the sounds
of his family so close, with one of Mama's hands stroking over his hair and Sleipnir's arm thrown
over his side. And in the middle of the night, if he woke with a scream on his lips, that was ok too,
because his mother was there to pull him back into the safe huddle of bodies.
The days following Fenris' return were spent mostly in their rooms. His youngest son was still easily upset by strangers, and Loki was of no mind to rush him. So much to Sleipnir's and especially Jorgumand's chagrin, they would spend perhaps an hour a day in the common rooms before heading back to the privacy of their own apartment.

That wasn't to say that they did not receive guests. Some of the Avengers stopped by to say hello to the boys. Books and games were brought by Steve Rogers, and Parker brought the collection of movies for them to watch on the television. Most surprisingly, it was Tony Stark who won the boys eternal affection when he gifted them with a box set of DVDs for a show called the Muppets, which quickly became a house favorite.

The boys were asleep when Thor came. Loki had instigated an afternoon nap due to his sons waning energy levels, none of them had been getting enough sleep because of the nightmares. So sometime after lunch each day the boys curled up together on the bed with a light blanket to cover them. It seemed to do the trick, and for whatever reason they rarely seemed to have nightmares during the daytime.

Loki had just been tucking Fenris in-between his two dozing brothers when a knock sounded at the front door. On silent feet he walked out of the room and gently closed the bedroom door. A knock sounded again, though no louder. At least whomever it was seemed courteous enough not to try and wake the boys.

When he opened the door, he expected Bruce, or perhaps even Steve. The small tentative knocking did not prepare him for the sight of Thor hunched in the doorway looking like a beaten dog.

Immediately he knew what had happened, and without a word he stepped aside to let his foster brother in. Thor entered with his eyes downcast and despite himself Loki felt a prickling of sympathy for the man.

"So," he began when it seemed like Thor would not. "How was she? It has been some time since I've been able to visit, though in my defense it has been a busy few years."

Thor met his eyes briefly before returning them to the carpet. "I'm sorry brother, I failed."

Loki watched him stand there for a long moment before he couldn't take it anymore. "Will you please wipe that expression from your face, it does not suit you."

"I knew you would." Loki crossed his arms at Thor's flinch and shook his head at the predictability of it. "That was not a shot Thor. I never believed that you could bring her here, not because it was you, but because it is an impossible task. I told you so before you left." Thor did not seem at all affected by his words so Loki spoke the harsh truth. "She's dead Thor. Are you so egotistical that you think you could have reversed that?"

"If I could have," Thor said weakly.

Thor's expression morphed into confusion, which was at least much more familiar. "What do you mean?"
"You look like you are prepared to throw yourself onto a sword if I so much speak the word and I'd rather you didn't. I have enough to clean after with three boys, and no magic." Thor did not seem amused. "I mean it Thor, I am not upset."

"How can you not be? Father all but murdered your daughter." Thor spat the word father, and contempt sat strangely on his usually kind face.

Loki casually leaned against the armchair and raised an eyebrow at his outburst. "Honestly Thor, out of all of my children's fates, it was Hela's I was least concerned with. I mourned her, and avenged her. When I found her in the underworld and realized that she could not return to Asgard, I conquered the realm of the dead so that she could rule as queen. It was more then I could ever do for any of my other children. Sleipnir was a beast of servitude, Jorgumand was banished to Midgard's deepest seas, and Fenris was chained in the darkness so that he could not even move. Really, Hela was much better off than her brothers."

"She's dead Loki!"

"She is free," Loki corrected. "In body and in mind."

Thor looked unconvinced. "She is not so free that she can leave her Realm."

"She can actually." Loki stated lightly. "She is my daughter, and dead or not she has my magic as well. It is well within her abilities to walk between worlds as I do. The matter is that she simply does not want to."

Thor nodded, but remained depressed looking. "I thought I could return your children to you, to undo father's treachery."

"Thor, you returned to me my sons, as children nonetheless. This was a gift I had thought I had lost long ago. It is enough." When Thor did not meet his gaze, Loki stepped forward and took hold of his chin and forced his head up. When Thor finally met his eyes he spoke. "It is enough."

At last Thor seemed to understand and Loki stepped back before his foster brother could do something imbecilic like try and hug him.

Thor shifted on his huge booted feet before walking over to the sofa to sit down, his elbows on his knees and his fingers laced together. "Hela spoke with me brother."

"Oh?" Loki prompted when it seemed as though Thor would leave it at that.

"Yes, I told her about her brothers, and of your..."

He seemed to flounder a little so Loki decided to help him out. "I believe the word you are looking for is pregnancy."

Thor's face flushed as if he had said something particularly dirty. "Yes. That." he stared down at his hands for a long moment. "She asked if you were planning on sending the child to her like the previous ones."

Suddenly Thor's unhappy disposition was understandable. "Ah, no. That is no longer necessary." Loki sat in the armchair so that he was level with Thor and placed a hand over his stomach.

"What did she mean Loki?" Thor asked, raising his eyes to meet his again.

"What do you think she meant?" he countered.
His foster brother grimaced and looked away. "How many?" he asked after a moment.

Loki frowned. "I was hardly keeping count." When Thor didn't respond he sighed. "Four."

Neither spoke for a while after that.

When Thor finally looked up, Loki met his pained gaze. "Why did you continue to do it?" he asked.

Loki glared at the man before him. "I believe I have already explained my reasoning." he said icily.

"That was not my meaning. I ask that if you knew already that you could not keep them, why did you continue... trying?" he finished weakly.

"Why did I continue to become pregnant you mean?" Thor nodded and Loki shifted in his seat. The further into his pregnancy he got, the more his back ached. Eventually he knew it would be a near constant thing, but for now he could dispel the discomfort by changing positions regularly. "It wasn't something that I consciously decided, or even desired. It simply happened."

He remembered how panicked he'd been when he realized he was with child the first time. The panic, the shame, and the knowledge that something must be wrong with him on a base level. He was already so different from his brother, from the men of Asgard. This was just another way for fate to tell him that he didn't belong. It was a punishment surely, for being so depraved as to lay with a man. He had been taken as though a woman and then somehow he was growing fat with child like one. Then Sleipnir had been born, and he realized it was not a punishment, but a gift.

Thor was watching him, and belatedly Loki realized that he was waiting for more of an explanation. "It is because I am Jotun Thor. Sometime after learning of my heritage, I did some research. Apparently on Jotenheim there are certain seasons in which its inhabitants are... fertile. But I had no idea what I was, and therefore could not purposefully avoid it. As it was, some seasons I managed to make it through without becoming with child, and then sometimes I did not." he smiled ruefully and patted his stomach. "Out of all of them, this was the only 'planned' pregnancy."

Thor seemed to perk up a bit at that information, no longer looking as miserable as he did when he arrived. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I was no longer living under Odin," Loki explained, "I knew the season was approaching, so instead of avoiding it..." he broke off with a casual shrug.

Thor stared at him. "You wanted this?" he asked, disbelief curling at the edges of his words.

"Well I didn't expect all this to happen." Loki replied. "I only planned to have the child in hiding. I'd layered my home in protective spells that should have held for years. I'd thought I would remain there until the child was born and my magic returned. After that, well it wasn't as if I was expected to return to Asgard any time soon, and I've grown to be quite proficient at hiding." He observed his foster brother critically. "And what will you do now Thor, now that your quest is over? You have rescued all of my children, those that could be anyways, will you return to Asgard now?"

Thor shook his head. "No, I think it best if I remain here. Asgard is at peace, there is little for our cousin to worry about as king. Balder will be fine until Father awakens."

"And after that?" Loki pushed.

Thor gave him a small smile. "I have heard Tony use a phrase before, 'absence makes the heart
grow fonder', and I think it may be a while before I return to Asgard again. Besides, it is not the same there without you."

Loki rolled his eyes and held back on the sarcastic reply that came automatically to his lips. "What of Odin?" he asked instead. "Do you not think he will come for you, for my sons?"

"Mother said that she will take care of that. And even if Odin comes, I would rather be here to help defend you."

Loki nodded, though he doubted Thor or most of the Avengers would be able to do much to stop Odin. The only one that could actually do it would be the Hulk. Bruce Banner's alter ego was pure power, a force that could challenge even the king of the gods.

"Where are they?" Thor asked suddenly, and it took Loki a moment to realize he was asking after the boys.

"They are asleep in the bedroom," he answered and Thor frowned.

"Asleep? In the middle of the day?"

"It is called a nap Thor. It is only for an hour or so."

Loki watched as Thor's shoulders sank a little, and he didn't need his magic to know the man's thoughts. "You should probably go, I am sure the director of Shield has much to talk to you about now that you apparently back to stay." Thor's shoulders sank further but he nodded in agreement. He made to rise but before he could open his mouth to speak any farewells, Loki spoke first. "Perhaps after you might join us for supper?"

The words were spoken casually, as if he had offered such a thing on a daily basis, and he waited for Thor to stop gaping at him. It took a moment, but eventually the dumbstruck look on his foster brother's face softened into a smile.

"Thank you brother, I would like that very much."

That night, Sleipnir and Jörmungandr watched the strange new man sitting at their dinner table with wide eyes. Loki patiently explained that he was Thor, and that he was the one responsible for removing the spell from them. Thor beamed happily as Jörmungandr started on the man with a barrage of questions with Sleipnir adding his own every now and then. Fenris stayed quiet in Loki's lap, but that was not unexpected. The little boy watched the large blonde man with serious eyes; all the while he ate from his own small plate with a blunted fork made especially for toddlers.

After dessert, the boys showed Thor their toys, and then after that convinced him to read a story to them.

"They are wonderful Loki." Thor told him when the boys were in the bathroom brushing their teeth.

Loki frowned at the strange tone to his foster brothers voice. "But?"

Thor grinned at him. "But I do not think I will ever become accustomed to hearing someone refer to you as 'Mama'."
Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Steve Rogers had missed this. There was something about doing something as simple as rough-housing with a kid that soothed a part of him that hasn't been right since Germany first invaded Poland. It didn't matter that the kid wasn't technically human either, that he was the son of a god from another planet. Or that the other guy playing around with them was in full costume and spent most of the time hanging from the ceiling. All that mattered was maintaining a secure grip on the kid's waist as he spun them around in a tight circle, and the sound of Sleipnir's laughter bouncing off the walls of the gym.

It was just the three of them. Loki had taken Jorgumand and Fenris back to their rooms for an afternoon nap an hour ago. Sleipnir was originally supposed to be with them, but Loki's oldest son had declared that he wasn't tired and didn't need a nap. Steve had been in the rec room and had overheard the conversation in its entirety. He'd been impressed by Sleipnir's speech which had been devoid of whining, he only pointed out that he no longer slept while his brothers napped. Loki, with Fenris already asleep in one arm and Jorgumand leaning heavily on his leg with his eyes closed, told him that if he wasn't tired he could play with his toys quietly while the others napped. Sleipnir had been less than thrilled with the alternative, and without thinking about how he was likely overstepping, Steve had spoken up and offered to watch Sleipnir for a while.

Looking back on it, he supposed he should be more worried on how little protest Loki had given before finally agreeing in the face of Sleipnir's hopeful expression. Peter had shown up shortly after Loki had left and the three of them had spent the last hour in the training gym on the mats, playing tag or catch or Sleipnir's new favorite: Tarzan, in which they used Peter's webbing to swing back and forth.

"I think we're going to have to install a tire swing somewhere." Peter said thoughtfully as Sleipnir wobbled over to one of the leftover strands of web, apparently still dizzy from the spinning.

Steve looked thoughtfully up at the metal rafters. "Why not in here? It can't be too hard to find a tire and some rope in this building."

Peter's mask twitched and Steve assumed he had raised an eyebrow. "You'd trust a tire from Shield?" he asked incredulously.

"Is there a reason I shouldn't?"

The young superhero shrugged. "I don't know, just be careful Stark hasn't ever been near it, it might have rockets or something installed in them."

Steve gave a small snort of laughter. "That reminds me, listen to this. Hey Sleipnir?"

The boy in question, who at the moment was hanging upside down three feet in the air looking like a young wall crawler in the making, looked over at them and smiled.

"Yes?"

"After this, do you want to go play with some of your Lego?" Steve asked.

Sleipnir nodded energetically, "Yes! Peter too?"
"Sure thing! What about Tony, is it ok if he plays with us as well?"

Sleipnir's smile faded a little. "But he's not allowed to play with Lego. Bruce said so."

"Did he? Did he say why?"

Sleipnir flipped so that he was right side up again and repeated Bruce's words verbatim. "Tony can't ever be allowed to play with Lego because he might use it to create weapons of mass destruction."

Peter let loose a laugh and Steve smiled at Sleipnir. "Well I guess you're right, that does sound like something Tony would do. Come on, how about we go visit Bruce in the lab before we take you back to your Mom?"

Sleipnir grinned and hopped down from the webbing. "Ok!" he said as he came over to stand at his side.

"Do you want to ride on my shoulders instead of walking?" he asked impulsively and Sleipnir looked up at him quizzically.

"Why?"

Steve shrugged. "It's fun? I used to ride on my uncle's shoulders all the time when I was a kid. Here," he kneeled down and lifted Sleipnir up to sit on his shoulders. "Hold on now!" he made sure to wait and make sure that Sleipnir had a good grip on his head before rising back up to his full height. He heard him give a little gasp and grinned. "See, now you're taller than everyone!"

Sleipnir didn't say anything right away, and it took Steve a moment to realize something was wrong. Sleipnir had gone very still above him and the hands that had affixed themselves to his short hair were gripping him tightly.

"Steve," Peter said suddenly in a strange voice, looking up at the child on his shoulders. "Put him down. Carefully."

Steve reached up and gently lifted Sleipnir down so that he was standing on the floor again. The child in front of him was vastly different from how he'd been thirty seconds ago. His large green eyes were wide and unfocused, his breathing was quick and shallow and his skin was stark white. He didn't even seem to register that they were there, so Steve gently reached out to place a bracing hand on the boys shoulder.

"Sleipnir?" he asked but there was no change so he gave the shoulder a tiny shake. "Come in buddy, snap out of it."

But it would seem as though Sleipnir couldn't hear him as he continued to stare forward, his attention stuck on something only he could see in his mind. Steve looked up to Peter who was hovering close, but the young man seemed as lost as he was.

"What happened?" the wallcrawler asked.

"I have no idea." Steve said grimly.

"Loki's gonna kill us if we broke his kid."

"He's not broken, he's just... come on Sleipnir, talk to us!" Steve urged the boy and in that moment he saw a small flicker of something in his eyes. "Sleipnir? Hey I know you can hear me buddy, it's
Steve and Peter. You're ok, you just have to snap out of this?" Steve watched Sleipnir's eyes carefully for any sign that he was coming out of it but there was no such luck. "Ok, ok Sleipnir, I'm going to have to pick you up again, but just so we can take you back to your mom alright?"

That seemed to do it. Sleipnir's eyes snapped back into focus and the boy let out a startled gasp as he came back to himself. "Sleipnir?" Steve called softly and a pair of wild green eyes settled on him. "Hey, are you ok? What just happened there?" He waited for Sleipnir's breathing to calm down, but even then the kid didn't answer. And then suddenly, without warning, Sleipnir's eyes filled with tears and he began to cry quietly.

Deciding that he couldn't possibly make it worse at this point, Steve reached forward and pulled the boy into a hug. Sleipnir just continued to cry.

"Come on kiddo, I'm going to take you back to your mom, ok?"

Sleipnir nodded against his shoulder, his breath hitching a little when Steve slowly stood up, lifting the boy with him and then they were striding down the halls at a fair clip. Peter was following, talking to Sleipnir from over his shoulder even though the boy didn't respond. When Loki opened the door Sleipnir practically flew into his arms with a desperate noise. The second Loki had him the boy began to cry in earnest, his sobs muffled into the fabric of Loki's collar.

In that moment Steve knew that if Loki had access to his magic, he would have been dead ten times over from the look the god gave him. "What happened?"

"I don't know Loki." Steve said, looking sadly at the weeping child. "I really don't. We were playing around and he was perfectly fine. Then we were going to go see Bruce and I put him on my shoulders and he just froze up. I don't know what happened, and it took him a minute to come out of it."

Loki's eyes flicked between him and Peter who was standing a little behind him.

"It was weird," he heard Peter say. "Steve picked him up and Sleipnir's face just went white, like he saw a ghost or something."

Loki continued to watch them for a moment longer, his lips pressed tight together and he nodded shortly. "Thank you for bringing him back," he said, and stepped back into the apartment.

"I'm really sorry Loki." Steve couldn't help but say.

Loki paused before replying, "As am I," before shutting the door.

Steve didn't see Loki or any of his kids for the rest of the day, or the following day either and he blamed himself entirely. Not that he knew exactly what he'd done wrong, but whatever had happened to Sleipnir, he had triggered it.

He didn't dare tell Thor what had happened, even when the man began commenting on Loki's absence. Instead, Steve went to the only other person he knew that might have some sort of insight, and might be able to offer some much needed advice.

He ended up standing in front of the door to Bruce's lab.

Steve knocked before entering the large room and waved when Bruce held up a finger indicating that he'd be a moment. Bruce was hunched over a small machine that had numerous wires attached to it and emitted a low hum as parts of it spun around. Whatever it was doing, it seemed to be doing its job right because Bruce adjusted a few connections before nodding to himself and turned to face
Steve. "Hey! What are you doing down here?"

"I was hoping on getting your thoughts on something," Steve said, coming around one of the long tables littered with machines and devices. "It has to do with Loki and his kids."

Bruce blinked. "Uh, ok… what's the question?"

"It's not so much of a question as it is a situation. There was an… incident, the other day with Sleipnir, I still don't know exactly what happened but Loki hasn't let any of his kids out of the apartment since."

That got Bruce's attention. "What do you mean by 'an incident'?” he asked, looking concerned.

Steve explained what had happened, from Sleipnir's refusing to take a nap all the way up to bringing him back to Loki, a shaking mess. Bruce listened attentively, and by the end he looked very thoughtful.

"And no one has seen any of them since that?" the scientist asked.

"That's right." Steve sighed. "I'm just worried that I've seriously set back all the headway we've been making with Loki. There's no way he's going to let any of his kids be alone with us now, not after that."

"Hey come on, I don't think it's that bad. I doubt Loki's going to blame you for what happened."

Steve shot Bruce an incredulous look. "You've got to be kidding. This is Loki we are talking about, and I seriously did… something to his kid."

Bruce shrugged. "I think you are underestimating how aware Loki is of his kids' mental state. Episodes like the one Sleipnir had are understandable, especially considering the circumstances; I'm surprised there haven't been more."

Steve stared at Bruce. "What do you mean? Why would there be any 'episodes'?"

The smaller man looked at him sympathetically. "I think one of the problems is that whenever you see Sleipnir, or Jorgumand for that matter, you and the rest of the team only see healthy normal little boys. But they're not normal Steve."

"I know they aren't technically human…"

"I'm not talking about physically." Bruce interrupted. "I'm talking mentally. Loki's kids are all traumatized. They were all turned into some other form, and then imprisoned, basically, for centuries."

"I thought- I was under the impression that they didn't remember that time."

"Consciously no. As far as I know, none of them remember anything from after the spells were cast on them." Bruce paused, tapping his fingers on the countertop beside him. "What was your first word?"

Steve blinked in confusion. "What?"

"Just humor me, what was the very first word you ever said?"

"Uh, I don't know," he stammered, thrown completely by the strange new topic. "I guess it might have been Ma, I don't know."
Bruce nodded, "Alright, good, classic choice. And you would have been, what, five, maybe six months old when you said that right?" Steve shrugged. "On average, most infants say their first word at around the six month mark. By the time they're two, most kids are starting to string words together to make sentences. Now, can you tell me how many times you've heard Fenris speak?"

Steve let out a breath. "Never." He answered, and sat down heavily on a nearby stool. "I didn't notice, but he never talks. I've never even hear him say Mama like the other two."

Bruce smiled grimly at him. "I know. And before you ask, yes, he can talk. In fact, I've heard him talk. The kid can speak in full sentences when he wants to. Only when it's just him and Loki though. The one time I heard him, I don't think he saw me there."

"So he's incredibly shy," Steve offered, knowing it was a weak excuse.

"I'm pretty sure it's more than a case of shyness. And Sleipnir isn't the only one prone to episodes either. The other day, Loki was down here and the kids were as well, obviously. I was showing the older boys the low powered laser; I figured they'd like it. What little boy doesn't like lasers right?" Bruce shook his head. "About ten seconds after I'd turned off the lights, and I hadn't even turned on the laser yet when Jorgumand started screaming. Just… lost it."

Steve frowned. "What happened?"

"It was the dark." Bruce explained with a one-shoulder shrug. "I don't know if it triggered some memory or whatever, but Loki told me Jorgumand had never been afraid of the dark before. And the way he went from being completely at ease and excited to absolutely paralyzed with fear…" he trailed off.

Steve blew out a sigh, and thought that over. "So what can we do?" he asked, because there had to be something.

"I don't think there's anything we can do right now. I mean, the kid's don't remember anything happening to them; it's all in their subconscious. I've talked to Loki about it, and I suggested maybe a child therapist, but this might even be something that passes with time. At the moment, I'm actually more worried about Loki himself."

"Loki? Why?"

Bruce hesitated before sharing. "All three of the kids have been suffering from nightmares. Apparently they don't remember anything when they wake up, but it's gotten pretty bad."

The nightmares he knew about. Steve had seen them first hand when he'd watched over the boys while Loki was retrieving Fenris. Sleipnir had started thrashing about under the covers, and when Steve had put a hand on him to try and calm him down, the boy had come awake with a start. The worst part had come after that. When Sleipnir had realized that Loki wasn't in the room, he'd become nearly inconsolable.

"From what Loki's told me," Bruce continued, "on any given night each one of them will wake up twice or three times a night. Now with that in mind, how much sleep do you think Loki's getting?"

Steve ran a hand over his head. "Jeeze, no wonder he didn't tear me apart yesterday, he probably didn't have the energy."

Bruce glanced back at the small machine he'd been working on. "I've asked him if he'll accept help, but he seems pretty determined to do it on his own."
Neither spoke after that, and Bruce continued to fiddle with his machine.

"Maybe," Steve said finally. "maybe we should stop asking."

Bruce met his eyes and quirked an eyebrow. "Let me know if that works."
Chapter 16

When the knock sounded from the front door first thing in the morning, Sleipnir was the only one available to answer it. His mother was in the bedroom with Fenris, trying to get the little boy into his day clothes while Fenris squirmed as much as possible. Jorgumand was in the bathroom washing his face, as well as his hands, arms, and neck. Somehow his brother had gotten jam everywhere. Sleipnir liked jam, but apparently not as much as Jorgumand.

Sleipnir himself was sitting on the sofa, gazing out the window when he heard the knock at the door. At first he waited, usually Mama liked to answer the door. But then he heard the sounds of Fenris making a fuss from the bedroom and Sleipnir decided that Mama wouldn't be upset with him if he answered the door this once.

Steve was on the other side, and he looked down at Sleipnir with a small smile. "Hey Sleipnir, how are you doing?"

Suddenly wishing he'd waited to let his mother answer the door, Sleipnir met the tall man's eyes. "I'm well, thank you," he answered, remembering his manners. "How are you?"

"I'm ok, is your mom busy? I was hoping I could talk to him for a sec."

Sleipnir nodded and moved the door open some more so that Steve could step through, and then ran towards the bedroom. Inside he found a fully dressed Fenris sitting on the edge of the bed with their mother kneeling in front of him.

"Steve is here," Sleipnir announced and Mama turned to him with a startled look. "He said he wants to talk to you," he added.

His mother sighed tiredly and rose to his feet. "Very well, was he alone?" Sleipnir nodded. "Alright, I will speak with him now, Sleipnir can you please take your brother and play quietly while I do?"

Sleipnir nodded again and Mama stepped around him, brushing a hand through his hair as he passed, and walked into the main room. Now it was just the two of them, and Sleipnir moved to stand in front of his youngest brother. "Come on Fenris, if you want I can read you a story," he offered.

Fenris seemed to consider that, and finally held out his arms to be picked up. Sleipnir shook his head. "No Fenris, you can walk." He watched as his little brother pouted but held his resolve. His mother had told them that Fenris shouldn't be carried everywhere, but their little brother was unhappy with the change.

"Want up Sep-nir." his brother pleaded, his hands still outstretched.

"But if you walk you can hold my hand," Sleipnir tried. "And I'll read Green Eggs and Ham for you."

The bribe worked, and moments later Fenris was climbing off the bed and taking his hand eagerly. Sleipnir didn't exactly understand why, Fenris must have had that particular story book read to him at least a hundred times by now. But for whatever reason, he was never in the wrong mood to hear it again. Leading his brother into the main room, he found Jorgumand kneeling by the small table.
by the sofa drawing in one of his books. Their mother was in the kitchen with Steve, talking in voices too low to overhear. Fenris had noticed Steve by this point, and the grip he had on Sleipnir's hand became vice like. Knowing better than to try and pry his brother loose, he simply pulled the familiar red book from the shelf and directed Fenris to climb up onto the sofa with him. Jorgumand looked up to see what they were doing and made a sound of dismay when he saw the book.

"Again?" he asked as he abandoned his colouring and took a seat next to Fenris. "Why do you like this one so much?" he asked the smaller boy but received no answer. Fenris had relaxed a little when Jorgumand had bracketed him from the other side, but eventually his thumb was raised to his mouth and Sleipnir decided to start reading. He hardly needed to look down at the words anymore, he knew the lines so well, and despite his initial complaint, Jorgumand stayed to read with them.

About halfway through the story, the voices in the kitchen became loud for a moment before silence fell. Sleipnir paused in his reading, and looked up to see Mama glaring at Steve who began talking quietly again. Feeling unsure as to what he should do, Sleipnir glanced over at Jorgumand, but his brother looked as confused as he was. After some deliberation, he decided it was best that he keep reading, unless he wanted to see Fenris become upset with him.

When the story finally came to a close, Sleipnir pondered what they should do next, but was saved from having to make a decision when Steve came out if the kitchen to kneel down in front of them.

"Hey guys, what are you reading?" the mortal asked them.

"Green Eggs and Ham." Sleipnir answered.

"Are you staying to play with us?" Jorgumand asked excitedly.

Steve smiled kindly at them. "Actually I am! I thought I'd stay here until lunch, while your mom takes a quick nap. Is that alright?"

Sleipnir looked over towards the kitchen where their mother was standing watching them with a worried expression. "Why is Mama taking a nap?" Jorgumand was asking. "Is he sick?"

"Oh no, your mom isn't sick or anything, he just hasn't gotten a lot of sleep lately, so this is just to catch up. It's nothing to worry about."

Jorgumand apparently believed the man, because he was then asking if they could watch movies together and Steve was nodding looking a little relieved. Their mother stayed in the kitchen watching over them as a movie was decided upon and they began watching. Fenris seemed to be doing better with the mortal man's presence, but he still clung to his bear and remained either at Sleipnir's or Jorgumand's side at all times. After some time had passed, Sleipnir watched out of the corner of his eye as their mother slowly moved from the kitchen to the bedroom. The door remained open, likely so that Mama could hear them, but eventually Sleipnir got caught up in the story on the television.

After the movie Steve showed them a deck of cards, and taught them how to play a game with them called Go Fish. There weren't any fish that Sleipnir could see, but it was still fun. Fenris couldn't play by himself so he sat between Sleipnir's legs and pointed at the numbers and letters printed on the waxy papers when he heard them being called.

After they grew bored of the cards, Jorgumand and Fenris began playing with the small collection of stuffed animals. Jorgumand was happily recreating the sounds the animals made, inventing new ones for the animals he did not know of yet, and Fenris seemed content enough playing along silently. Steve had gone into the kitchen to start making food for lunch and Sleipnir considered
what he should do next. For once the sight of his Lego did not call to him. He felt unsettled, and a
little anxious, though he didn't know why. Despite the fact that he quite liked Steve, he didn't want
to go to him in the kitchen to seek comfort that he knew the mortal would be happy to give. Steve
gave very good hugs he'd learned, but right now he did not want one. In the end, Sleipnir waited
until he knew that Steve was head deep in the fridge and his brothers were occupied with the toys
before heading straight for the bedroom.

Sleipnir crept silently into the dark room, and the noises of his brothers became muted as he closed
the door, leaving it open a small amount. In the dim light afforded by the doorway he could just
make out the form that made up their bed and the figure that slept in it. His socked feet were silent
as he padded across the floor and peered over the edge of the bed to see his mothers sleeping face.
As his eyes adjusted to the darkness he could see his mothers eyes were closed in slumber as he
slept on his side. Leaning on the mattress, Sleipnir considered what he should do next. He didn't
feel much like playing with Steve today, but he also knew better than to wake his mother when
he'd spent most of the morning looking so tired. Eventually he decided to go back out to the main
room, maybe he would just tell Steve he was tired as well...

Mind made up, Sleipnir pushed off the mattress and started back towards the door. He made it
perhaps half a step when two arms shot out, hooked him under his armpits and pulled him under
the warm covers if the bed. He didn't have time to yelp in surprise before the arms that had
grabbed him turned him about and pulled him into a familiar embrace. Sleipnir grinned and curled
his own arms around his mother, laughing when he felt fingers dance on his sides.

"Tell me, when did the captain become so boring that watching me sleep is a more interesting
activity?" his mother asked in a sleepy voice near his ear.

Sleipnir shook his head and pressed his face into the soft fabric of his mother's shirt. "I'm tired
too," he explained and he felt fingers slide through his hair.

"I suppose that's fair." his mother hummed. "I doubt any of us have had much sleep as of late."

Sleipnir relaxed as his mother continued to stroke his hair, and he closed his eyes. If they had been
open he might have noticed a shadow appear in the doorway, but it only lingered long enough for
his mother to see it and give it a slight nod before disappearing again.

"Do you have nightmares?" Sleipnir asked looking up at his mother, suddenly curious.

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

"What are they about?"

The hand in his hair paused for a moment before resuming its soothing motion. "I dream that Thor
never broke the spell on you and your brothers," his mother confessed.

The room was quiet for a while after that, and Sleipnir closed his eyes again. He curled up against
his mother's body, mindful not to knee his stomach where his newest brother grew. He felt warm
and safe, and perhaps that was why the words came to his lips so easily.

"I remember my dreams sometimes," he said quietly.

His mother replied in a voice just as quiet. "What do you dream, Sleipnir?"

"It's strange," he began, trying to recall the images that plagued his sleep. "There's always lots of
people, more than I've ever seen. And they are very loud, and sometimes they are very angry and
scary. And I want to find you but I can't. Or sometimes you are there, but you can't see me."
Sleipnir opened his eyes and looked up at his mother through the darkness. "That's usually when I wake up."

"I can understand why you are so upset when you wake then, that would be a very distressing dream."

Sleipnir nodded. "Do you know what's really strange?"

"What's that?"

"In all of my dreams, I'm really tall."

Mama looked down at him with a confused face. "What do you mean?"

"I'm taller than everyone, that's how I know there are so many people, I can see over all of their heads." he pulled absently at his mother's shirt. "I don't like it, being that tall. That's why I didn't like it when Steve was playing with me the other day."

He glanced back up to see that his mother was looking at him with a sad expression, and before he could ask what was wrong he was suddenly pulled into a tight hug.

"I am so sorry Sleipnir," Mama said in a sorrowful voice. "I had hoped that you would never remember..."

"Remember what?"

His mother sighed and pulled back from the hug just enough so that he could make eye contact. "I must tell you something, but before I do I must first explain that this was never a secret. I had planned to tell you this eventually, when you were a little older and could understand better as to why this happened."

Sleipnir felt confused. "Why what happened?" he asked.

His mother sighed again before answering. "I have told you how you slept the centuries away because of a spell that had been placed on you, but that is only half of the story Sleipnir. When the man cast his magic upon you, your mind went to sleep, but not your body. He turned you into a horse, and placed upon you a bridle that could not be removed by magic or any other force that I tried."

Sleipnir blinked. "A horse? But why?"

"I am a very powerful sorcerer my son, and one day you will be too, perhaps even more so. The man feared that, he was afraid of how strong you might one day become. So he transformed you into a beast so that you would no longer be a threat to him."

"But I didn't do anything!" Sleipnir protested.

"I know, but this man was afraid, and thought he was doing the right thing."

Sleipnir thought that didn't sound fair at all, but from the look of his mothers face, he wasn't alone in that opinion. "What about my brothers? Were they turned into horses as well?"

"No," was his answer. "Jorgumand was turned into a serpent, and Fenris, he was transformed into a wolf."

Sleipnir let that soak in, but it was hard to picture his quiet little brother as a wolf. Than a thought
struck him and he felt a shiver of fear creep up his spine. "Mama? What if he finds us again? Will he turn us back into animals?"

Firm hands took hold of his shoulders and held him tight as his mother shifted in the bed so that they were eye to eye. "Sleipnir, if you believe nothing else than you must believe this. That will never happen. I won't ever let that man near you again, and neither will any of the Avengers. He feared you and what you may one day become, but he fears me more now. I promise you my son, if he ever tried to take you again it would be last thing he would ever do." The hands on his shoulders came up to stroke his face. "Do you believe me Sleipnir?"

Sleipnir nodded and closed his eyes as his mother leaned forward to kiss his forehead.

"You must promise me one thing though, you can not speak to your brothers of this. Allow me to tell them when they are ready to hear it. Alright?"

Sleipnir nodded. "Yes, I promise."

Mama smiled at him. "Good boy." A hand went back to stroking his hair again. "Does it bring you peace? Knowing the truth?"

"I think so," Sleipnir said slowly. "But are you sure I was a horse?"

Mama frowned a little at the question. "Yes, why?"

"You're sure I was horse, not another kind of animal?"

"I am quite certain Sleipnir, now why do you ask?"

Sleipnir shrugged. "Well, Steve and Bruce and everyone here always calls us kids, so I was wondering if my brothers and I were turned into goats instead of horses and wolves." he offered a smile which only grew when his mother snorted.

A hand tugged on his ear and his mother muttered "Cheeky," before pulling him back into a hug. Sleipnir allowed himself to fall into the comfortable embrace, and felt that he really might sleep this time.
Chapter 17

It had taken a great deal of convincing, pleading, and something Clint referred to as puppy eyes, but eventually Loki had broken down and agreed to let Thor take care of his sons the next time he had an appointment with the Shield doctors. Normally it was Bruce who held the honor, but Thor had insisted. Loki had at first argued that his sons barely knew him, but he countered that by stating unless they spent time with him they would never know him.

"When was the last time you had contact with a child? Not including the one dinner you have already shared with us?" Loki had asked, and Thor had to admit, he had little experience with children. But he promised that he would bring Jane along, who unlike Thor, had plenty of experience through cousins and nieces.

Thor wasn't ignorant. He knew the true reason behind Loki's hesitance. His brother feared that Thor would forget his strength and injure one of the boys. That would never happen, but Thor found it difficult to convince his brother otherwise. Yes, he may be rough with his friends, and sometimes what was meant to be a friendly pat on the back sometimes sent the recipient flying over the table, but that was among grown men and warriors. Never in his life had he ever accidentally harmed a woman or child.

In the end, Loki had given his word that at the next opportunity, Thor would be granted the honor of watching over his nephews. This would turn out to be a week later, and the thunderer arrived at Loki's rooms excited. The appointment with the doctors was to be longer than usual, as Loki's pregnancy had reached a stage that allowed for more testing. Thor didn't know exactly what the tests were for, but Loki explained that in the end, the Shield agents were ensuring that the fetus was healthy and still not a monster.

The plan was for Thor to pick up the boys, and then he would bring them to the common room where Lady Jane would be joining them. After that, they were going to take the boys up to the roof and Jane was to teach the boys about kite flying. Thor only had a basic idea of what kite flying was about, but Jane assured him that Loki's children would enjoy it.

The boys were ready to go when he arrived, though they seemed shy to follow him out the door, leaving Loki behind. The youngest held on to Sleipnir's hand with a stuffed bear tucked under his other arm as they walked along, and watched Thor with wide serious eyes. Sleipnir and Jorgumand at least seemed to warm up to him a little as they got closer to the common rooms, asking questions like where his hammer was, and if he really wore a dress to get it back once.

Jane was already there when they arrived, and for a moment Thor forgot about the boys as he observed his love in the morning light.

"Good morning Jane!" he greeted, startling the petite woman from her thoughts and embraced her happily. She returned the gesture, and smiled brilliantly at him when they parted.

"Morning! Are you excited about today?"

"I am, thank you Jane for agreeing to accompany us."

She waved a hand in the air, "Please, I'm so happy you asked me," Jane glanced around and then raised her eyebrows up expectantly. "So do we need to go pick Loki's kids up, or is he bringing them here?"
Thor frowned in confusion, "What? They are right here-" he looked behind him to where the boys had been just a moment ago, only to find they weren't there. For a few seconds Thor could only stare at the empty spot before he glanced quickly around and realized that he could not see them anywhere. "Where..." he said quietly, mostly to himself as he walked over to the sofa to see if the boys had moved to sit on it, but it was empty.

Jane, who must have realized what had happened, began to search about the room, and soon both of them were calling out the boy's names. There was no answer. As far as they could tell, Sleipnir, Jorgumand and Fenris were gone.

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Tony winced at the racket he made when the cart he was pushing crashed into one of the tables in Bruce's lab. He and the scientist got along pretty well most of the time, but a line had been drawn when it came to Tony messing around in Banner's lab. Out of respect for his teammate and for the continued peace within the tower, Tony usually stayed out. But this was a unique situation. In the last tussle with the big bad of the week, Tony's suit had been doused with some kind of slime from when Thor had taken his hammer to the monsters head. The creature had, for lack of a better term, exploded, covering entire city blocks with a strange oozing compound. Everyone in the team had been covered, but unlike everyone else who could easily replace his or her uniforms, his was a little more difficult. The ooze had solidified, and it was damn near impossible to get it off. He really didn't want to write off his suit, but the gunk had gotten into some of the mechanisms on his legs. Thankfully Steve had told him that morning that he'd used a solvent that Bruce had given him on his shield, apparently it took the crap right off.

The problem he had now was that since Thor had lost Loki's kids, everyone was busy running around looking for the little ex-monsters; likely Bruce was among the search party. Well Tony was sure the scientist wouldn't mind if he just helped himself. So he'd carted down the suit in pieces, hoping to be in and out before Bruce ever knew he was there.

The fact that Bruce was still in the lab was not something he'd been counting on. Banner turned around from the counter he was standing by, took one look at him and the cart he'd bashed into the table, and pointed at the door.

"Out."

"Hello to you too sunshine." Tony grumbled, and considered bringing up the fact that it was his damn tower, but then he noticed that behind Banner, two sets of eyes were peeking over the counter to see what the commotion was. Figures.

"You do know that there is currently a nationwide search out for those kids right?"

Bruce looked over the counter where the boys had ducked back down and then back at him with a sigh. "What do you want?"

Grinning in victory, Tony leaned on the handlebars of the cart. "A little red white and blue bird told me you have something that can get monster ooz off metal armor."

Bruce pushed away from the counter and opened a walk in storage room filled with containers and machines. The canister he hauled out looked to be too large for the smaller man to carry, but he managed and put it down on a table nearby along with some cloths and paper towel. "If you make a mess, clean it up." With that he turned back to whatever he was working on. The youngest of Loki's brood tottered from around the counter to sit at Banner's feet, a teddy bear held tight in his grip. Another kid followed, and sat next to the other one with a book and began reading slowly out
Tony paused just had he started to put the part back into place, and looked directly at Sleipnir. The
boy already had his eyes on the place where the part was going to fit. Tony didn't move for a few moments, and waited for Sleipnir to look at him. When he did, Tony held up the thruster he had in his hand.

"You know where this goes, don't you?"

Sleipnir bit his lip, waited a beat and then without verbally responding, he stretched across the table to point directly at the spot that the part belonged.

Tony eyed him critically for a moment, and then handed the thruster over. "Put it back then."

Sleipnir took the metal in both hands, and stared at it closely, taking in all the details before climbing up to sit on the table so that he could reach easily. The thruster slid back into place with a sharp click, and Sleipnir looked back at him with a delighted smile. Tony found himself returning the smile before he knew what his face was doing, and even then he didn't try and wipe it off. Instead he held up the next part. "What about this one?"

Piece by piece, part by tiny part, the leg was reconstructed, even the complicated circuitry. When it was done, Tony sat back and looked Sleipnir over. "You know, you're pretty smart for a kid," he said conversationally.

"Were you expecting him not to be?" came Bruce's voice from across the room but Tony ignored him.

"I don't suppose you'd be willing to share how you were able to get around the tower without anyone seeing you guys, including the cameras."

"Magic." was the simple reply, and Tony froze.

"You guys can do magic?"

Sleipnir nodded absently. "Jorgumand cast it, I had to carry Fenris."

Tony looked over at the seemingly innocent four-year-old that was drawing on a sheet of paper and then back at Sleipnir. "So, what, he turned you guys invisible?"

"No," Sleipnir shook his head. "It doesn't make you invisible; it just makes people not see you."

Tony stared at him. "What?"

"These aren't the kids you're looking for." Bruce said suddenly with a slight wave to his hand with an amused look on his face.

"You would make a Star Wars reference," Tony grumbled.

Loki arrived to find his apartment empty, which wasn't surprising really. He expected Thor was probably in the common room with his children and briefly he allowed himself to enjoy the quiet. He wouldn't change a thing about his sons, and he was pleased that they seemed happy in this new home, but sometimes the three of them could make such a racket. Loki hadn't had to live with such a constant volume of chatter since he and Thor had shared rooms as children, and so at times like this, he selfishly basked in the blessed silence.

After a minute he moved away from the door to place the envelope of papers he had been given in
one of the high cupboards above the fridge. It was hardly secret information, and it was likely that several top government officials had the same envelope on their desks by now, but the papers were important to him, and high cupboards meant safety from small reaching fingers at the moment. Absently Loki walked around the apartment, putting away things that had been left out in the morning rush to be ready, before deciding that Thor had spent enough 'bonding' time with his children.

There was a startling amount of people in the common room when he arrived, and to his great amusement, none of them seemed to notice his entrance for several moments. When they did, Loki frowned a bit when Thor took one look at him and went pale as a sheet.

"Is everything alright?" Loki asked when it seemed like everyone in the room had stopped what they were doing to watch the two brothers talk.

Thor opened his mouth, only to close it seconds later. "It's fine, everything is fine," he managed to get out on his second try. "How was your appointment? How is your child?"

Loki could have known that was a diversion if he were deaf, dumb and blind, and he quickly scanned the crowd for his children. "All is well, it is still human shaped -where are my sons?"

Loki's worry only grew when Thor visibly deflated and several people in the room tensed. "Loki, I- they-"

"We're right here!" Jorgumand declared, slipping up from behind him. At the same time he felt Fenris' hand slide into his own and Sleipnir appeared on his other side.

"May we have lunch now?" Jorgumand asked, completely oblivious of all the dumbfounded faces around him.

"Did Thor not feed you?" Loki asked, glancing up at his foster brother. The blond man was staring strangely at the boys and Loki raised an eyebrow in question.

"No, we were too busy playing," Sleipnir answered before Thor could even open his mouth.

"Hmm, well in that case let us go see what there is to eat. Yes, Jorgumand?" he asked when his son pulled gently on his free hand.

"What does the word bullshit mean?"

If the common room had been quiet before, now it was completely silent. You could have easily heard a pin drop, or the squeak of a boot as Clint Barton took a nervous step back.

"Where did you hear that word used?" Loki asked, careful to keep his voice completely calm.

"Tony said it." Sleipnir answered for his brother, and at the back of the room Loki heard Clint expel a relieved breath. Loki glanced about until he spotted the redhead he was searching for, but Pepper Potts was already tapping furiously at her phone, a small blush upon her cheeks.

Addressing his sons once more, he hid any and all amusement in his voice. "It is a vulgar word used by those with a common mind and common vocabulary. When you are older and find the need to swear, I hope you three will be more creative. Now, I believe we were on our way to lunch?" There was a chorus of yeses and with one last uncertain look at Thor; Loki led his children out of the room.

It wasn't until after the boys had been fed and they were once again in their apartment that Loki
questioned them.

"What exactly did you three do with Thor?" he asked as he drew out runes on paper for Fenris to learn from.

"We played games," Jorgumand answered right away from where he was drawing on his own paper.

"I see, and what games did you play together?"

His two eldest shared a look before Sleipnir answered, "Hide and seek."

"Ah, and before you three went off to hide, you of course told Thor what game you were playing?" The pair of guilty faces before him was answer enough. "Hmmm," he drummed his fingers against the tabletop and considered his sons. "And where did you hide? I'm assuming from Thor's expression when I arrived that he did not succeed in finding you. And I do believe before you three left this morning I expressed how important it is that you are never left alone."

"We weren't alone! We were with Bruce, he let us play there until Thor found us, but he never came," Jorgumand said, as though it was Thor's own fault that he couldn't find the boys.

"Are we in trouble?" Sleipnir asked quietly.

Loki sighed and shook his head. "Considering that this is the first offence, no. But next time Thor is to watch over you three, I insist that if you wish to play with him, you must first tell him before you run off. And next time you see him you both are to apologize for today."

"Yes Mama." the boys chorused.

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Later that night, Loki woke to the sound of three sleeping children, all of them quiet and still. After the last month, it was the most beautiful sound Loki had ever heard. Fenris was curled up to his chest, his thumb perilously close to falling out of his mouth, while his other arm was hooked around his bear. Jorgumand was sleeping in the middle, his arms stretched over his head and his pajama top hiked halfway up his torso. The boy's nightmares had disappeared when Loki had begun to leave the bedside table light on; an easy solution in the end. Sleipnir was the furthest from Loki, curled slightly on his side facing his brothers, a peaceful expression on his face.

It was a wonderful sight to behold, and Loki basked in the moment before wondering what had woken him in the first place if all three of his children were fine. It took him a moment longer to realize there was an extra set of lungs breathing, which meant that there was someone else in the room, and that someone was beside the bed to his back.

It was difficult to keep his breathing relaxed as a cold spike of fear darted up his spine and seized his lungs. His eyes darted to the small form that was his cell phone that rested on his dresser. Too far away, and there were no weapons at his disposal.

The bed shifted as the intruder sat down on the edge and in his mind Loki prayed that it was only Thor, that his stupid brother was playing a nasty joke to scare him, or needed to speak with him and could not possibly wait until morning. But he knew already it wasn't. Suddenly thin fingers carded through his hair in a soothing fashion and Loki knew who it was. The knowledge that his mother was in his room was not something that calmed his nerves though. In fact it boosted his fear for his children tenfold and he gave up the pretense of slumber to stretch an arm over all three of them.
"Peace, my son," Frigga whispered from above him but Loki felt no such thing. If she was here then that meant that the Allfather had awoken at last. Frigga said nothing else, if she noticed the tense set to his shoulders, or how he gripped Sleipnir's arm she did not speak on it. Instead she continued to stroke his hair as she had when he was very little.

Eventually when enough time had passed and Loki could no longer take the tension, he turned his head enough to see his mother's face. She wasn't looking at him though; instead she was looking over his children with a fond expression. When she noticed his attention on her, she looked to him and gave a watery smile.

"They are beautiful Loki," she said softly.

Loki looked away at that, his eyes going back to his sleeping children. His mind raced over all the possible reasons why his mother would be in his room, how she had gotten there and what her intentions were. Did Odin think he wouldn't fight her?

"It pains me to see you like this." she said after the silence had stretched past the point of comfort.

"How so?"

"Afraid," she answered, her beautiful voice sounding brittle. "Afraid for your children, because of me."

Loki looked back towards her and was dismayed to see tears in her eyes. Instinctively he wished to deny it, but it was true so he said nothing.

"Loki, I have not come here to take your sons from you," she promised quietly. "I've come to see how you fair. I promise there are no other motives."

With those words Loki felt himself finally relax. After all he had not learned to lie from his mother. He managed to give her a small smile and loosened the grip he had on Sleipnir's arm so that his hand merely rested there.

"How have you been Loki? How are your sons?" she asked as she continued to stroke his hair.

"Well," he answered quietly and looked back over to the boys "There were complications, lingering effect from their transformation, but the worst of it seems to be over now."

"I'm glad," she said, and he watched as one of her hands came into view and gently stroked Fenris' cheek. "They deserve peace after what was done." She paused for a moment and retracted both her hands. "Why did you never tell me Loki?"

"It was difficult enough to see father's face fill with shame and disappointment with me each time, I could not bear to see it on yours as well."

"You believed that I would be disappointed with you?" she sounded distressed.

"Odin said-"

"Odin was a fool." she cut him off sharply and Loki turned to her in surprise. Though there were still tears, her eyes were fierce. "If he had only accepted your children, brought them home to be raised as sons of Asgard-"

"All would know I had birthed them and discovered I was a Jotun." Loki finished but Frigga shook her head.
"No one would have had to know that. We would have invented a woman, if the court could believe that you birthed a horse then they certainly would believe in some imaginary mother.

Loki found he had nothing to say against that. Frigga sighed, "There is another reason behind my visit," she admitted softly. "When your- when Odin woke, he intended to send warriors to take your children. He was convinced that your boys would eventually become a threat to Asgard."

Loki jerked his head to look directly at her, but Frigga put a calming hand on his shoulder.

"It is alright Loki, that will not happen. I made sure that."

"He is your king," Loki said sharply.

"And you are my son," Frigga replied. "And these boys are my grandsons."

There was a note of finality to her tone, ending the argument there, leaving him with no choice but to believe her. He wanted to ask what she had done, what arguments had she made to convince Odin to spare them, but he knew better than to ask. At the same time he tried not to think of what might have happened if she had known the truth from the beginning.

Loki closed his eyes and swallowed against the lump that had formed in his throat. If he had only told her before, if he hadn't been so worried about her disappointment in him, perhaps things would have been different. If he had told her when Sleipnir was first transformed, she might have made Odin change him back, and Jorgumand and Fenris would never have been taken from him, and Hela...

Loki took a steadying breath and pushed such thoughts aside. It would do no good to dwell on what could have been. Instead he opened his eyes to his mother, "You are certain he will not come?"

She nodded, "Yes, under the condition and neither you, nor any of your children set foot in Asgard. If you do, it would be seen as an act of war and you and your children would be marked as enemies of the realm." she paused to stoke his hair once more. "I am sorry,"

Loki shook his head. "Don't be, it is probably better this way, and there is little left for me in Asgard in any case."

The queen nodded, her lips pressed together and she looked down at him with tear filled eyes, "I will miss you, my sweet boy."

Loki reached over and took her hand in his. "I will miss you as well," he replied quietly.

Frigga smiled and brushed a tear from her cheek. "If you would permit it, I thought I might visit, from time to time?"

"You detest traveling by the Bifrost," Loki said, and it was true. Frigga almost never left Asgard but for the most important diplomatic visits.

She turned her gaze upon his slumbering children. "I think I might find it more manageable given the proper incentive." She squeezed the hand that was still caught in his. "I thought I might visit after your child is born?"

It was stated as a question, and the imploring look on her features was identical to Thor's. "Of course," he said, directing her hand down until it was pressed flat against his stomach. He heard her sigh happily as her own delicate brand of magic reached out and made contact with the small life within him. She wasn't the goddess of marriage and motherhood for nothing. With one touch,
Frigga knew more about his child than all of Shields machines.

"I have brought you a gift," Frigga said quietly, "for my newest grandchild when it arrives."

Loki turned in the bed enough to see a large wide shape by the window, and it took him a moment to recognize what it was.

"Both you and Thor slept in that cradle," Frigga told him, her voice sounding like it was miles away. "I had planned to gift it to either of you, whichever one of you graced me with a grandchild first." Loki glanced at her, an eyebrow raised. Her faced matched his own. "Well, better late than never I suppose." she added.

The room was quiet for some time after that, with Frigga studying the sleeping faces of her grandsons, and Loki allowing her the moment to do so. Finally, his mother shifted on the bed. "I cannot stay much longer, and I must visit your brother before I go. But I will see you soon?"

"Yes, quite soon."

Frigga smiled at him, leaned over to press a kiss to his forehead and was gone. He waited a few moments in the quiet room to make sure she was truly gone before he looked back at his sons.

"You may open your eyes now Sleipnir."

Obediently, his eldest blinked his eyes open and smiled shyly at him.

"It is a shame you did not alert her when you awoke, she would have been happy to have met you," Loki said quietly, shifting his arms around as Fenris squirmed a little in his sleep.

"She said she would be coming back," Sleipnir argued, sitting up in bed to look at the large wooden cradle that hadn't been there when he'd gone to bed. "Is she really our Grandmother?"

Loki smiled, "Yes, she is. Sleipnir, stay in bed, you may look at it in the morning."

Sleipnir paused, one foot already on the floor, eager to examine the gift that had been left. "But I'm awake now."

"Sleipnir," Loki said in a tone that all his sons knew to obey. Sure enough, Sleipnir sighed and maneuvered back under the covers. "How about if I tell you a story, one that your grandmother used to tell me?"

Sleipnir perked up a bit at that, and turned over to face him. Loki began the tale, his son listening avidly until about halfway through when his eyelids began to droop. He continued on in the telling after Sleipnir's breathing evened out.
Chapter 18

In his lifetime, Loki had fought in countless battles, against enemies of all kinds. He had faced impossible odds, and escaped certain death. Even in the height of his madness, never did he feel bone-numbing fear as he did now. The sight before him should not have affected him so, but no matter how much he told himself that there was no threat, he could not stop his palms from becoming slick with sweat, or stop his eyes from darting to each movement searching for a threat that would surely come.

Before him lay a construction of coloured tubes, blocks and bars on which children swarmed over in the middle of the sunny day. He stood before it, weaponless, magic-less, completely without any means to defend himself and his three children that stood with him.

They were not alone of course; this whole blasted idea had been Rogers' after all. The blond American icon stood to his right, along with Thor and Banner. They were all dressed in civilian clothes, himself included, the bulk of the ill-fitting jacket he wore disguised his pregnancy.

Fenris had an arm wrapped around his leg currently, and seemed to be feeling as anxious as Loki did about the whole thing. His brothers on the other hand, were watching the playground in front of them with a kind of hunger in their eyes and Loki had to concede that Rogers had something of a point. Now that Frigga had declared that Odin would not be coming for any of Loki's children, the state of house arrest he was under no longer mattered.

"It's not healthy for them," Steve had argued. "being cooped up all the time. They need some fresh air, at least for a little bit."

"Then I shall open a window," Loki had replied sourly. He knew that his sons were becoming agitated from their restrictions, and he never wanted to deny his children anything, but he was powerless and far too vulnerable.

But Thor had offered to come along as protection (and Loki still chafed at the idea that he needed it) and then Rogers and Banner had added their own offers.

"It's not like we're going to take them to a battle zone, or even a high profile area Loki. It's just a park, a normal park with normal kids."

Eventually he had agreed, despite his misgivings, and once the day trip was approved by higher authorities, they were delivered to a small park on the edge of the city via non-descript cars.

"You ok Loki?" he heard Rogers ask and he looked away from the playground for a moment to meet the man's eyes. It was almost funny, the mortal was worried for Loki when the truth was that he should be more concerned for himself. If something happened and he lost one of his sons now, after everything, he would burn the worlds. So he didn't answer, and instead went back to watching the playground.

Then Bruce stepped forward and knelted down in front of the boys. "Hey, do you guys want to go play with the other kids?" he asked kindly.
Both Sleipnir and Jorgumand turned back to Loki, a question clear on their faces and against his better judgment he nodded jerkily. Instantly huge smiles bloomed on their faces and when they turned back to Bruce they voiced the affirmative excitedly.

"Alright, but before you go there's some rules ok? See that fence over there?" he pointed, "That marks the edge of the park, and you guys have to stay inside that line alright? If any of you step outside of that line we all have to leave right away and we won't come back. So this is very important ok?" The boys nodded solemnly. "Second thing is if you hear any of us call you, you come. Right away, kay?" Again the boys nodded. "Alright, last rule. You can't tell anyone that you live with the Avengers, if anyone asks you, you tell them you live with your Dad."

"But why?" Jorgumand asked.

"Because it's part of the game," Bruce said casually, and Loki was reminded of why he liked the small man so much. The boys nodded eagerly and Bruce gave them one last summary. "Alright, stay in the park, come when you hear your name being called and don't tell anyone where you live. Got it?"

"Yes!" the boys agreed.

"Alright, go ahead, play nice."

At those words, Sleipnir and Jorgumand took off running for the playground. Bruce stood up and gave him a sympathetic smile. "They'll be alright," he said reassuringly. Loki gave the man a small nod, and glanced down at his remaining son who was watching the playground with the sort of look that one might give a snake pit. Well at least that was one less son he would have to worry about. He bent over to pick the boy up, kissing his cheek as he did so.

"Come Fenris, let's go find a place to sit and watch your brothers."

Over the next hour Loki watched from a park bench as his two older sons ran about happily with the mortal children. Thor and Steve tried at one point to tempt Fenris into playing in the sandbox that was nearby, but the little boy seemed disinclined to play in the dirt. Instead he sat content in the grass at Loki's feet, playing with his toys that had been brought along.

Sometime later, it crossed Loki's mind that if he were ever to speak the cliché phrase 'I told you so', now would be the appropriate moment. The playground was in ruins, twisted spikes of ripped metal tubes reaching out from the settling dust and smoke. The children that played on it were long gone, taken to safety by their parents. As far as he could see there were no casualties, for which he was thankful. Even in the height of his villainous career he would never have wished harm upon a child.

When the small army of Moloids first swarmed from the sewer grates, Steve was the first to notice and called out for the boys. Sleipnir and Jorgumand, who were in the middle of a game that might have been tag, stopped what they were doing and ran for the closest Avenger.Unfortunately that was Bruce, who was already mid-transformation by the time the boys reached him. More confused than frightened, they changed direction just as the Hulk leaped over their heads and into the fray. Thor was with them instantly, and brought them to Loki before joining his comrades in battle.

The problem with this was that there was no cover, nothing to hide behind for protection as debris flew through the air. The Hulk was using chunks of the playground equipment as weapons, and the Moloids were fighting with an assortment of random weapons, from knives and axe's to maces made out of broken glass. All of this was flying through the air and Loki could not get out of the way fast enough.
So when he saw the piece of metal come flying at them, Loki turned and covered his sons as best he could and waited for the shrapnel to pierce his upper back. What he felt was a light tap, and saw the metal shard drop harmlessly to the grass. Dumbfounded, Loki looked from the metal on the ground, to the battle that waged meters away, and then to his sons. Jorgumand and Fenris were watching the fight with wide eyes, but it was Sleipnir who drew Loki's attention. His eyes were dulled, and he held onto Fenris' hand with his left, his right was holding on to Loki's pant leg, and now that he was paying attention he could feel the current of magic connecting them. He recognized the shielding spell for what it was and a great swell of pride filled him. It was a simple spell, not strong enough to defend against a sword or axe, but rubble and shrapnel would bounce right off them.

Making sure that all four of them kept the physical contact needed for the spell to continue, Loki moved them further from the fight, and managed to find meager cover behind a large old tree.

"That's my good son," Loki murmured into Sleipnir's ear as he pulled the boy into his lap. Fenris squeezed in beside his brother, looking no worse for wear, and Jorgumand kept peeking around the side of the tree to report on the battle.

The fight did not last much longer, the Moloids were hardly formidable enemies, their only real strength was in their sheer numbers. Soon enough the last little yellow creature was scuttling back into the sewers just as the fleet of police and Shield vehicles were pulling up.

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"You know, you have the best poker face I've ever seen," Steve said from beside him as Loki stood off to the side and observed the aftermath of the battle. "I can't tell if you're upset or angry or amused..." the super soldier broke off with a shake to his head.

Loki didn't bother to answer, and instead kept his eyes on the sight before him. When the sirens and soldiers had appeared, the Hulk had become agitated, ready for more of a fight. But then all of a sudden, Jorgumand, who had seen that the battle was over, ran over before Loki could grab him. Any fear Loki had felt was apparently unfounded, as the large green behemoth did not lash out but bent low to observe the small child that bounced around him talking excitedly.

Now as the agents in black suits kept the public at bay and started the process of closing off the scene, Loki watched as his three sons climbed on the Hulk in lieu of a proper jungle gym. Even Fenris seemed to recognize that there was someone familiar under all that muscle and sat happily on the creatures shoulder as Jorgumand swung from an arm.

Loki supposed he couldn't complain, his sons were getting all the fresh air and exercise they needed, all under the watch of the most power being on the planet. And they were happy, what more could he ask for really?

Chapter End Notes

For those who don't read the comics, Moloids are a population of yellow creatures that live underground and are ruled by the Mole Man (no seriously, true story) If you are curious, go to google, type in Moloids marvel, and search away! Also, go to your comic book store and get all the issues of avenging spiderman cause hong there be the rofls.
Chapter 19

If there was one thing Loki missed about Asgard, (besides his mother of course), it was the libraries. Not just the one, though the palace library was the largest, Asgard had several scattered over the different parts of the city. Loki probably knew the halls of those buildings better than those of the palace itself. After his fall, and subsequently loosing his right to freely peruse the libraries of Asgard, Loki had started his own collection, and after only two years he had to give himself credit, he had managed to amass quite a collection. Books, and scrolls from all nine realms, covering any kind of subject that caught his eye, though most of them were of magic. A large portion of it had been kept close at hand, in his hideout. Now they were likely locked up in a Shield warehouse somewhere.

Well, not all of them exactly. During his time in the Avengers tower, Loki had been called for his 'magical expertise'. The first few times it had been to look at something after the fact, the villain had already been defeated and Shield only wanted Loki to look at a weapon or artifact that had been found on their person. Mostly just so he could inform them what it was and what it could do. Sometimes it was a little more difficult, and he had to watch recordings of magical attacks by individuals that hadn't been caught yet. In these cases it was Loki's job to tell Shield how to best combat each foe and put a stop to their attacks.

For the most part Loki found it rather easy to answer their questions. For one thing, he had never held any sort of loyalty to his fellow villains, and he knew without a doubt that any of them would have sold him out just as fast as he did them. For another, it was easy to help Shield because Midgard sorcery was hardly that advanced, and those that used it all seemed to use it in the same way. It was easy to pick out the patterns in an attack, and then tell Shield exactly how and when they should strike back. Sometimes though, a mortal would surprise him, either by using Midgardian magic in a very unique and creative way, or by somehow getting a hold of a different kind of magic altogether. These cases were few and far between, but Loki found himself enjoying it when he came across one. It was a puzzle, something for him to work out.

And usually in these cases he could not rely solely on his own knowledge, and needed to research. In the first few occasions this happened, he would have had to describe the books he needed in exact detail, and they would be brought to him from wherever they were being held. In recent weeks though, a new way of acquiring his books was presented to him. Bruce had given him a laptop, and on it was a program that had a catalogue of all of his books, including quite a few he'd forgotten he'd had. Now whenever he needed one of his books, he only had to scan through the digital library to find the picture of the book he required.

Of course, in the beginning when he was presented with any of his old books, Shield agents would watch him every second it was in his hands. He couldn't blame them really. Knowledge was his weapon as much as Mjölnir was Thor's. But over time their security grew lax, until he could be left alone for hours with his books, and no one paid him any mind. He wasn't sure if it was because they were lazy, or if they were suddenly beginning to trust him, but Loki had taken the opportunity to sneak in a few extra books for his own personal projects. As previously mentioned, there was more than one kind if magic, and one did not have to be a sorcerer (or have active use of their magic) to use Runes.

It was a secret, what he ended up doing. He was sure that if Shield knew that he was using any type of magic, they would likely take away what leniency he'd been given. Unfortunately, he hadn't
been as careful as he'd thought.

He had been alone with his children in the common room one morning when Bruce had entered. The boys' attention was glued to the television, and they didn't even glance away when Banner took a seat next to Loki. The man had a pad of paper in hand, which he then wordlessly handed over to Loki. On it was a small circle of runes, a set that Loki recognized immediately though he made sure not to show it in his face. Instead he raised an eyebrow in question.

"You wanna tell me what this is?" the scientist asked, his face carefully blank.

"They appear to be runes," Loki answered simply.

"Yes, I was hoping you could explain why there are a set of these drawn into every corner of my lab."

Loki did not react visibly, but inside he was shocked that the man had found them at all. He had been so careful, placing the runes behind heavy machines and well out of sight.

"Why would you assume I would know anything about it?"

"Well, probably because out of everyone who has access to my labs, you are the only one you knows anything about magic." He held up the pad so that the runes were facing Loki. "Why did you do it?"

Loki's mind worked furiously to come up with a reason, at least one other than the truth.

Bruce spoke up before he could think of one though. "And for the record, yes, I do know what they are for. I had a little video chat with Doc Strange."

Well damn. That made coming up with a valid lie that much harder. Still, he was the liesmith for a reason, and every believable lie has a shred of truth in it.

"With the amount of time my sons spend in there with you, did you think I wouldn't take measures to protect them?" he asked evenly.

Bruce just stared at him before leaning back in his seat. "So you drew runes into the walls of my lab to 'promote calmness', because you were worried I might hulk out on your kids?" he nodded slightly to himself, "Alright I think I could buy that, if it weren't for the rest of the runes that are supposed to help thought productivity. How's that supposed to help your kids?"

Loki dropped his eyes, feeling trapped.

"Loki," Bruce called lightly, "We're friends, right?"

Again, Loki couldn't find anything to say to that.

He heard Bruce sigh. "Look, it's ok for friends to do favors for each other. Favors like doing what you can to keep me calm and making it easier to do my research. I'm actually really thankful you did, I've noticed the difference since you put them up." There was a pause in which neither of them said anything, but then Bruce said in a voice a little louder than before, "Loki, look at me."

He did, and the scientist was watching him with an earnest expression.

"Thank you Loki."

There hadn't been any more words after that, and Bruce didn't bring up the subject again. Loki
knew that the mortal had seen the others though, the protective runes he had carefully placed in strategic places all over the tower.

They did not make the tower impenetrable or anything, they simply protected against basic threats, though one custom set of runes located near the main entrance did stop shape shifters from entering the building under disguise. That had been an interesting afternoon...

Loki shook his head, and focused on the tome in front of him. Doom was one of the mortals that was continually surprising him with his forays into magic. Loki knew that most of the mans knowledge came from Morgan le Fae, and he was certain the Latvian was working with at least three spell books that Loki himself had read before. The problem was that Doom had a bad habit of mixing magic with Midgard science.

Now Loki had once heard Thor talking to his mortal woman, telling her that their science was practically Asgardian magic, and it was all he could do at the time not to laugh outright.

It was not exactly as simple as that. In fact, magic and science were so different that mixing the two was particularly dangerous. And yet Doom was doing it somehow, and he found it an interesting. Not that Loki would voice his opinions as such, as he was sure Shield was rather less impressed by the Doctors inventive work.

As a point of fact, Loki was careful to keep any of his personal opinions of Midgard's villains to himself. The conversations they inspired were something he would prefer to avoid if he could, with the exception of one memorable occasion when he had been overheard discussing Doom's methods with Banner by Stark. The bearded mortal had then commented on how well Loki seemed to know the Latvirian villain, and in a very roundabout way, jokingly insinuated that perhaps Doom was the father to Loki's unborn child.

It was not meant as a jibe, Loki was sure when he saw Starks eyes widen when he realized what he'd said. But the words had been spoken, and those present in the room waited to see Loki's reaction. Bruce pressed his lips together, saying nothing but Loki could sense the disapproval the man felt for his friend's careless statement. Everyone else just seemed torn between waiting to see if Loki would tear into Tony, or admit the truth of the statement.

The paternity to his child was not a new topic at all, but Loki maintained that it was none of Shield's business and continued to tell them so when asked. Unfortunately, it would seem that by not revealing the name of the father, that left room for people to make their own assumptions. A quick glance at Thor informed him that his foster brother feared that Stark was right, but was reluctant to ask outright.

Loki decided then to deal with the situation, if they were going to gossip about him, he would give them something worth gossiping about. Bruce, having correctly interpreted his intentions, demonstrated exactly why Loki liked the man so much.

"I really don't think that was very appropriate," the scientist admonished, adjusting his glasses on his face as he did so. "Especially from you."

The second half of his statement had it's desired effect, directing everyone's attention onto Bruce which gave Loki a moment to school his expression for what was coming next. Everyone else was looking at Bruce and likely wondering why Tony would be expected to do anything but ask inappropriate questions.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tony predictably asked and Loki had to admire Bruce's acting ability.
The scientist looked uncomfortable for a moment, glancing around at all the eyes that were turned to him as though just now realizing that he wasn't alone. "Well... considering that... I mean, I understand if you..." Bruce stopped all of a sudden and stared at Tony as though he had just realized something. He then faced Loki who by this point had pulled a sullen expression over his face.

"Haven't you told him yet?" Bruce asked, a slightly incredulous tone to his voice.

Loki averted his eyes and frowned. "I did not agree that I would in the first place," he admitted and Bruce frowned at him. Everyone else just looked lost.

"Uh, hey? What's going on?" Clint asked from his perch on the couch.

"Loki," Bruce said forcefully, completely ignoring everyone else. "Come on, you have to."

"Has to what?" Stark asked but was ignored.

Loki and Bruce ignored them all; instead they were staring each other down. Finally, without breaking eye contact with Bruce, Loki addressed Stark.

"He is referring to the fact that you are the father," he admitted, and only when he heard Tony's laugh did he look away from Bruce. "Do you find this amusing?"

Stark's grin turned patronizing, "Yeah, though I don't know what's more funny, the idea of me sleeping with you, or that you think I would ever fall for that."

"Tony," Bruce said gently, as though saying it quietly would soften the blow, "He's not lying, I did the blood test myself. Several times."

Stark remained unmoved, "Yeah, that's great, except that I never slept with him."

"Is that so?" Loki asked, a dangerous smile forming on his face.

"Yeah, I think I'd remember that." Tony was all confidence.

Loki savored his next words, each syllable falling from his lips like poisoned honey. "You don't remember the Bellagio?" he asked, and to his great pleasure Stark's grin froze on his face. "Or the green dress? I suppose it might have been hard to recognize me in that borrowed form, but surely you remember what happened after?"

Everyone was looking at Tony now, who looked more and more like a mouse that had been cornered by a viper. "This isn't funny."

"It wasn't intended to be so," Loki snapped, pushing himself out of his chair and striding from the room, Bruce following shortly after.

They only just managed to make it back to Bruce's lab before they both broke down in laughter. Tony's face had been perfect, just spectacular. Completely worth all the research he'd put into a conversation that might never have come up.

Tony Stark was most certainly not the father, but it was sinfully fun to make him believe he was. The fact of the matter was, Bruce was the only one who knew who the true father was. Loki had willingly told the man one afternoon in the lab and Bruce had just nodded. Loki felt it couldn't hurt telling him really, the mortal already knew of the father's to the rest of his children, what was one more?
"It's almost a little anti-climatic," Banner commented afterwards. "I mean Sleipnir's dad has that whole wall story, Jorgumand's is some kind of nobleman, same with Fenris', Hela's dad is an elf, and this new baby's, you what, met him at a bar?"

That discussion led into who else would have made a more interesting story if they had been the father, which then evolved into who would be the most scandalous. This of course is how they both reached the agreement that Tony Stark would make the largest scandal of them all. After that it didn't take long to go from Bruce imagining what Tony's reaction would be like to actually planning a to find way to get the man to believe it.

The real trick was finding information on a conquest of Stark's that would have had to have taken place around the time of possible conception. Thankfully everything seemed to be recorded on this planet, especially if you were as famous as Stark was. After a suitable subject was found, all that was left to do was wait for the opportune moment. Stark had been pestering him for months, nothing worthy of murder (at least not the eyes of Shield), but enough to set Loki on edge and itch for retaliation. Giving the mortal a small heart attack at the idea of impending fatherhood would have to suffice until Loki got his magic back. Bruce had played his part perfectly, and Loki had to concede that he really couldn't have pulled it off without his help.

Loki was only just wiping the tears from his eyes when Miss Potts entered, the clicking of her heels the only warning they had to sober their expressions before she saw them.

"May I please see the results to the paternity tests you did Dr. Banner?" she asked, her tone already exasperated.

Bruce gave her his best shy smile, ready to give up the game early, but Loki saw and opportunity and leaped on it.

"If I vow that upon the return of my magic to show you exactly how Stark reacted, would you consider... waiting a short while longer before telling him there are no blood tests?"

Miss. Potts fixed him with a level stare, one that might have been intimidating if it weren't for the spark of interest in her eye. Loki held her gaze, already certain of her answer.

Suddenly, a smile appeared on the woman's face. "That depends, just how spectacular was it?"

"It was marvelous." Loki assured her and her evil little grin brightened.

Addressing Banner this time, her tone switched back to a much more professional one. "Thank you very much for your help Dr. Banner, I completely understand that you have a lot of work that Shield has keeping you busy. Just send those tests my way when you get the chance." And with that she was gone, the clicking of her heels tapping down the hall.

"You should sell cars." Bruce commented after she left. Loki only raised an eyebrow to that and Banner waved him off. "Never mind. So now what? All of my current projects are processing, and I'm pretty sure if we head back upstairs Tony will pounce on us. Peter's going to be watching the boys for another hour or so, any idea what we should do in the meantime?"

"There was something I was hoping to have your assistance on," Loki said and Bruce looked at him, already interested.

The project Loki proposed didn't take too long to do really, not after they figured out Sleipnir's birthday. Soon, he and Bruce had cross-referenced seasons and centuries until they had an approximate day for each of his sons birthdays, right down to the Midgardian month and date.
Honestly, he felt a little bad that he hadn't thought of it before, but Bruce had placated him by reasoning that he'd had a busy couple of months. And besides, they hadn't missed any birthdays either. Sleipnir's would fall about a month after the birth of the baby, and Fenris and Jorgumand's wouldn't be until the new year.

The boys were delighted when he told them, and were soon planning the party that Peter had told them would have to take place. Soon it became an intense study for the two older boys, discovering exactly what was expected at a Midgardian birthday party. A list of invitee's was made, with the Avengers names written out in crayon. Frigga's name was added as well after Sleipnir had asked him if she would like to come.

"I'm certain she would be delighted Sleipnir. She will be visiting after the baby is born, I'm sure you can give her an invitation then."

Also added to the list were his sons new young friends, the two children of the Fantastic Four.

He still wasn't sure who was behind the whole idea, though he was putting his bets on Mrs Storm herself. All he knew was that one day after the Avengers had returned from a joint mission with the other New York based team, plans had been made for something called a playdate between his children and theirs.

That was not what it was called officially of course. The excuse was that Reed Richards was to work on a joint project with Banner and Stark, the rest of his team had just happened to come along, their children as well.

Franklin and Valeria were about the same age as his older two sons. The children were hesitant around each other for a bit, his own sons more unsure than anything. It was with a note of sadness that Loki realized that this would be the first time his children were presented with the opportunity to make friends without a cover story.

Eventually curiosity won out in the end, and the children began peppering each other with questions. Most of them are answered right away, but some the children turned to their respective parents for. Like when his sons asked why their Hulk was orange, and why he never seemed to turn back, or when Valeria asked why the boys called their father 'Mama'? And then suddenly, they were friends, and Sleipnir and Jorgumand were dragging the Ritchards children around, showing off their home and belongings proudly.

The only downside to the whole day was that in addition to making new friends, his sons had also decided that Ben Grimm, aka The Thing, was 'The coolest superhero ever'. Not only did this show off their growing modern vernacular, but they also expressed the need to emulate their new hero in every way they could, up to and including turning all of their clothes the same garish colour of orange. Not to mention that Thor was rather put out that the boys had chosen another hero to idolize.

Thankfully, their infatuation died down to more manageable levels after a week, and the boys set their clothes back to rights eventually. Now all Loki had to deal with was the growing collection of Fantastic Four paraphernalia that was taking over the toy box, and the occasion cry of "It's clobberin time!" whenever the boys deemed appropriate.

At the moment his sons were playing in one of the mat covered sparing rooms with Steve, expending as much of their considerable energy as possible. Now that they were for the most part sleeping through the night, the boys' energy levels had taken a notable rise, and everyday Loki was tasked with finding outlets for that energy before the boys began bouncing off the walls. It didn't help that now at 7 months pregnant, Loki was beginning to find it difficult to move around and was
almost constantly tired. It was for the sake of his sons that he accepted help when offered.

So while the boys were off with different Avengers, Loki used his free time to go through his spell books and set about making plans for when he got his magic back and could properly teach the art to his sons. Sleipnir and Jorgumand already had some ability with magic, but most of it was for survival, ways to go about without being noticed and basic defense. It was a necessary skill from their previous lives, but now he could teach them so much more. He was confident that they would learn quickly as well, all three of them were already quite powerful. Even Fenris, whom Loki had yet to give any proper lessons to, had already shown signs of a talent for shape shifting. So far no one else had noticed, but then it was excusable since all the child had done was change the colour of his eyes from pale green to a light blue. Loki imagined people might pay more attention when Fenris started to change other more obvious features.

Suddenly there was a knock at his door, and Loki placed a scrap of paper to mark his place in his book before getting up and answering it. Steve stood on the other side, his face a mix of worry and bemusement with Jorgumand and Sleipnir standing at his sides. Fenris' feet could be seen behind Sleipnir and that was all. Loki raised his brows in question and Steve automatically started to speak.

"We were in the workout room playing hide and seek, and when we found Fenris, he looked like this," Steve explained bluntly and Sleipnir stepped aside dutifully to reveal Fenris. A blonde Fenris, with short hair that greatly resembled a certain super soldier. Fenris looked up at him with a blank look that Loki found himself mirroring. Glancing back at Steve, Loki gave the man a look that clearly said 'continue your explanation.'

"I just want to make sure that- that this was nor- uh... that he was ok?"

Loki glanced back down at his youngest son again and gave him a smile. "Of course he is," he stated, holding his arms open for Fenris who readily allowed himself to be lifted up into an embrace. "Though I don't understand why you seem so upset, I thought that imitation is considered the sincerest form of flattery."

Steve let out a small laugh, "I guess I was just worried you'd think I'd dropped him in a puddle of peroxide or something."

"What is peroxide?" Jorgumand asked.

"It is a substance mortals put in their hair to change its colour," Loki explained as Sleipnir slipped past him, making a beeline for his Lego. "Sleipnir, aren't you forgetting something?"

His eldest jumped back up and ran to the door. "Thank you very much for playing with us Steve!"

"Yes, Thank you!" Jorgumand added much more enthusiastically before following Sleipnir back to the toys.

"I hope they weren't any trouble," Loki said once it was just him, Fenris and Steve at the doorway.

"Of course not, I was only a little freaked out by Fenris because I wasn't sure if something like that was supposed to happen. The boys told me it was ok, but I just wanted to make sure. Changing hair colour isn't something I normally expect when babysitting," the soldier shook his head. "They sure are full of surprises."

Loki smirked at that. "Captain, you have no idea."
Chapter 20

Loki leaned back into the pillows arranged behind him with a contented sigh. The electrical heating pad that was situated at his lower back was spreading its glorious warmth perfectly, easing all the muscles that suffered. Shifting a bit to find the most comfortable position, Loki bent his knees and smiled as Fenris moved around him.

His youngest son was currently occupied by one of his new toys, a soft wooden train. Fenris had become fascinated by toys with wheels lately, or anything that had parts that he could move around really. The train set had been Bruce's idea, and like the Lego for Sleipnir it was a perfect fit. Now wooden train track pieces wound around on the floor. Sleipnir had taken to building bridges and obstacles for the track with his Lego, and Jorgumand helped Fenris put together the tracks in complicated patterns, but Fenris' favorite part was the engine with its big plastic wheels. He was currently running it over the back of the sofa, down the cushions, and then up Loki's foot.

Loki smiled as he watched Fenris drive the toy up one of his legs to the bend of his knee, and then down the other side. The toy moved easily over the swell of his stomach, and Fenris climbed around him to continue the train's path. The wooden toy had just reached Loki's chin when they heard a crash from the second bedroom. The train was derailed when Loki turned his head to look in the direction of the noise but Fenris was undeterred and drove it up the side of his head instead.

The bedroom door opened a crack and Jorgumand poked his head through.

"We're ok," he declared and tried to go for a reassuring smile when Loki raised an eyebrow at him. Jorgumand ducked back into the bedroom, shutting the door behind him and Loki turned back to his youngest son.

"What are your brothers up too?" he asked, but Fenris was more interested in his train than answering.

Loki shook his head and watched Fenris maneuver the toy back towards the other end of the sofa, shifting his body so that the boy wouldn't accidentally step on his stomach as he went. Once Fenris was situated down by his feet again, Loki readjusted the pillows behind him and straightened out his shirt. He had to admit, Miss Potts had a talent when it came to finding him clothes. He had finally outgrown most of the shirts that he had originally been given, leaving only oversized sweaters that did not flatter him at all. This had been expected, in his previous pregnancies, he would have been deep into hiding by this point and would have taken to wearing loose fitting robes. This time around, he'd been surprised at the arrival of several new articles that were delivered to him. The bags they came in indicated that they were from a maternity store, and at first he'd thought it was a joke, likely from Stark, and that it was being suggested that he wear women's clothes.

He supposed they were technically made for women, but the tops and sweaters that had been inside the bags at least looked unisex. Made up mostly of plain colours, the clothes were cut especially to have give around his stomach. There were even several pairs of pants that came with elasticized waistbands while still looking like his usual trousers.

His thoughts were disrupted when a knock sounded at the door. Loki briefly considered getting up to answer it, but in the end he decided that moving away from the blessed heating pad for any small amount of time would not be worth it. Instead he gave the call to enter, and waited.

The door opened and it was Thor who walked through, dressed in his Midgardian clothes.
"Hello brother," Thor greeted, his eyes taking in his position on the sofa before moving to Fenris who had squeezed behind the bend of Loki's legs.

"Thor, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he asked without really looking. Instead he tilted his head to see Fenris watching him. He gave the boy a smile which was returned and Fenris went back to playing with the train in his hands.

"I didn't realize that I needed a reason to visit," Thor answered as he shut the door and walked further into the room.

"Well, forgive me if I don't stand to greet you properly, I don't plan to move from this spot until I absolutely have to." he wiggled a little in place to emphasize his point.

Thor's brows drew together in concern. "Is everything alright? Are you well?"

"Well enough," he answered, and sighed when Thor did not look convinced. "Carrying a child does tend to wreak havoc on one's body, particularly my back. A heating pad was suggested to me; I was told that it soothes tense muscles and it's working. Ergo, I am never getting off of it."

Understanding lit Thor's face, followed by a faint blush that always seemed to follow any mention of his pregnant state. "Ah, I was unaware that- I didn't realize that being... with child would be so difficult."

Loki gave a toothy smile. "It is nothing compared to the actual birth, I assure you." he paused to enjoy the look that crossed over Thor's face before continuing. "Although I must admit, I am looking forward to attempting this delivery with the assistance of Midgardian drugs."

"Drugs?" Thor questioned weakly, as though he wasn't sure he wanted to hear the answer.

"Yes, from what I hear an epidural is so much more better that a strip of leather between your teeth." he laughed internally as he watched Thor squirm a little at that information and all it entailed. But he was being cruel and he knew it. Deciding to end any further teasing, Loki put on a sympathetic face. "I've made you uncomfortable."

Thor shook his head quickly. "No, it is alright, I- I am glad that the healers here are able to help you."

Loki considered the man standing in the middle of the room before coming to a decision. "Will you do me a favor Thor?"

Thor perked up immediately at the question. "Anything brother."

Loki gestured to the kitchen. "Would you bring me something from one of the cupboards?" Thor nodded, though he seemed confused at the menial request. Loki directed him to the high cupboards above the fridge, and asked that he bring him the large white envelope that had the most recent date on it. Once Thor was out of immediate sight, Fenris crawled under the bend of Loki's legs, off the side of the sofa and ducked under the coffee table.

Thor returned with the envelope in hand, and passed it to Loki with a small smile. Loki took it, and pulled the sheaf of papers that were inside. Finding the one he was looking for, he set the rest aside and looked at the black and white image before offering it to Thor.

"Midgardian technology has other uses as well, for example, by using a machine that uses a technique similar to echolocation, they can determine the shape of the child before it is born."
Thor looked at the paper in his hand, and then back at Loki with a lost expression.

Loki sighed. "It is a picture of my child Thor."

That seemed to generate more of a reaction, as Thor's eyebrows lifted and he looked back at the picture with a more intense focus. Loki could see the exact moment that Thor recognized the shape of the baby when a wide grin split his face.

"Loki, this is amazing! This is your child!"

Loki couldn't help but smile back at Thor's enthusiasm.

Once Thor had studied the image for several long moments, he passed the paper back with a warm smile fixed on his face. "It is beautiful brother."

Loki took the photo and looked over it again. "Yes, she is."

The room was silent for a moment as Thor registered what he had said before slowly sitting down on the edge of the sofa by Loki's feet.

"It is to be a girl?" he asked hesitantly.

Loki smiled to himself as he put the photo back in the envelope and nodded. "Sleipnir will be disappointed. He was so hoping to have another brother."

Thor chuckled and placed a warm hand on his knee, squeezing gently in place of the hug he most likely wanted to give. Loki placed the envelope on the coffee table, and glanced as Fenris who had found one of the other train cars and was puttering around under the table happily.

"Have you thought what you might name her?" Thor asked suddenly and Loki looked back at his foster brother. The man had a strange expression on, and it took a moment for Loki to read it correctly.

"Why, did you have a suggestion?"

Thor seemed to hesitate, and Loki braced himself. "Well, in Asgard, there have been children, girls as well, that were named after me." by the end of his short, fractured proposal, Thor was smiling hopefully.

Loki felt like his mouth might be open but he couldn't be bothered to shut it. "You- how would that..." he couldn't even seem to finish his question, but Thor must have figured out what he was trying to ask.

"It would be Thora, for a girl,"

Loki had to close his eyes and take a deep breath to stop himself from verbally attacking the poor blonde imbecile. "You must be mad," was all he said in the end.

"It would be considered a great honor to be given that name," Thor insisted.

"It would be abuse." Loki countered as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

Thor deflated, "You won't even consider it?" he sounded hurt.

"Thor," Loki said, putting his hand down on his stomach and meeting Thor's eyes. "There are many things I would be willing to do to show my gratitude for returning my children to me, and for
sheltering us, but naming my daughter Thora is not one of those things."

For a moment Loki thought Thor might actually be upset with him, but then his lips pulled into a grin. "It was worth a try anyways."

Loki let out an un-amused "Hmmm" and shifted again on the pillows. Thor took this as a chance to look around, his eyes moving over the toys littered in the one corner between the bedrooms.

"Where are the other two?" Thor asked suddenly, having only just noticed Sleipnir's and Jorgumand's absence.

"They are in the other bedroom, working on a secret project" Loki explained. Thor looked at him, obviously needing more of an explanation. "That is what they told me yesterday morning. They asked for privacy as well, apparently what they are working in is a surprise." Loki had promised to stay out of the second bedroom, mostly because he was just happy that the boys were playing in the room at all. Sleipnir had at one point asked about the purpose of the empty room, and had been visibly upset to learn that it was to be their bedroom eventually. Of course this had been during the period of time when all three of his children had suffered from constant nightmares. None of them even wanted to think of the possibility of sleeping alone. Since then, the second room had been avoided altogether, as though the boys thought that if they were even seen near it Loki would make them sleep there.

Loki glanced at Thor, but the man was staring at the door to the second bedroom with a strange expression. "If you would like to see them, go knock. I'm sure they will come out if they know you are visiting."

There was a flash of something across Thor's face, and Loki frowned when Thor shook his head. "No, I will leave them to their games."

Even if he had not seen the spasm of emotion on Thor's face, Loki could not have missed the depressed tone to his voice. "What is it?" he asked, studying Thor's face carefully.

The thunderer winced, "It is nothing,"

Loki was unconvinced, and continued to glare at his foster brother.

Thor sighed in defeat, "It is just... I do not think they would come out. If they knew I was here I mean."

Loki blinked in confusion. "Why wouldn't they?" he asked, but Thor did not answer. "Has it escaped your notice that they can not get enough of others attention? They adore visitors."

"They do not like me." Thor said quietly, his eyes fixed on the carpet.

"What are you talking about?"

Thor sighed, looking very sad. "I have seen how they enjoy others company, and it makes me happy to see how they are able to so openly trust after what father did to them, but they do not- Loki, whenever I am alone with them the leave, they hide from me."

"Then stop looking for them." Loki answered with a wave of his hand. "They are playing hide and seek with you Thor, and you are playing along by looking for them. It is a game. If you do not seek them out then they will stop hiding. It is a simple as that."

Thor did not seem convinced. "But why is it only me they hide from?"
"I suppose it is because you are their uncle and they think they can play such games with you. If it really bothers you so much may I suggest telling them. Perhaps you can think of another game to play." Loki offered with another careless wave of his hand. When he looked up again he nearly burst into laughter at the look on Thor's face.

Thor looked like he'd been sucker punched with his own hammer.

"You- do they know that I am their uncle?"

"That is what I just said, isn't it?" Loki asked redundantly.

Thor sat back against the sofa looking shocked, but it wasn't long before a happy smile appeared. "Thank you brother, next time I will talk to them about their hiding."

Loki nodded, glad that Thor wasn't going to have an emotional outburst over being named uncle despite how Loki had been denying their brotherhood for years. He couldn't really explain it himself why he told the boys who Thor was. It had rather just slipped out. After Thor had come and shared dinner with them after he had failed to retrieve Hela, the boys had asked more about the strange man. He'd ended up telling them that he had been raised with Thor as brothers. It was Sleipnir who had asked if that made Thor their uncle, and Loki didn't deny it. He supposed he could claim later that he simply wanted to give his sons the sense of family, or even just blame it on hormones.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a loud thump, and the coffee table giving a small jerk. Seconds later the cause of the sound became clear when Fenris began to whimper. Apparently his youngest had forgotten there was a table above him and had knocked his head.

But before Loki could do anything about it, Thor had stood up suddenly and was lifting the table off the ground, uncaring of the books and papers that were on it. Fenris was so startled by his cover disappearing that his cries cut off as he stared up at Thor.

Loki sighed and waited. Sure enough, Fenris' face screwed up and he dashed from his place on the floor, his trains forgotten, and ran to climb into Loki's arms. Thor's face fell but Loki was too busy already comforting Fenris to bother with him.

The little boy squirmed until he was tucked between the back of the sofa and Loki's side, and the boy kept his eyes fixed on the large man putting coffee table to rights. His thumb wasn't in his mouth yet, which was a good sign that Fenris wasn't truly that upset, only startled.

"Is he alright?" Thor asked quietly.

"It was only a bump on the head Thor," Loki said with more patience than he felt as he stroked the little boy's hair.

Thor sighed and looked down at Fenris with sad eyes. "The older boys may only be playing games with me, but you can't deny that Fenis seems to be honestly afraid of me."

Loki rolled his eyes. "And you can not deny that he is no more skittish around you than he is anyone else who is not his blood."

Thor hesitated before answering, "He does not seem to mind Bruce I've noticed."

Loki turned away from his son to give Thor an incredulous look. "Are you actually comparing yourself to Banner? A man who is half your size, and is the most calming presence out of anyone I have ever met? Yes, Fenris is not frightened by the man, if only because he is the least frightening
person imaginable. The child might take more kindly to you if you did not loom over him all the time."

Thor, for lack of a better description, pouted, which looked as ridiculous as it sounded. Though Loki supposed it was unfair to blame all of Fenris' issues on Thor's size. Feeling charitable for once, Loki sighed and pointed to an item on the floor that had fallen from it's perch on the coffee table.

"Pick that up."

"Sit down in the armchair," Loki directed, watching Thor take a seat. He was very aware that Fenris was now watching Thor with a completely different expression. "Now put the book in your lap," Thor did, though he still looked confused. "Open it, to the first page please."

The book was barely cracked open when Fenris removed himself from Loki's protective arms, climbed off the sofa and scurried around the coffee table towards Thor. There was no pause, no sign of hesitance at all when Fenris grabbed handfuls of Thor's jeans and hoisted himself up into the stunned god's lap. Thor stared down at the small boy, and after a moment of looking at the open book, Fenris twisted around to look at Thor with an expectant expression.

"Start reading Thor," Loki suggested, feeling more amused than anything at the sight in front if him.

Thor blinked at him before glancing at the book and apparently remembered what books were for. "Oh, yes..."

Thor was obviously not used to reading children's books, he was more comfortable reciting tales of battle with gruesome details than rhyming stories of discolored food. Still, he made due and Fenris sat happily on his lap, turning pages and pointing to the pictures when they were mentioned.

When the tale was over, Fenris closed the book, nimbly climbed down from Thor's knee and put the book back on the coffee table.

"Fenris," Loki said quietly, "what do you say?"

"Thank you," the child said to Thor before ducking back under the coffee table. Thor looked like he was fit to burst.

There was a small commotion at the door for the second bedroom, and Loki looked over to see Jorgumand and Sleipnir slip out and run over to his side.

"We're done!" Jorgumand declared loudly, pulling on his sleeve a little. "Come and see!"

Loki raised an eyebrow at him, but started to pull himself up anyway as Sleipnir talked Fenris out from under the table. The second his back left the heating pad he could feel the aches begin to return, but it was hardly debilitating. He paused before standing upright, and Jorgumand lost all his patience and began trying to pull him up out of his seat while Thor watched with a bemused smile on his face.

"Is there a time limit on this surprise?" Loki asked as Jorgumand pulled him upright.

"No."

"Yes."
Both his boys answered at the same time and Loki shook his head. Thor stood up too, and followed behind curiously as Jorgumand opened the door to the darkened room. Loki stepped in just as Sleipnir turned on the lights and he froze on the spot.

When the boys had told him they were working on a secret project in the second room, he had assumed that the two of them were building something with their toys. He could not have been more wrong. The once plain empty room was now painted a shocking orange (exactly the colour of the Thing of the Fantastic Four he noted), and the floor space was taken up by furniture. Three small beds had been constructed, two of them being part of a bunk bed setup, along with a large set of drawers, a toy chest and a small table that was about knee height for him. Almost all of the boy's toys were placed around the room, along with many of their books on top of the drawers.

Fenris climbed up onto the bed closest to the door to reach for his bear that sat amongst the pillows.

"That's his bed," Sleipnir was saying before running over to the lower part of the bunk bed. "This one is mine!" he declared proudly.

Jorgumand was already up on the top bed, his crooked grin in place. "Are you surprised?" he asked excitedly.

Loki couldn't imagine being more surprised, and told them so. The boys' smiles became delighted and Loki looked around the room again. The beds were made, but the linens were rumpled and crooked, obviously from being made by his sons. The bed frames themselves though were solid, put together by expert hands and Loki frowned. "Where did you get all this from?"

"Steve helped us, and Peter," Sleipnir answered. "And Bruce helped us keep you out all day yesterday so Steve and Peter could put all the beds in."

That may have answered his questions, but there was still the explanation as to why the boys were suddenly alright with sleeping in a separate room from him. He stepped closer to the bunk beds and made a show of inspecting them. "And who is responsible for picking all this furniture out?"

"Oh, that was us!" Jorgumand boasted.

"Bruce gave us a book, like the ones you have sometimes, and we got to pick what kind of beds we'd like," Sleipnir added helpfully.

"Franklin and Valaria don't even have bunk beds though," Jorgumand added as an afterthought.

Ah, there it was. The boys had learned that their new friends had their own rooms, and wanted the same.

For the next half hour, Loki and Thor were given a full tour of the new room and all it's features. After, the boys went about moving the rest of their toys into the bedroom, with Fenris and Jorgumand setting the train tracks up on the small table and Sleipnir putting more of their books away. Thor was delighted with finally interacting with the boys.

Deciding that his presence was no longer necessary, Loki left them to it and made for the kitchen to start putting together something for lunch. He didn't expect Thor to follow him out.

"It is a fine room," the blond man said, "Though it is rather small for the three of them..."

"When I was granted these rooms, at the time I was only expected to be caring for one infant. I think it's forgivable that no one at Shield predicted that I would have four children by year's end,"
Loki reasoned.

"But though no one guessed it, you now have three boys to share that small room, and another child arriving soon. Do you not desire more rooms Loki? I'm sure if we spoke to Fury, he would grant you new quarters with more space for your sons, and your daughter."

"And what would the point of that be?" Loki asked without looking up from what he was doing. "I assure you Thor, just because the boys have chosen to sleep in separate beds does not mean that they won't be ending up in my room eventually tonight. It will take time for them to be comfortable sleeping in separate beds, and it would be more difficult if those beds were all in separate rooms. Besides, they just put that room together, it is something that they made. Why would I take them away from that?"

"I suppose it is no harm for now, but surely when they get older they will want rooms of their own?" Thor persisted.

"I imagine so yes, but in a matter of weeks I will have my magic back, and the size of this apartment won't really be an issue anymore." Loki reasoned as he finished cutting the crust off of two of the sandwiches. Glancing up at Thor, he froze at the sight of the expression on his foster brother's face. Mentally he went back over his words, but could not fathom why Thor suddenly looked so miserable.

"I... I understand Loki," Thor said quietly. The man seemed to think something over before opening his mouth to speak. "May I ask something of you?"

Loki put down the knife, giving Thor his full attention. "What is it?"

"Will you please still visit after you leave?"

Loki stared at Thor. "Leave?"

"I won't stop you, I promise, and nor will I tell any of my friends. But I do wish to see your sons, and your daughter after she is born. I just, I will not ask you not to leave, only that you do not disappear entirely. You are my brother, and I would like to continue getting to know your children... I am their only uncle after all."

Loki continued to stare. "I... see," he said slowly. "Could you please remind me as to where I am going? And why I am leaving in the first place? I seem to recall a contract stating that I am to remain here."

Thor flushed. "Yes, in return for keeping you and your children safe from Father. But he will not come for you anymore, the danger is past and your deal with Shield no longer stands."

Loki was well aware of this, in fact he'd given the subject much thought since Frigga had come baring news of Odin's decision. At the moment he still relied on Shield's protection, from the villains he'd helped them defeat since he'd arrived. He was sure that at least Doom would be out for a little revenge. But once he had his magic back it would be a small matter of taking himself and his sons to another realm for a century or so. It would hardly be the first time the boys would have lived in hiding.

Loki would lay awake at night, considering all the options, which realm would offer the most protection, what spells he would use to conceal them all, and of course back up plans should anything go wrong. It was exhausting.

In the end he'd come to a decision, one that he had hoped he wouldn't have to explain to anyone.
Unfortunately Thor seemed determined to draw everything out today.

"I'm not leaving Thor," Loki admitted, looking back down at the sandwiches he'd made. Picking up the knife again, he began to cut up some carrots so that at least he would not have to look at Thor. Admitting all this was humiliating enough.

There was silence in the kitchen for a long minute, the only sound was the knife as it sliced through the vegetables.

"You aren't?" Thor asked slowly, and Loki nodded briskly, wishing that his foster brother would leave it at that. Unfortunately, Thor continued, "Forgive me Loki, but it is unlike you to keep a bargain that brings you no benefit. And yet you say you will stay here, continue to help Shield, help us, even when there is nothing that we can offer you in return?"

"It is not only Odin that I need shelter from Thor. I have made many enemies in the realm, and most of them would not hesitate to harm my children to get to me. Even at full strength, and with all of my power available to me, I cannot guarantee their safety at all times. This tower is one of the most protected buildings in the realm, even I could not penetrate it but a handful of times."

There was a pause, and then, "If it is the enemies of this realm that threaten you, why not just go to another realm?"

"Can you name any that would welcome me at the moment?"

"That has never stopped you before," Thor countered and Loki swore internally.

He risked a glance up at Thor to see his face crunched up in thought. Suddenly it cleared, and a small disbelieving smile appeared instead.

"You like it here," It was not a question, but a statement, and Loki scrambled to find a way to argue it.

"Finding something convenient is not the same as liking it," he said sourly and scowled when Thor laughed.

"I can't believe it! You like it here."

"Yes, after all, what is there to like about living here?" Loki growled. "Where my children do not have to hide their own gifts and are free of Asgard's prejudice of me. Where my magic is seen as an asset and not an embarrassment. Where there are people who pursue knowledge over muscle. Where I am known as Loki, not simply as the brother of Thor. Oh yes, what could I possibly like here?"

The smile that had formed on Thor's face fell off about halfway through Loki's short rant, and by the end, he looked genuinely remorseful. "I am sorry brother, I should not have laughed. I am glad that you have found a place here." Thor leaned back on the edge of the counter and looked down at his hands. "And I am sorry that I did not see how out of place you felt in Asgard."

That was a bit of a surprise to hear. Since Thor's return after discovering Odin's treachery, they had avoided talking about anything from before either of them had fallen to Midgard. Now Thor looked to him with regret clear in his eyes.

"I have been watching you, at first it was to ensure that you were alright, that none had threatened you or made you feel unwelcome. And then I began to see how happy you were. Most of the time it was when you were with the boys, reading with them, or watching them play. But then
sometimes I would see you with Bruce, you would be discussing something about magic or Midgardian science, and you would smile.” He shook his head, his eyes having gone distant as he recalled the memory. "Try as I might, I can not recall the last time you had smiled so at home. Or even the last time you had been truly happy. I only realize now, how lonely you must have been in Asgard."

Thor shifted on his feet and dragged a hand through his hair, his expression pained. "For so long I have wondered why you hated me, why you would betray me and our family. Now I realize that I hurt you first. I thought I was a good brother, because I would fight for you, do battle beside you, and protect you because you could not fight like the rest of us. That was the worst thing I could have done isn't it?"

Loki could not find himself able to answer. Months ago he would have enjoyed this, reveled in it in fact. Now he simply wanted Thor to leave, to go back to his ignorant boisterous affection. Or to his confused hurt, or righteous anger. Anything was better than this... revelation, that tasted too much of pity. But any words he might have spoken got caught on his suddenly slack tongue, and again Thor began speaking.

"Loki, you have stood at my side in countless battles. And in all of our wanderings and adventures and fights, how many times was it your magic and your quick thinking that saved us all? And then of course, how many times did I even acknowledge that?" Thor shook his head again, a few wayward strands falling into his eyes. "I belittled your talent with magic when I should have encouraged you, mocked you when I should have stopped others from doing the same. I laughed when father took away your children. I laughed. And now instead of wondering why you turned from us, I only wonder why it took so long for you to do so. It is no wonder that you hate me."

The sandwiches were made, all with precisely cut carrot sticks laid out beside each one, leaving nothing left to do with his hands, and yet Loki could not make himself to face Thor when he responded. "I do not hate you," he said quietly.

He did not have to look at Thor to see his expression; he could feel the disbelief from where he stood. "If you find that hard to believe, consider this; if I still hated you as I once did, why have I allowed you to befriend my sons?"

When he glanced up to gauge his reaction, Thor was watching him with a strange expression, but it would seem as though he had no words to speak so Loki added, "I can not afford to hate you anymore."

Thor blinked and thought that over. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Loki sighed, "Children learn by example Thor, especially my children. They observe how others behave and react to another, and they do what they can to copy that. Because of this, I have done my best to... let go, of most of my hatred and dislike of you and your friends, because the boys would see it, and in return, emulate it. That is something I would never wish upon them." he explained, glancing in the direction of the second bedroom, where he could hear the sounds of his sons playing. "Before all of this," he said with a gesture towards his own stomach. "Hating you gave me strength, gave me power because it was better that feeling less than you. It is still a wretched feeling but it was better than the alternative. But I would do anything within my power to make sure that my children never feel either."

The kitchen fell into silence after Loki finished, and Thor visibly struggled to find something to say.

"Thank you," he said eventually, "for permitting me a second chance."
"It seemed only fair," Loki responded lightly, "considering all the times you've tried to give me one as I tried my best to destroy everything you love."

Thor’s lips twitched up into a smile, but it faded too quickly Loki noticed.

"What troubles you Thor?" he asked suddenly feeling tired. Truly, honesty was exhausting.

"Do you promise that you plan to stay here?" he asked sounding unsure.

"Yes Thor, that is what I just explained to you," Loki answered, feeling impatient.

"But you see, I only ask because you had said that, in regards to the size of this apartment, it did not matter, because your magic would be returning soon. I thought, well it sounded like you were saying that the size of these rooms do not matter because once you have your magic back you will not need them anymore."

Ah, well, that made more sense then. It certainly explained why Thor's mood had dropped so quickly. "No Thor, that was not my meaning. I suppose what I intended to say was that with my magic, I can shape these rooms into whatever I like. Though adding rooms on will be tricky, it is hardly impossible."

Any response Thor might have had to that was interrupted by the small figure that was Fenris coming into the kitchen and leaning onto Loki's leg.

"M'hungry," the little boy declared.

Loki smiled down at his son. "You are in luck then, as it is now time for lunch." he gestured for him to go sit at the table. Loki then began to gather up the plates he'd prepared but Thor stopped him.

"I can feed the boys, go rest." He ordered softly, and interrupted Loki before he could open his mouth to argue. "You have been leaning on the counter for support for the last five minutes, go lay down and rest your back. I will take care of the boys."

Loki was ready to tell Thor that he was more than capable of setting a few plates on the table and that he was not so inept, but stopped himself. Thor was looking at him with his most earnest eyes, and Loki sighed in resignation. His back really was bothering him, and so he nodded reluctantly and carefully made his way back to the sofa. Lying back down onto the heating pad brought a relief that was practically exquisite. Loki closed his eyes as the pain ebbed away slowly, and listened to the sounds of Thor bringing Sleipnir and Jorgumand to join their younger brother at the table. The boys behaved, and Thor kept their rapt attention by regaling them with a tale from one of his earlier adventures, emphasizing how in the end it had been Loki's cunning and magic that had saved them all.

Loki ended up falling asleep there on the sofa, a hand resting on the swell of his stomach, lulled to sleep by Thor's storytelling and his sons quiet noises of amusement.
Jorgumand tiptoed quietly into his mother's bedroom, careful not to make a sound. The armchair that sat next the old wooden cradle served as a ladder as he climbed up and peeked inside. Adelis was sleeping amongst the blankets, her face peaceful in slumber. Jorgumand was very tempted to reach in and wake her, but the last time he had, he'd not only gotten a fierce scolding from his mother but Adelis had cried for nearly a whole day. His lesson learned, Jorgumand resigned himself to waiting for his sister to wake before practicing the new spell he'd learned.

His mother's magic had not returned the moment the baby had been born, but now three months later it had finally returned to full strength.

Jorgumand remembered the day his sister arrived, or rather, the night. He remembered waking up in his mother's bed and not his own. He'd had a nightmare earlier and his mother had allowed him to sleep in the familiar bed with him. It was still dark when his mother woke him, asking Jorgumand to pass him the cell phone that was on the night table. He remembered the strange urgency in Mama's voice that had chased all the sleepy cobwebs from his mind instantly.

His mother had then called someone, trying to maneuver out of bed as he did so. He only managed to sit up though, and Jorgumand sat back on his legs and watched his mother anxiously. It seemed like only minutes later that there was someone knocking on the door to the apartment and Mama asked him if he could let whomever it was in.

The knocking had woken Sleipnir, and that was why he was in the main room when Jorgumand went to get the door, and that was why they both saw the dark figure standing near the sofa at the same time. Sleipnir didn't even stop to ask who it was like Jorgumand wanted to. His older brother only reached out, grabbed his hand and yanked him into their mother's room shouting all the way. They had only just begun to explain that there was a stranger already in the apartment when the front door opened by itself and more yelling occurred.

It would turn out that his little sister Hela; who though their mother insisted was younger than them, she was actually quite big. The shouting had come from some of the Avengers and Other men who had come to help Mama. They had been startled by her presence and her appearance, which Jorgumand didn't quite understand. Hela was pale, almost grey in colour, but there wasn't really anything to be scared of. Jorgumand had never seen his mother look so relieved.

"She is here to take care of you three," Mama said as their Uncle helped him into a chair that had wheels on it. The other people who had come all seemed unsure of that, but left eventually, taking their mother with them.

Alone with their strange younger big sister, Jorgumand studied her silently. She was tall and thin, with long black hair that fell about her like a dark curtain. He felt that he might not have felt so nervous if she had any sort of expression on her face, but it was blank. In fact, she had yet to speak a single word. Sleipnir seemed unwilling to break the silence, and Jorgumand wanted nothing more than to go with their mother.

Speaking up, Jorgumand told her so, and started walking towards the front door.

When his sister spoke, her voice was low and smooth, it was actually quite pretty. She told him that he couldn't go with mother this time, that bringing a child into this world is very hard work.

"I can help!" Jorgumand insisted, but Hela shook her head solemnly.
"There is nothing more you can do. You must stay here where you are safest."

"This whole tower is safe, that's why we live here. The Avengers protect us," Sleipnir said, though he didn't sound like he was arguing, more like he wanted to know what Hela would say to that.

"The Avengers are distracted, and not all of them are here right now. Now would be the best time for an attack. Mother knows this. That is why I am here, so that he does not have to worry for you. I can protect you much more than the mortals can with my magic."

Jorgumand perked up at that. "You can do magic?"

"Yes."

He shared a look with his brother who looked as eager as he did. Turning back to his sister he asked, "Can you teach us some?"

For the first time since her arrival, Hela smiled.

The practiced magic until the sun came up and Fenris stumbled into the room, rubbing sleep from his eyes. Jorgumand had worried that his little brother would be upset by the stranger looking after them, but to his surprise Fenris barely faltered in step before walking directly over to their sister and wrapped his arms around her leg. This was the strangest thing yet, Fenris never liked anyone right off. But then Hela reached down and pulled Fenris up into her arms and smiled. It was their mother's smile, exactly the same one. Fenris smiled back and relaxed completely against their sister, resting his head on her shoulder as she went back to explaining the spell they were learning.

The rest of the day was a mix of learning new spells, showing Hela their toys and napping. No one came to visit, though at one point Sleipnir expressed concern over their mother.

"Mother is well." Hela said in her soft voice. The words were spoken with such certainty, nothing like a platitude but as a fact.

"How do you know?" Sleipnir asked.

"I know." she answered cryptically. "It will be soon."

After that, it became hard to concentrate on anything else, and Jorgumand found himself looking at the door every few minutes. Hours past, they ate lunch and then dinner and still their mother was not back. Hela would not tell them anything other than their mother was fine. Eventually Jorgumand became so exhausted from the excitement of the day that he went to bed before the sun went down. He didn't sleep in his own bed though; instead he tucked himself into his mother's bed. It seemed only moments later that he woke, but knew it must have been longer because the sun was gone, and there was someone larger that Sleipnir getting into bed with him. His eyes focused in the darkness and he realized with a jolt that it was his mother.

Uncle Thor was helping him under the covers, piling pillows behind him so that Mama could sit up comfortably. It was only when Mama leaned back that Jorgumand was able to spot the small bundle tucked safely into his arms.

Mama sank into the pillows with a tired sounding sigh, and Jorgumand barely registered Sleipnir coming to sit on the bed beside him with Fenris in tow. Their uncle stayed a moment to talk quietly with their mother before he looked over and gave them a warm smile. Then he left, along with
everyone else that Jorgumand hadn't even noticed, until the only people left in the room was his mother, brothers, his sister and the new baby.

"Sleipnir, could you please turn on the light there on the table?" their mother asked, because it was rather obvious that no one was going to be sleeping anytime soon. But instead of crawling over the bed to reach the night table, Sleipnir just made a gesture in the air towards it and the light clicked on.

Mama smiled wide, "Well I was going to ask how you three spent the day with Hela, but I suppose that answers that." He glanced at their sister where she stood stoically by the door. "Thank you darling."

Hela just nodded in response. Fenris, apparently fed up with all the talking, moved closer so that he could peer into the blankets in his mother's arms and Mama tilted so that they could all see better. "May I introduce Adelis, your new sister."

Jorgumand studied the tiny red face that was displayed in front of him, and felt a little underwhelmed. Sleipnir however, he was disappointed and voiced it.

"A sister?" he repeated, sounding dismayed. "But I already have a sister."

"You also already have two brothers Sleipnir." their mother reasoned.

"She's really small," Jorgumand observed as Sleipnir bit back an argument that he had wanted a brother. "Why is she so small? Fenris wasn't this small."

"He was when he was born, you all were, I assure you." Mama told them. "Babies are born very small and very fragile. You won't be able to play with her until she is older."

Jorgumand wrinkled his nose at the news as he stared down at the tiny little sleeping face. That hardly sounded fun at all, why even bother having a little sister if you can't even play together? Their mother seemed happy though, smiling as he used his free hand to stoke one of the baby's cheeks. They all stayed up a little longer, Jorgumand and his brothers wiggling a little closer when the baby opened her greyish eyes.

Eventually they had to go to bed, and Hela moved from the door to take the baby from their mother's arms to place it in the cradle. No one moved to leave the bed though, and their mother pulled the blanket over them briskly showing that even he didn't expect them to sleep in their own beds that night. Hela sat in a chair that had appeared beside the cradle, her posture suggesting that she had no plans to leave that spot for some time.

In fact, the only time she did move what in the middle of the night when the baby let out a small cry. Jorgumand blurrily remembered seeing Hela reach into the cradle and bring the baby to their mothers waiting arms. The crying stopped shortly after that, and Jorgumand went back to sleep.

Their mother stayed mostly in bed for three days, still so tired from having the baby that even sitting up was a struggle. After the first night, Jorgumand and his brothers began sleeping in their own beds again once it became obvious that the baby would continue to wake at all hours of the night. Hela was always there though to bring the baby to their mother, or to bring whatever was needed. She ended up staying with them for a week, helping in her quiet, stoic ways. She never ate, and never slept Jorgumand noticed, but he found that he was rather comforted by her presence. She was always there with them, watching over all of them.

She only left when their mother was able to get out of bed and move easily around the apartment
without help. She did promise to return to visit, accepting an invitation to Sleipnir's birthday party.

Even once she was gone, there was no shortage of visitors to their home. It seemed every day there was someone new to see their baby sister. Many of the Avengers came by, offering congratulations and gifts for the baby. The Fantastic Four came with Valeria and Franklin, bearing gifts for Adelis. Their uncle had brought a loud group of people from Asgard whom their mother seemed weary of at first, but allowed at least the largest of them to hold their sister in the end. Sleipnir and Jorgumand spent some time listening to stories their uncle Thor told them with his friends, but Fenris seemed to dislike them, and stayed quietly behind their mother until the rowdy group departed.

Another visitor was a beautiful woman that for some reason Sleipnir knew on sight. She was introduced as their grandmother, and Jorgumand had felt a surge if fear at the revelation and he didn't know why. It was confusing, because the woman seemed very nice, and his mother seemed happy to see her. Still, he was rather shy to greet her, and absently stuck close to his mother for a while after that, anxiety pulling knots in his stomach.

His mother seemed to understand without him even having to say a word, and held Jorgumand tightly in his arms for several long minutes, telling him that it was alright and that they were safe.

Jorgumand felt much better after that, and did his best to ignore the nervousness he felt when he was with his grandmother. She seemed very happy to spend time with not just the new baby but with all of them. She was very kind, and allowed them to direct her around their home, showing off their toys and creations. She even sat on the floor in her pretty gown as Sleipnir explained his Lego and Fenris sat happily in her lap. Like Hela, she accepted the handmade invitation to Sleipnir's birthday party, promising to be in attendance. She too stayed for several days, and Jorgumand sometimes woke in the night to get a glass of water only to find his mother and grandmother still awake and talking quietly on the sofa.

After she left, most of the excitement died down, and life went back to being mostly normal. Adelis slept a great deal, and they had to learn to be quiet when their sister napped. Their mother hadn't been lying either when he'd said that they couldn't really play with her for a while. She seemed content to lay in a padded basinet, making incomprehensible noises as they played around her. Sometimes they would lean in to show her a toy and laugh as she threw her arms and legs about in delight.

When their mother's magic began to return, it was almost a shock to see it. Jorgumand had gotten rather used to his mother doing everything the 'muggle' way as Sleipnir called it.

It started as small things, items that their mother reached for leaped into his hands, and doors shut and locked on their own. It was Sleipnir who fist noticed the wards that had appeared. Seveeral of them in fact, covering the front door, their bedroom, even the bathroom. They were protective wards put in place by their mother.

Soon after the wards went up, Mama began teaching them about magic again, much to their delight. They started with small spells, easy ones like what Hela had taught them, but those spells turned into bigger ones. Their mother explained how an easy spell like lighting a candle is only the beginning, and once they learn how to control the magic, they could use the same principals to hold fire in their hands, or even shoot fireballs at an enemy.

Today's lesson had been illusions, bending light to take form and colour. Their mother could make doubles of himself, and could even make them solid as though they were real which he told them was very difficult. To start their mother showed them how to make small forms, without worrying about colour or tangibility. Sleipnir got it right away; he usually did much to Jorgumands
fustration. Their mother had noticed and told them both very seriously that it was not a competition.

"Sleipnir may be able to cast the beginner spells easily, but that is because everyone, every sorcerer casts differently. We all learn a different paces and what might come easy to your brother may be a little more hard won for you. But remember the opposite may be true in other things. What might be easy for you is difficult for him." his mother lectured once.

"But he always gets the spells on the very first try!" Jorgumand insisted.

"Yes, he does. But though he was able to light the candle, it took him much longer to be able to make the flame move about or change its shape. A talent that you grasped right away I remember."

Jorgumand did remember, but remained sullen. Finally his mother held him by his shoulders and spoke earnestly. "Your brother thinks very logically. His thoughts are very linear, in the way that to him a plus b equals c and once he understands a subject, it is as simple as following the steps. But when he needs to change those steps to alter the spell, he struggles. You, my imaginative son, you can see what you want the magic to do, and very nearly skip over all the steps for the end result. But once you have your flame lit, you have no issue with making it do whatever you want it to do. You both have your strengths as well as your weaknesses."

Put that way, Jorgumand reluctantly felt better. And when they began learning illusions and Sleipnir created a fox out of the light on his first try, Jorgumand held back on his frustration and kept trying again and again to make his own form. When he did, his brother was very happy for him. And when they were instructed to make their illusions move around, he helped his brother when his fox struggled.

Now their mother was sitting with Fenris, teaching him the basics, Sleipnir was busy making his fox falteringly trot around the main room. Or rather he had been busy with that when Jorgumand snuck into their mother's bedroom. Now Sleipnir was poking his head through the door looking alarmed to see Jorgumand leaning over the crib.

"We aren't supposed to wake her!" he said in a quiet but urgent voice.

"I'm not!" he insisted, and glanced down to see pale grey green eyes peering up at him. "She's already awake!"

Sleipnir scrambled up next to him and looked into the cradle to smile at their sister.

"I wanted to show her what we learned," Jorgumand explained and Sleipnir nodded absently, dangling a hand near Adelis who threw her arms about trying to catch him.

"Are you going to show her your rabbit?" he asked as Adelis latched on to one of his fingers and wouldn't let go.

Jorgumand shook his head; he'd had something else in mind but didn't want to say in case he couldn't do it. Instead he closed his eyes, and tried to focus on what he wanted. Several minutes passed and when nothing happened, Jorgumand let out a disappointed groan.

Suddenly a pair of hands were on his shoulders, "Try again," Mama said encouragingly.

Taking a deep breath, Jorgumand closed his eyes and did as he was told. This time, when he opened his eyes, three blue-green butterflies hung in the air over Adelis' crib. The baby was staring at the still images with rapt attention, and with a grin Jorgumand set them into motion, fluttering around made out of iridescent light. Adelis squirmed happily, her arms and legs flying about in the
"Well done!" Mama said, squeezing his shoulders. Jorgumand grinned, and sent the butterflies fluttering around their heads. He even tried to put a different colour in them but they remained the same. He would have to work on that.

Mama reached over him and gently lifted Adelis out of the crib. "I think that is enough practice for now, any more and you will be asleep before supper I think." he advised as they climbed off the chair to where Fenris was standing. Their mother started to walk out of the room and Jorgumand shared a look with Sleipnir. His older brother nodded, and took a deep breath.

"Mama?" Sleipnir called, "May we get a pet?"

Their mother's smile twitched at the question, and he turned to face the three of them. "A pet?" he repeated as he thought it over. "As in a cat I suppose, or a goldfish-"

"We were hoping more for a dragon," Sleipnir corrected.

"A small one!" Jorgumand added when their mother's eyebrows rose at the suggestion.

"I don't believe that dragons are considered a conventional pet here on Midgard, or anywhere else actually."

"The X-men have one!" Sleipnir insisted, "Logan told us when he was here last week. It's only this big!" he held up his hands to show approximately how small the dragon had been described as.

Their mother didn't seem instantly displeased with the idea, so Jorgumand pushed on. "We even know where to find some! We did research, and talked to Uncle Thor and made a whole list of different places that dragons live."

"And in two of those places the dragons will be nesting soon, so we can just get an egg and when it hatches it will recognize us as family, so when it gets bigger it will be the best guard we could have. It would protect us!" Sleipnir explained enthusiastically.

Mama's eyes moved back and forth between them for a moment, clearly amused. "I can see you've put a lot of thought into this."

They nodded, even Fenris who hadn't really done much to help but Jorgumand appreciated the support. If their mother thought that all of them wanted a dragon then he'd have to let them get one. "Even Adelis likes Dragons! See?" jorgumand concentrated hard, focusing on thought and form, and suddenly a small blue green dragon appeared in the air and flew a few circles around their mother. Adelis caught sight of the shimmering creature immediately and let out a happy shriek, nearly leaping out of their mother's arms in an attempt to grab at it when the dragon flew close.

Their mother adjusted his hold and sighed. "I will... consider it." he said finally and Jorgumand jumped into the air with glee. That practically meant a yes!

Mama smiled and shook his head, taking the baby with him back out into the main room. Fenris began chasing the fake dragon as it looped around the room and Sleipnir grinned shyly.

"So when do you think I should tell him about the robot Tony's been letting me build downstairs?"

THE END
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